



Northern Ireland
Assembly

OFFICIAL REPORT

(Hansard)

Volume 10

(12 March 2001 to 6 May 2001)

BELFAST: THE STATIONERY OFFICE LTD

£70.00

© Copyright The Assembly Commission.

Produced and published in Northern Ireland on behalf of the
Northern Ireland Assembly by TSO Ireland,
which is responsible for printing and publishing
Northern Ireland Assembly publications.

ISBN 0 339 80008-9

Volume 10

12 March 2001 to 6 May 2001

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)

Adams, Gerry (SF) (West Belfast)
Adamson, Dr Ian (UUP) (East Belfast)
Agnew, Fraser (UUAP) (North Belfast)
Alderdice, The Lord (Speaker)
Armitage, Ms Pauline (UUP) (East Londonderry)
Armstrong, Billy (UUP) (Mid Ulster)
Attwood, Alex (SDLP) (West Belfast)
Beggs, Roy (UUP) (East Antrim)
Bell, Billy (UUP) (Lagan Valley)
Bell, Mrs Eileen (A) (North Down)
Berry, Paul (DUP) (Newry and Armagh)
Birnie, Dr Esmond (UUP) (South Belfast)
Boyd, Norman (NIUP) (South Antrim)
Bradley, P J (SDLP) (South Down)
Byrne, Joe (SDLP) (West Tyrone)
Campbell, Gregory (DUP) (East Londonderry)
Carrick, Mervyn (DUP) (Upper Bann)
Carson, Mrs Joan (UUP) (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Close, Seamus (A) (Lagan Valley)
Clyde, Wilson (DUP) (South Antrim)
Cobain, Fred (UUP) (North Belfast)
Coulter, Rev Robert (UUP) (North Antrim)
Courtney, Mrs Annie (SDLP) (Foyle)
Dallat, John (SDLP) (East Londonderry)
Dalton, Duncan Shipley (UUP) (South Antrim)
Davis, Ivan (UUP) (Lagan Valley)
de Brún, Ms Bairbre (SF) (West Belfast)
Dodds, Nigel (DUP) (North Belfast)
Doherty, Arthur (SDLP) (East Londonderry)
Doherty, Pat (SF) (West Tyrone)
Douglas, Boyd (UUAP) (East Londonderry)
Durkan, Mark (SDLP) (Foyle)
Empey, Sir Reg (UUP) (East Belfast)
Ervine, David (PUP) (East Belfast)
Farren, Dr Seán (SDLP) (North Antrim)
Fee, John (SDLP) (Newry and Armagh)
Ford, David (A) (South Antrim)
Foster, Sam (UUP) (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Gallagher, Tommy (SDLP) (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Gibson, Oliver (DUP) (West Tyrone)
Gildernew, Ms Michelle (SF) (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Gorman, Sir John (UUP) (North Down)
Hamilton, Tom (UUP) (Strangford)
Hanna, Ms Carmel (SDLP) (South Belfast)
Haughey, Denis (SDLP) (Mid Ulster)
Hay, William (DUP) (Foyle)
Hendron, Dr Joe (SDLP) (West Belfast)
Hilditch, David (DUP) (East Antrim)
Hussey, Derek (UUP) (West Tyrone)
Hutchinson, Billy (PUP) (North Belfast)
Hutchinson, Roger (Independent Unionist) (East Antrim)
Kane, Gardiner (DUP) (North Antrim)
Kelly, Gerry (SF) (North Belfast)

Kelly, John (SF) (Mid Ulster)
Kennedy, Danny (UUP) (Newry and Armagh)
Leslie, James (UUP) (North Antrim)
Lewsley, Ms Patricia (SDLP) (Lagan Valley)
Maginness, Alban (SDLP) (North Belfast)
Mallon, Séamus (SDLP) (Newry and Armagh)
Maskey, Alex (SF) (West Belfast)
McCarthy, Kieran (A) (Strangford)
McCartney, Robert (UKUP) (North Down)
McClarty, David (UUP) (East Londonderry)
McClelland, Donovan (SDLP) (South Antrim)
McCrea, Rev Dr William (DUP) (Mid Ulster)
McDonnell, Dr Alasdair (SDLP) (South Belfast)
McElduff, Barry (SF) (West Tyrone)
McFarland, Alan (UUP) (North Down)
McGimpsey, Michael (UUP) (South Belfast)
McGrady, Eddie (SDLP) (South Down)
McGuinness, Martin (SF) (Mid Ulster)
McHugh, Gerry (SF) (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
McLaughlin, Mitchel (SF) (Foyle)
McMenamin, Eugene (SDLP) (West Tyrone)
McNamee, Pat (SF) (Newry and Armagh)
McWilliams, Ms Monica (NIWC) (South Belfast)
Molloy, Francie (SF) (Mid Ulster)
Morrice, Ms Jane (NIWC) (North Down)
Morrow, Maurice (DUP) (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Murphy, Conor (SF) (Newry and Armagh)
Murphy, Mick (SF) (South Down)
Neeson, Sean (A) (East Antrim)
Nelis, Mrs Mary (SF) (Foyle)
Nesbitt, Dermot (UUP) (South Down)
O'Connor, Danny (SDLP) (East Antrim)
O'Hagan, Dr Dara (SF) (Upper Bann)
O'Neill, Éamonn (SDLP) (South Down)
Paisley, Rev Dr Ian (DUP) (North Antrim)
Paisley, Ian Jnr (DUP) (North Antrim)
Poots, Edwin (DUP) (Lagan Valley)
Ramsey, Ms Sue (SF) (West Belfast)
Robinson, Mrs Iris (DUP) (Strangford)
Robinson, Ken (UUP) (East Antrim)
Robinson, Mark (DUP) (South Belfast)
Robinson, Peter (DUP) (East Belfast)
Roche, Patrick (NIUP) (Lagan Valley)
Rodgers, Ms Brid (SDLP) (Upper Bann)
Savage, George (UUP) (Upper Bann)
Shannon, Jim (DUP) (Strangford)
Taylor, Rt Hon John (UUP) (Strangford)
Tierney, John (SDLP) (Foyle)
Trimble, Rt Hon David (UUP) (Upper Bann)
Watson, Denis (UUAP) (Upper Bann)
Weir, Peter (UUP) (North Down)
Wells, Jim (DUP) (South Down)
Wilson, Cedric (NIUP) (Strangford)
Wilson, Jim (UUP) (South Antrim)
Wilson, Sammy (DUP) (East Belfast)

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE ASSEMBLY

<i>First Minister</i>	The 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 Investment</i>	Sir Reg Empey
<i>Minister of the Environment</i>	Sam Foster
<i>Minister of Finance and Personnel</i>	Mark Durkan
<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>	Gregory Campbell
<i>Minister for Social Development</i>	Maurice Morrow

JUNIOR MINISTERS OF THE ASSEMBLY

<i>Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister</i>	Denis Haughey Dermot Nesbitt
---	---------------------------------

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>	Ms Georgina Campbell
<i>Private Secretary</i>	Niall Johnston
<i>Special Adviser</i>	Nicolas Hanna QC
<i>Counsel</i>	
<i>Board of Management</i>	
<i>Clerk to the Assembly</i>	Arthur Moir (from 2 April 01)
<i>Deputy Clerk</i>	Vacant
<i>Head of Administration</i>	Gerry Cosgrave
<i>Clerk Assistant</i>	Murray Barnes
<i>Editor of Debates</i>	Alex Elder
<i>Acting Keeper of the House</i>	Agnes Peacocke
<i>Director of Research and Information</i>	Allan Black
<i>Director of Finance and Personnel</i>	Dennis Millar
<i>Clerk of Bills/Principal Clerk</i>	Alan Patterson
<i>Clerk of Business/Principal Clerk</i>	Joe Reynolds
<i>Clerk of Committees/Principal Clerk</i>	John Torney
<i>Clerks</i>	Christine Darrah George Martin Dr Andrew Peoples Mrs Debbie Pritchard Michael Rickard Alan Rogers Mrs Cathie White Martin Wilson
<i>Head of Security</i>	Gerald Colan-O'Leary
<i>Head of Research</i>	Vacant
<i>Head of Information and Events</i>	Patrick Price
<i>Acting Principal Doorkeeper</i>	Stephen Scott

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Monday 12 March 2001

The Assembly met at 10.30 am (Madam Deputy Speaker [Ms Morrice] in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

FOOT-AND-MOUTH DISEASE

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development that she wishes to make a statement on the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers): As a result of new information that became available over the weekend, I have adjusted my statement. The revised statement will be available in the Business Office.

I am grateful for this opportunity to update Members on the foot-and-mouth disease situation as it has developed over the past week. Since making my last statement on this subject there have been no further outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease in Northern Ireland. My efforts have been devoted to ensuring that that remains the case and to discussing with the industry how we can deal with the practical issues which flow from the present situation. As time goes on, we can be increasingly hopeful that we have been able to nip what could have been a major disaster for the agri-food industry — north and south of the border — in the bud.

The process has required enormous effort on the part of Department of Agriculture and Rural Development staff. We have slaughtered and incinerated some 2,500 cattle, sheep, pigs and goats that were in contact with infection. We have been manning the checks at the points of entry to and exit from the 1km zone around the outbreak area — 24 hours a day — for almost two weeks. The helpline which I established on 21 February to deal with queries had, by last Tuesday, handled over 12,500 enquiries, including over 3,000 on one day alone. This has been a huge operation by any standards, and I want to take this opportunity to place on record my appreciation of the efforts of all the staff concerned over the past few days.

I am acutely aware, of course, of the enormous impact that the outbreak has had on farmers, the public and the agri-food industry in Northern Ireland. My officials and

I have been meeting with all sectors at regular intervals, collectively or individually as appropriate, to hear at first hand about the practical impact of the disease and the effects that our controls have had on it, and to see how we can help.

My officials have also been having regular meetings with the RUC and the Army to keep them up to date with the situation, to explore how our controls are working on the ground and to sort out any difficulties. Contrary to what has been portrayed by some sections of the media, I have no difficulty at all in seeking and obtaining RUC and Army assistance where I thought it was needed, and they have duly provided it.

The foot-and-mouth disease situation in GB is much less happy, and there are as yet no signs that the outbreaks there have been contained. The contrasting situations there and here vindicate my decision on 21 February to ban imports from GB of the relevant livestock and products. I know that that decision has caused problems for various parts of the industry and, indeed, the public. However, this is a price which simply has to be paid to protect us from foot-and-mouth disease.

So far as the Republic of Ireland is concerned, I met with Joe Walsh TD last Wednesday to compare our respective situations. The Irish Minister for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and his officials were able to assure me that, while they have a number of herds restricted on a precautionary basis, foot-and-mouth disease has not been found in the Republic. The situation remains that there is no justification for controls on imports of animals or produce from the Republic over and above those that have already been imposed at EU level.

As time has moved on, the emphasis of our work has shifted away from containment and eradication to other issues. After the outbreak in County Armagh, it was necessary for the Department to follow up all instances where animals had moved to Northern Ireland and had been traded illegally. That we have now done, and the papers have been passed to the RUC so that the necessary actions can be taken against those responsible.

At this point I need to depart slightly from the wording of the printed version of my statement, which went to Members on Friday, to take account of the latest information I have received over the weekend. There are now anecdotal reports that the consignment of sheep which came from GB and which led to our single outbreak in Armagh may — and I stress the word “may” — have been larger than we had been led to believe.

My staff are presently working with the various police forces to get to the bottom of this, but we are receiving little co-operation from those who are under suspicion, which makes the task much more difficult. Until our enquiries into this new information are complete, I am unable to state categorically that all the potentially infected animals have been traced and accounted for.

This matter is being pursued with the utmost urgency, and I will update Members as soon as I can. I want to emphasise that we need as much information as possible, and I appeal to anyone who has any information to let me or the Department have it immediately.

Understandably, people's minds are now turning to the financial aspects of this outbreak. In broad terms, current Government policy is that compensation is paid only for anything the Government require to be destroyed — whether animals or, for example, feed. My Department is processing the compensation claims we have received, and payment will issue shortly. We are, as Members would expect, looking at all those claims to ensure that those responsible for the illegal trading which was at the root of this outbreak do not benefit further from it. We are also arranging to pay out as soon as possible as many subsidy payments as we can in order to help farmers' immediate cash-flow situations.

Members will have noted from what I have said that there is no provision for compensation for consequential losses.

While I realise that many businesses are losing substantial amounts of money as a result of the foot-and-mouth disease crisis, the financial implications for Government of compensating for those losses is potentially enormous. Nevertheless, I know that Ministers in Great Britain will be under pressure to pay compensation for such losses, and obviously I will be stressing that any change in policy in that area will have to apply in Northern Ireland too.

As the present controls begin to bite, we are all becoming aware of the practical problems that they cause and I am increasingly being asked to make exceptions in relation to particular situations and activities. The fundamental principle under which I have been working, and will continue to work, is that my prime objective is to prevent any further foot-and-mouth disease outbreaks in Northern Ireland and to ensure that should the virus still be present somewhere in Northern Ireland, its spread will be limited. So, while I will, of course, look at particular problems thrown up by our controls, I am simply not prepared to agree to any relaxation which may undermine that prime objective.

Looking to the future, it is imperative that all of us continue to exercise the utmost vigilance against the threat of foot-and-mouth disease. As the days go by with no fresh outbreaks here, there will be an understandable temptation to drop our guard. However, with such a major disease outbreak on our doorstep, that must not happen, and I urge everyone, whether involved in the agri-food industry or not, to adhere to the guidelines issued last week by the Executive Committee.

Finally, I would like to pay tribute again to our hard-pressed farmers and to the wider agri-food industry for their continued fortitude in the face of this crisis, and

to assure them that I will continue to do everything that I can to help.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that we have one hour for questions to the Minister and that they should be questions rather than statements.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee (Mr Savage): I congratulate the Minister on all the steps that she has taken, and pay tribute to all her staff. I know that we are going through a very difficult time. One of the main issues, which we cannot get away from, is that yesterday in Great Britain was one of the biggest days for outbreaks since this foot-and-mouth crisis began. This emphasises a point raised in the Minister's statement this morning — that we cannot afford to drop our guard. I hope that people will bear that in mind. Again — to quote the Minister — it can be short-term pain for long-term gain. I read a press statement in the paper at the weekend —

Madam Deputy Speaker: Can we get to the question.

Mr Savage: I will come to my question; I am building up to it.

In the statement there were comments made that those responsible for this outbreak in the very first place would be immune from prosecution if they were to come forward with information. I was surprised to read that in the press. I urge the Minister not to go in that direction.

Ms Rodgers: I too have read those reports in the paper. I assure Mr Savage that my departmental fraud investigation unit, the veterinary service enforcement unit and the serious crime squad of the RUC are meeting again this morning to take forward the issue of investigations into the individuals concerned.

Mr Dallat: The Minister has our full support in the restrictions she has imposed. However, looking to the medium or long term, the Minister will be aware that many social, sporting and cultural organisations have cancelled or postponed events because of the crisis. Can she give any indication when she believes the controls can be relaxed?

10.45 am

Ms Rodgers: I understand the concern that is out there. Before I answer the question, I want to pay tribute to the many sporting organisations such as the Gaelic Athletic Association and those involving soccer and rugby and, indeed, other event organisers who have so willingly co-operated in a situation that makes life very difficult, not only for those participating in the sports but also from the commercial interest point of view. I do appreciate that.

It is extremely difficult — even more so when one has people who are still not co-operating — to be sure of when this crisis will end. As soon as my veterinary

advice tells me that there is a possibility of relaxing the controls in any way, I will review the situation. However, given the additional information that I received over the weekend, there is absolutely no question of relaxing the controls at the moment and I want to make that clear. Whenever it is possible, be it in a week or so, we will review the situation with a view, possibly, to making some adjustments to the present restrictions.

In relation to the east-west trade, however, and given the situation in Great Britain, it will be a fairly long time before we can afford to make any adjustment to the present restrictions on trade between Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Mr Paisley Jnr: I thank the Minister for her statement and for bringing this additional information to our attention. I note that the papers are with the RUC. I hope that prosecution will be swift, certain and severe and that an example will be made of the reprobates who did this to the industry in Northern Ireland. I trust that the Minister agrees.

With regard to the additional information that the Minister gave us this morning, I have two questions. If the beasts have not all been traced, can she give the House an idea of how many of them are unaccounted for? Have the Republic of Ireland Government confirmed to the Minister how many have been slaughtered in its jurisdiction and sold on to France as Irish lamb?

Turning to the issue of compensation, has the Minister been able to calculate the loss to the Northern Ireland tourist industry and the agri-food sector? Does she agree, and can she give a commitment to the House, that now is the time to put together a special case for widespread compensation in order to assist the entire sector in Northern Ireland that has been affected by this terrible disease?

Ms Rodgers: I thank Mr Paisley for his questions. There seemed to be not two but rather three or four. However, I will try to deal with them.

First, there are possibly 60 animals that are unaccounted for, but, given the manner in which these illegally traded animals have been moved about, it is impossible to be absolutely certain of the number. It is not clear whether they are here or in the Republic. To the best of my knowledge, there have been 4,500 animals slaughtered in the Republic to date as a precaution.

In relation to animals' being slaughtered in the Republic and sold on, the Member is aware that under the current EU regulation, processing plants are not required to designate the country of origin or the country of slaughter on their produce; they merely have to give details on where it was processed. That will be a matter for the Republic. I do not want to comment on that, but it is perfectly legitimate to have animals processed in another

state and then have them exported elsewhere as produce of a particular processing plant.

The loss to the tourist industry is not a matter that comes within my remit; it falls to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, as the Member will know. I cannot, at this stage, give the Member any such figures, but I do understand the real difficulties being faced by the tourist industry and empathise with it. The sooner these people are brought before the courts and prosecuted and the Department gets all the information it needs, the sooner normal trading and business will be resumed in the industry. However, there will still be problems for the tourist industry, given the situation in Great Britain.

As the Member knows, farmers will receive 100% compensation for each animal. The slaughter premium that they will lose will be added to the market value.

Mr Paisley's question is also concerned with cash flow difficulties. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is doing everything possible to ensure that farmers are receiving cash as quickly as possible via subsidies in other areas.

Consequential compensation is a matter for decision at national level. My monthly ministerial meeting with Nick Brown and the other regional Ministers will take place next Wednesday, and I have already asked Mr Brown to put consequential compensation on the agenda.

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's statement. Last year I wrote to her Department about the practice of spreading blood from slaughtering plants on to farmland. At that time I had grave concerns about the implications of that for the spread of diseases, particularly BSE. However, given the rapid spread of foot-and-mouth disease, can the Minister say whether that practice is still going on in Fermanagh and South Tyrone and whether it will continue?

Ms Rodgers: I cannot give a specific answer now, but I will give the Member a written answer.

Mr Ford: I welcome the Minister's statement, but I am sure that I am not the only Member who is concerned about the additional information that the Minister brought to the House this morning. I am sure that there is a unanimous feeling that there should be no immunity from prosecution for those people responsible for bringing foot-and-mouth disease to Northern Ireland. Does the Minister think that there should be a reward scheme for those people who may be in a position to provide tip-offs? Some people who work for dealers may be in a position to supply information that would benefit the police and the Minister's officials in following up the issue.

At the Agriculture Committee meeting last Friday, I asked Dr McCracken about the issue of permits for special movement of animals where welfare conditions required it. Dr McCracken highlighted the issue of dairy

heifers coming close to calving. Will the Minister confirm that that is still an option, despite these further concerns? Obviously we will expect the Department to maintain the highest standards of scrutiny for any possible effect on the disease.

Ms Rodgers: The investigations should be allowed to run their course. That is my priority. My officials are having one of their regular meetings with the RUC this morning in order to bring forward the investigations.

Animals can only be moved for welfare reasons under licence authorised by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. That is due to the risk involved.

Mr Boyd: Does the Minister agree that it would be inconsistent and hypocritical to allow the St Patrick's night function to take place in this Building, with up to 500 people from all over Northern Ireland due to attend?

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not in order.

Mr Boyd: Will the Minister call for that function to be cancelled?

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not a matter for the Minister. I would like the Assembly to take note that the Speaker is considering the matter. It is under review, and a decision is expected shortly.

Mr C Wilson: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I appreciate your ruling, but an advertisement has been placed in the newspaper, with advice from the Assembly's Executive for the public and other bodies to cancel events. Therefore it is right that the Minister should involve herself and give some direction to the Speaker on this matter.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The Speaker will take account of that advice in making his decision.

Mr B Hutchinson: I hope I do not incur the Deputy Speaker's wrath with my question.

I welcome the statement, and I congratulate the Minister on what she has done so far. I am sure that she has had very little time to spend with her family. It must be the same for her officials also, due to the amount of work that they have put in.

I have a serious question, which needs to be answered. I am totally confused about the way in which we are dealing with this matter. There are hundreds of people in this building today. Some have come from rural communities and others come from farming communities. My difficulty is in that we are telling people that they cannot go to events.

At the weekend, Rangers and Celtic fans travelled to Scotland to watch football, and they mingled with people from the community there. Some of them will be back today. Manchester United's match was called off. If it had not been called off people from both sides of the border would have travelled to the match. There

would have been large numbers of people involved — not just a couple of hundred.

Why have the Minister and others called for the cancellation of junior soccer and Irish League soccer, considering that one of the matches cancelled was between Cliftonville and Crusaders in north Belfast, which does not have a rural community? There are probably more people in the Chamber today than would attend that match.

Ms Rodgers: I thank Mr Hutchinson for his kind remarks and his consideration for the problems my family are going through. I will pass his comments on to my husband — it might go some way towards compensation. I assure the Member that he has not incurred my wrath, for his question is perfectly legitimate. I understand that there is confusion.

The Executive Committee have issued guidelines which people need to look at and apply to their own situation as individuals or as organisers of events. The guidelines were worked out on the basis of clear advice from the experts, who are the Chief Veterinary Officer and other veterinary officers.

With regard to events and public amenities, the guidelines state that events in urban areas, which do not involve large numbers of people travelling from England, Scotland or Wales, can go ahead. I am not aware that I have asked for any junior soccer to be postponed. It would be crazy not to go ahead with junior soccer in urban areas that involves only people from urban areas. However, it is understandable that large numbers of people should not travel from England, Scotland or Wales given the present situation across the water.

I cannot ask Celtic, Rangers or my own team — Manchester United — to cancel their games, for many people across the water go to them, and that is their business. I am trying to protect the Northern Ireland industry. People who travel to those matches should look at the guidelines. For instance, if they are farmers abiding by the guidelines of fortress farms, in their own interests they should not travel to those matches. That is the first rule.

11.00 am

The first line of defence is the farmer himself. Secondly, anyone in a rural community, or in touch with farming people, land or animals, should certainly not be travelling across the water at this time. I ask individuals to take responsibility for themselves. It is impossible to police every person. The guidelines are there and the implications of foot-and-mouth disease coming in to Northern Ireland have been spelt out. I am simply asking for continued public support.

If someone from north Belfast, the lower Shankill, west Belfast or another urban area is a supporter of either of those teams and is going across there and coming back here again, the risk is possibly not as great. It depends

on whom they are in contact with when they are over there. It is impossible to legislate for everyone. In relation to large crowds coming to events over here, the guidelines clearly state that in urban areas, events which do not involve large numbers of people from England, Scotland or Wales should go ahead, but if they do involve such visitors, then cancellation should be considered.

Mr Armstrong: I thank the Minister for all that she has done over the past weeks on foot-and-mouth disease. I have some concerns. Can the Minister assure me and the House that she will encourage the United Kingdom Minister for Agriculture, Mr Nick Brown, and the Prime Minister to put measures in place that will ensure persons or traffic at ports are monitored, especially if they have been in contact with farmers on the UK mainland?

My biggest worry is that foot-and-mouth disease could be brought across to this Province on clothes or vehicles because of lack of precautions at the ports on the UK mainland. I do not think that precautions at the UK mainland ports are as stringent as those in our own country. When a person or vehicle from the UK mainland comes into Northern Ireland carrying foot-and-mouth disease, it is there, and you cannot send it back.

Ms Rodgers: I agree with the Member and share his concern. I will be reviewing, and possibly tightening further, the GB controls. I visited Larne last week to see for myself and was entirely satisfied by the enormous effort being put in by my staff and by the vet in charge there. Not only were the lorries there going through a very wet and squelchy disinfectant mat when they arrived; they were then being brought into the yard and sprayed with disinfectant. I saw that for myself.

We have now ensured that mats have been placed on ships and boats, so that lorry drivers, in particular, who would otherwise simply drive off, have to go through the mats on the boat before they get into their lorries. That measure was not there before. Our measures are very strict and well adhered to, but I will be keeping them under review. It is an issue that I will be discussing next Wednesday at the ministerial meeting. As the situation in GB worsens, we have to keep our controls very tightly under review.

Mr McGrady: Like other Members, I commend the Minister and her officials on their tremendous work and their dedication to this particular problem. I am sure that every Member is concerned that there may be some animals that have not been traced. We hope that that problem is resolved as quickly as possible. In view of her statement, will the Minister look at particular problems thrown up by the existing controls? Is she aware of that substantive economic sector in the agriculture community — horse-breeding? The studding of the mares must be carried out at this time of the year, within a particular time frame.

Can she examine the controls and negotiate with the Republic of Ireland's Minister of Agriculture so that carefully controlled licensing of movement between mares and stud farms can be facilitated thus allowing the industry to survive the season? If this cannot be achieved within the next couple of weeks then the breeding season will be cancelled until next year.

Ms Rodgers: That is a very relevant question because specific problems are being faced by the equine industry at the moment. Horses are not susceptible to the disease, but they can be carriers. I assure Mr McGrady that my chief agricultural officer had a productive meeting with equine industry representatives at the end of last week. Some adjustments to the controls have been made and, as a result, the industry has expressed satisfaction with the current position. Mares can be brought in to foal, and, in welfare situations — where they cannot be treated on the premises — horses can be brought to the vet under licence. At the moment, all animal movement is permitted only under strict licence.

Mr Kane: How does the Minister expect the co-operation of farmers to restrict the spread of foot-and-mouth disease when Greenmount Agricultural College was spreading cattle slurry on land at a rented farm last Thursday? I am sure the Minister is aware that the spread of foot-and-mouth disease is a risk, but so is the spread of brucellosis — and I believe that Greenmount has had an outbreak of this disease. Has the Minister and her chief veterinary officer considered the risk in spreading animal slurry? What steps can be taken to prevent it in the future?

Will the Minister consider that there may be an opportunity to reduce the number of cattle being transported across the Province by suspending the over-30-month cull until the end of the incubation period? These animals are being slaughtered at Langford Processors, Largy Road, Crumlin. This transportation and slaughter is not necessary, and it is putting neighbouring farms at risk. Can the Minister give this House constructive advice on the issue?

Ms Rodgers: My Chief Veterinary Officer advises me that slurry spread is not a problem, and I have been guided throughout this crisis by his expert advice. I cannot comment on Greenmount, except to say that it is not a problem.

I am not aware of the situation regarding transport of cattle for the over-30-months scheme cull. I know that cattle are being transported for slaughter because that is essential in order to keep the food chain going. It is carried out on the basis of cattle going straight from farm to slaughterhouse in order to minimise risk. All over-30-month scheme cattle are going direct to slaughter and not through the marts. The old practice of collecting cattle from different farms before taking them to be slaughtered is not happening.

Mr McHugh: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's statement and her

prime objective of preventing further outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease. Does she think that the continued running of events in Belfast will give the wrong message to the public?

Hugh Byrne, who is a Minister in the Southern Government, said today that Britain was now the leper in Europe. We seem to have a “business as usual” attitude in the face of the foot-and-mouth crisis across the water. Should people not have a more responsible attitude in terms of cohesion and how we approach the whole subject, in relation to events in Belfast that bring large numbers of people from rural areas, and, in particular, the meeting of the General Assembly of the Free Presbyterian Church at the Odyssey complex next weekend? *[Interruption]*

Ms Rodgers: I thank Mr McHugh for his question.

Dr O’Hagan: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Ian Paisley Jnr called Mr McHugh a papish bigot. Will you rule on that? *[Interruption]* Madam Deputy Speaker, I am only after being called a papish bigot as well. *[Interruption]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that they must temper their language. The dignity of the House must never be compromised.

Ms Rodgers: Such remarks are unfortunate at a time of crisis for such an important industry.

One of the issues that we must face when holding events is that of public confidence. We need to protect our industry, and we need to ensure that there is a proportionate response and not an overreaction. As the guidelines spell out, there will be events in urban areas that can go ahead with minimal risk. I can only appeal to the public and to those holding events to look at the guidelines, apply them to their own situation and take whatever action they feel is responsible and necessary.

The first line of defence against this disease lies with the farmer. Therefore people in rural communities, and particularly on farms, must not go to any such event in case they bring back infection. They must take responsibility for the availability of disinfectant and so forth as they go in and out of their farms. The “fortress farmer” attitude is important.

I will not comment on other remarks made by other people, except to say that in relation to this crisis I have had full co-operation from Minister Walsh in the Republic and I am entirely satisfied that that co-operation has been working well. Minister Walsh is on record as saying that we have been in constant contact and that he is entirely satisfied with the co-operation. Both Departments have been in contact on an hourly basis, and sometimes on a half-hourly basis — particularly my Chief Veterinary Officer, Dr Bob McCracken, and the chief vet in the South. There is entire satisfaction that everything is

being done to keep foot-and-mouth disease off the island of Ireland.

Mr Leslie: I note with concern the Minister’s additional remarks regarding some untraced sheep. I thank her for bringing that matter promptly to the attention of the House. It is clear why she cannot be completely specific about this. I note the Minister’s assertion that she will not be relaxing controls for as long as she deems that there is a risk to justify them. I assure her of my full support in taking that stand. I trust that she will err consistently on the side of caution until we reach the end of this episode.

Further to the points raised by Billy Hutchinson and Billy Armstrong, I refer again to the vexed question of travel to and from Scotland. Surely the Minister has noted, as we all have, the severe clustering of cases of foot-and-mouth in the Scottish border counties. Unfortunately, these are absolutely adjacent to the main arterial routes that both cars and lorries travel up and down to get to Northern Ireland. There is an inconsistency and vagueness as to how real we think the threat is of infection being picked up by people travelling in that way.

11.15 am

I understand the restrictions in relation to those who have been on farms, but can the Minister assure the House that everything is being done to ensure that infection is not being brought in completely innocently by other people travelling through those areas?

Ms Rodgers: It is impossible for me to say that I am completely confident of anything, given the situation I face and the amount of illegal trading that has gone on. This is a real concern, and we will look at how we can tighten our controls where necessary.

I take this opportunity to appeal to people who are travelling and who have been on or near farmland or in infected areas. If they have any doubt at all as to whether there is a risk, I appeal to them to own up on their return and to be disinfected at the port or airport to make sure that they are not carrying the disease.

It is virtually impossible to police everyone. We will continue to keep everything under review, and everything possible is being done at the moment, but we do need the co-operation of the public. People must recognise how important it is. There would be no problem if everyone were to take responsibility for his or her own behaviour, but I cannot categorically assure the House that every person will do that. All I can do is appeal to people to be responsible and to look at the guidelines. The clusters in Scotland are clearly a constant source of worry. A television programme a few nights ago showed the routes taken by trucks and the areas of infection. We can just do our best.

Mr Byrne: I welcome the Minister’s statement. Given this morning’s information, it is timely.

Would she care to comment on the suggested need to formally register legitimate cattle dealers in order to keep track of the movement of all farm animals now or in future?

Can she clear up confusion among the public about whether Northern Ireland's resident sheep should be tagged?

Ms Rodgers: I thank the Member for his question, but I am not sure what the last part meant. We will look at all those issues once we get over this emergency. Clearly, issues will arise from what has happened, and there are lessons to be learnt. Where there is a need to tighten up controls, we will do so.

As the Member will be aware, all Northern Ireland sheep are tagged and can be traced. Any lessons to be learnt from the disastrous events of the last few weeks will be learnt. At the moment, all my efforts are concentrated on trying to ensure that we do not exceed the one case of foot-and-mouth disease that we have.

Mr Poots: The news that over 60 animals, which came from the infected area in England, are circulating somewhere in the Irish Republic or in Northern Ireland is alarming. Will the Minister assure us that she is encouraging the RUC to arrest and charge the people responsible for not co-operating with the Ministry of Agriculture on this issue? Furthermore, will she use this experience to clamp down on the illegal smuggling ring that has existed for many years — particularly in south Armagh — and take herd books from those farmers who take many thousands of animals into their herds each year? Those animals seem to go nowhere else. They seem to die on those farms, when in reality they go south of the border.

Will the Minister also act against those cattle dealers who buy calves in marts but have no permits to take them elsewhere? It is quite clear that those animals are being smuggled. Further to that, will she consider taking a case to the Agriculture Minister in England to get compensation for the livestock markets? Their business has been completely stopped, and they have had no income for the last three weeks. Will she support a reduction in their rates?

Ms Rodgers: I thank Mr Poots for his five or six questions. In relation to his first few questions, I find it rather strange to be asked if I will encourage the RUC to arrest those responsible. My officials have been meeting — and, indeed, are meeting today — with the RUC and the Department's fraud unit and veterinary investigation units. They are taking the investigation forward, and I imagine that they are taking it forward for no other reason than to seek the arrest and conviction of those responsible. I sincerely hope that they succeed.

Mr Poots talked about clamping down on illegal smuggling and acting against cattle dealers. These are matters that arise from the present situation, and clearly

they will be looked at in the post-mortem of the foot-and-mouth disease outbreak. My concentration and my whole focus is to ensure that the policy objective of keeping Northern Ireland free of foot-and-mouth disease, with the exception of the one case that we have, is achieved.

With regard to the numbers of missing cattle, the figure could be up to 60, but, given the lack of co-operation, I am not certain. Further questioning is under way on that issue.

Mr Poots raised another question to do with compensation or rates; I am not sure which.

Mr Poots: My question related to compensation for livestock marts.

Ms Rodgers: This is an issue of consequential compensation, and, as I have already stated, this has been put on the agenda for the ministerial meeting next week. I am aware of the problem, but it will be dealt with at national level.

When I met with the auctioneers last week, the issue of rates being paid by the marts was mentioned to me, and I raised this at the interdepartmental meeting of officials, which I chair. Following that meeting the matter has been passed on to the Department of Finance and Personnel, and I expect it to be discussed at today's Executive meeting.

Mr C Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's statement and particularly the fact that the door has not been completely closed on compensation for consequential losses. An obvious example of this is a case where a dairy herd may be slaughtered, and the farmer will receive compensation for the livestock but not for the loss of milk products for a number of months. Rural tourism projects in the restricted zone in South Armagh area have been hit very hard due to events having been cancelled, and this has resulted in financial loss. If the Minister does not receive sufficient flexibility in order to make available compensation for consequential losses, can she at least ensure that next year, when her Department is considering grant aid to these projects, that situation will be borne in mind?

Ms Rodgers: At this point I am not prepared to make any commitment about what might happen next year. I understand the difficulties that people are facing, and I sympathise with them. I am aware of the cash-flow situation in the farming community, and I would like to inform Mr Murphy that I have taken all necessary steps to alleviate it. Payments of the less favoured area allowances are starting to go out today — and 90% will be paid by the end of March. I have asked my officials to prioritise that so that money is getting into the farmers' pockets as soon as possible. The balance of the sheep annual premium is being paid in March — this may

extend into April — but it is being expedited. The first tranche of the sheep agri-money payment will be made before the end of March, and the balance of the sheep special premium will start to be paid at the beginning of April.

I have tried to do everything possible to ensure that subsidies will flow quickly. I cannot, at this point, make any commitments about what will happen in the future. Clearly, there will be sympathy in the Assembly and in the Executive for the industry's plight. There will, I hope, be some flexibility when I come to the Minister of Finance and Personnel to look for additional money.

Mr Beggs: I thank the Minister for highlighting the need for vigilance against foot-and-mouth disease by demonstrating the use of a disinfectant at the port of Larne, in my own constituency. Can she assure me that all vehicles and foot passengers are required to pass over disinfected mats?

The Minister referred to illegally traded animals. Does she agree that the absence of individual sheep tagging in the Republic of Ireland has enabled this smuggling to occur with relative ease? Has she raised her concern about this lack of tagging in the Republic of Ireland with her counterpart there? Does she agree that the proof that sheep movements into the Republic of Ireland are associated with this foot-and-mouth outbreak demonstrates the clear need for the Republic of Ireland to introduce sheep tagging — in the same way as in the United Kingdom — to protect animal health in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland?

Ms Rodgers: My response to the Member's first question is yes. All vehicles are disinfected, as are all foot passengers who disembark. The problem of sheep tagging in the Republic of Ireland no longer exists because the Republic's Agriculture Minister has announced that, from now on, tagging is to take place.

Will Mr Beggs please repeat his third question?

Mr Beggs: Does the Minister agree that this illegal movement and the fact that there was not proper sheep tagging have jeopardised animal health in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland? She will also be aware that the implementation of sheep tagging on all farms in the Republic of Ireland will take some time.

Ms Rodgers: Of course, the illegal movement of sheep and the lack of co-operation have created a huge problem for animal health and, particularly, as we have seen, the spread of foot-and-mouth disease. I discussed all of these matters last week with Minister Walsh, and they will be discussed at the North/South Ministerial Council when we meet again.

Animal health is already on the North/South Ministerial Council's agenda. Officials in both Departments are proposing joint strategies for animal health on the

whole island. Mr Beggs's question was well put, and I appreciate its importance.

Mr Bradley: I join the other Members in paying tribute to the Minister on behalf of the farming community for her ongoing efforts. I share other Members' anxiety about the addition to this morning's statement. The Minister stated that up to 60 animals from the controversial consignment may have — and I appreciate that she emphasised the word "may" — slipped through the net. How can the farming community help her to investigate and, if necessary, trace these animals?

Ms Rodgers: Mr Bradley has made a good point, but we are not certain that these "additional" animals exist. However, I say to the farming community that it is essential that we get to the bottom of this matter. The entire industry will be aware of the implications of the possible existence of irregularly or illegally traded animals, particularly sheep, with which the infection seems to have started. I appeal to anyone in the farming community, the rural community or anywhere else in Northern Ireland to pass on any scrap of information which might help the investigations to me, to my Department or to the police.

Mr Shannon: Will the Minister consider applying the provisions and recommendations on disinfectant precautions to roads on, for example, the Ards Peninsula? Some of the farmers in that area have told me that they would be happy if very strict restrictions were imposed to control any possible outbreak of the disease. At the moment, we are fortunate not to be affected.

11.30 am

What is the Minister's advice to those farmers who are bringing their cattle and sheep off the hills for winter grazing or moving them close to their farms? What is the correct method of bringing livestock closer to home?

Ms Rodgers: With regard to Mr Shannon's queries about restrictions on the roads, it would simply not be possible for my officials to do this. They are already over-stretched. I visited the Newry office last week, and I was very impressed by the enormous burden of work that those people have been doing since this thing broke out two weeks ago. Some of them have been working around the clock to try to deal with one outbreak. It would be simply impossible to put restrictions on roads just as a precaution.

I must reiterate the need for a fortress farm approach. All farmers, in the Ards Peninsula and elsewhere, need to be aware that they are the first front line of defence. They need to guard their farms and take all necessary precautions. The Ulster Farmers' Union has emphasised that this is the best way of ensuring that they remain free of the disease.

In answer to the question about sheep, I am aware that there are problems — particularly with bringing ewes down for lambing, and it is the lambing season.

Indeed, I met one farmer last week going into the Newry office who had a real problem getting his sheep down for lambing. I am keeping this under review, and I will be guided by the advice of the Chief Veterinary Officer at all times.

Movement of sheep would be very risky at this time. I am not yet in a position to say whether it will become possible to make some adjustment under very strict supervision. I am examining all options and if there is a possibility of any easement on the advice of the Chief Veterinary Officer, I will be prepared to move. However, given the information I have put before the House today, I am extremely reluctant to do anything that might endanger the industry. I know that ewes can lamb on a hill when bedding and straw are put down. It is more difficult, and there is a slight risk of losing the lambs, but I have to balance those risks. Which is the greater — the risk of spreading foot-and-mouth disease or the risk of losing one or two lambs? I am aware of the huge inconvenience.

Mr Hussey: I would like to thank the Minister for the work she and her officials have done and for her report to the House today.

The additional information supplied today deepens my concern on one count. The Minister has referred to the fortress farm approach to help to restrict the possible spread of foot-and-mouth disease. The Minister has also referred to the safeguards put in place at the ports. In the interests of the fortress Ulster approach, I urge her to be aware of the back door.

We do not know where these 60 animals have disappeared to. The Minister will also be aware of the theory — perhaps anecdotal, perhaps factual — that BSE in the Republic may have been curtailed by the JCB. If that continues to be the case in the Republic, and if there is foot-and-mouth disease there which we are not aware of, would the Minister not consider it circumspect for us to check the borders in the same way that the Irish Republic is checking the border?

Ms Rodgers: With thanks, I hope that Mr Hussey is not playing politics with this. Maybe he is not. He may be genuinely concerned.

As I have already said, there is no sign of foot-and-mouth disease in the Republic and the resource implications of closing the border would be enormous at a time when our resources are focused on the essential task of keeping foot-and-mouth disease out of the North. The most important area to patrol is the point of entry from GB, where the disease is spreading at an alarming rate.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that there are some seven and a half minutes left and a number of Members wish to put questions. I ask Members and the Minister to be brief.

Mr Fee: I would like to add my thanks and deep gratitude to the Minister and her Department. The past couple of weeks have been particularly tough in County Armagh, and when the going gets tough, the tough get going, and we very much appreciate the tough way in which the Minister has approached this problem. We also appreciate how well she understands the problems of the farming community in south Armagh that are over and above the problems of the farming community throughout Northern Ireland. When we get through this crisis, will the Minister look at those farms in County Armagh in particular, taking measures to ensure that depleted flocks and herds are replenished, and will she also consider how lost markets can be restored? Will she put in place financial counselling to rebuild lost farm businesses and take such measures as are needed to alleviate the emerging problems in relation to collateral and credit with financial institutions?

Ms Rodgers: I thank Mr Fee for his remarks and for his questions. I empathise with what he has said about how the farmers in south Armagh are suffering. I have spoken to some farmers who have lost their herds, and I know the trauma they are suffering. I fully understand that many people will need counselling, and I am considering ways in which farm families can be supported.

I will look sympathetically at all the consequences, and there will be immediate compensation for the loss of animals. Any consequential will have to be looked at at a national level, and I will raise this issue at the ministerial meeting in London next Wednesday. I cannot go further at this stage, except to say that I sympathise with the farmers. However, my current focus is on eradicating and eliminating the disease.

Mr Gibson: First, in view of the 60 untraced animals and the fact that an RUC agriculture fraud squad is virtually having to be established, does the Minister not accept that this calls into question the traceability which was much hailed in recent months?

Secondly, I thank the Minister for arranging compensation payments because a west Tyrone lobby has come to me saying that cash-flow problems are strangling the agriculture industry. Will the Minister move quickly, because farmers are in a desperate situation?

Thirdly, on behalf of the consumer as well as the distressed farmer, why has the cost to the farmer gone up by only three pence per kilo over the past month. From an original high of 172p he is now facing a reduction, whereas, I am told, butchers have faced an increase of 12p? Is there evidence of a meat cartel using foot-and-mouth disease to increase its profits?

Ms Rodgers: The problem with untraced animals is not the traceability system; rather, it is that some people have been trading illegally. We will have to look at that and tighten it up. Some people have been acting outside the law, trading illegally and flouting the law.

I thank the Member for recognising the measures that I have taken to deal with cash-flow problems. Last week I also had meetings with the grain trade and the banks. I had a very sympathetic hearing and was assured that they are aware of the cash-flow problems that the agri-food industry and farmers in particular are experiencing. They are prepared to be flexible and will not come down hard on people with real cash-flow problems at present.

In relation to the consumer and the prices being charged, I have no evidence of a cartel, and if there were one I would be very concerned about it. That would be a matter for the Office of Fair Trading. I have met with the General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland this week to hear its concerns. I would be extremely concerned if the price of meat was rising at a time when the price of animals was falling. That is a commercial issue that I could not get involved with, but it would be an indication of what could be called an unfair exploitation of farmers at a time when they are in real difficulty.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. In relation to Mr Hussey's comments about fortress Ulster, is that two thirds of the nine counties of Ulster?

Is the Minister satisfied with the measures put in place by the Post Office, given its central role in the matter? I have been informed that farmers from the restricted area of County Armagh have to travel to Newry to collect their post, and in some cases disinfectant matting is not in place. Can the Minister assure me that there is close liaison with Post Offices to ensure that appropriate measures are taken?

Ms Rodgers: I consider this particular crisis to be an all-Ireland crisis. It crosses the border, so the term "fortress Ulster" refers to the nine counties. Indeed, it is fortress Ireland at the moment, so I do not have a problem with the term used. It is not a time for making political points.

The Post Office is aware of the guidelines that we have set out. I will look at the matter, but I cannot give an exact response as it has just been brought to my attention.

Mr Leslie: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. My point of order is further to a point of order on this subject which I raised in September. It is to do with the taking of points of order during questions on ministerial statements. We seem to have at last achieved consistency, and questions are not taken during questions to Ministers. However, I understood that the Speaker ruled in September that points of order would not be taken during the hour allocated for questions to a Minister on a statement, but would be taken at the end of the period. There seems to have been serial recidivism on the matter since. I ask you to confer with the Speaker's Office so that a clear, unequivocal and consistent line will be taken on the matter.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the Member for bringing up that point about procedure. The matter will be looked into.

Mr A Maginness: Madam Deputy Speaker, I accept your earlier ruling about the use of the term "papist bigot". The Member who was alleged to have made the comment from a sedentary position has not denied it. Such language is not of a political nature but, rather, of a religious nature that is deeply offensive to the House. I think that all Members will share that deep offence.

11.45 am

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like you to reflect on your ruling and perhaps give further advice to the House with regard to such deeply offensive religious abuse. Perhaps you could tell the House what further action might be taken in such circumstances and advise the Member concerned to avoid such offensive religious remarks.

Mr Kennedy: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. You, rightly, gave a ruling on this matter. It is my understanding that, under Standing Orders, this matter cannot be re-examined. It is therefore an abuse by the Member for North Belfast to attempt to re-examine it in these terms. It is unhelpful to the House, and it is a clear abuse of his responsibility as a Member.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have listened to both points of order, and I am grateful for the advice from both sides of the House. I ruled on the issue, and I repeat that the dignity of the House or any of its Members must never be compromised. However, this matter will be taken up with the Speaker for further advice.

THE ENVIRONMENT

North/South Ministerial Council Sectoral Meeting

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Foster): I will make a statement on the third environment sectoral meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council, which was held at Belle Isle, County Fermanagh, on Friday 23 February 2001.

(Mr Deputy Speaker [Sir John Gorman] in the Chair)

Following nomination by the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, Mr Mark Durkan and I attended the meeting, which I chaired. The Irish Government were represented by Mr Noel Dempsey, the Minister for the Environment and Local Government. This statement has been agreed by Mr Durkan and is also made on his behalf.

The meeting began by reviewing progress on the current environmental work programme. The Council noted progress by the Environment and Heritage Service and the Environmental Protection Agency in developing a joint register of environmental research projects. The agencies are in the process of tendering for a joint contract to develop a web site of current environmental research. Access to this information will help researchers to avoid duplication of effort and to identify topics for research and possible funding sources.

The working group on water quality reported on the two areas that it was tasked to take forward — namely, water quality strategies for the Erne and Foyle catchment areas and the implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive.

Dr Alan Barr of Kirk McClure Morton made a short presentation on the main findings and recommendations of the review of the Erne and Foyle catchment management strategies. Copies of the report have been placed in the Assembly Library.

The Council also approved the publication of a report — ‘New Technologies for Monitoring’ — which was prepared jointly by the two environmental agencies. This report has been placed on the agencies’ web sites, and copies have been deposited in the Assembly Library.

At the second environment sectoral meeting the Council agreed that co-operation on new technologies for monitoring should concentrate initially on water quality monitoring. In view of the importance of water quality monitoring for the implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive, the Council decided at the Belle Isle meeting that this work should be taken forward by the working group on water quality as part of its work on the implementation of the Directive.

The Council noted the progress being made by the two environmental agencies in developing databases of environmental information. Ministers agreed that initial work should concentrate on cataloguing the information held by both jurisdictions. Decisions will then be taken on how best to provide Internet access to the data.

The Council agreed that the two Environment Departments should conduct a joint study into a number of the most significant impacts of agriculture on the environment. The terms of reference of the study include: assessment of the use of nitrogen and phosphorus fertilisers; consideration of good farming practices and relevant controls both North and South; and assessment of the cross-border movement of slurries and spent mushroom compost. A steering group including representatives of the relevant Agriculture Departments will take the work forward.

The Council then turned its attention to cross-border waste management. Ministers agreed that officials should begin work on identifying options to encourage the expansion of waste recycling in Ireland. In particular, it was agreed that a joint approach to developing uses and markets for secondary materials and recyclates would be of mutual benefit.

Ministers also noted the arrangements for taking forward the issues raised by Assembly Members, following my first report to the Assembly on 11 September 2000. Pollution of the Erne system and the spread of zebra mussels will be studied by the water quality working group in the context of its work on the implementation of the Water Framework Directive.

Investigating problems of disposing spent mushroom compost will form part of the study on the environmental impacts of agriculture. Primary responsibility for transposing the Major Accident Hazards Directive in the South rests with the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment rather than with Minister Dempsey’s Department. It is not, therefore, a matter for the environment sectoral group.

Finally, the Council considered and agreed the text of a joint communiqué that was issued after the meeting. A copy of that communiqué has been placed in the Assembly Library. The Council agreed that the next sectoral meeting on the environment will take place in June in the South.

Ms Hanna: I welcome the Minister’s statement, in particular the announcement on co-operation on new technologies for water quality monitoring. Does the Minister believe that there are adequate measures in place to protect our waterways, and that there are sufficient fines to deter polluters?

Is he considering raising the 10% target reduction of medium to severe water pollution incidents to a more challenging level and, indeed, perhaps raising the fines?

Mr Foster: New monitoring technologies are extremely complex and must be thoroughly considered. Copies of the joint report on new technologies for monitoring have been placed in the Assembly Library. The report is also available on the websites of the two environmental agencies.

The report concluded that there are well-established methodologies for monitoring emissions to air and water and for measuring air quality. The report stated that co-operation should initially concentrate on monitoring water quality. The initial work in that area will focus on three main issues; the chemical and biological monitoring of surface waters, and the assessment of fish stocks.

Our interest in fish stocks is purely as an indicator of environment quality — any work will be undertaken in conjunction with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure as appropriate. Where there are other issues, these will be followed up.

Mrs Carson: I welcome the Minister's statement that the working group on water quality has reported on the water quality strategies for the Erne and Foyle catchments and the implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive, and also that the working group will be studying the pollution of the Erne system and the spread of zebra mussels as part of the Directive.

What progress has the working group made in the water quality strategies? What advice would the Minister give to boat owners and anglers in the Lough Erne area?

Can he give an assurance that positive action will be pursued on the zebra mussel problem in Lough Erne? That was not our problem — it was one that we could have used the policy of "fortress Ulster" on — but unfortunately it is with us. Will the Minister update the Assembly on progress, if any, that we can make?

Mr Foster: The Water Framework Directive requires member states to identify cross-border waterways as international river basin districts and member states are required to co-operate on the management of water quality throughout such a district on both sides of the border.

Northern Ireland's three main waterways are the Erne, the Foyle and the Lough Neagh systems. They form part of catchments with the South. The group has made good progress in two areas: the Erne and the Foyle water quality strategies. Kirk McClure Morton, consulting engineers, were commissioned to review the Erne and Foyle catchment management strategies. They presented the main findings of the report at the meeting at Belle Isle.

Significant water quality management advances have been made since the original strategies for Lough Erne and Lough Foyle were completed in 1997–98. However, there are important new areas of work to be done to meet the water framework directive requirements.

The working group has begun to plan for the long-term implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive.

Relevant officials from both jurisdictions and their counterparts in Great Britain will have to liaise on technical matters.

The occurrence of zebra mussels outside their natural habitat is a problem in many parts of Europe and north America. They first appeared in the Erne system in 1996. They probably spread to Ireland on the hulls of boats that entered the River Shannon and then to the Erne system by the pleasure craft.

The main thrust of my Department's spring publicity campaign will be to educate the public about the mussel problem. It will be aimed particularly at boat owners, anglers and those who engage in watersports. We need their help to stop the spread of the mussels to waters that are not yet affected. The campaign will alert those groups to the danger of transporting zebra mussels to unaffected waters and will explain how their boats and equipment can be cleansed by steam-cleaning —[*Interruption*]

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. There is someone in the Chamber who has a mobile phone. Will he or she please remove himself or herself and the phone.

Mr Foster: The campaign will explain how boats and equipment can be cleansed by steam cleaning hulls, and so on.

Mr Poots: In October 2000 the environment sectoral meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council agreed to proposals for the development of the database of environmental information. It was agreed that the emphasis should be placed on a few specific matters such as the options for completing the CORINE Land Cover Project 2000 and the development and integration of several key databases on matters such as river and air quality. Today, the Minister told us that the sectoral meeting of the Council noted the progress on those issues. What exactly has that progress been?

Mr Foster: The land cover map records in detail the extent and type of land use — for example, forest, wetland, farmland and coastal areas. The information is valuable to environmental planners, regulators, agriculturalists and conservationists. The main difference between the UK land cover map and the CORINE map is the level of detail in each. The CORINE map records information to a minimum of five hectares. The UK land cover map is more detailed and records information every one hectare. Northern Ireland is included in the more detailed UK land cover 2000 map.

It is a European requirement that Northern Ireland also be part of the CORINE land cover map. There should be no additional costs to Northern Ireland. The cost of converting the UK land cover map to CORINE will be shared by the UK and European Environmental Agency. The obvious benefit of a joint land cover map is that land types will be classified in the same way in the North and in the South. It will be essential to have similar information

in the North and the South when characterising shared river basin districts for the water framework directive.

We are working on other databases, and the first step in the integration of key environmental databases will be to catalogue the information held by both jurisdictions. Full integration of data may not be necessary — the catalogue itself may be sufficient.

People will have Internet access to the information in both jurisdictions. It is too soon to estimate the cost of developing a catalogue of environmental information. However, both environmental agencies had already begun the process for their own purposes.

Progress is slowly being made towards integration, which is not expected significantly to increase the costs.

Mr M Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

The Minister had a meeting on 23 February, and foot-and-mouth disease was confirmed around that time.

What controls has the Minister considered placing on environmental issues? Was that discussed at the cross-border meeting? What advice has the Minister given to people travelling either North to South or South to North — for example, hill walkers?

12.00

Mr Foster: There were no confirmed cases of foot-and-mouth disease when the environment sectoral meeting was held. We have assisted the Department of Agriculture by taking the necessary measures and precautions over the movement of people. We have eased the enforcement of the tachograph rules. We have worked in conjunction with the Department of Agriculture, and we will continue to do so. We work with that Department — it is mainly a Department of Agriculture issue — under the guidance of the Executive Committee.

Mr McClarty: I am interested in the fact that the Council has noted the progress made by the Environment and Heritage Service and the Environmental Protection Agency in developing a joint register of environmental research projects. The Minister mentioned that the progress of the two environmental agencies in developing databases of environmental information was also noted. What progress has been made so far in developing the joint register of environmental research projects? Can the Minister briefly outline the benefits that will arise from the involvement of the two agencies in developing the databases of environmental information?

Mr Foster: An advertisement calling for tenders for a contract to develop a web site for the joint environmental research register was placed in newspapers both North and South on 22 February 2001. Access to the register will be through the web sites of the two agencies or through the sites of partner organisations that have contributed information about their research to the register.

The register currently contains information about environmental protection research carried out by the Environment and Heritage Service and the Environmental Protection Agency. Research about nature conservation will be added next. Thereafter it is planned to add information from academic institutions and the private and commercial sectors where available. The register will be of great benefit to anyone who is involved in environmental research or anyone — such as universities and colleges, environmental groups, industry, environmental consultants and agriculturists — who wants to know about the current and past studies. Sharing the information will help researchers and sponsors to avoid duplication of effort and cost, identify new areas for research, find partners for collaboration and identify potential sources of funding.

Information about the new monitoring technologies is in the Assembly Library; it is also available on the web sites of the two environmental agencies. The report concluded that there are well-established methodologies for monitoring emissions to air and water and for measuring air quality and that co-operation should concentrate initially on monitoring water quality. Initial work in this area will focus on three main issues — chemical and biological monitoring of surface waters and the assessment of fixed fish stocks.

Mr McGrady: I thank the Minister for the comprehensive report on the joint work by the two environmental agencies. Can he confirm that the Environment and Heritage Service is an agency of the Department of the Environment, whereas the Environmental Protection Agency is independent of the Republic of Ireland's Department of the Environment and Local Government? Northern Ireland is the only part of these islands that does not have an environmental protection agency which is independent of the worst polluter — namely, the Department of the Environment itself.

Is the Minister aware of the inland fishermen who complained bitterly for over two decades that they could not get the Department to act on proven pollution? Is it not time for Northern Ireland to have an independent environmental protection agency that would act unilaterally to guard the environment on all the issues that the Minister so clearly listed in his report this morning?

Mr Foster: This question is very important and the issue is one that has been referred to many times. The Member is referring to pollution incidents where there has been Crown immunity. If we were to introduce an independent agency, we would be creating another quango — and I am not sure that that is what is wanted.

There are advantages and disadvantages. I assure the Member that any Government agency that pollutes the water will certainly be exposed. We do that rather pedantically. Sewage treatment is the responsibility of the Department for Regional Development; it is not

within my remit. Regarding pollution, we will certainly go after the polluter, whoever he may be, and we will enforce the issues when they come before us and where it is possible to do so.

Mr Berry: At the October 2000 meeting the Minister raised the issue of the Major Accident Hazards Directive, which had not been implemented by the Republic of Ireland. Today, he has told us that it is not appropriate to the environment sectoral group but to the South's Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. Has the Minister passed our deep concerns about this Directive to the relevant Minister, to have something done about the issue?

Mr Foster: The Major Accident Hazards Directive is not within the remit of Mr Dempsey's Department and, therefore, did not come under this sectoral meeting. I assure the Member that where the issue impinges on us, we will be pursuing the matter vehemently with the Republic of Ireland's Government. This would be a national issue, and the UK Government would be involved.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a leasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement and particularly welcome the presentation of the two reports — the working group on water quality and new technologies for monitoring. I look forward to examining these reports, particularly given the recent evidence presented to the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee that the Department of the Environment is one of the major polluters. I would like to see the actions, proposals and recommendations that those reports contain taken forward.

My question to the Minister is on the part of his report that deals with waste management. While I welcome the announcement about the cross-border waste study, it is somewhat vague and general. The study is very important, and I want to know when it will begin. How urgently is this matter being addressed, and how long will it take? Will the Minister undertake to review the current waste management strategy in the light of this important research?

Mr Foster: I am pleased with the progress that has been made on implementing the waste management strategy since its publication in March 2000. My Department will make £3.5 million available to help councils implement the strategy, which requires district councils to submit their waste management plans to my Department by June 2001. District councils have formed three waste management planning groups to meet this requirement.

Further planned work includes: establishing a new advisory board, which will comprise 15 members, including a chairman, to assist my Department implement the strategy; the issue of planning policy guidance on planning and waste management; the introduction of regulations to place a duty of care on anyone handling controlled waste to ensure that it is managed properly and recovered or disposed of safely; and the introduction of

a waste management licensing scheme to control the operation of waste disposal sites. The progress may be slow but we are working on it and movement has been made.

A study is beginning straight away, and I will also inform the Member when the first review of the waste management strategy comes around.

Mr Ford: I welcome the Minister's statement. With regard to the study on the expansion of waste recycling, what involvement will there be of private sector bodies, which seem to be playing the major part in recycling and on which we will be depending if we are to meet the targets now being set?

As regards the study on the impact of agriculture on the environment, this is not exactly the best timing for such a study. Moreover, it is couched in terms such as "consideration of good farming practices" and "relevant controls", as opposed to perhaps "consideration of the encouragement of good farming practices". Would it not be better to encourage farmers, by grant aid, to move towards better practices — especially in the face of the current crisis of BSE and foot-and-mouth disease — rather than suggest further controls, to add to their problems?

Mr Foster: The Member has referred to the waste management strategy. It has set a target for district councils to recycle 15% of household waste by 2005. This will entail a significant increase in the current level of recycling with district councils, estimated to be around 5%. I am pleased to state that my Department will provide, as I have said, £3.5 million to help councils to implement the strategy. This can include assistance with recycling and the development of targets for recycling.

With reference to the farming issues, one takes into consideration the great difficulties farmers have at this time. However, agriculture is a major contributor to the economy of both Northern Ireland and the Republic, of which we are all very much aware. I fully appreciate the dire circumstances that the agriculture industry finds itself in at present, particularly with the current foot-and-mouth emergency.

Nevertheless, we have to take a longer-term view and recognise the impact that agriculture activities have on the environment. The greatest problem is the run-off of nutrients to lakes and rivers, leading to excessive growth of algae and plants. This can cause oxygen levels to fall, which is the most serious water-quality problem affecting waterways on both sides of the border.

At Belle Isle, Ministers agreed that a joint study should be carried out into a number of the most significant impacts of agriculture on the environment. The study will involve representation of both Agriculture Departments. It will assess the use of fertiliser application rates, identify good farming practices and relevant controls, and assess cross-border movement of slurries and spent mushroom compost. Data from private bodies will come

in through the Waste Advisory Board, which will be appointed very shortly.

Mr Savage: I welcome the Minister's announcement that the Department of the Environment and its Republic of Ireland counterpart will be conducting a joint study into the significant impacts of agriculture on the environment.

I also welcome that the terms of reference for the study include assessment of the use of nitrogen and phosphorus fertilisers, cross-border movement of slurries and mushroom compost and good farming practices.

The Minister also mentioned the problem of disposing of spent mushroom compost, saying that it will be part of the environmental impacts of the agriculture study. Will he briefly outline what the study will be looking at and what impact will this have on the agriculture industry?

Mr Foster: As I said, the agriculture problem is a big problem. It is a difficult time for farmers, as I appreciate. The waste management strategy deals with the management of controlled wastes, which includes household, commercial and industrial wastes. Agricultural, mining and quarrying wastes are not included. However, the EU Waste Framework Directive requires that controls will be extended eventually to agricultural wastes.

My Department and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development will be working together to bring such wastes within the control regime and to develop an agricultural waste strategy. The aim is to incorporate within this the waste management strategy at its first review in 2002.

So far as the cross-border issue of spent mushroom compost is concerned, the mushroom industry is concentrated in the border counties of Armagh, Tyrone, Monaghan and Cavan. Spent mushroom compost (SMC) has become a major environmental problem in those areas. In Monaghan, around 60% of SMC is dumped, only 10% is composted, and 30% is land spread. If the compost were to be imported into Northern Ireland for disposal, the district council would need to be satisfied that environmentally sound disposal methods were not realistically available in the country of origin.

12.15 pm

Disposal options for SMC include utilisation in the potato sector, vermi-composting using worm beds, pelleting of pig slurry and SMC for use as fertiliser, and waste-to-energy recovery through incineration. Those are issues that we take on board, and, as I said earlier, we appreciate their importance and the difficulties that agriculture is having at this particular time. We are all involved in what is good for agriculture, and for all of us, in the long term.

Mr A Doherty: My question relates to waste recycling options. This is an urgent matter in view of the punitive deadlines on district councils to produce and implement waste management strategies. The Minister suggested,

in answer to a previous question, that work would begin at once on identifying such options. Can he be more precise with regard to the

"joint approach to developing uses and markets for secondary materials and recyclates"

that he mentioned? When will this approach move beyond the agreement stage to the setting-up and operation of effective joint working strategy groups?

Mr Foster: The waste management plans are due from district councils by June 2001 and will include proposals for achieving the recycling targets. Cross-border co-operation will provide the economies of scale necessary to make investment in recycling and recovery facilities viable. Northern Ireland is not large enough in itself, so there will be co-operation as far as that is concerned. We will look at it on an all-island basis. As I have already emphasised, that will also provide a larger market for products made from recycled material. That is a big issue on which we are working jointly.

Mr Gibson: I note that the Minister's water quality control group is going to undertake a study of the freshwater zebra mussel. He used the term "pollution of the Erne system". Is it true that the zebra mussel is a pollutant? Has any effective study been done? Has anything been done to see what its effect is on fishing? Does it usurp and take the food of the fish, or is it an excellent means of clearing the water? Furthermore, what has been done to prevent the spread of this mussel to the Foyle estuary? There are concerns in the fishing industry and, among those who enjoy fishing, concerns as to the effect of the freshwater zebra mussel.

Mr Foster: The zebra mussels at first seem as if they are clearing the water, but they do a lot of damage to it. I am not aware of any full investigations having been done. I understand that the Department of Agriculture is undertaking a major study of the zebra mussel issue because, as I said earlier, it is a very big issue that has really been imported. It looks as if the emphasis needs to be on prevention rather than cure because, as I understand it, whenever one has the problem, it is very difficult to get rid of it. Therefore prevention is an important issue. That is why I emphasised that boats and equipment can be cleansed by steam-cleaning the hulls. We depend very much on the people who move boats and equipment in waterways to ensure that they steam clean. The emphasis must be on prevention rather than cure.

Mr Hussey: Like others, I wish to home in on the issue of waste recycling. The Minister will be well aware that the group of councils in the north-west is of a cross-border nature and, from the point of view of my council in Strabane, we have had difficulties in working in a cross-border manner, particularly with Her Majesty's Treasury.

Will the Minister tell the House under what conditions the United Kingdom management plan is likely to allow

cross-border imports and exports of waste? Will the cross-border study involve a study of energy recovery from residual waste?

Mr Foster: The waste management strategy allows for cross-border co-operation as part of the district council waste management plans. Any cross-border co-operation needs to comply with the waste management strategy and the United Kingdom management plan for exports and imports of waste. The United Kingdom plan is currently under review. It is likely to allow cross-border imports and exports of waste where there are sound economic and environmental reasons for such activity and so long as the activity is included in the district councils' waste management plan.

The waste management strategy encourages groups of councils to draw up joint waste management plans to achieve economies of scale. Everything that is done will be controlled. The strategy will be watched closely, and control will be exercised on all cross-border activity. The North and South are co-operating so much, because waste management is a big issue — almost too big for Northern Ireland to deal with on its own. It is good that we, as two separate jurisdictions living in a neighbourly fashion, can work together on this big issue.

Mr O'Neill: I too welcome the Minister's statement. It is a clear indication that there is good work going on. When can Members expect the full implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive? Is there a programme for its implementation, and have dates and benchmarks been set?

Has the Minister noted the publication last Thursday morning of the report from the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee? Among the 67 recommendations made in that report, a large number referred to the Department of the Environment. Can the Minister give me, as Chairman of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee, a commitment that he and the Department of Environment will give early attention to all those areas that are the responsibility of his Department?

Mr Foster: There is a 15-year package associated with the Directive, so it will be some time before it is fully implemented. The report from the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee that the Member referred to was issued only last Thursday. My officials have not yet had a chance to consider fully the implications of the recommendations that affect my Department. Some of the recommendations relate to the work of the Department of the Environment. My officials will be in touch with their counterparts in the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. It is premature at this stage to speculate about how the Department of the Environment might respond. However, where there is a duty to respond, I assure the Member that the Department will do so.

Mr Shannon: When will the EU Water Framework Directive be implemented, and how will it be funded? Is

the Minister aware of the problems that there are in many constituencies relating to that? The Minister also mentioned waste recycling in his report. What financial incentives will be offered to individuals and companies to promote waste recycling?

Mr Foster: Finances are always a problem. The issue will be pursued, possibly through Europe and the Executive as well. We have 15 years in which to achieve the good water quality specified in the Directive. It will take some time for us to get there, and undoubtedly the money is a problem. That is why there is a cross-border study. Northern Ireland is not big enough to tackle waste management on its own. The Department of the Environment wants to encourage people to recycle and make them realise that it is a valuable thing to do.

A number of financial incentives will be considered to encourage recycling, but the first step is the development of markets and plans. We are working on that at present. This is a difficult issue which is going to be bigger than Northern Ireland can deal with on its own. It is worthwhile for the two different jurisdictions that border on one another to work hand in hand for the mutual benefit of all concerned.

Dr Birnie: I too would like to focus on waste management and recycling. I welcome the Minister's statement and agree on the importance of economies of scale. What problems have arisen with respect to ensuring the maximum co-operation between Northern Ireland and the Republic? The United Kingdom immediately implemented the relevant EU Directive, whereas the Republic of Ireland sought, and got, a derogation. That means, in practice, that it is behind us on implementing recycling targets.

Mr Foster: It can be very difficult if the two jurisdictions are not running in co-operation and co-ordination with each other. However, we hope to get that married together and balanced so that it will work. It is an important issue, but it will take some time to get us working in co-ordination.

The Chairperson of the Environment Committee (Rev Dr William McCrea): The Minister said in his statement that officials are to start work on identifying options to encourage expansion of recycling with a joint approach to uses and markets for secondary materials and recyclables. However, the Department is currently considering proposals from district councils on a sub-regional implementation of waste management strategy. The Environment Committee was given that information in a recent presentation by a key official from the Department. Is there, therefore, a danger that this initiative from the sectoral group will be seen as pre-empting the outcome of the present consultations with district councils? Surely the Department of the Environment's would be better actively participating with district councils to develop our own waste management strategy.

Mr Foster: I take Dr McCrea's point. There are issues that concern everyone, and everyone must work together to get something which will bring us together. The data will be used to support councils' plans, and the study is welcomed by them. This is why I emphasise that we will be receiving concurrent data, which will be useful and will give us something to go on. I want to emphasise that we are not there for the sake of just being there. We want to gain something which will be of mutual benefit to both jurisdictions.

Mr K Robinson: I welcome the Minister's statement. I would like to raise again the matter of human sludge. Has the Republic of Ireland failed to sign up to the EU Directive on putting human sludge on to agricultural land? If the disposal of such sludge is close to the border regions, will it pose a danger to the Erne system?

Mr Foster: We will take those concerns into consideration. We have to be very careful about what comes into our territory. It has to be guarded and watched. Co-operation between myself and the Minister across the border is vital so that we can watch carefully what takes place.

12.30 pm

I am willing to co-ordinate and work this. I want to ensure that what we do is for the benefit of our people up here as well as for people in other jurisdictions.

TRUSTEE BILL

First Stage

Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan): I beg leave to lay before the Assembly a Bill to amend the law relating to trustees and persons having the investment powers of trustees; and for connected purposes.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

The sitting was suspended at 12.31 pm.

2.30 pm

On resuming (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr McClelland] in the Chair) —

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION

Department: Equality Agenda

1. **Ms Ramsey** asked the Minister of Education to detail what steps he has taken to advance the equality agenda. (AQO 1054/00)

The Minister of Education (Mr M McGuinness): My Department is fully committed to undertaking the very important work that needs to be done in order to advance the equality agenda. The creation of a new Equality Division within my Department at the start of this year reinforces this commitment and signals my determination to ensure that the equality agenda and related work move forward at a much greater pace.

As part of the increased priority I have now placed on the equality agenda, I was pleased that my Department's equality scheme was one of the first in the public sector to be approved by the Equality Commission.

Ms Ramsey: I thank the Minister for his answer, but I want to know why he thought it necessary to set up this new division to take the equality agenda forward. Does he think that other Departments should follow suit?

Mr M McGuinness: The Department of Education takes very seriously its responsibilities under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement. A new division was set up to take this agenda forward because of the need to recognise the importance of this area and to take a joined-up and integrated approach to the Department's responsibilities in the areas of equality, rights and social inclusion. A considerable amount of work still has to be done following the approval of the equality scheme, and that will be overseen by this new division.

Mr Fee: I welcome the setting up of the Equality Division. Will the Minister ensure that each child is treated equally in every school and that a fair share of resources — whether in respect of school buildings, the pupil/teacher ratio, access to teaching aids, and so forth — be administered?

Mr M McGuinness: Absolutely. I think that it is vital, given that the word "equality" was such a powerful one during the negotiations leading up to the Good Friday Agreement. Flowing from the Good Friday Agreement is a responsibility — not just in my Department, but in each one of them — to ensure that people are treated

with equality, dignity and respect. As Minister of Education I pledge to ensure that this will happen, and I think that the creation of this division shows how much importance I place on the issue. It is vital that every child be treated equally.

Under-Age Drinking

2. **Mr McMenamin** asked the Minister of Education to make extra funding available to schools to educate children as to the problem of under-age drinking.

(AQO 1024/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Alcohol education is already included in the statutory curriculum, mainly through the health education cross-curricular theme, which is compulsory for all pupils aged four to 16. This is funded through schools' normal local management of schools (LMS) budget.

Mr McMenamin: All too often money given to schools is used to reduce debt created within school budgets rather than on specific projects. Will the Minister assure me that he will ring-fence moneys to deal with this problem in the future?

Mr M McGuinness: I think that everybody is aware that we will soon be issuing a document for consultation which deals with the whole issue of LMS and the need to put in place a common formula. However, it is vital to educate children about drug and alcohol abuse and to put proper education processes into place.

We must guarantee that there are education programmes to deal with these important social issues. These issues can be to the detriment of young people in relation to the quality of information that we put before them. Ultimately, the children have to make their own choices. However, it is our duty and our responsibility as the people in charge of education to ensure that the full range of information is put before young people. The issues of alcohol abuse and drug abuse are important to the community, to parents, to educationalists and to children. Despite all the other pressures, it is important that we move forward sensibly and ensure that we are able to provide proper education in these fields.

Mr Kane: Can the Minister indicate to the House the level of expenditure on making school children aware of the hazards of drug abuse? Also, can he confirm if this growing social problem can be tackled through our education system?

Mr M McGuinness: It certainly can be tackled through the education system, and I absolutely believe that it needs to be. Educationalists have a vital role in preparing young people for the future. In 1996 my Department issued guidance to schools in the form of a resource pack entitled 'Misuse of Drugs'. This included vital information about alcohol misuse. In addition, under the Northern Ireland

drugs strategy, approximately £800,000 was allocated to the education sector in March 2000 to enable provision in schools and the youth service to be strengthened. As a result of that, each of the five education and library boards have appointed two full-time officers to address the development of drug education programmes, including education about alcohol. With regard to details of expenditure, it is not possible to identify that separately.

Mrs Carson: Is the Minister aware of legislation that is going through the European Parliament at present which places emphasis on improving education for young people on the dangers of alcohol? Will he undertake to study these proposals with the view to producing action which will contribute to the health of young people in Northern Ireland and rid the whole country of the scourge of antisocial and environmentally damaging under-age drinking?

Mr M McGuinness: I am aware of the European initiative. The Department has taken a keen interest in this. The Department is currently studying the initiative. It is vital for us to do everything in our power to ensure that we learn as much as possible about how we can combat the unacceptable levels of alcohol abuse which clearly exist in our community. Anyone who is out there in the real world either during the day or on a nightly basis can see that there is huge alcohol abuse taking place. This is to the detriment not only of young people but also of the local community. We must do everything in our power to ensure that we face up to these hugely important issues that affect our young people and society as a whole.

AS and A2 Modular A Levels

3. **Mr Ford** asked the Minister of Education to detail what additional funding has been made available to schools to implement the new AS and A2 modular format A levels introduced in September 2000.

(AQO 1073/00)

Mr M McGuinness: I recognise that these new examinations will place some additional pressures on school budgets. For this reason an additional £220,000 will be made available to schools to help meet the cost of increases in examination fees which will result. These funds will be allocated to schools shortly. Schools will also be able to draw on their share of the general £14.7 million addition made to schools' delegated budgets for this year, as well as the extra £20 million that I have announced for next year. I hope that these will help to ease any pressures.

Mr Ford: Certainly the £220,000 will be welcome. Can the Minister give us any indication as to what share of the increased examination fees will actually be covered by the amount that he has announced today? Also, is he aware of the issue of key skills testing that now goes on

at A level, which will undoubtedly result in increased administration costs and therefore add to the burden in respect of which he has given some relief?

Mr M McGuinness: I recognise that schools will face an increase in examination fees arising from pupils being encouraged to take at least four AS levels in lower sixth, and because they will now have to pay exam fees for each module rather than one fee for the final exam. That is why I have made the extra £220,000 available to help meet these costs. In relation to the specifics of how much that represents in terms of the overall requirement financially, I will be glad to send him that information.

Mr K Robinson: Does the Minister acknowledge that the actual cost of these examinations to schools is not yet being met and that, yet again, schools are being asked to deliver more, without adequate funding? It is time to deal with the principle of actuality instead of going for average costs.

Mr M McGuinness: We all have to appreciate that this is new and there is no doubt whatsoever that in the coming period we are going to have to assess the types of pressures that these new approaches place on schools. We are certainly committed to doing that. However, I urge people to understand that this is a new development and that there will be a period of assessment required. We are determined to ensure that we can move forward sensibly, so that we can try to at least minimise the pressures on individual schools.

Post-Primary Education

4. **Mr Gibson** asked the Minister of Education to ensure that any reform of the transfer procedure will result in an increase in educational standards.

(AQO 1032/00)

19. **Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister of Education to confirm that the Review Body on Post Primary Education will publish its report by May 2001 deadline.

(AQO 1065/00)

Mr M McGuinness: With permission, I will answer question 4 along with question 19.

The prime purpose of the review body is to consider research, selection and other information and make recommendations on future post-primary education arrangements.

Only arrangements that will improve our education system, by enhancing choice, equality, accessibility and excellence, will be implemented. The review body has asked for an extension of the original May 2001 deadline to October 2001. This is in light of the huge response to the public consultation process and the wealth of oral and written material which has been submitted for consideration. The Education Committee has not yet finalised its submission. It, and other educational interests groups, have also requested a longer period for consideration of

this complex issue. It is vital for the future of our children, and for our economy and society, that we develop the best possible arrangements for post-primary education here. If a little more time is needed to achieve this, it will be time well spent. Therefore I agreed to an extension for completion of the review body's report to the end of October 2001.

Mr Gibson: In view of the extension of time the Minister has given to the review body, is there a benchmarking tool being used throughout the education system to accurately measure current school and pupil performances, so that in the future we can establish whether a new system, whatever it may be, will be viable and will deliver a higher standard of education.

Mr M McGuinness: Everybody will appreciate that the review body is undertaking what is an incredibly important review of post-primary education. It has been involved in extensive work: about 25 public meetings, more than 1,000 written submissions — which most people will agree is enormous — and a website that has had approximately a quarter of a million hits. That shows there is an incredible interest in what is probably the most important education debate that we have seen in many years.

With respect to what all of this will do for the issues that Oliver Gibson raised, it is vitally important that we appreciate and understand the incredible good work that has been done in our education system. What we are trying to do is enhance and strengthen that education system.

2.45 pm

Obviously, pending the outcome of the review, it remains to be seen how we can move forward and whether or not we can put in place a process, mechanisms and procedures that will further enhance and strengthen our education system. The benchmarks are all there to show our position at the moment — the latest 11-plus results, for example. People will be interested to see whether we can enhance our education system and benchmark it to show whether it is an improvement on the previous one. We cannot pre-empt the outcome of the review. I am as interested and as keen as anyone else to see this completed as a matter of urgency.

The way in which all political parties and educationalists have approached the issue since the review body was set up has been incredibly encouraging to everybody working in what is a very important area for young people, their parents and our society as a whole. I pay tribute to the parties in this Assembly that have moved forward in a positive and constructive way. We must keep up that approach. We must keep moving forward and ensure that the review body is aware that we are all behind it. When decisions have to be taken at the end of this process, I hope that they will be taken in consultation with this Assembly, with the Education Committee and with the Executive.

The Chairperson of the Education Committee (Mr Kennedy): The other members of my Committee and I have for a long time advocated an extension of the review body's timescale. It is necessary and appropriate, given the importance of the issue. Can the Minister confirm that he has extended the deadline to the end of October? Can he tell us how much money this extension will cost, and where the additional funding will come from?

Mr M McGuinness: I have extended it to the end of October. I suppose it is possible that the review body will report before then, but that remains to be seen. The extension will not, in my opinion, add unduly to the cost because, as a result of detailed consultation with the Executive and the Education Committee, the review body was not established as early as anticipated.

Ms Lewsley: I welcome the extension of this review. Like Mr Kennedy, my party found during its consultation that the biggest issue for many people was the length of time. The Minister is right. If we want the right outcome, it is important that time is given to it.

Can the Minister assure this Assembly that, following the review, whatever type of transfer system is chosen will mean equality of opportunity for every child who moves from primary to secondary education, whether he or she takes a vocational or an academic route?

Mr M McGuinness: "Equality" is the key word, and I certainly support our moving forward on a basis on which all our children are treated equally. I cannot pre-empt the outcome of the review body's very important deliberations. Anyone who has observed the review body's management of this cannot fail to be impressed by the incredible amount of work that it has done and has still to do over the coming period. I am as anxious as anyone to see the outcome. It will be my duty to take possession of the report and to manage the forward movement as expeditiously as possible. When I came to this position I made it clear on the very first day that the foundation stones of the Administration would be equality, excellence, choice and accessibility. If we stick by those guiding principles, it will be possible for us all to move forward with an education system that can truly value all our children equally.

Mr McHugh: Is the Minister satisfied with the present consultation from the Hayes review? Is it adequate?

Mr M McGuinness: Just to make a correction, it is the Burns Review.

I am satisfied with the amount of work undertaken. The way in which the review body has conducted its consultation with the public inspires tremendous confidence in the community, which can say at the end of the process that it has had an unprecedented opportunity to engage in what is probably the most important education debate that we have seen. Many people have already told me that they were very satisfied that, in each area of the North of Ireland, opportunities were presented for them to have their say.

Examinations (Weather Conditions)

6. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Education to detail what provision he will make to assist those students who missed sitting whole or part of public examinations as a result of adverse weather conditions.

(AQO 1074/00)

Mr M McGuinness: I am aware of the difficulties and understand that the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessments (CCEA) is doing everything possible, working closely with the schools involved to ensure that pupils affected do not suffer as a result of the adverse weather conditions. As well as providing advice and support to schools, pupils and parents, the council is making supplementary tests available for those pupils who were unable to attend the examinations.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for his response. Will he consider putting in place suitable emergency measures to combat any future disruption in the schools at examination times, whether from severe weather conditions or, perhaps, for pupils in the rural community, where there is the threat of foot-and-mouth disease, rather than simply waiting until a crisis is upon us?

Mr M McGuinness: We should continually review our approach to these situations. We need to put the difficulties experienced into perspective. A total of 594 pupils were unable to attend for examinations because of the adverse weather conditions. Supplementary tests have been arranged by the CCEA for the A level and GCSE pupils this week.

There is concern that some pupils will be disadvantaged, but that will not be the case, in my opinion. However, I do agree that we should continually review our approach to these situations. The Member has raised a very important issue in relation to the agricultural crisis and the effects the foot-and-mouth disease outbreak is having and might continue to have over the coming period. We should all learn lessons from the experience and do whatever we can to ensure that in the future we will overcome the hurdles that are, on occasion, placed before us.

Mr J Kelly: Can the Minister give an assurance that pupils having to sit the supplementary papers will not be disadvantaged?

Mr M McGuinness: Yes, I can give that assurance. I understand that the CCEA's subject examination teams will pay particular attention to the marks achieved by pupils taking a paper in any given subject to ensure that the papers are of a consistent standard and that no pupil will be disadvantaged as a result.

School Uniforms and Pupils' Equipment

7. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Education to outline his policy on school uniforms and to detail what

steps he intends to take to ensure that uniform and equipment requirements are within the budget of parents.

(AQO 1026/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The wearing of a school uniform is not governed by legislation and is a matter for individual schools to determine in line with their internal organisation and management. However, education and library boards may provide or contribute towards the cost of clothing for pupils in post-primary and special schools whose parents are in receipt of income support or income-based jobseeker's allowance. The clothing allowances scheme is intended not to cover the full cost of school uniforms but to assist those in need with the cost of purchase.

Parents should not be charged for any equipment for use in connection with their child's education. However, parents may be invited on a voluntary basis to provide their children with incidentals to their education — for example, items such as pens and pencils or articles of sports equipment, which will remain the property of the pupil.

Mr Dallat: We eagerly await changes to the selection procedure and the consequent changes to the structures of secondary level education, but does the Minister agree that the often extravagant demands of certain grammar schools in relation to uniforms and sports gear may have the effect of closing the door of such schools to children from low-income families who may have qualified for places in those schools? Has the Minister sought advice from the equality unit in the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister or the Equality Commission in this regard?

Mr M McGuinness: It is vitally important that no school should impose extravagant charges on any child which make it difficult or even prohibitive for that child to attend the school. We should approach this matter in consultation with the schools and the school authorities. It is an issue that we should be concerned about. The vast majority of schools behave very responsibly. The importance of the issue lies in the difficulties that it can present in some circumstances. We must establish where it is a problem. If people can identify where the problem is, the best solution will be to move forward in consultation with the school to ensure that no child, parent or family is put under pressure in an unacceptable way.

Before seeking advice from the Equality Commission, the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister or anyone else, we should establish whether this is a real problem. If it is a problem, then we can consider going down that route.

Mr Molloy: A LeasCheann Comhairle, can the Minister tell us what is the position on contributions by parents?

Mr M McGuinness: The restrictions on charging do not prevent schools from seeking voluntary contributions from parents or others for the benefit of the school or in

support of any school activity. However, schools must make it clear that there is no obligation to contribute and that pupils will not be treated differently depending on whether their parents have made a contribution in response to the request.

Cross-Border School Transport

8. **Mr C Murphy** asked the Minister of Education to detail progress on establishing a cross-border school transport policy. (AQO 1042/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The question of establishing a cross-border transport policy has not been considered. The home-to-school transport arrangements approved by my Department support parental preference and enable education and library boards to provide transport assistance for pupils living within the area of the board who are unable to gain a place at a suitable school within statutory walking distance of their home. I have no plans at present to extend the policy as to do so would divert resources away from the classroom. Our aim should be to concentrate the maximum possible level of resources on teaching and learning.

Mr C Murphy: I thank the Minister for his answer, and I appreciate some of the difficulties that he has in dealing with cross-border matters, given the illegal actions of the First Minister in this regard — the restrictions that he has imposed on the two Ministers.

Does the Minister agree that this leads to all sorts of anomalies, particularly in border areas? It is ludicrous that, while someone from Forkhill who wants to send a child to an Irish-medium school in Dundalk cannot get assistance from the Southern Education and Library Board, that board is prepared to finance the child's transport to the Irish-medium secondary school in Belfast. That is the sort of anomaly that inaction on cross-border co-operation will throw up. Can the Minister assure us that he will look into this issue in the future when he is back to operating at full tilt in the cross-border bodies?

Mr M McGuinness: My Department pays out some £45 million per annum on school transport. That has a huge impact on our budget. In relation to the current transport arrangements, everybody knows that education and library boards are required to make such arrangements as they consider necessary or as directed by the Department to facilitate the attendance of pupils at grant-aided schools. The current arrangements, which were introduced in 1997, enable transport to be provided where pupils have been unable to gain a place at a suitable school within statutory walking distance of their home. Therefore, in the context of transport arrangements, the term "suitable school" has a precise definition.

3.00 pm

This issue has highlighted the fact that children from this jurisdiction are being educated in the South, while

children who live in the South are being educated in the North. The North/South Ministerial Council is the best mechanism to address the difficulties that this imposes on both education systems and, in particular, to deal in particular, with the children in border areas who are affected in this way. We hope that the next education sector meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council can take place as quickly as possible. It is in the working of that institution that both Departments of Education on the island will face up to what is a key issue for people who live in border areas.

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Acute Hospital Services

1. **Mr Gallagher** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail how rural proofing criteria will be taken into account in the future provision of acute hospital services in Fermanagh and South Tyrone.
(AQO 1048/00)

4. **Mr Gibson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail her plans to provide acute hospital facilities for the South/West region.
(AQO 1033/00)

7. **Mr C Murphy** asked the Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail when the new cancer unit at the Belfast City Hospital will be operational.
(AQO 1043/00)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms de Brún): Le do chead, a LeasCheann Comhairle, glacfaidh mé ceisteanna a haon, a ceathair agus a seacht le chéile ós rud é go mbaineann siad uilig le toadhchaí géarsheirbhísí ospidéal.

I shall take questions 1, 4 and 7 together, since they all relate to the future of acute hospital services.

Tá coinne agam go dtuairisceoidh an grúpa aithbhreithnithe ar ghéarospidéal liom san earrach. Ó cuireadh ar bun é i Meán Fómhair na bliana seo caite, tá an grúpa ag éisteacht le barúlacha pobal áitiúil, leasanna sláinte agus seirbhísí sóisialta agus le barúlacha mórán eile. Níor chuí liom trácht ar sholáthar géarsheirbhísí i gceantar ar bith sa todhchaí go dtí go raibh faill agam staidéar a dhéanamh ar thuairisc an ghrúpa.

Gidh nár dréachtaíodh sainchritéir ar phromhadh i dtaca leis an tuath le polasaithe uilig an Rialtais a phromhadh go fóill, cuirfidh cinntí ar bith sa todhchaí ar sheirbhísí géarospidéal tosca tuaithe san áireamh go hiomlán.

I expect the review group on acute hospitals to report to me in the spring. Since it was established last September, the group has been listening to the views of

local communities, health and social services interests and many others. It would not be appropriate for me to comment on the future provision of acute services in any area until I have had the opportunity to study the group's report.

To date, no specific rural proofing criteria for all Government policies have been drawn up, but any future decision on acute hospital services will take rural considerations fully into account. Any decision taken as a result of the review will be in line with the principles of targeting social need and will be subject to an equality impact assessment.

Mr Gallagher: The absence of rural proofing criteria will disappoint many who live in rural parts of the North of Ireland. However, in their absence, will the Minister outline her current plans to ensure the delivery of acute services in Fermanagh and South Tyrone, which has the most dispersed rural community in the North of Ireland? Many constituents live 45 minutes' journey from the nearest hospital, and some live even further away.

Many constituents are of the opinion that one of its hospitals has had its services whittled away as a result of a policy of "death by 1,000 cuts". Will the Minister outline her Department's plans to ensure that the provision of future acute services will be fair to everyone?

Ms de Brún: On the issue of fairness, I made it clear in my substantive answer that all decisions will be subject to a full equality impact assessment. Obviously, access to acute hospital services is a matter of crucial interest to rural communities. Therefore I have asked the review group to give particular consideration to this matter. I expect that the report from the review group will focus, in particular, on rural areas. In addition, any change proposed in the report will need to be considered in the context of new targeting social need policies and will be subject to an equality impact assessment.

Mr Gibson: Bearing in mind that we were all assured, when the Assembly was suspended, that George Howarth was about to issue the result of his review, will the Minister indicate when she expects to have this report? What is causing the delay? Is the Department being run by various colleges rather than by the Minister?

Ms de Brún: First, the Member will know that I did not ask for suspension. That came from a different side of the House. Having taken on such an onerous portfolio, I certainly did not seek four months of suspension in the middle of this. The Member will also know that the review of acute hospitals was announced following the end of suspension and therefore was not affected by that. I have reiterated this time and time again: the whole idea is that we are in a new situation with a new network of institutions, and people expect to have their views taken on board.

I set up the review group to ensure that people in rural and other areas had a chance to make their views

known and to give a strategic overview of the services which will be needed in the future. I expect it will report to me in the spring. Such reviews take time. On the one hand there is a need to get this complex issue right, and the review group has gone out to public meetings in order to do this. Also, the group has sadly suffered from the loss of one of its very highly respected members, and that will have an impact on its work. The review group will set a strategic overview for us, and Members will recognise how crucial it will be for the future of our acute hospital services here.

Mr C Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a Comhairle. Can the Minister assure us that the review body is continuously taking into account the changes in provision of services in hospitals on the southern side of the border? For example, the removal of maternity services in the Louth Hospital will obviously have an impact on the people in north Louth using maternity services in Daisy Hill Hospital.

Ms de Brún: The remit of the acute hospitals review group includes scope for co-operation in the provision of services with hospitals in other parts of the island. I therefore expect the group to bear in mind the likely implications of changes in hospital services in the South, particularly in border areas.

Mrs Carson: Given the confirmation by the Executive that rural proofing encompasses all Departments, what guidance is the Minister giving the group on taking account of this in its report?

Ms de Brún: I believe I have answered that question. The question of access is within the specific terms of reference of the group. It has been asked to examine access to hospital services, and it is very clear that this includes rural access. We know that that has been dealt with in its meetings in local areas, and I expect the report to give particular focus to rural issues and to highlight the matter.

Hospitals (Hygiene)

2. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the steps she is taking to improve hygiene in hospitals. (AQO 1044/00)

Ms de Brún: In Aibreán na bliana seo caite d'iarr mo Roinn ar na boird sláinte agus seirbhísí sóisialta oibriú le hiontaobhais le clár gníomhaíochta a chur i bhfeidhm le bearta i gcoinne an ionfhabhtaithe in ospidéal a neartú. In 'Tosaíochtaí do Ghníomhaíocht' de chuid mo Roinne, a eisíodh ar 8 Márta 2001, iarrtar ar iontaobhais glantachas a n-áiseanna a mheas i gcoinne caighdeán atá le sonrú ag an Roinn.

In April last year my Department asked the health and social services boards to work with the trusts to implement a programme of action to strengthen the prevention and control of infection in hospitals.

Under my Department's priorities for action, which were issued on 8 March, trusts are being asked to benchmark the cleanliness of their facilities against standards to be specified by the Department.

Mr McCarthy: Does the Minister agree that hospital hygiene standards should be issued by her Department and ought to be included in the specifications when cleaning contracts are being sought and subsequently awarded? Can she detail the patients who became even more ill because they caught an infection while hospitalised?

Ms de Brún: I have just said that we will be setting standards. In the Department's priorities for action in the year ahead, we are committed to drawing up new standards of cleanliness for hospital facilities and a multidisciplinary group is being set up in the Department to take this forward. The question of additional resources will have to be looked at in that context. Specifications for cleaning contracts will also be looked at.

A voluntary system is in place for consultant microbiologists to report significant infections, including MRSA (methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*), to the Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre. In 2000, 10 laboratories reported 121 such infections.

In line with the Department's priorities for action for the coming year, trusts will be required to report rates of bacteraemia, including MRSA, in their hospitals. A hospital-acquired infection is a complex matter and cannot be attributed to one source alone. The new requirement will be another useful step in the process of controlling infection.

Mr Kane: Can the Minister inform the House whether the number of patients with MRSA increased or decreased in 2000-01? We are told that the most effective way to stem the spread of this disease is to improve hygiene.

Ms de Brún: I will write to the Member with detailed information on the number of patients with MRSA. I agree that a major mode of MRSA transmission is via the hands of health care personnel, so frequent and thorough hand washing is considered of primary importance in preventing the spread of MRSA.

The overuse of antibiotics, for example, increases antimicrobial resistance, and there are other matters that need to be examined. However, cleanliness and good hygiene standards are crucial, and my Department has taken, and will continue to take, steps on the matter.

Cancer Treatment: Hospital Facilities

3. **Ms Armitage** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to give her assessment of the current quality of service at Belvoir Park Hospital and in particular the equipment being used to treat cancer patients. (AQO 1021/00)

8. **Mr McFarland** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail when the new cancer unit at Belfast City Hospital will be operational.

(AQO 1025/00)

Ms de Brún: Le do chead, a LeasCheann Comhairle, glacfaidh mé ceisteanna a trí agus a hocht le chéile ós rud é go mbaineann an bheirt acu le seirbhísí ailse.

I will take questions 3 and 8 together since they both relate to cancer services.

Cuireann Ospidéal Belvoir Park seirbhísí uasleibhéil ar fáil atá ag cur leis an tsábháilteacht agus le cumas an trealamh. Tá an trealamh radaiteiripe ag tarraingt ar dheireadh a shaoil úsáidigh, agus le himeacht ama cuirfear trealamh úr ina áit san ionad ailse úr ag suíomh Ospidéal Chathair Bhéal Feirste. Faoi láthair, tá Iontaobhas Ospidéal Chathair Bhéal Feirste ag aithbhreithniú cás gnó don ionad ailse a chaithfear a réiteach taobh istigh de Rialtas. Nuair a thabharfar an faomhadh seo agus nuair a dhéanfar an cinneadh deireannach ar sholáthar beidh sé soiléir cá huair a bhéas an t-ionad ailse úr réidh. San idirlinn, tá mé meáite ar a chinntiú go mboidh seirbhísí ailse sábháilte éifeachtacha ar fáil ag Belvoir Park agus glacfaidh mé cibé céimeanna a bhéas riachtanach le seo a chur i gcrích.

3.15 pm

Belvoir Park Hospital provides services at the maximum level consistent with the safety and capacity of its equipment. The radiotherapy equipment is nearing the end of its useful life, and in the longer term it will be replaced by new equipment in the new cancer centre at the Belfast City Hospital site. The Belfast City Hospital Trust is presently revising the business case for the cancer centre, which will need to be cleared in Government. The date for the completion of the cancer centre will be clear only when this approval is granted and a final decision on procurement is taken. In the meantime, I am determined to ensure that safe and effective cancer services continue to be available at Belvoir Park, and I will take whatever steps are necessary to achieve this.

Ms Armitage: I asked the question because Belvoir Park Hospital has a fine record of care, commitment, understanding and medical expertise. Treatment at Belvoir has saved many lives, including my own. The new cancer service at the Belfast City Hospital may not be operational until 2004. Until then, I hope, Belvoir, the staff and the patients will not be made to suffer because of lack of funding. Some of my constituents have, on occasion, travelled to Belvoir, only to be told that the equipment had broken down and the treatment could not be administered. I know that the breakdown is not the Minister's responsibility, but it is her responsibility to make sure that equipment is functional.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will you ask a question, please.

Ms Armitage: My question is about equipment. Will the Minister secure funding? As it is a long time until

2004 and the new City Hospital centre, what does she propose to do for my constituents who travel to Belfast and find that their treatment cannot be administered? Ultimately we are wasting money on the ambulances and minibuses used to take those patients to Belvoir when there is no treatment for them. I am thinking only of the Department's finances.

Ms de Brún: I agree absolutely with several points made by the Member. First, I join her in commenting on the fine record of Belvoir Park Hospital and of the staff who have done a tremendous job there. Equipment breakdowns result in the disruption of services. That is absolutely to be regretted. It has happened recently. The effects have been minimised, in some cases, by the continuing efforts of the clinical and scientific staff at the hospital, but it is to be regretted that anyone should make their way to a hospital for treatment, only to find that it is not possible because of equipment breakdown.

My Department has asked Belfast City Hospital Trust to assess the capacity of the radiotherapy equipment at Belvoir Park Hospital. I consider urgently any proposals for the short-term replacement of such equipment, to ensure the effective continuation of services while the new cancer centre at Belfast City Hospital is being developed.

Mr McFarland: I thank the Minister for her answer. She will recall that the decision to move cancer services from Belvoir to the City Hospital was taken in 1998. That now looks extremely out of date. The latest evidence from Belvoir suggests that the equipment is on its last legs. Unlike Ms Armitage, I suggest that it is the Minister's responsibility to find money to make that equipment fully serviceable. I welcome the £4 million that she is putting into the new cancer facility at the City Hospital, but is this just papering over the fact that the Department's plans for combating cancer in Northern Ireland are in tatters?

Ms de Brún: The Member will know that he and I often have discussions about the tone in which he asks or ends his questions. However, I agree that I need to look, and I will look, at whatever needs to be done — whether that is the replacement of existing equipment or the provision of additional imaging or radiotherapy facilities — to ensure that cancer patients receive timely, high-quality care and treatment. It is clear from the Programme for Government, the budget allocations and the priorities for action that I have set out that the development of cancer services remains a high priority for my Department.

On the issue of the decisions around the completion of the cancer centre, the Member should know that in 1999 an outline business case was prepared on behalf of Belfast City Hospital Trust and was approved at a total estimated cost of £32 million. This envisaged the new cancer centre being operational from the end of 2003. The trust has recently indicated that, owing to significant and rapid developments in cancer services and new

building requirements, the cost of the project may be considerably higher. My Department has therefore asked the trust — as I know the Member would expect it to do — to urgently revise its business case and to resubmit it for consideration. That process will inevitably cause some delay to the completion of the project.

The Chairperson of the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee (Dr Hendron): My question follows on from those of Ms Armitage and Mr McFarland.

I know that the Minister is concerned about the very serious situation in cancer services in Northern Ireland. Cancer cannot be treated until it is diagnosed. My question relates to magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans. The Minister has heard me, on a number of occasions, talking about positron emission tomography. The most important thing at the moment is to do with MRI scanning, not just in Belfast City Hospital but in other parts of Northern Ireland. Can the Minister give me an answer on that?

Ms de Brún: As I told the Committee recently, we have an imaging strategy that we are seeking to put forward at present. The idea of the extension of MRI scanning is a very major part of that. I will be able to come back to the Member, and to the Committee, shortly on the details of how we can proceed with that. Some of the bids that we have made will obviously have an impact on how quickly we proceed with some of our objectives.

Mr Poots: Is the Minister aware that people have to wait up to two and a half years for MRI scans? A constituent of mine was told after six months that he would get an MRI scan but that it would be in 22 months' time. Further to that, is the Minister aware that many people are having operations cancelled because there are not enough intensive care beds? Many people who have to receive thoracic surgery — in particular, to remove cancer — cannot have the operations because of the lack of intensive-care beds.

Ms de Brún: If the Member writes to me with the details of any of the cases he has mentioned I will be happy to respond in writing.

We have recently taken action on the waiting list for MRI scans. In particular, a mobile unit was made available. I refer the Member to the announcement that I made about Altnagelvin. We have a strategy to put in place. Specifically, part of the priority of that will be to deal with the whole question of MRI, because we know that there are waiting lists there and that that does need improvement.

I cannot comment on the specific cancelled operations that the Member mentioned — he would need to send me the details. However, I have said many times in this House that the capacity in our hospitals at present is not the capacity that is needed, due to years of underfunding of health and social services. I have asked, and will continue to press the case with, my Executive Colleagues to have further resources made available.

The 'Priorities for Action' document, which was issued on 9 March 2001, outlines my priorities for the coming year. The improvement of capacity, in order to ensure that people have access to hospital services and to deal with a continuing high level of demand and winter pressures, is one of those priorities.

Craigavon Area Hospital: Beds

5. **Mr Savage** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm if patients are being kept on trolleys overnight at Craigavon Area Hospital; and to make a statement. (AQO 1067/00)

Ms de Brun: Mar is iondúil le gach ospidéal gnóthach, bíonn feithimh ar thralaí in Ospidéal Ceantair Craigavon nuair a bhíonn ráchairt an-ard ar ghéarsheirbhísí, agus amanna ciallóidh seo go dtugtar cúram d'othair ar thralaithe thar oíche. Mar sin féin, déanann an t-iontaobhas a dhícheall le cinntiú go dtugtar an chóireáil agus an cúram cóir d'othair atá ag fanacht le hiontráil agus le cinntiú go gcoinnítear líon na bhfeitheamh ar thralaí chomh beag agus is féidir i gcónaí.

As with all other busy hospitals, Craigavon Area Hospital does experience trolley waits when the demand for acute services is particularly high, so patients sometimes have to be cared for on trolleys overnight. However, the trust makes every effort to ensure that patients who are awaiting admission receive proper treatment and care and that the number of people waiting on trolleys is always kept to a minimum.

The Southern Health and Social Services Board has been working with Craigavon area hospitals group and the Craigavon and Banbridge Community Health and Social Services Trust to deal with the problem. The measures include increasing the number of intensive care and high-dependency beds and enhancing community provision to take the pressure off Craigavon Area Hospital.

Mr Savage: The Minister will be aware of widespread public concern about the number of patients who have to wait for beds on trolleys. Does she agree that patients should not have to wait on a trolley overnight for a hospital bed? Can she secure additional finance to help Craigavon Area Hospital resolve this problem?

Ms de Brún: It is absolutely unacceptable that even a minority of patients should have to remain on trolleys for unreasonably long periods of time. This year's winter plans were supported by an investment of £15 million and involved a range of measures to speed up admissions and discharges from hospital. My priority has been, and remains, the provision of safe and effective services.

I have made several bids this year for money to deal with some of the pressures on Craigavon Area Hospital, particularly the temporary transfer of services from South Tyrone Hospital, and money was put aside for that. I

allocated £5.5 million to address the financial consequences of the temporary closure of inpatient services at South Tyrone Hospital. That will cover the additional costs that are incurred by Craigavon Area Hospital.

Nonetheless, Craigavon Area Hospital is one of the three hospitals that most frequently experience capacity problems at the moment. As I have said, one of my priorities for the coming year is to increase capacity to deal with the problem. For example, I have asked that the provision of intensive care and high-dependency beds, and other areas of hospital capacity, be examined. I have also asked that community care be considered as a means of relieving pressures on the hospital.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel will answer questions next, so I will not even begin to answer the Member's question about whether I can get the money to do this. However, I will continue to press my Executive Colleagues for increased funding to enable the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to deal with these problems. Members will be aware that, within the Executive, there are competing priorities for resources.

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. In the light of the fact that Craigavon Area Hospital cannot cope with the day-to-day demand for beds there, could further use be made of South Tyrone Hospital? What additional measures have been put in place to deal with the patients who have to wait on trolleys as a result of the pressures of winter? Go raibh maith agat.

Ms de Brún: All acute hospitals are under pressure, and there are particular capacity problems at Craigavon Area Hospital. This year, I made additional resources available for acute hospital services, and I will continue to press Executive Colleagues for additional resources to address the years of underfunding by previous Governments.

South Tyrone Hospital cannot provide overnight accommodation for patients because there is a lack of specialist medical cover there. However, there is an opportunity to develop elective day surgery at South Tyrone Hospital, and I have made it clear that I expect the chairpersons and chief executives of the boards and trusts to take personal responsibility for ensuring that that is done.

In my response to Mr Savage's question, I referred to measures paid for out of the £15 million that had been made available.

3.30 pm

The winter plans put into place contained a range of measures — notably almost 300 extra beds and 1000 community care packages. These measures have undoubtedly helped, but our hospitals are still affected by significant capacity problems directly resulting from years of underfunding by successive Governments.

Mr Carrick: I note the Minister's comments about the temporary funding of the transfer of services from

South Tyrone hospital. Can she confirm that the transfer of services from Dungannon exacerbated the current pressure on hospital beds in Craigavon Area Hospital because the necessary funding did not accompany the transfer of services? Can she assure the House that there will be temporary funding and sustained funding to overcome the problem at Craigavon Area Hospital?

Ms de Brún: As the Member has accepted, I have made £5.5 million available to address the financial consequences of the temporary closure of the inpatient services at South Tyrone Hospital. This amount will cover the additional costs incurred. The funding issue is not contributing to the other problems of the trust because the finance has already been made available.

Mr Paisley Jnr: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Have you received notice from any Minister, or from the Minister of Agriculture in particular, that she intends to return to the House to make a further statement on the foot-and-mouth crisis? I understand that the Minister has briefed the press about a hot suspect case that has been discovered in Northern Ireland. I am wondering why that information was not disclosed to the House this morning?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I have received no notification that any Minister, including Minister Rodgers, is coming to the House to make a statement.

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Rating Policy Review

1. **Mr Ford** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the terms of reference of the review of rating policy. (AQO 1075/00)

6. **Mr Molloy** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the nature of the rates review and to confirm whether or not it will incorporate a revaluation of properties. (AQO 1055/00)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan): With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will take questions 1 and 6 together.

The review of rating policy will examine the role of local revenue raising in our Programme for Government. That will include its impact on households, small and larger businesses — including industrials — and the voluntary sector. Other issues that will be included are the fairness of the system to single-person households and the relationship between regional government and district councils. All the issues will be considered in the context of the equality agenda and the new TSN programme.

The non-domestic revaluation exercise is separate; it is being undertaken by the Valuation and Lands Agency.

Mr Ford: The terms of reference are restrictive in that the re-examination will be purely within the existing rating structures. Would the site value rating system — used widely in the USA — not represent a better way of ensuring that public-sector infrastructure building, which benefits the private sector economy, is brought fully into account when the new rates are set? The existing rating system does not take that into account and is not a recipe for the twenty-first century.

Mr Durkan: I want to assure the Member that the terms of reference are not as restrictive as he suggests. I wrote to the Finance and Personnel Committee to update it on the rating review developments and to seek its further views and consideration. The review will involve an open consultation stage. We are trying to look at the whole rating system and no issues are barred from being examined. One issue that we must address is the need to raise resources through some local taxation.

The Chairperson of the Finance and Personnel Committee (Mr Molloy): A LeasCheann Comhairle, I thank the Minister for his reply.

Will he ensure that the review will take into account the changing nature of out-of-town developments and the effect they have had on towns and the shops in them? Can he guarantee that the review will not simply be a paper exercise showing the square footage of buildings but will actually look at turnover, car parking and all the different facilities that out-of-town shopping has and in-town shopping does not have?

Mr Durkan: First, the non-domestic revaluation exercise getting underway on 1 April — to update the last exercise carried out a number of years ago — will examine a number of issues, including the changes that have taken place since then in relation to retail geography, et cetera. Many people are making the case that the development of many out-of-town shopping centres in recent years has made a difference. Hopefully, the non-domestic revaluation exercise will pick up on that.

However, more importantly, the wider rating policy review can look at our policy for distributing the burden of rating. The non-domestic revaluation exercise will decide, in valuation terms, how that burden should be distributed. We have to look at wider policy issues, including what particular sectors we want to protect or promote or what issues we want the rating system to particularly bear upon. The issues raised by the Member can be reflected in both exercises.

Department: Review of Audit and Accountability (Report)

2. **Mr Hussey** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether the report by Lord Sharman of Redlynch entitled ‘The Review of Audit and Accountability

for Central Government’ has any implications for his Department. (AQO 1084/00)

Mr Durkan: Lord Sharman’s review was carried out on behalf of the UK Government. It was independent of Government and represents his personal views following wide consultation with a variety of individuals and bodies. The UK Government will be considering the report and recommendations and will provide a co-ordinated response in due course.

My Department will be considering Lord Sharman’s recommendations very carefully, with a view to improving the present system of accountability in Northern Ireland. It will also be important to have a full and wide-ranging consultation process across Government, the Assembly — particularly the relevant Committees — and with other interested parties.

Mr Hussey: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he agree that the recommendations and amendments put forward to the Government Resource and Accounts Bill by the Finance and Personnel Committee pre-empted, to some degree, the findings of Sharman? Despite opposition, the Committee was successful in getting changes to the Bill.

Also, does he agree that the implementation of the recommendations of the Sharman Report will create a degree of openness and scrutiny of Government accounts? Can he assure us that this will be the case with respect to future legislation?

Mr Durkan: There are a number of points in that particular question. I believe we improved the Government Resources and Accounts Bill through consideration in Committees and in the Chamber. Nevertheless, I also believe that some of the proposed amendments raised issues that would be better and more competently pursued in future legislation. We have already indicated that the Audit Reorganisation Bill would be one area in which to take forward some of those issues.

Now that we have the Sharman Report and recommendations, it is particularly important that we consider them properly. A number of false statements have been made in relation to Sharman, the legislation, and the attitudes to amendments that I had dealt with previously. The order making provision that Sharman recommended be used in the Government Resources and Accounts Act 2000 is in our Bill, which has now gone for Royal Assent.

Furthermore, we included the additional requirement on the Department of Finance and Personnel to have regard to any views of the Public Accounts Committee in relation to that order making provision. Quite a number of issues have been raised — more far-reaching than we could consider in the context of the Government Resources and Accounts Bill. The Executive, the relevant Committees and I are determined to fully consider those issues.

Mr Close: Can the Minister assure the House that we will not follow slavishly that which is done in another

place? Can he assure us that in applying the best parts of the Sharman Report we will be able to demonstrate our own autonomy, which is the interest of accountability for the people of Northern Ireland?

Mr Durkan: I can assure the Member that it is precisely for that reason that we need to have our own consideration and our own wide-ranging consultation on the Sharman Report and on the other issues involved. There might be issues and ideas outside and beyond that report that, for our purposes, we want to take forward.

We need to remember that the original focus and thrust of the Sharman review was looking at things from the perspective of the UK Government. It did not look at issues at local government level, some of which, in our devolved context, fall to us, as opposed to the situation across the water. We need to come up with our own views and our own proposals. That is why I have argued that we should take the time to properly consider the Sharman Report and other aspects of these issues that might fall outside the ambit of the report.

In the Bill that we recently passed in this House, we have already made provisions that go beyond those in the equivalent Whitehall legislation.

Deprivation (Noble Study)

3. **Mr McMenamin** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail what progress has been made on the Noble study into identification of the deprivation levels throughout Northern Ireland. (AQO 1076/00)

Mr Durkan: That project is well under way. A programme of consultation with a wide range of interested groups has been completed and the consultants are currently checking and evaluating data sources supplied by Departments. A consultation version of the research findings will be made available in April, and I expect the final report on the research to be published by early summer.

Mr McMenamin: Can the Minister confirm the level of allocations he has made for gap funding? What arrangement has he agreed with the European Commission and the Northern Ireland Departments to alleviate the difficulties facing those groups operating in areas of greatest disadvantage? Furthermore, can he inform us of the procedures to be followed by voluntary groups seeking to avail of the resources?

Mr Durkan: That goes outside the immediate point about the Noble study. However, to make it clear, as I have recounted to the House before, in the current financial year we have made some £9 million of gap funding available to cover a number of European programmes. Half of that is to cover the gap between Peace I and Peace II.

Nevertheless, we recognise that the main issue of concern to people is the gap in funding that will apply in the next financial year. To that end, as I announced in

this House on 12 February, the Executive is now authorising Departments to go ahead and, on the basis of sound judgement, to make advanced allocations to projects that they believe would be eligible under Peace II. We have allocated a further £2 million to the Executive Programme fund on social inclusion and community regeneration, effectively as a safety net to cover Departments in case they make a bona fide allocation on that basis to a group that subsequently does not qualify for Peace II. That safety net provision is there, first to protect the respective departmental budgets, and secondly to protect the budget for the Peace programme overall.

Mr Beggs: Does the Minister agree that it is important to replace the dated Robson indices when using new criteria to determine funding so that more up-to-date data would be used? Does he agree that it would be highly questionable, to say the least, to continue to rely on dated information such as the Robson index — or the International Fund for Ireland ward designation, which has been derived from it — when developing new TSN criteria? Furthermore, does he recognise the importance of being able to target pockets of deprivation, which might be neglected at ward level?

Mr Durkan: I agree with the thrust of most of the points raised by the Member. The Robson indices have served their purpose and run their course. That is why we are conducting this exercise at present. We want to make sure that we have new indicators of deprivation, both to take account of a wider range of domains of deprivation, because those are relevant to particular programmes, and, in aggregate terms, to give us a more reflective and broader-based measure of deprivation. It is also important that, as far as possible, we improve the assistance that such measures of deprivation can give us in targeting terms — and that means not just in helping to map the particular factors of deprivation, but also being able to locate concentrations of deprivation.

3.45 pm

Whilst, as before, a great deal of the work will be processed on the basis of ward level, the clear aim is that the outcome will not be confined to information which is available only at ward level. I accept that there are pockets either within wards, or that straddle wards. Ward boundaries are not necessarily drawn in the most congruous way from an administrative or social point of view.

Rating Policy

4. **Mr Dodds** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what plans he has to discuss future policy on the level of rates with local councils. (AQO 1058/00)

Mr Durkan: As the level of regional rates is a matter for the Assembly, I have no plans to meet councils to discuss future policy on rates levels. However, I am prepared to meet council delegations to listen to their

concerns on rates issues, and I have meetings with a number of council delegations later this week. Subject to diary commitments, I am also arranging further meetings with council delegations next month — all on rate-related issues.

Mr Dodds: I thank the Minister for his answer but want to probe him further. He said that he has no policy in relation to meeting with councils, and yet he lists a number of meetings that he is going to have with them. Given the outcry that there has been about the increase in regional rates levels, certainly in so far as his original proposals were concerned, he will be aware, as a former councillor, that many local council representatives — from parties of all descriptions, his own included — have voiced grave concerns about the level of the increase.

Would it not be more sensible for the Minister to agree that as part of the future proposals in relation to the level of rates, he should have a formal process of consultation with local councils? Can he also outline to the House what plans he has to ensure that when the rates bills come through people's doors that they know to whom they should complain about a regional rate increase of more than double the rate of inflation — almost treble the rate of inflation — which is his responsibility?

Mr Durkan: I have already pointed out in this Chamber and at the Finance and Personnel Committee that some time ago, I asked the Rate Collection Agency to ensure that on the rates bill, there is a much clearer and stronger differentiation between the regional rate and the district rate. It may be harder to do that satisfactorily this year, compared with future years, simply because of time factors and the question of the need for better information and technology — different software, essentially. However, we have already taken the decision in principle, and an instruction to sharpen up that differentiation has been given to the Rate Collection Agency. It is important that people understand the basis and composition of the rates bill that they are being asked to pay.

As regards the wider points, I said that it was in relation to future rating levels that I had no plans to discuss or deal with councils. I based that partly on the fact that, in the nature of our public expenditure planning and of the number of meetings that I have to undertake within Government, it would be hard for me now to promise and build in a satisfactory consultation phase with local government about future regional rate levels. It is more important for us to make sure that we have built in more prior consultation with the Assembly, and its Committees, in particular, for I know that that has been a point of criticism and concern here. We could, therefore, look after our responsibility for the regional rate in an open and transparent way, allowing councils to do the same in relation to their responsibility for the district rates.

Mr Leslie: The Minister was straying into the area on which I was about to question him. Does he have

plans to introduce some clear delineation between the general Exchequer grant and money raised through overall rates, and the local element of the rates, and could these, in future, be clearly delineated?

Mr Durkan: Those questions were also raised in the context of the rating policy review because they relate to the make-up of rates and the presentation of subsequent rates-based transactions. Therefore they are relevant to the wider rating policy review. That rating policy review will be open to views submitted from a range of interests including local government, and there will be a public consultation phase. The debate that will take place at that time will usefully pick up on some of those points.

Procurement Policy

5. **Mr Byrne** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to set out his policy on procurement.

(AQO 1086/00)

11. **Mr C Murphy** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline progress in the development of proposals to improve public procurement.

(AQO 1041/00)

12. **Mr A Doherty** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the progress being made in the procurement review.

(AQO 1078/00)

Mr Durkan: Mr Deputy Speaker, with your permission I will take questions 5, 11 and 12 together.

Current policy is that all public procurement be based on value for money, having regard to propriety and regularity. Value for money is defined as the optimum combination of whole life cost and quality or fitness for purpose to meet the users' requirements. The review of procurement was conducted prior to devolution and produced a number of recommendations which have considerable merit. However, more needs to be done to ensure that that important work is taken forward in the context of devolution and in a way that is consistent with the wider commitments in the Programme for Government.

An implementation team has been established to take forward the findings and recommendations of the initial review. The first meeting of the team took place on 19 February, and it will bring forward its proposals and take account of the equality dimension for consideration by the Executive Committee by June 2001.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for his statement and for clarifying the issue for me. Will he inform the House if the Government Purchasing Agency (GPA) was used in assessing the award of a purchase contract for the Northern Ireland Tourist Board to Baird's printing company for the production of promotional and marketing materials? If the GPA was not used, why not? Will the Minister assure the House that it is Executive policy that all public

service contracts are submitted to a process so that no conflicts of interests may arise now or in the future?

Mr Durkan: The GPA was not used in the procurement transactions that were the subject of the Comptroller and Auditor General's report. That decision was not made by the GPA or the Department of Finance and Personnel. Therefore I cannot comment or give details on it.

Subsequent to the first draft of the Comptroller and Auditor General's report, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board moved to a position where all its procurement will be conducted through the GPA.

Mr C Murphy: Go raibh maith agait, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister assure the House that the implementation team will adopt a mechanism whereby firms that are found to be in breach of fair employment practices will not benefit from public procurement?

Mr Durkan: The composition and terms of reference of the team include the facility to have regard to equality implications, and that touches on the issues that Mr Murphy has raised. Therefore the exercise can take account of those issues, and I await the team's consideration and recommendations.

Mr A Doherty: Does the Minister agree that by introducing a more professional and integrated approach to the public sector buying process substantial savings can be generated, which in turn can be used as a source of funding for areas of greatest need? Does he have any indicative figures as to the value of savings on a budget the size of the Northern Ireland block?

Mr Durkan: As I have said, the review was undertaken prior to devolution. It looked at public procurement in Northern Ireland, which is running at £1 billion a year.

That review said — on the basis of the savings being suggested for Whitehall — that we should be able to achieve savings of some £30 million. After further examination of this matter, we could achieve even greater savings. The main aim is not to quantify the possible savings, but to make sure that we have the means to guarantee that all possible savings are made. We should also maximise the value for money that we get from public procurement so that we do not overspend on items and services and so that we can, in turn, release that money into other hard-pressed areas of public spending.

Northern Ireland Departments: Staffing

7. **Mr Berry** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the current level of staffing for each of the 10 Departments. (AQO 1051/00)

Mr Durkan: On 1 January 2001, 24,731 civil servants were employed in the 10 Departments, excluding the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. The figures include permanent and casual staff as well as

industrial and non-industrial staff, but they exclude those on career breaks.

The departmental breakdown is as follows: Agriculture and Rural Development, 3,618; Culture, Arts and Leisure, 351; Education, 588; Enterprise, Trade and Investment, 1,155; Environment, 1,725; Finance and Personnel, 2,538; Health, Social Services and Public Safety, 903; Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment, 1,398; Regional Development, 4,799; Social Development, 7,656; and, in case anybody is still concerned, in the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, 296.

Mr Berry: I thank the Minister for his detailed breakdown. I am sure that he is aware of the public perception that the bureaucracy created is a sort of gravy train. What policy does he have in place to determine the level of staffing in all the Departments?

Mr Durkan: My Department's personnel function is to ensure that Departments have the financial and human resources they need to carry out their responsibilities. Departments are feeling financial and human resources pressure, not least because of the demands created by devolution. We have to make sure that we are not overspending on government and that, as far as possible, public money is being spent on public services. The money spent on government is intended to ensure that public services are managed in an accountable manner and planned in a way that best meets this community's public policy priorities, particularly as reflected by the Assembly.

Ex-Prisoners' Groups

8. **Mr Armstrong** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to confirm that moneys will not be allocated to ex-prisoners' groups from the Executive programme funds. (AQO 1066/00)

Mr Durkan: The Executive have made no decision about the allocation of the Executive programme funds. The proposal is that, in the first instance, applications to the programme funds be made by Departments. They can include bids for moneys intended for distribution through the community or voluntary sector. I assure the House that each application for funding will be rigorously assessed against the criteria agreed by the Executive, and they will be assessed by the Executive to ensure that the significant resources in the programme funds are put to the best possible use.

Mr Armstrong: Does the Minister accept that there is an increasing public perception, rightly held in my view, that those who inflicted most damage on this society over the years are gaining most from the money allocated for victims? Does he agree that by ensuring that any further funds go to the real victims of terrorism, the Executive would be showing the people of Northern Ireland that they care for those who have suffered most?

4.00 pm

Mr Durkan: First of all, I recognise that there has been an amount of public comment on these issues and that some comments have misrepresented, in an unfair and unhelpful way, many of the allocations that have been made by organisations such as the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust and their management as intermediary funding bodies of Peace I. Nevertheless, I recognise the genuineness with which particular concerns are held on the degree to which money is being made available to a range of victims' groups and specific victims' interests. The Executive are trying to be sensitive to this, and in the arrangements made in Peace II in respect of victims that measure will be managed under the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. I think steps are already being taken to make good some of the deficiencies that people have identified in past practice or their perceptions of it.

Senior Civil Service Review

9. **Mr A Maginness** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail when the Senior Civil Service review team will meet and the date its work will be completed. (AQO 1079/00)

Mr Durkan: The first meeting of the review team took place on Monday 5 March 2001. As agreed by the Executive Committee, the review team will report to me in six months. I will bring the report and my recommendations to the Executive for final decision.

Mr A Maginness: I would like the report to be as comprehensive and wide-ranging as possible and the outcome of the review to be acted upon speedily to ensure that opportunities for those groups who are currently under-represented — women and Catholics — are enhanced.

Mr Durkan: The terms of reference for the review have been deliberately cast broadly to maximise the opportunity which the review provides. The review team has been asked to ensure that current practices and procedures for appointment to and promotions within the Senior Civil Service facilitate the business objective of Ministers and Departments and that these practices match examples of best practice in other major public and private sector bodies. We are determined to reduce obvious under-representation, particularly in respect of women and Catholics. We also want to look at any other identified form of under-representation. With the agreement of the Executive we are determined to act on the recommendations proposed by the review team.

(Madam Deputy Speaker [Ms Morrice] in the Chair)

DRAFT LIFE SENTENCES ORDER

The Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Committee (Mr Savage): I beg to move

That the report of the Ad Hoc Committee set up to consider the draft Life Sentences (Northern Ireland) Order 2001 referred by the Secretary of State be submitted to the Secretary of State as a report of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Perhaps it will be helpful to Members if I set out some details of the workings of the Committee. The Assembly established the Ad Hoc Committee on 22 January 2001 to consider the draft Life Sentences (Northern Ireland) Order 2001 and report to the Assembly. The draft Order seeks to introduce new provisions for the sentencing, review and release of life-sentence prisoners and those in prison at the pleasure of the Secretary of State. It will establish a specific body of Life Sentence Review Commissioners and move to address the matter of compliance with the Human Rights Act 1998.

Our first meeting was held on 29 January 2001. We met on four further occasions, all in public session. The Committee considered the draft Order and debated the purpose of and changes to the legislation. As a result of extremely tight deadlines the Committee decided to invite written evidence from seven organisations, as listed in the report. The Committee also invited the Secretary of State and senior Northern Ireland Office officials to give oral evidence on the background to the Order.

However, owing to pre-existing diary commitments they were unable to accept the Committee's invitation.

Overall, the Committee received six written submissions and took oral evidence from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, the Probation Board for Northern Ireland and Prof John Jackson from Queen's University, Belfast. This provided a good spread and balance of evidence, considering the extremely tight deadline. All written submissions, minutes of evidence and minutes of proceedings are included in the report for completeness.

Having heard oral evidence on 5 and 6 February the Committee carried out an article-by-article consideration of the draft Order on 12 February. This also included consideration of the four schedules overall. A majority of the Committee welcomed the draft Order, as it attempts to bring the law on the release of life-sentence prisoners into line with the requirements of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). However, the Committee had a number of concerns, including the fact that the Secretary of State would retain certain powers, potential breaches of the ECHR, lack of clarification on all life prisoners recall and revocation of licence. The

Committee made the following recommendations and comments in relation to the draft Order.

For article 3, a statement should be included that the Commissioners are to be independent of Government. The appointment of commissioners should, as far as possible, be made through open competition.

"In discharging any functions under this Order the Commissioners shall have regard to —

(b) the Convention rights of life prisoners;

(c) any representations made by or on behalf of a victim or a member of his/her family."

"Convention rights" and "victim" need to be defined.

For schedule 1, the Commissioners must have security of tenure to ensure their independence of Government, and provision should be made for a fixed-term appointment of five years. For article 4, there should be a role for the commissioners in deciding what information should be disclosed to the prisoner. This would entail a process whereby the Secretary of State would refer to the commissioners for a decision on the extent to which certain information should be withheld from the prisoner.

For article 5, new arrangements whereby courts will be required to fix the punishment part of a life sentence were welcomed. Political interference with the court's power to sentence convicted offenders who were over 18 when they committed their offence was questioned. The power of the Secretary of State to review the court sentence when the offender was under the age of 18 when the offence was committed was considered appropriate.

For article 6, an amendment was recommended to exclude consideration of certain factors when deciding when to release a life prisoner. For article 7, the Secretary of State should consult the commissioners in all compassionate release cases.

For article 8, there should be an amendment to allow the commissioners to review the licence at regular intervals and to give commissioners the power to annul a licence after a certain time has elapsed and where there have been no breaches of the licence conditions.

For article 9, there should be an amendment of the wording of article 9(2) so that it reads

"The Secretary of State may revoke the licence of any life prisoner and recall him to prison before a recommendation by the Commissioners is practicable where it appears to him to be necessary for the protection of the public from serious harm."

An amendment to article 9(4) should specify a timescale:

"The Secretary of State shall as soon as reasonably practicable refer the case of a life prisoner recalled under this article to the Commissioners."

On article 10, the power to specify the tariff or punishment part of the sentence of transferred life prisoners should be given to the court. In order to comply fully

with article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights, the determination of the tariff requires a hearing before a court. There should be a procedure whereby the Secretary of State refers the case of a transferred life prisoner to the court for the tariff to be determined.

On Article 11, as with article 10, the power to certify the part of the sentence which should be served before a prisoner is due to be considered for release should also be given to the court.

These recommendations are outlined in detail in the report, together with the Committee's conclusions, which stress

"The need for the Secretary of State to enter into meaningful consultations with the relevant organisations before implementation."

The Committee was set tight deadlines to complete its work, which militated against the provision of oral and written evidence from the Secretary of State, the Northern Ireland Office and to some extent the legal profession. That timely evidence would have helped us to produce a more fully informed report.

The Assembly is often put in the position of presenting complete reports or commentaries on pieces of legislation within tight deadlines, giving it little time to perform these functions adequately. A strong message should go from the Assembly to the Northern Ireland Office and the Secretary of State that Members should be given a reasonable time to react to proposals from the Government.

I thank the members of the Committee for their assistance, their hard work and their contribution to the report. I also thank the various organisations for their written submissions and oral evidence, which were given short notice.

Finally, I thank the Assembly staff for their support.

I invite Members to support the motion.

Mr A Maginness: I thank Mr Savage for his chairmanship of the Committee and for the contribution he has made to the House. It was a comprehensive presentation on behalf of the Committee on this proposed draft legislation. I agree with the Chairperson about the time frame. All members of the Committee and, indeed, other Members of the House agreed that insufficient time was given for consideration of this draft legislation. The same was the case with the flags regulations, the financial services legislation and so forth.

Under section 85(4)(c) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the period we are given is, in effect, 60 days. It should be emphasised to the Secretary of State that 60 days is not long enough and that the Act should be amended to extend the time period. The code of practice on written consultation issued by the Cabinet Office in November 2000 stipulated a period of 12 weeks, which compares unfavourably with the time allocated to the Assembly. Strong representations should be made not

only by the Committee in its presentation to the House but also by you, Madam Deputy Speaker, to the Northern Ireland Office.

4.15 pm

This has resulted in a very tight schedule for Members in the completion of their work, and it is unfair that we, as legislators, should be so pressurised, especially on such important legislation.

The other effect is to impose an even more unfair burden upon outside organisations which are very dependent on voluntary contributions to their various internal and policy committees. We are therefore not getting the benefit of fuller presentations from those organisations. That is a further point for consideration by the Secretary of State.

Moving to the substance of the report and of the draft legislation, the Committee has emphasised the need for the commissioners to be truly independent of Government. The Committee has made several suggestions in that regard. A constant theme in the Committee was that independence should not just be notional but that it should be firmly established. It was suggested, for example, that the commissioners' terms of office should be for five years, which would guarantee their independence. Other provisions were also suggested.

Also, in that section of the report, the Committee suggested that representations should be made by victims or their families in relation to the decision-making process concerning releases. That is a very important matter which the House should bear in mind. Those who have suffered, or families which have suffered, as a result of the offences committed by the people with whom we are concerned today, should also be considered by the independent commission in the exercise of its functions.

In relation to schedule 2, a point was made regarding the disclosure of evidence and information to the commissioners but not to the prisoners. In the view of the Ad Hoc Committee, that creates problems. It was felt that that would be in contravention of article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights. That is not just some sort of minor reservation. It is a very real reservation of the Committee, and it should be emphasised in the House that it is not right that such information and evidence should not be disclosed to a prisoner or his representative. To some extent the proposed legislation tries to meet that, in so far as the legislation indicates that a special advocate could be appointed by the commission to consider the evidence and information presented.

While that to some extent ameliorates the problems, it does not remedy in full the defect in this schedule. It would therefore be best if all evidence and all information were disclosed to the prisoner appearing before the commissioners.

There are differences between evidence and information. Evidence is subject to various proofs and has been

brought to the commissioners with weight and authority; information has not necessarily been tested. It is important therefore that all information and evidence is brought to the attention of the prisoner so that his legal representatives can deal with any problems as they arise. A prisoner must be in a position to rebut defective information or evidence.

Under article 5, which is at the heart of the proposed legislation, a judge will fix the tariff. He or she will fix the punishment for retribution and deterrence. That is a crucial innovation because it will make our approach to sentencing compatible with the European Convention on Human Rights. In no way will the sentencing of an individual depend on anything other than a court.

However, a distinction is made for "whole-life prisoners" — prisoners who receive sentences that do not have fixed terms. When a person is under 18 the Committee believes that it is appropriate for the Secretary of State to be able to say that that person can be referred to the commissioners. That is an important move by the Secretary of State.

The Ad Hoc Committee divided on prisoners who were over 18 when they committed the offence and received a whole-life tariff from the court. Although the Committee's majority view was to accept the provision that the Secretary of State could act, some members objected in principle, saying that that allowed for political interference with the court's power to sentence convicted offenders who were over 18 when they committed the offence. I agree with the majority view on this matter because I cannot envisage a situation in which a person should be sentenced to a whole-life tariff and suffer an indeterminate sentence for the rest of his or her life. In those circumstances someone has to intervene in order to review that sentence at an appropriate stage. There is no provision for a court to do so and the best possible alternative is for the Secretary of State to intervene or, if such matters are devolved, the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. We should support the majority view of the Committee, which is to accept this provision. I know that that deviates from the concept of there not being any political interference in sentencing.

However, for the reasons that I have just outlined, I believe that, in these circumstances, it is necessary for there to be an intervention, albeit from a political source. I believe that it is fair and just in all the circumstances. A better alternative would be for a court to review that, but there is no provision for that in this or any alternative legislation. In these circumstances, I support the majority view.

In relation to article 8, it was the Committee's view that the imposition of a licence or licence conditions on a prisoner for the rest of his life after release from prison was unduly harsh. I agree with that. There must be circumstances when a prisoner who has been released for a number of years should be given the opportunity of

wiping the slate completely clean so that there is no longer anything hanging over him, and he can get on with the rest of his life. The stigma of having a life sentence would therefore be removed. Where a person has shown himself to be of good character and has rehabilitated himself, it is wrong and unjust that he continues to carry the stigma of a life prisoner. I believe that there should be some provision — and the Committee has accepted this — for the annulment of that licence. This would be of benefit to the released prisoner.

I know that this will probably not be accepted by the Secretary of State, although I hope that it is, for it is a very important message for the Assembly to send to the Secretary of State so that this stigma can be removed from released life prisoners at some time in the future. We should all support it. If the Secretary of State does not accept the terms of the present draft legislation, perhaps at some point in the future he will accept them in alternative legislation before Parliament.

Finally, I have points in relation to articles 10 and 11. Article 10 deals with transferred prisoners, and article 11 deals with existing life prisoners. It was the view of the Ad Hoc Committee that these two provisions were incompatible with article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Again, we have the interference, as it were, of the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State has a sentencing function and can specify the remaining tariff that a prisoner has to serve. That is in relation to either an existing life prisoner or a prisoner who has been transferred, for example, from prison in England or Wales, or even from the Irish Republic. The Secretary of State should have no significant role in deciding the term or tariff that the prisoner will have to spend in prison. That function should be exercised by a court. I fully support that — I believe that the court should exercise such a function. The provision in the legislation before the House says that the Secretary of State should deal with the matter in consultation with the Lord Chief Justice.

4.30 pm

However, I believe that that is insufficient to meet the terms of article 6 of the European Convention. It seems to be wrong in principle to allow that to happen. I support the Committee fully in its recommendation that a court is the appropriate body for dealing with this, notwithstanding the fact that the Lord Chief Justice would have some sort of role, according to the draft legislation before the House.

The Committee did outstanding work in the time available, and its members worked very well together in a non-partisan fashion. It produced a consensual report that it can be proud of, and I believe that the House should give it the fullest support.

Mr Paisley Jnr: Once again this House has demonstrated that it is able to put together a report under the difficult and, at times, perplexing circumstances in

Northern Ireland. It allows Members to produce a report from which they can select *à la carte*, and which says, essentially, that we agree to disagree. That is a unique feature of this House. We did the same with the flags report. In that case none of the parties agreed with each other, but nonetheless we were able to produce a report. In this case, although the disagreement is on technical issues, we have been able to produce a report wherein we agree to disagree. We came up with a report that expresses and represents all the different points of view. That at least gives us the ability to come forward and suggest that we can support it, if the Secretary of State agrees to certain points.

On that basis, my party will be supporting the motion that was so ably presented this evening by the Chairperson of the Committee. I wish to add my congratulations to the staff of the Committee for the way in which business was conducted. We have produced a report, under difficult circumstances, which would not otherwise have been proposed or supported in this way.

The report deals with a number of issues, and I would like to break them down into four areas. The first is the issue of consultation. Both of the Members who have spoken on this have indicated their disappointment and dissatisfaction with the way the consultation process operates. I have to add my voice to their concern. There is a recommendation in the report that reflects our concern about the lack of consultation.

We asked the Secretary of State and officials from the Northern Ireland Office to make themselves available to consult with us, in a meaningful way, about many of the terms that have been introduced into this draft Order. As we see from the report, the Secretary of State had too many diary commitments, and officials from the Northern Ireland Office were too busy to attend. We must express our concern that neither the Northern Ireland Office nor the Secretary of State could make themselves available to discuss this very important issue, to give us their point of view and to answer questions. Many members of the Committee had questions and concerns about this proposed Order.

Once again, the way that the Northern Ireland Office has handled this makes a mockery of the consultation. It should take that to heart. If it is going to take this House and its representatives seriously then it must consult with them seriously, instead of treating them in the off-hand way that it did during the course of the deliberations of this and other Committees.

The Order raises an issue that divides us on fundamental grounds. That is the issue of whether or not the Secretary of State should have a role in the sentencing process. That was discussed at the Committee meetings.

My party is of the view that no politician should have a direct say in the sentencing of a prisoner. That is an issue for the court — the court should make a deter-

mination, and the sentence should be served unless it is overturned at appeal. This Order gives the Secretary of State a direct input into the sentencing of prisoners. I object strongly to that measure because I believe that it is open to abuse.

Politicians, by their very nature, are lobbied, and they can succumb to a lobby. On an issue of justice that should be arbitrated independently by the court, it is wrong that a politician should have that say. I have had some experience of that.

I was involved in a case, over 10 years ago, known as the “UDR four”. The mechanism that was then open to us was to lobby a politician. We had to provide him not only with evidential issues but with political reasons why he should reopen the case.

Fortunately, as a result of an appeal relating to that case, that mechanism has changed. You have to go back through the courts, and an independent Criminal Cases Review Commission must come up with evidence and put forward a case that shows that there is sufficient evidence to warrant an appeal, as opposed to there being both evidential and political grounds for an appeal.

There has been a subtle change, but this Order allows for back-peddalling on that, which is wrong in principle and could be open to abuse. There have been a number of cases that have demonstrated in England and Wales — and, in principle, could demonstrate here — how this measure would operate.

Under article 5, for example, it is essential that those people who serve a whole-life tariff do actually serve that tariff. If you do the crime, then you must be able to serve the time. Although that is a cliché, any political interference with how a person serves that time should be restricted.

I believe that life should mean life. That is a view that raises the hackles of some people, but it is one to which my party holds firmly. We think that any attempt to undermine what life means, and what a court means when it sentences someone to life, should be resisted.

There are three types of case where we can see that abuse could arise. There is what I would call the Hindley-type case, where, under article 5(4), a person can, through political lobbying, ask for his or her case to be looked at again. That should be avoided. The Criminal Cases Review Commission should be the only mechanism used, and on an evidential basis only.

Then there are the Bulger-type cases. Those cases again indicate — even where juveniles and very young children are involved — that they can be open to political interference.

In addition, under article 7, the Secretary of State may, at any time, release a life prisoner if he is convinced that there are exceptional circumstances. We could name that the “Kray clause” — the Home Secretary was

convinced that, under certain circumstances in that particular case, a prisoner could be released.

This Order does not allow for consultation. I am glad that we, as a Committee, attempted to plug the gap by saying that if the Secretary of State wants to use those wide-ranging powers he must, at least, consult. He must consult with people who are openly recruited and appointed as independent commissioners.

The third area that concerns me is the role of the independent commissioners. I think that the Committee was agreed that the commissioners should be independent and independently appointed. Indeed, on page 18 of the report, we recommended that the commissioners

“should be independent of Government and appointed through open competition”.

We recommended that they should,

“in exercising their functions, have regard for the Convention rights of life prisoners”.

It is essential that those commissioners demonstrate that they have human rights experience, because to date most commissioners have not been able to demonstrate that.

There are two issues relating to the commissioners: who are they — they should be independent — and what are they entitled to hear? The non-disclosure of material to commissioners causes great concern right across the community. If we believe in fair trial, there must be a fair and transparent legal system. Such a system could not include a mechanism that would allow a prisoner to be shut out of a hearing so that he or she would not know who was making the accusations or what case was being made and would not be able to respond directly to the allegations. I share with most members of the Committee the concern that the draft Order allows for something that could lead to a travesty of justice. We should guard against introducing an Order that could pervert justice. That is why I support the relevant recommendations.

When we first considered it, the draft Order contained no article that addressed the issue of victims’ rights. That was disappointing. I am glad that the Committee’s recommendations in relation to article 3 proposed that the commissioners should listen to representations made on behalf of the victims. Prof Dickson, chief of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, gave evidence to the Committee and suggested that, at the very least, a victim should be able to make a case in writing. I agree. However, there should be a mechanism available to victims that would allow them to make their case to the commissioners, so that the commissioners would know exactly the feelings that they would evoke and the reaction that they would cause if they were to allow a particular prisoner to be released on licence.

It is essential that people understand how victims feel. Until now, they have been excluded from the process.

The one thing that the Secretary of State should learn from consideration of the legislation is that victims have rights. He should give them not only a voice but an ear in the process. People must see that victims have rights and that they must be listened to.

Prof Dickson said that he would consider with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission the issue of how victims should bring their case before the sentence commissioners. On page 59 of the report, we have published a letter from Prof Dickson that reveals a careless and flippant disregard for the rights of victims:

“the Commission was not able to discuss further the respects in which victims’ views could be taken into account.”

The professor goes on to say

“we had so much else to discuss that day that we did not reach that item.”

I do not doubt that Prof Dixon is a busy man and that the commission is a busy commission. However, the fact that there was so much else on the agenda that victims’ rights were not even reached will be a bitter pill for victims of crime to swallow. Their rights must be considered.

Many people perceive that more attention is paid to prisoners’ rights than to those of victims. The letter from Prof Dickson and the Secretary of State’s Order do nothing to dispel that perception. Many people will argue that that is just a perception and that prisoners have a hard time of it. However, that perception must be addressed. If life is too busy for the views of victims even to be taken into account, they will be justified in holding on to that perception. Victims have been ignored until now. I hope that the recommendations that we have made in respect of the Order will spur the Secretary of State and the Northern Ireland Office into recognising that they must take cognizance of victims’ views.

4.45 pm

Mr J Kelly: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I too want to congratulate the Chairman and staff of the Ad Hoc Committee for the work that they did in a such a short time. The question of time is important, as Alban Maginness pointed out. The usefulness of the Ad Hoc Committees comes into question when no time is given to properly conduct an inquiry into the subject that is under consideration.

We asked the Secretary of State to attend a Committee meeting, but the invitation was refused. That is a further indication of how little regard they have for Ad Hoc Committees. The same is true of the judiciary and their non-attendance at the Committee.

We welcome any move that aims to put human rights legislation into practice. It is not enough to amend existing legislation or to adopt a model that has been designed for use in England and is fraught with problems. There are a number of radical progressive alternatives in

Scandinavia, for example, that provide fair and more humane regimes.

It must be remembered that, for the most part, the intermediate and subjective elements of life sentences have been used against Republicans. There is nothing new in this system to guard against that happening again. My party has long argued in favour of the abolition of both mandatory and discretionary indeterminate life sentences. The proposed introduction of a tariff system throws up many new concerns that will only compound the problems associated with life prisoners and those that are being detained at the Secretary of State’s pleasure (SOSp).

If the judiciary were given the power to set a tariff — with all the connotations that its loyalty to the Crown has — what checks and balances will be put in place to ensure equality under the law for both victims and perpetrators? Political prisoners are still being brought before Diplock courts with all their inherent bias and willingness to convict on the most dubious of evidence. It must be noted that the only two prisoners that were given natural life sentences were Republicans who were convicted of single killings. That contrasts sharply with the treatment in court of the Loyalist death squads such as the “Shankill butchers”. There is much that we can do about that, but we should be mindful of these things when considering any new proposals.

If a commission is to be set up to oversee the release process, a number of safeguards must be put in place to ensure that the system is open and fair. The Secretary of State currently has extensive powers to deal with life and SOSp prisoners that should be given over to the commission. Sentencing should be a matter for the judiciary, and release should be a matter for the commission. The separate arrangements that are in place under the Good Friday Agreement are the appropriate mechanisms for dealing with political prisoners.

The commissioners should be representative of the community and not simply political appointees drawn from particular professional classes. The commission should be open to representatives of community organisations such as community restorative justice committees. We should be told clearly what skills, experience and training the commissioners will need. The commissioners will need staff. The staff should not be drawn from the Prison Service or the Civil Service but should be independent and accountable only to the commissioners.

There is a need for clear guidelines, definitions and directions to be given to the commissioners. Terms such as “risk to the public” need to be defined. There should be widespread consultation on the issue, and it should include the views of the community, ex-prisoners representative groups such as Coiste na n-Iarchimí and Restorative Justice and prisoners themselves. The review

process should be transparent and open. There should be no secret hearings or undisclosed evidence.

Prisoners should have the right to be present, along with their legal representatives or any other person nominated by them. People serving life and those serving sentences at the Secretary of State's pleasure need to be able to challenge any aspect of evidence presented and any decision of a review or commission hearing.

The present system of phased release needs to be overhauled, to give a meaningfully structured release programme of paroles. Information and support should be part of the release process, but the Prison Service is not necessarily best equipped to provide that. Consultation with current and former lifers would be useful in that regard. After a period has elapsed, the commission should have the power to annul licences. Former life sentence prisoners and prisoners at the pleasure of the Secretary of State should also be afforded that facility. Release should be unconditional except in the case of sex offenders, who should be placed on the sex offenders register.

The criteria for releasing a lifer or a prisoner at the pleasure of the Secretary of State on compassionate grounds should be clearly laid out and administered by the commission. That would avoid situations where prisoners are discriminated against, as has happened in the past with British soldiers released after serving only a few years. The power of recall should be removed from the Secretary of State, who is, after all, a political appointee. Recall should not happen unless new evidence is brought before a court.

At the outset I congratulated the Chairperson and the members of the Committee for the work that they did in such a short time. The question of Ad Hoc Committees and their usefulness, considering the scant amount of regard that is given to them, should be taken up by the Business Committee.

Mr B Hutchinson: I will start by declaring an interest in this, as a former life-sentence prisoner still on licence. I have not had that licence removed, even though I have been released for 11 years. Also, for the Hansard record, I will clear up misinformation from John Kelly, which I know he did not give deliberately. In the case of the "Shankill butchers", two people were sentenced to natural life, and on the day of sentencing the judge repeated that both should serve natural life. Also in the 1970s, two other Loyalists were sentenced to death for the killing of a policeman, but both had the sentence commuted. We should not give out misinformation. I do not know why we are talking about Loyalists and Republicans. I would like to think that that is all behind us. We are now dealing with a new breed of prisoner.

I have to agree with what John Kelly said about the tariff. I am concerned when I hear people talking about rehabilitation and then a tariff. We need to decide what happens to people when they go to prison — is it about

rehabilitating or about punishing? I think that a tariff is about punishing, not rehabilitating. How can you sentence someone to life imprisonment and say that he should serve at least 15 years before you consider him for rehabilitation? You can only judge whether a person is rehabilitated by their actions in prison. There is no evidence to suggest whether a person is rehabilitated or not.

I agree with Alban Maginness that we need evidence rather than information, but the information that keeps, and has kept, people in prison for a long time has only been information — it has not been evidence. If we were to take examples of people who have been in prison for a long time, whether Republican or Loyalist, the information was given by the Prison Service and by people on the outside, who made a judgement of whether the prisoner would be a risk to society. How can someone decide that when there is no evidence, only information? In some cases that information was 15 and 16 years old — not current.

We need to be careful about that. I want to be careful about setting tariffs. Rehabilitation is an individual thing, and not something that you can lay down for everybody. People take different lengths of time to be rehabilitated — some can be rehabilitated quite quickly; others cannot. From my own experience, having been in prison, I think that some people are kept in prison too long — they have been rehabilitated, but actually start to turn back. They feel that they have been victimised, not because of something they have done but because of something that people think they are doing or have done. That is a big danger. We need to be careful about tariffs.

Like everyone else, I need to mention that we lacked enough time to respond to every issue. We can complain about that bitterly from now until the cows come home, but it is not going to solve the problem. However, the report is very good, and the Secretary of State and others reading it will get a lot of information from it. It should help them.

Someone once said that nothing concentrates the mind like a hanging — no pun intended. That is what happened to us: we had to concentrate on the job in hand. Mr Paisley Jnr was right when he said that we had to agree on some things and agree to differ on others. At least we produced a report, and it is an example of how this Assembly has worked well. We all set our minds to trying to achieve that, even though we may not necessarily have agreed on the issues.

There are problems as regards the Secretary of State retaining certain powers. I hear quite a lot of people saying — and I agree with them — that there is a difficulty with the decision being a political one. Politicians can be lobbied. However, I would remind them that very few judges in this country do not have a political view. Regardless of whether the view is a party political one, it can be either right or left of centre — and God help

the prisoner if it is right of centre, for he will probably not get a fair deal.

We really have to be careful about pinning the responsibility on politicians. Judges also have a role, and I am not sure that the judiciary is independent from political thought or political beliefs. I would not expect it to be. Judges are human beings and they are entitled to hold political opinions. However, is it possible for them to detach themselves from their opinions when they are actually doing their job?

Mr Paisley Jnr quoted quite a good example, and I was thinking about it while he was speaking. I was thinking about his work with the “UDR four”. Very few people wanted to get involved with the “UDR four”, but Mr Paisley stuck his head above the parapet. He has to be commended for that. He proved to be right in the long run.

The point is that there are ills in this society. There have been travesties of justice the whole way along. Therefore we need to have some sort of mechanism to deal with that. At the end of the day, and irrespective of whether people go back to court to get their cases reopened on appeal, we have to have some mechanism whereby the Government can decide that cases need to be re-opened. These will be political decisions. However, we need to find the appropriate mechanism.

We cannot divorce the judiciary from politics completely. It cannot be done. It is a matter of fact and a matter of life. All of these things are cross-cutting, and we need to have powers whereby politicians or Government can have cases re-opened. It is a question of being above board and letting everybody see it being above board. We need to address the system that facilitates it and ensure that it is above board, so that every person can have that right. Criteria should be laid down, and if people meet the criteria their cases could be reopened. Those are all important issues.

We need to be careful regarding the recall of prisoners. I do not think that anybody in the Committee would have disagreed that there is a lack of clarification about when people could be recalled and when they could not. I am very concerned about it because it is a thorny issue. We need to ensure that there is no breach of the European Convention on Human Rights. That is very important. Some of the evidence given to us suggests that it might have been the case on some occasions in the past. Therefore we need to be careful about the recall of prisoners and take a longer look at it. We need to make sure that there is some consultation with others and that we get opinions from them.

I congratulate the Chairperson and Committee staff again for pulling this report together. We will have more Ad Hoc Committees, and we may not have the time to respond to every issue that we would like to have.

5.00 pm

However, we need to respond in the short time that we have. If this is anything to go by, we can produce reasonable documents — in fact, good documents — in a short time. This report and the flags report are examples of how we will deal with legislation on reserved matters. We must respond, no matter how little time we have.

Mr Attwood: I associate myself with the comments of Billy Hutchinson, Alban Maginness and Ian Paisley Jnr about the work of the staff and about how agreeing to disagree meant that there was no more serious conflict on the Committee.

Several themes and principles that arise from the Ad Hoc Committee’s report are relevant to this discussion and others. First, I share the concern that the Secretary of State’s consultation with the Assembly on the matter was inadequate. However, as we also know, it goes further than that. At the public hearing, Brice Dickson, the chief commissioner of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, replied as follows to a question about whether the Northern Ireland Office had consulted the Human Rights Commission before the draft Order was issued:

“No. We received the first version before Christmas, at the same time as everyone else.”

The statutory body responsible for human rights matters in Northern Ireland, as laid down by an Act of the British Parliament was not consulted in any way prior to the issue of the draft legislation. That should not surprise us. At the Ad Hoc Committee on flags, a similar question was put to the chair of the Equality Commission, Joan Harbison, and she confirmed that the Equality Commission had not been consulted by the Secretary of State or the Northern Ireland Office in advance of the issue of the draft Flags (Northern Ireland) Order 2000. There is a structural problem with consultation with the Assembly and the main statutory bodies in the North that are responsible for the issues that have arisen from draft legislation. That structural problem must be addressed.

Like others, the SDLP welcomes the draft legislation, although not without objection. We welcome it for several reasons. First, as Prof Jackson said at the public hearing, the draft legislation introduces a principled and human-rights-based approach to the release of life prisoners. Although there are weaknesses in the draft Order, that principled and human-rights-based approach is the appropriate method for the consideration of future legislation. That should be made explicit, which is why the Committee has recommended that article 3 be amended to read as follows:

“In discharging any functions under this Order the Commissioners shall have regard to” —

inter alia —

“the Convention rights of life prisoners”.

That makes explicit the principled and human rights-based approach to the release of prisoners that Prof Jackson said was implicit in the draft Order.

There are some even more compelling principles that inform both the draft legislation and the recommendations of the Committee. If the Assembly can agree to endorse those principles in relation to this draft legislation, I would like us to endorse the application of the same principles when it comes to our own legislation. They are good principles, and they represent good practice.

First, there are a number of principles in the legislation and in the Committee's recommendations about the independence of membership of statutory bodies, the transparent working of statutory bodies and the belief that such bodies should be free of political interference. That is why the Committee said that in order to ensure that members are independent in discharging their functions, they should have security of tenure for at least five years in the first instance. That will ensure that people who are fulfilling a public function do so independent of obvious external pressures. A tenure that is limited to one, two or three years is an external pressure. By creating certainty of tenure, one creates greater certainty of the independence of a member. That principle should apply across the board in relation to public nominations. In due course the Assembly may have to consider that principle in respect of other public nominations.

Secondly, appointments to public bodies should be decided through open competition. That is an appropriate principle that should influence those who are appointed to public bodies. It should apply equally to other public appointments. In the North there are approximately 3,500 people appointed to quangos and similar organisations. We should have, and are beginning to have, a rigorous system of open competition for filling those appointments. That is good in practice and principle, and it informed the Committee's report.

Thirdly, and at the risk of going into uncertain territory, another principle was flagged up in the Patten Report on policing. It said that there should be a robust separation of powers between the policing board and the Executive. Those principles also informed the Committee in its recommendations to the Assembly on the powers of the Secretary of State and the powers of the Commissioners.

There are passages in the draft report where the Committee states that there should be a robust separation of powers between the Secretary of State and the Executive on one hand and the Commissioners on the other. Those examples include the power of the Secretary of State under the draft Order to recall a prisoner and the power of the Secretary of State and a judge to determine what part of a life sentence prisoner's life sentence should be served where he has been transferred to the North from another prison. There are a number of other examples, but they escape me at the moment. The

Committee endorses the principle of a robust separation of powers between the Executive on one hand and a legal authority on the other. That principle should begin to inform the Assembly in other deliberations yet to arise.

Fourthly, the principle of transparency is also important. The Committee's report says explicitly that while there was discussion about transparency, it has concerns about the Secretary of State not discharging information about a prisoner in certain circumstances. While the draft Order introduces a special advocates clause in order to mitigate the prospect of a prisoner not being aware of matters that might be relevant in the consideration of his case, the Committee said that that was not adequate to ensure that there was an accountable and transparent process when it came to determining what a prisoner should or should not know.

It should be for the Commissioners to decide what information is or is not made available to a prisoner whose case is under consideration — not for the Secretary of State or the special advocate. That is an important principle. If the Assembly accepts that principle, it will have a wider application in other ongoing procedures in Northern Ireland where information is not made known to a certain person because it may be security-related or security-relevant.

As a consequence, in the North there are procedures where a special advocate process is already in place in spite of the difficulties that some of us think are associated with that procedure. If the Assembly considers that the special advocate procedure is not adequate with respect to the release of life prisoners, then the Assembly may, in due course, similarly consider that it is not appropriate or relevant in other cases.

The final point I want to make is about release on licence. While Alban Maginness and others have dealt with the substantive parts of the Committee's recommendations, I want to highlight that part relating to the release on licence of a life prisoner. It seems inconsistent to say that if the process of imprisonment is an exercise in deterrence and rehabilitation, and if a life sentence review board concludes that the deterrence principle has been satisfied, the licence cannot be annulled. The rehabilitation principle should be satisfied to the point where a prisoner on a life sentence licence should have that licence annulled. That person should be treated equally with every other citizen.

I support the report.

Mr Savage: We have heard the views of many Members. This is a very complex issue. When the Committee was given the task to do, it got tore into it. Many loose ends had to be tied up. The Committee knew that there was a job to be done, and we put our backs into it. Overall, there is support for the report. The Committee worked hard to arrive at the report, and there was agreement on the need for this legislation. There

was also agreement on the Committee's recommendations and concerns, and they are all highlighted in the report.

This is a good report. It speaks well for every Member who contributed to it. I would also like to thank the staff for their hard work. We have put into place, I hope, new legislation that will bring about change in an area where it is needed.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have taken note of Members' concerns, particularly with regard to the consultation period provided for the Assembly in section

85 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The point is well made in the Ad Hoc Committee's report. I will bring the matter to the attention of the Speaker on his return.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the report of the Ad Hoc Committee set up to consider the draft Life Sentences (Northern Ireland) Order 2001 referred by the Secretary of State be submitted to the Secretary of State as a report of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Adjourned at 5.13 pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 20 March 2001

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

ASSEMBLY: VOTING

Mr Speaker: At the end of the sitting on 6 March Dr Paisley raised a question about decisions by the Chair and the collection of voices. Standing Orders are clear that the Speaker shall judge whether a motion be carried by a collection of voices. Where the outcome is unclear the question will be put again. If the Speaker's decision is challenged by a number of Members clearly pressing their case — even if only a few voices — the matter will be put again. If the “Aye” and “No” voices are similar, it will be put again. The Speaker will call for Tellers, and if Tellers are provided, the House will divide. I trust that the matter is now clear.

ASSEMBLY: UNPARLIAMENTARY LANGUAGE

Mr Speaker: During questions following a statement by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development on 12 March, a Member was alleged to have described another Member, from a sedentary position, as a “papish bigot”. The Member was also alleged to have repeated the remark to another Member for having raised a point of order on the matter.

I have considered the matter carefully, and I am not aware of a precedent set elsewhere clarifying such a remark as unparliamentary language. That said, I find it inconceivable that such a remark could be regarded as anything other than a term of abuse. While I wish to ensure that we have robust debate in the Chamber, I do not see the case for abusive language. In that respect I consider that this term should henceforth be regarded as unparliamentary language in the Chamber.

However, I am not aware of any precedent set down elsewhere in respect of such remarks. The Member involved, if he did make such remarks, could not have expected the Speaker to consider his remarks to be unparliamentary language. Therefore, in terms of natural justice, it would be inappropriate to take any kind of retrospective action regarding the remark. However, I repeat that, from today, such remarks in this Assembly will be regarded as unparliamentary language. Also, remarks made from a sedentary position that are subsequently referred to by another Member during debate should be considered part of the proceedings of the Assembly and subject to the rule of the Speaker.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: Are you prepared to rule that the term “Protestant bigot” will also be sat on in this House? You cannot say something about one section of the community and not about the other. “Papists” are referred to in the constitution of the United Kingdom.

Mr Speaker: That is quite true. I trust that we shall not see such invective used in the Chamber. With regard to the use of the term “papish” or “papist”, immediate assumptions are being made, not only about a person's religion but also regarding the standing and reverence in which he or she holds the pontiff. At least, one would suppose that that is what is meant by it. In fact, it is usually used as a simple term of abuse. I trust that other such terms — for example, “Orange bigot” — will not become part of the parlance of this Chamber.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: Or “Protestant bigot”?

Mr Speaker: And, indeed, “Protestant bigot”. It is unhelpful and it is unparliamentary. I am unaware of terms of that kind having been used in the Chamber. Then again, I am not here absolutely all of the time.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. What about “Unionist bigot”?

Mr Speaker: We could quickly get into a situation where, off the cuff, I go through a whole series of remarks and make rulings in regard to them. That is not a helpful way to proceed. If Members sail too close to the wind, I will undoubtedly consider the matter — particularly when it is raised by a Member to whom such a remark is directed. When my attention is drawn to it, I will then consider the question and see whether or not it is appropriate, inappropriate, parliamentary or unparliamentary — as distinct from true or false, which is a different matter.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I understand that the Deputy Speaker who was in the Chair that day made a ruling on this matter. Are Deputy Speakers' rulings now to be referred to you, or is it the case that such rulings cannot be challenged?

Mr Speaker: The subject was raised again, in writing, on more than one occasion after the Deputy Speaker had ruled. Hence, a further ruling was necessary.

Mr McCartney: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I must confess that the use of this language is not something that I approve of. However, is the ruling in relation to the word "bigot", or is it in relation to "papish"? If one calls someone an "extremist bigot", a "sectarian bigot", a "papish bigot" or a "Prod bigot", the first word is simply an adjective specifying the type of bigot. What I am concerned about is whether the essential core of your ruling is "bigot" or whether it is the adjective preceding that word?

Mr Speaker: It is not the term "bigot" of itself.

ASSEMBLY BUSINESS: ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

Mrs I Robinson: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. There is to be no Adjournment debate today. The Strangford MLAs have put down a motion concerning the plight of fishermen in Northern Ireland in relation to the cod recovery plan, which will come into effect on Friday. Also, the need of compensation for fishermen who have to tie up for the next five to six weeks —

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member knows perfectly well that it is not in order to raise questions of that kind. It is a matter for the Business Committee. This is clearly not a point of order but an attempt to put the Member's views on record at this time.

Mr P Robinson: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Is it possible for you to call the Business Committee together at lunch time to see if it would allow that Adjournment debate to take place this evening?

Mr Speaker: I recall that Mr Robinson has raised this precise point of order in respect of various motions. My response has always been the same. It is not possible for the Business Committee to add matters to the Order Paper as published. I can understand that, with age and grandfatherly duties bearing down on him, the Member may have forgotten that, so I remind him of the rulings that I made in the past.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: On a further point of order, Mr Speaker. It should be clear to Members that if they do not discuss this plan today, they will not have any opportunity to do so, for it will be passed on Friday.

Mr Speaker: The Member knows that it is the Business Committee, on which he and his Colleagues have representation, which decides what matters need to be on the Order Paper. The Committee will be meeting at lunch time today, as usual, and representatives may raise these questions if they wish. The question of order that the matter raises is clear.

Mr P Robinson: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. This is a serious issue. In most, if not all, other elected bodies, Standing Orders allow for emergency debates. Can we not, through the Procedures Committee, see whether, when an emergency occurs, there can be a proper debate in the Assembly?

Mr Speaker: There is no reason why the matter should not be raised through the Procedures Committee. The Member may talk to the Committee Chairman, Mr Conor Murphy, who will undoubtedly oblige by putting the matter on its agenda.

RATES (REGIONAL RATES) (NO 2) ORDER 2001

Mr Durkan: I beg to move

That the Rates (Regional Rates) (No 2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2001 be approved.

This short statutory instrument specifies the regional rate poundages for the financial year 2001-02 and the amount of the domestic rate aid grant applicable to that year. It also revokes and replaces an earlier rule that has been made but which, as I will explain shortly, will not now be brought before the Assembly.

Members will recall that on 12 February, I announced in this Chamber that the uplifts in the regional rates previously incorporated in the Budget plans would be abated from 8% to 7% in respect of the domestic rate and from 6.6% to 3.3% in respect of the non-domestic rate. The Order that we are considering today prescribes the actual rate poundages that reflect these lower percentage increases. I will quickly describe each of the articles in the Order.

Article 1 provides legal definitions of the two main classes of rateable property. A specified hereditament means, broadly, a commercial property. Consequently, an unspecified hereditament is a domestic property.

Article 2 fixes 30.42p as the commercial regional rate poundage and 192.95p as the domestic regional rate poundage.

Article 3 specifies 69.15p as the amount by which the domestic rate is to be reduced. The domestic rate that ratepayers will actually pay will therefore be 123.8p.

Article 4 revokes an earlier Order, which was similar in every respect to the present Order except that it would have come into operation on 14 May instead of 1 April. Subsequent to the Order being made, it was revealed that a May start date for the new rate would have posed more significant operational difficulties for the Rate Collection Agency than had been realised.

10.45 am

A second Order was therefore prepared, and urgent steps were taken to complete it in a shorter time frame than previously intended. Before being halted, the original Order had not progressed far enough to be laid before the Assembly.

Members will be interested to know that in this coming year revenue raised from the regional rate will exceed £300 million, which will make a very significant contribution towards the expenditure plans set out in the Budget announcement in December. At that time, however, I made it clear that we would be keeping under review revenue forecasts and other related matters and that I would be prepared to reduce the proposed rate increases if the opportunity arose. Members will recall

that, as a result of the December monitoring round, some room to manoeuvre emerged. Having listened carefully to the views of Members and ordinary ratepayers, I was pleased to announce to the Assembly on 12 February the reduced percentage increase now included in today's Regional Rates Order.

I stress that the regional rate is an important part of the funding for our public services. As a result of last year's spending review, our total spending on services under the control of the Executive has increased by 8%, as expressed in the departmental expenditure limit set for us by the Treasury. That is a much more relevant comparator in this context than is the rate of inflation. Increasing the regional rate by 8% would have done no more than keep constant the proportion of spending which is funded from the regional rate. However, as I have explained many times, the level of local revenue raised here is relatively low, and the Treasury has pressed consistently for a relative increase. We were able to reduce the increase in the domestic rate to 7% because the information on valuation showed that the level of revenue would be higher than had been expected.

I do not deny that major issues remain in relation to financing local services, and I am taking three initiatives towards resolving them. With your indulgence, Mr Speaker, and for the information of Members present, I should like to make a few brief remarks on each one.

First, a comprehensive review of rating policy is now under way. An interdepartmental steering group has been set up, and work on the review will be taken forward as quickly as possible. The role of local revenue raising in our Programme for Government will be explored, including its impact on households, commerce, industry and the voluntary sector. Fairness in the system, and the relationship between the regional Government and the district councils will also be examined. Widespread public consultation will take place later this year, and I hope that the review will be completed by spring 2002.

Secondly, I am pleased to confirm that I am bringing forward a scheme for mandatory rate relief for shops and post offices in rural settlements. Additional discretionary relief will also be available for such businesses and other undertakings by way of a qualifying settlement. That will benefit the local community, and the scheme should be in operation by October 2002.

Thirdly, a non-domestic revaluation for rating purposes is in progress. Work on this will continue until the autumn of 2002. A new valuation list will be issued before the end of December 2002 and will come into force on April 2003. The valuations in the new list will reflect the social, economic and demographic changes which have taken place since the revaluation six years previously.

I am certain that Members will agree that these three initiatives, along with the reduction in the previously announced rates increase represented by today's Regional

Rates Order, demonstrate clearly that I and my ministerial colleagues in the Executive are prepared to listen when representations are made to us and to act in the best interests of the whole community — even when difficult issues have to be faced and equally difficult choices have to be made.

I commend the Order to the Assembly.

The Chairperson of the Finance and Personnel Committee (Mr Molloy): A Cheann Comhairle, go raibh maith agat. The Finance and Personnel Committee discussed the Regional Rates Order at its meeting on 15 March, when officials explained the background to it. Generally there were feelings of unhappiness among members of the Committee about the rates increases. Members, however, agreed to support the Order — a motion being carried by three votes to two, with one abstention. That shows the disagreements and concerns that there are within the Committee on this matter.

I ask the Minister to ensure that in the review the issue of rates as a means of taxation is looked into. The Committee has voiced concerns on a number of occasions that this is a crude system of taxation that is, in some ways, discriminatory as it does not take into account the services that are provided within a district area or the difference between urban and rural areas. Members of the Committee had difficulty accepting any suggestion that the level of rates increase in the North should be linked to increases proposed by other Assemblies. Members also resented the implication that the Treasury would be able to use the adoption of a lower rate here as a weapon in negotiations on the Barnett formula.

Over the last year members raised the possibility of using savings from the in-year monitoring rounds to offset increases in rates. In the follow-up to the December monitoring round, the Minister did use such money to reduce the planned increase in the non-domestic rate. However, the reduction in the domestic rate was linked to increased valuations. That is unfortunate because the Minister pointed out that the proposed rise in the domestic rate will only bring in £4 million. That is a lot of pain for very little gain, and the pain is going to be on the domestic dweller because the rates are once again being hiked up.

The Committee made the point a number of times, and we welcomed this fact that the reduction in the non-domestic rate will help small businesses and towns that are suffering. I welcome the idea of the rural rebate put forward by the Minister. It is most welcome that consideration is starting to be given to the rural areas. I hope that this will not be abused by out-of-town shopping centres that might try to make the case that they are now rural. The Minister will have to ensure that this is not abused by different operators. There is quite a difference between an out-of-town shopping centre with a large turnover paying a reasonable rate and an in-town shopping centre, shop or business paying a large rate because it is

based in a town centre. I hope that in the review the Minister will ensure that adequate concern is shown to the changes that are happening in town centres. Town centres are not now the viable propositions they once were. A user of premises in towns does not have the free parking, the services or the flexibility that a user of an out-of-town shopping centre has. There has been a change of character in the whole business of shopping.

I must make the difference between my position as Chairperson of the Committee and my own position, although they are similar. The Committee decided to support the motion although concern was expressed. I say again that we need to look at the review of the rates system. We need also to make sure that revaluations do not become simply paper exercises that look at the square footage of a property and then increase the rates accordingly.

We need to look at the turnover and viability of the business and ensure that the rates reflect that, rather than simply measuring the building and putting a square footage price on it. I hope that that will be taken into consideration in the review, together with the concerns that have been raised both by Members in the Committee and the Assembly and by the general public in relation to the domestic and non-domestic rates.

The Committee supports the motion.

Ms Lewsley: The issue of the rates has already been debated in the Chamber, and the pros and cons of rates have been raised many times. However, the real argument is not about rates, but about how we continue to make effective public spending decisions and how we finance them. Some people here take a very simplistic approach — that we need to cut the rates or cut elements of the North/South bodies. That cannot be tolerated any longer. The North/South bodies are an integral part of the Good Friday Agreement and, as such, need to be funded.

The real issue is the economics of the real world and the steps that we need to take to improve our schools, hospitals and infrastructure as a whole. Those are the demands on the public exchequer. Our only indigenous fund raising mechanism is the rates. We need to explore more innovative means of supplying resources to the public sector.

The fact that this Budget is administered by local Ministers will help to reassure the Northern Ireland public that local issues will be addressed and that there will be an opportunity for innovation and, in particular, for Departments to become more proactive, rather than reactive, with their budgets.

Value for money is essential to promote optimum return for the limited resources available. That will involve allocating funds to particular areas of need and social deprivation. The targets defined in the Programme for Government have to be regularly reviewed and examined

to enable us to turn them into realistically achievable objectives. However, we cannot do that without adequate funding. I welcome the Minister's commitment in the Programme for Government and the Executive to explore new, innovative ways of finding finance. I understand that the Minister is actually taking steps to do that. One of the ways, for example, is the rural rate relief scheme, which makes provision for two types of relief from rates for non-domestic properties in rural settings. One is 50% relief for a single general store post office; the other is a discretionary relief for properties used for community benefit. Those will benefit local communities by maintaining essential services in rural communities and promoting social inclusion for some of the most disadvantaged sections of our population.

I believe that the Finance and Personnel Committee as a whole needs to look at ways to complement the Programme for Government, to find new finance and to support the Minister in doing that. Many Members know that the Committee is looking at some research into public/private partnerships and private finance initiatives. No one here thinks that we should not be meeting the needs of all our constituents. We all want better education systems, schools, hospitals and infrastructure. We have to stop this constant criticising and bringing forward glib solutions to a very difficult and complex situation. It is about time we harnessed our energies in support of what the Minister, Mark Durkan, is trying to do with regard to balancing need and fairness.

I ask Members to support the motion.

Mr Dodds: We return to the issue that will continue to dog the Minister for as long as he continues on the road down which he is planning to take the Assembly. There is a basic inequity about imposing on householders an increase in the regional rate that is over twice the rate of inflation.

11.00 am

That is the basic fact that we are dealing with in the House today. No matter how they try to run away with it or talk round it or obscure it, the Members of this House know that this is not a fair approach. They know the context in which this increase is being proposed: 8% increases in each of the last two years already and, under the Minister's Department, plans by the Executive to have increases far above the rate of inflation for the next two years as well. This is not a one-off for non-domestic ratepayers; this is part of a five-year programme of yearly increases way above the rate of inflation.

There was outrage and outcry in this very Chamber among those who have just spoken when increases of a similar nature, extent and range were proposed for Northern Ireland Electricity and when there was even a suggestion of an increase in Housing Executive rents of 2% above the rate of inflation. What outrage that provoked. Members should also bear that in mind. All sides of the House

were concerned that this would run against the basic tenets of targeting social need (TSN), and the same people come here today and tell us that an increase of 7% for domestic ratepayers is wonderful and acceptable. Indeed, when the Minister announced a couple of weeks ago that he was taking the massive step of reducing it from 8% to 7%, they were clapping and cheering. I wonder how many of them have asked their rate-paying constituents whether they think that that is an acceptable level of increase.

The Minister has said that he listened carefully in respect of the non-domestic rate increase. Although I do welcome that fact, I must say that when he announced it in his statement to the House in February, he did it on the basis of having gone back to the figures. In fact, if I remember well, he was at pains to tell us that it was not as a result of popular pressure or of pressure from the House. Rather, he said that it was something that he had always intended to look at in the light of the figures and the revenue implications. Now he tells us that it is a result of his having listened carefully. Well, I urge him to listen a bit more carefully. I urge him to listen to working families. He should listen to those who are earning just above the rate that would qualify them for rate rebates and housing benefit and to people who complain about the basic unfairness of increases of above 8% in the regional rate over the last two years, of 7% this year and of more to come. He must listen to this as well as to the opinions of traders and small shopkeepers. I would be grateful if the Minister were to outline his plans for the next two years, perhaps in his response at the end of this debate. He did say in his initial statement that rate increases of 8% were planned for the financial year after this one as well as for the year after that.

I also urge him and those parties who will troop into the Lobbies today to support this increase to listen to what their members are saying in councils up and down the Province. I understand that the Finance and Personnel Committee is today going to hear representations from a cross-party delegation from Belfast City Council, which is coming before the Committee to voice concerns about general rating issues as well as about the level of the increase in the regional rate. Members of the SDLP and the Ulster Unionist Party and other parties who will today vote to increase the regional rate for domestic ratepayers by over twice the rate of inflation should really be listening to their councillors and to what their representatives at the coalface have to say about this issue.

Mr P Robinson: A person's rates bill is made up of the regional rate, which the Minister is setting, and the district rate, which councils set with real prudence in the pursuit of tight fiscal policies. Is there not something dreadfully unfair about that system? For instance, Castlereagh — the best council in Northern Ireland — boasts the lowest rates in the Province.

There is a nil increase in the district rate there. Then the Minister comes plodding in, hiking the rates by 7%,

and people get the impression that, somehow, councillors are also to blame.

Mr Dodds: Mr Robinson has made an entirely fair point, which will be endorsed readily by ratepayers and people in general.

It is also the case that in Belfast City Council — which you, Mr Speaker, will know something about, given your past membership of that body, as will other Members — all parties have been trying to keep the district rate down as far as possible to the rate of inflation. Increases in the district rate level by Belfast City Council have been kept to the bare minimum.

Time and time again, the Department of the Environment, as it was called under direct rule, stepped in with swingeing increases in the regional rate to the horror, anger and spoken outrage of Belfast City councillors. Some of those councillors are present today among the SDLP Members. The Ulster Unionist Members are not present. Assembly Members who are also members of Belfast City Council expressed outrage at these levels of increase while wearing their council hats. However, in the Assembly, they say “It is OK. We are going to increase the rates at more or less the same level for domestic ratepayers as that which we expressed outrage at as councillors.” It makes people wonder what has made the difference.

I am grateful to Ms Lewsley for making it clear from the outset that the increase is important because North/South expenditure is an integral part of the Budget. She was very clear about that, and all Members should bear in mind that right at the heart of this matter is the fact that the money is needed because North/South expenditure is integral and cannot be done away with.

There are tens of thousands of people out there who do not look at it that way. They look at trying to meet their household bills and manage their weekly budget as being more important than implementing the all-Ireland aspect of the Belfast Agreement.

Undoubtedly, some people — including the Minister — will say that we need the increases because of the programme of expenditure we have set out. That is why, throughout the debate and discussions, the Democratic Unionist Party have been up front about our views. We did not just say “Cut the expenditure.” We went further and said where the cuts could be made. We make no apology for saying that they should be made in the expenditure on the all-Ireland bodies.

Increases in North/South expenditure have been outlined before. In some cases they are of the magnitude of 50%; in others it is 100%. In total, taking into account the North/South tourism body, it amounts to £18.1 million.

There may be Members in the House who want to justify that, but I think it is unjustifiable. When you look at the sort of figure we are talking about — £4 million —

which would be needed to reduce the 7% increase to approximately the rate of inflation for domestic ratepayers it is not a lot of money. This is especially so when we consider the sort of largesse and the amount of money that the Minister informs the House about during monitoring rounds.

I make no apology for repeating these figures because they need to be hammered home to some people who think that £1 million here or £4 million there is not much. I remind Members that for every million pounds saved from North/South expenditure we could pay for 200 heart operations in Northern Ireland, 25 new homes could be built, or 300 homes that have no heating at the moment could be centrally heated. We could have 1000 homes adapted for people with disabilities. That is a far better way to spend the money than on North/South expenditure — if the Minister is looking for a different way to spend it.

The case for reducing the regional rate for non-domestic ratepayers to the rate of inflation, while maintaining an increase of more than double the rate of inflation for domestic ratepayers, is simply unsustainable. There is no justification whatsoever for that. The Minister could easily find that money. He could find it in the way that we have outlined. Others have described other means of finding it.

The Minister came to this House previously and said that there was no room for manoeuvre. I suspect that when he heard the reaction, the outcry, the deputations and the representations, he made a move, but he did not go far enough. On behalf of my party and others outside this House, I appeal to the Minister to think again, if not this year then at least next year. If he is prepared to ram this through with the support of his Colleagues in other parties, then let him think next year and the year after, and not impose this unfair and inequitable burden on domestic ratepayers in future years.

Mr Close: I welcome the opportunity to have another crack at this iniquitous tax. It should be remembered that when we started this particular battle, a flat 8% increase was proposed right across the board. That increase had come about through the application and implementation of a former regime that ruled and controlled the finances of Northern Ireland.

I remind Members that, from 1979, that regime was a Conservative regime. We all know how the Tories feel about those impoverished and less-well-off people in Northern Ireland. It can be put in a few words. They could not care less about those people.

However, we now have a devolved Assembly in Northern Ireland. The political parties in Northern Ireland, some of them with very nice names referring to their democracy and social conscience, decided that they were going to roll over and implement exactly the same type of policies and increases as previous Tory overlords

had proposed for the people of Northern Ireland: they were going to adopt an 8% blanket increase on an iniquitous tax that is known as the regional rate.

Battle commenced. There was a total outcry throughout Northern Ireland from all right-thinking people, who expressed their opposition to such a swingeing increase in an iniquitous tax like the regional rate. Gradually, slowly but surely, a little bit of progress was made. We managed, for reasons that I shall not go into, to get the regional rate reduced.

Dr Birnie: If the tax, as the Member has said on at least four occasions, is iniquitous, what is the alternative? Is it a poll tax? Is it higher income tax for Northern Ireland? We need to hear that.

Mr Close: The iniquity lies in the fact that it is unfair. It takes no account whatsoever of ability to pay and it strikes those who are less able to pay it. Is it fair that a senior citizen living on her own should have to pay the same sort of rate bill as a family of up to six adults living in a similar dwelling? Is that fair? Can anyone advocate that type of system and say that that is fair play and recognises the needs of our citizens?

I welcome the review of this system that the Minister has already announced. It goes without saying that the system is not being reviewed because it is fair or because it is the best system for raising money or for squeezing money out of individuals. We will all be reviewing the system because it is recognised as unfair and iniquitous. There is that word again.

11.15 am

Mr Leslie: I am glad that the Member has rectified the lack of clarity of his thoughts on this matter. If he thinks that it is unfair to levy the tax per household, irrespective of the number of people in the household — and there seems to be some strength in that argument — is he saying that it would be fair to levy the tax per adult head and not per householder?

Mr Close: The hon Member knows quite well that that is not what I was saying. I refer the Member to a verse that I think is from Ecclesiasticus:

“In a shaken sieve the rubbish is left behind. So too the defects of a man are found in his talk”.

The Member should pay attention to that before he rises to interject. This could be the last time that the Assembly has the opportunity to recognise that it is a listening Assembly — that it listens to the electorate, the people of Northern Ireland, and to the pleas of those who are less well off. This could be the last opportunity for the Assembly to prove that, having listened, it is prepared to take action.

I get a bit fed up with people who jump to their feet in here and speak about Members who criticise the regional rate, alleging that they propose simplistic solutions. For

as long as I can remember every single council in Northern Ireland has objected for reasons similar to those that I am exposing and expounding. I have sat on local authorities for 28 years and not once in that time have I heard one councillor from any party in Northern Ireland say that the regional rate was a good thing or show support for it. Each year when the rates are set every party objects to the swingeing increases. What has changed?

The only thing that has changed is that some people who once sat on local authorities now have some power. How do they use that power? That is the fundamental question, and that is what we are trying to get to the bottom of. We are pleading for those people to apply the same rules and regulations and show the same social conscience that they applied and showed when they sat on the local authorities and voted against large increases in regional rates. Do not change your tune because you have become a Member of the Northern Ireland Assembly, because people will not forgive you for that.

However, we have made some progress because we have managed to have the non-domestic rate reduced to 3.3% and the domestic regional rate reduced to 7%. The issue was raised at the last meeting of the Finance and Personnel Committee. The Committee has a scrutiny role and an advisory role. What advice did the Committee give to the Minister? The Committee divided, and there were three votes for the increase in the regional rate, two votes against it and one abstention. That was not what you could call an enthusiastic vote of support for the increase. That was not a tremendous endorsement of the Order before us today. Views on the matter are split, and we should still be able to oppose the Order.

If we really are democrats, and if we really believe in the possibility of change and of making life better for the citizens of Northern Ireland, we should take the opportunity today not to accept this Order.

How much money are we talking about? If the domestic regional rate is reduced to the same level as the non-domestic regional rate, in other words an increase of 3.3% instead of the 7% that is proposed, we are talking about around £4 million. That is a drop in the ocean compared with the overall level of public expenditure in Northern Ireland, but it is not a drop in the ocean given the individual rates bills that will drop through letter-boxes in Northern Ireland in a matter of weeks. It is not a drop in the ocean to the senior citizen who finds himself or herself with a large rates bill in a few weeks' time. It is not a drop in the ocean to the family that falls just outside the benefits regime and is struggling to clothe and feed its children.

That type of increase will drag those people unremittingly into the poverty trap that the Assembly should be endeavouring to squash out of existence rather than add to it through such large increases. References to and comparisons with what takes place across the water are

absolutely irrelevant. We know that our fuel prices are far higher. We know that it costs more to clothe and feed children here. We know that car tax and insurance costs are far higher in Northern Ireland. Let us compare like with like.

Mr McCartney: Does the Member agree that the average industrial wage in Northern Ireland is significantly lower than on the mainland where people have the advantages of cheaper clothing, food and fuel?

Mr Close: I thank the Member for that pertinent point. I think that the figure in Northern Ireland is £100 less per week. We must put the blame where the blame lies — fairly and squarely on the Executive. The Executive should say that council tax across the water has gone up by 8% and that that is where that figure came from. We must make no mistake about that; this has nothing to do with the needs of Northern Ireland. This is following directly what is happening in the rest of the UK. That is unfair; it is unjustified; it is iniquitous. We cannot stand here today and endorse that iniquity or turn a blind eye to it. If we really mean what we say, if we have concern for our people, we will share that concern and not support this Order.

The other question is: where are you — not you, Mr Speaker, but the Assembly — going to get the money? When the rates issue was first raised in the House I stated — and Hansard will show this — that the money was in the system. The money is still in the system. If Members take the time and effort to look through the various monitoring rounds they will find that since the issue was first raised, virtually enough money has been raised through the monitoring rounds to cover the total amount of money raised through the regional rates.

At today's meeting of the Finance and Personnel Committee further savings will be shown as a result of the February monitoring round. How much money are we talking about? It is another £25 million. Reducing the rate of increase of the domestic regional rates to the same level of increase as that of the non-domestic regional rates would cost £4 million. My plea is for the Executive to take that £4 million from the latest £25 million of savings and demonstrate once and for all that they have the care, concern and the interests of the people of Northern Ireland at heart.

Mr McCartney: Mr Close quoted Ecclesiastes, I think. I shall make a play upon some words from Ecclesiastes:

"All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full"

and there is no new thing under the sun. The rivers of taxation flow into the coffers of the Exchequer and it is not filled, but that is nothing new so far as Ministers of Finance are concerned.

I do not often find grounds for agreement with the First Minister, but in a speech he made on 3 November 2000 to the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives

— interestingly called SOLACE — he said this about the cost of bureaucracy:

"In addition to the Assembly, its Committees and the 11 Departments, we have a Civic Forum, nearly 80 executive quangos, 50 advisory bodies, 26 district councils, and a range of partnership boards.

It is difficult to argue in favour of a system that is as elaborate, complex, fragmented, and expensive as ours. We need to be able to provide the public — our customers — with better quality services and value for money."

The Minister of Finance, in proposing the Order, said that £300 million would be raised through the rates, and that in the current year there would be an increase of 8% in the cost of expenditure, presumably on services such as education and health. There is some financial sleight of hand taking place in connection with this because there is no question that those services could still be delivered and significant savings made.

Mention has been made in an earlier speech about the vast sums of money — £57 million on one occasion, and an alleged £20 million on the present occasion — found during the monitoring rounds. In those circumstances it is extraordinary that out of those vast sums of money £4 million cannot be found to reduce the proposed increases in the domestic rate to the level of inflation. We are only talking about £4 million.

Perhaps Mr Close put his finger on the matter when he said that the figure for the 8% rise really came from the mainland, where social, economic and domestic considerations are entirely different from those in Northern Ireland.

Where can these savings be made? The Democratic Unionist Party has argued, with some force, that if £18 million is being spent on cross-border bodies — essentially not a domestic or social objective but a political one — some saving might be made there.

That is a fundamental political question, but huge savings could be made in relation to the administrative matters that the First Minister has alluded to. For example, for the current year the Minister previously indicated that it would cost approximately £670 million to administer this place. I understand that the budget for next year for administering the 11 Departments and running the Assembly will reach a new level of £750 million. Are people honestly going to believe that administrative costs of £750 million per annum could not be successfully pruned, even very slightly, to deliver the £4 million that is going to be raised by the increases in the domestic rate above the rate of inflation. I do not think any sensible citizen will believe that that is not possible. Of course it is possible.

People in the Assembly will say that Bob McCartney is on his usual hobby horse, criticising the amount of money that is spent on running the Assembly and its Executive.

Well, take the appointment of three Deputy Speakers, at £7,500 each, for an Assembly that sits in plenary session two days a week for a limited number of weeks of the year — and not always two days in every week.

11.30 am

Look at the current proposals before the Commission for the payment of short money — only it is not now going to be called that but given some fancy title such as “professional services”. These will increase the current very generous payment of short money from something like £440,000 to almost £1 million — £1 million that is being milked out of the system. That amounts to a quarter of the entire money that will be raised by the increase in the domestic rate.

This payment is an entire fraud. The four major parties in Government will receive by far the lion's share of that £1 million of short money — something like £600,000. Short money is not even paid in the Westminster Parliament. It is only paid to parties notionally in opposition, on the basis that the parties of Government have access to the whole support system of the Civil Service, special advisers and others, who are all paid out of the public purse. How anyone could conceivably justify the payment of that sort of money in an administrative cost, in circumstances where it will represent almost 25% of the total of £4 million to be raised by this increase in the domestic rate, beggars belief.

An enormous amount of money, as the First Minister has pointed out, could be saved. However, money is being poured into all sorts of community groups and other specialist lobby groups. There are now groups for almost everything from nose-picking to bottom-scratching. We are inundated with literature — glossy magazines and annual reports that cost tens of thousands of pounds. The only sign that these groups exist is the presentation of their annual “glossy”. That is just one example of Government expenditure being churned out at the expense of ordinary people — ratepayers who are working. I am not suggesting that all these groups do not have worthy objectives. However, in the administration costs of the Government in Northern Ireland, we are now supporting a whole range of bureaucrats and other people who are contributing absolutely nothing to the inherent wealth and welfare of our society — and yet we have increases in the domestic and regional rates.

I welcome the statement from the Minister that a comprehensive review of the whole rating system is in the pipeline. Changes in Government have undermined the whole basis of the rating system. Originally rates were raised from the people in the community to pay for the services being provided by the district or county council. Then, as central Government took an increasing role in providing services in those local or county districts, the rate system was changed. Now we have the Government actually taxing through the rate system, in

an unfair and inequitable way, all the people in the taxation area — many of whom do not receive direct benefits from the rating system.

It was fairly pointed out by both Mr Peter Robinson and Mr Close that each and every district council has opposed the regional rate on the basis that, while the councils scrimp and save in order to minimise rate increases, they have no control over the sweeping imposition of a regional rate. Other Members have already pointed out the inequities of that system, and I will not dwell upon them.

However, let me raise one particular point in relation to the rating of agriculture businesses. It has been recently drawn to my attention that in the view of the central Government — and no doubt it will spill over into this devolved Government — the countryside and farming are no longer of major importance. Someone recently said “What is all this outcry about foot-and-mouth and the special relationship with farmers? They should be treated like the miners, since on the mainland they contribute something like 1.6% of GDP, while tourism, which is being battered to death as the result of foot-and-mouth, contributes 6%”.

Many farmers are now looking for alternative means of earning a living. They are converting their farms for other interests: horse training, horse breeding, riding schools and the like. But once they do that, once they attempt to utilise their assets for another purpose — since farming is not profitable — in businesses that the Government encourage them to take up, they are hit with the business rate. I hope that that will be one of the aspects of rural life, along with post offices and rural shops, that the Minister will take into account when any rebate scheme is introduced in order to alleviate some of the acute difficulties that people in those communities experience.

However, I return to the central issue of the domestic rate. Four million pounds is a drop in the ocean. It is a drop compared to the vast sums that are available to the Minister. It is a fraction of the sums that, in the monitoring round, he has managed to extricate from all sorts of weird places in the Departments — almost £100 million. Yet he finds it necessary to impose these increases in the regional rate and the domestic rate.

I read recently in the ‘Belfast Telegraph’ a tremendous panegyric about the Minister and his capacity to deal with all the intricacies of our financial system. The article dealt to some extent with the necessity to exercise the ministerial powers to raise money by means of the rates. That apologia may have satisfied the readers of the ‘Belfast Telegraph’. It certainly has not sufficed to satisfy the people within this Assembly who do not belong to the major parties that are going to railroad these increases through. It cannot be justified either in terms of the expenditure on bureaucracy in this Assembly or in terms of the money that it will produce, when that

is related to the amount of money that is awash throughout the system.

It cannot be justified to those individual householders on the margin who have to pay for it. It is time the Minister really started governing in this Executive in the interest of the people, not in the interest of those who fill official offices and who are financially reaping the benefits of the emoluments of office in this Assembly.

Mr Speaker: This is a time-limited debate. If Members speak for substantial periods they will reduce the amount of time that is available to their Colleagues. Indeed, some of their Colleagues will not get the chance to speak at all. Even if you do not share power I encourage you to share time — at least for this morning in order to give all Members an opportunity to speak.

Mr Attwood: I will make some comments about three of the speeches that have been made so far by Mr McCartney, Mr Dodds and Mr Close. I had some sympathy with a few of Mr McCartney's comments about the cost of bureaucracies in the North, quangos and the system of Government that we had for far too long. However, one of his comments echoed what he said in the Assembly before Christmas when he demeaned Members who were previously unemployed. You were equally demeaning about the community sector in the North whom you characterised in a way that many find offensive and inappropriate. While you make some valid comments, you undermine your legitimacy by the abusive nature of the remarks that you make about those who are not even here to defend themselves.

Mr Speaker: Order. I encourage the Member to make his comments through the Chair.

Mr Attwood: I also noted what Mr Close said. He made some valid comments too, not least perhaps his remarks with regard to monitoring returns. However, it is inaccurate to characterise this debate and the Government by suggesting — as he did — that we are implementing the same policies as the Tories. Those were the words that he used. Go and ask the farmers if we are implementing the same policies as the Tories. Perhaps even ask those involved in the 11-plus consultation or those who will benefit from the section 75 equality duty and the workings of the equality unit in the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister if Tory policies are being implemented. Go and ask those people if this Government is administering Tory policies or implementing Tory practices. I think that their conclusion will be contrary to Mr Close's assertion.

Mr Close: I suggest that Mr Attwood read the Minister of Finance's speech. He said that he was carrying forward the plans of the previous Administration with regard to the 8% increase.

Mr Attwood: Mr Close may have forgotten that there was an election four years ago which returned one Tony

Blair to Downing Street and not one William Hague or John Major. It is Labour Party policy that we are listening to and heeding. As my Colleague Ms Lewsley said, in spite of that the Minister is clearly doing his best to remodel the rates in an effort to ensure that they are administered more favourably. She welcomed the Minister's commitment in the Programme for Government to explore new innovative ways of finding finance. One way is the rural rates relief scheme, which Ms Lewsley described in some detail. That is not Tory policy. This is not a Tory Government; this is a Government which is trying to rework rates policies in the North to benefit the people of the North, especially those in some need.

However, I found Mr Dodds's speech most instructive. At least our Colleagues Mr McCartney and Mr Close tried to outline ways of finding additional sources of funding. Mr Dodds did not even go that far, save in one regard, which exposed the core frailty of his argument. The only source of additional finance that he could come up with was the North/South bodies. The only strategy that Mr Dodds put forward for finding additional resources was to unpick and undermine the integrity of the Good Friday Agreement, the workings of bodies on this island that have economic and other benefits for all the people of this island and policies that can work well for the advantage of people on both sides of the border.

In that contribution Mr Dodds exposed the core motivation behind his proposals — to unpick the agreement rather than to create a proper Government. That was confirmed by the core inconsistency of his argument. On one hand Mr Dodds said that my Colleague Patricia Lewsley found the Rates Order to be wonderful and acceptable — those are his words — but, on the other hand, he said that SDLP members of the Belfast City Council considered the rates increase to be an outrage.

11.45 am

That revealed another core flaw and fault in what Mr Dodds said, because the SDLP does not deny or diminish the consequences that rates increases and the Rates Order will have on ratepayers. The SDLP does not deny or diminish that. In fact, the Minister has attempted to mitigate the effect of rates where that is consistent with the proper management of the country's finances.

We have not denied or diminished the fact that there are consequences, and the SDLP and Ministers in the Government will try — where feasible and possible — to mitigate the rates burden in the future. That is why the Government and the Finance Minister made their commitments in the Programme for Government.

It is ironic that in attacking the Finance Minister on the Rates Order, Nigel Dodds affirmed the policy of targeting social need. Mr Dodds spoke affirmatively and generously about the programme and policy of targeting social needs adopted by the Government and being

implemented in the North. When the DUP Ministers come to implement the targeting of social needs, I trust that they will target the disadvantaged communities in the North — which are common between our peoples — and those communities that have been discriminated against over many years. That category applies particularly to one of the traditions in the North. It is to be hoped that the DUP Ministers will implement Nigel Dodds's warm phrases about targeting social needs. The Assembly will then judge them more fully than we do at the moment.

Over the past few months one of the consistent and prevailing themes of those who present themselves as the Opposition in the Assembly has been the rates increase. That theme has been raised many times. It seems as though the rates increase is their only point of attack against a Government that is working demonstrably on behalf of the North's citizens and communities. If that is the only criticism that they can level at an Executive who are working effectively for the citizens and communities in the North, it is a sad indictment of the argument that they are making.

Mr S Wilson: Some Members who spoke in support of the Order have admitted that the Assembly is finally ratifying the bill for the Good Friday Agreement and the chopped-up Government that have led to the formation of ten Departments — which were set up to ensure the inclusion of two Sinn Féin Ministers in the Executive — and the cross-border political institutions. Despite what was said by the previous Member — who has done his usual stunt of making his speech and leaving before anybody can comment on it — those cross-border bodies are nothing to do with the economic or social betterment of the lives of people in Northern Ireland. They are to do with political chicanery and with setting up institutions to keep Republicans and Nationalists happy.

Ms Lewsley was quite clear about the rates increase. She said that the North/South bodies must be funded. Part of the price of that is an increase in the domestic rate over and above the level of inflation. There is no doubt that ratepayers are getting a bill for the political institutions and the political arrangements which are essential to keep Nationalists and Republicans happy and to finance what they want from the Good Friday Agreement.

You cannot fault the SDLP and, to a lesser extent, Sinn Féin for supporting the Rates Order. However, I find it very odd that Unionists are supporting it. To date, no Members from the Ulster Unionist Party have spoken on this important issue. However, they have made various declarations in the past and a couple by way of interventions this morning. The Member for North Antrim, Mr Leslie, who is at least sitting through the debate, said on a previous occasion that we should be rejoicing at the increase and that we should be looking forward to paying our bills and standing on our own two feet.

Today he has sought to defend his party's support and his party's vote by taunting Mr Close about his alternatives

for raising money. I will not go through Mr McCartney's proposals, because you have encouraged us to be brief, Mr Speaker.

Mr McCartney and Mr Dodds outlined ways in which we could raise money without increasing the rates bill and without hurting the people of Northern Ireland by cutting services. But rather than applying itself to the rigour of doing that, and rather than offending those who demand the North/Southerly which is all part of the agreement, the Ulster Unionist Party has decided to support the Rates Order. However, there have been reductions since the increase was first announced. Before he left the Chamber, Mr Attwood said that the only way in which the anti-agreement parties have been able to oppose the Executive — and that shows that he does not sit in the House long enough to listen to anybody — is by raising the rates issue. At least we have had some success on that.

Mr Leslie: I wonder how the Member would feel if we had a cut-price model of Government such as direct rule under which the rates increases would be forced through every year with no opportunity to argue for the reductions, which have been delivered this time round. Perhaps he would prefer something much cheaper, more autocratic and on the Cuban model administered by Ché Close and Fidel McCartney.

Mr S Wilson: I do not understand the point that the Member was making. Anyone, by any stretch of the imagination, could say that Northern Ireland has got an austere system of Government. Mr McCartney pointed that out and his contention is supported by the comments of Mr Leslie's party leader, who has said that we are over-governed and that the bill for Government is way too high. I am not suggesting any kind of hair shirt type of Government for Northern Ireland. I am simply saying that there are plenty of ways in which the pain of this Rates Bill that we are discussing this morning could have been reduced with ease. But, of course, for political reasons, that will not be done.

I now move on to the reductions that we have seen and where there has been some success as a result of the pressure applied by my party, and by others, on this issue. When the Minister first announced this, he was emphatic that it was required. In the debate of 18 December he stated

"The Budget plans ... are based on an assumed level of regional rate revenue of £334 million ... the indicative allocations of 2002-03 and 2003-04 would imply further increases in the domestic regional rate of 8% and 5.5% in the non-domestic regional rate in 2002-03 and 2003-04."

But by February the Minister seemed to have got his sums wrong. In the short space of two months he recalculated his figures and in February he told the Assembly that because of strong continued growth in valuations of domestic property, there was some scope for adjusting the domestic regional rate increase. He then went on to make the announcement.

I suggest that, rather than the Minister's getting his sums wrong, the effect of opposition by the DUP and other parties in the House — and the opposition that was found outside — forced the Minister to look at his sums again. As Mr Dodds said, if the Minister could find that within two months, surely to goodness if he looked a bit harder — and along the lines indicated by Mr McCartney in the House this morning — he would find sufficient money to keep the regional rate increase at to the rate of inflation.

There is one other point that I want to make regarding the Minister's statement this morning. He announced three things. The first is a review of the policy and, as has been said, you only review something if you know it is inherently wrong. Secondly, we are to have rates relief for shops and post offices in rural areas. *[Interruption]*.

Mr Speaker: May I suggest that the Member bring his remarks to a close?

Mr S Wilson: I am going to finish now.

There are just as many owners of small shops on arterial routes in main towns — especially in the inner part of Belfast — hanging on by the skin of their teeth. Are they going to be included in that review?

The last announcement is not a reason for hope; it is a reason for dread, especially for householders: he has announced a revaluation of properties. In one east Belfast street there are new properties on one side, old properties on the other and a 75% difference in what is being paid between the two. Both sides of the street will be revalued under current rental rates, and what is being paid by those in the old properties will eventually rise to the same as what is being paid by those in the new ones. So the final announcement made this morning should not — as has been suggested by some members of his party — be a source of hope. It should be a source of dread for many people, especially for those on the margins who do not qualify for housing benefits and who will be forced to pay higher rates bills in the future.

12.00

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom labhairt i bhfabhar forbartha uile-Éireann i gcúrsaí eacnamaíocha, agus cuirim fáilte roimh an díospóireacht seo.

I welcome the debate on the rates issue and the repeated indication of a comprehensive review of the whole rating system — a root-and-branch review, which is to be instituted later this year.

Similarly, I want to identify with other Members in acknowledging the hard work of the many councils that wisely manage their resources at local government level. Armagh City and District Council seems to be one of the exceptions, and Castlereagh Borough Council should not claim to be so masterful in this respect either, given the fact that many of the services used by the

citizens of Castlereagh are in Belfast and that the industrial base is concentrated there. Castlereagh Council members are, perhaps, blowing their own trumpet a bit too much.

Many councils deserve commendation to have arrived at a district rate which is sensitive to the views of local people. This year, Omagh District Council — which includes a number of Members of this Assembly as members — instituted an open forum approach whereby citizens of the district came to a publicly advertised meeting to be consulted, for discussion and for councillors to listen in line with best value principles. As part of the root-and-branch review, I hope to see that exercise being repeated as much as possible at the macro level in Six Counties terms.

There is much talk of rates relief, and that is worth exploration. Areas of disadvantage — namely, County Tyrone and County Fermanagh — do not have the requisite infrastructure or investment and, therefore, should be treated as being different until such time as the playing field becomes considerably more level.

Mr Speaker: Order. If Members wish to have ongoing conversations, they should, in fairness to the House, have them in the Lobbies.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat. In relation to one political untouchable for many, I believe that a comprehensive programme of British demilitarisation in the North would free up resources for necessary spending elsewhere, such as in areas of health, education and industrial development. This is an area where savings can be made and money redirected.

It is poor reasoning in this day and age for Nigel Dodds to be advancing the argument that what he calls "North/Southery" is costing money, when the reverse is true. To examine the folly of having separate economic systems on the island of Ireland shows that the underdevelopment of North/Southery is costing money. There should be further development and further intensification of all-Ireland harmonisation, which will benefit everyone concerned. There is an economic rationale for this in terms of health provision. For example, why should seriously ill patients from Donegal have to bypass Derry and Omagh on their way to hospitals in Dublin?

It makes sense to have a single island's wholehearted embrace of tourism potential and agriculture — this has all been said before. Here are three key areas where all-Ireland development will make a tremendous benefit. It would be great if the Celtic tiger got its paws wet more often in the North. The DUP are swimming against the tide of economic rationale and history by opposing the economic coming together of both states on this island. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Speaker: Before calling the next Member, I want to refer to remarks made by Mr Wilson earlier. He said that a Member had left the Chamber shortly after having

spoken. I know that Members who are here are not the ones to be reproved. I have noticed from time to time a number of Members coming in almost immediately before they intend to speak and/or leaving immediately after they have spoken, frequently having put a number of questions to a Minister and not returning to hear the replies.

This is discourteous to the House as a whole and to individual Members. Mr Sammy Wilson made the point. I think that it is worthy of note and emphasis — not only in respect of the particulars to which Mr Wilson referred, but also in the generality. I ask those who have taken the trouble to be here — people in all parties — to convey this to their Colleagues. My experience is that all parties have from time to time transgressed. No one should point at anyone. *[Laughter]* It has often been remarked that when someone points a finger, there are at least three fingers pointing back.

Mr Hay: I have listened to the debate, and there is no doubt that there are many double standards in this House. Many of us have been members of district councils in Northern Ireland — those of us who managed to get elected. If we are honest we will admit that we have all condemned direct rule Ministers over the years for continually hiking the regional rate. Some of us — right across Northern Ireland — felt so strongly about the matter that we frequently met with those Ministers. We made it clear that if local councils decided to strike a lower rate it would be unfair for a direct rule Minister to then take advantage of that by striking a very high regional rate. Indeed, in Mr Durkan's council there was deep concern at the rise in the regional rate. Our council felt so strongly about this that, rather than just voicing concern, it was proposed that a letter expressing our concerns should be sent to Mr Durkan.

The tragedy is that, when it comes to the rise in the regional rate, all of us — certainly the Members who have spoken this morning — seem to be saying one thing at local Government level and then doing something different in the House. That is what is happening here today. I have no doubt that when councils were striking the local rate, most of us — and most of the councils — expressed deep concern at the rise in the regional rate. Members need to be honest when they express concern at the regional rate hike.

For quite some time we had a situation in Northern Ireland where direct rule Ministers were responsible for a number of issues, including that of the regional rate. As public representatives from all political parties, we have all over the last 30 years continually and absolutely condemned direct rule Ministers on many issues relating to Northern Ireland. That was because we ourselves had no control over some of the matters. It was easy to blame the direct rule Minister, to opt out and to point the finger somewhere else. We can no longer do that. We must lay the blame fairly where it belongs — in the Executive and in this House. The Minister of Finance knows quite

well that when he was on his local council he expressed deep concern at direct rule Ministers' taking advantage of the local rates struck by local councils.

We must be honest about this. Small businesses in Northern Ireland will continue to suffer in the way that they have done for many years. In my city of Londonderry the retail business sector is under severe financial pressure because of our proximity to the border and the exchange rate differential between the punt and the pound. Many small business owners' biggest expenditure is their rates bill, and, over the past five to eight years, many have found it extremely difficult to pay that bill. As Assembly Members, we are responsible to the entire community of Northern Ireland, but especially to the small retail businesses here. Some Members are defending the decision to increase the regional rate, but there are no grounds for this stance.

People are only interested in the size of the bill that drops through their letterboxes. We can debate the niceties, such as the contribution that the extra finance will make to the entire block budget. The tragedy is that it is the local council's name that will appear on that bill. Members who vote for the rates rise today in the hope that they will get away with it in the smoke must remember that it is the local councils which will be blamed when these huge bills arrive. Many still believe that the councils are responsible for rates increases in Northern Ireland. Public representatives have been trying to explain the situation. During direct rule they went out of their way to explain that the councils had been striking very low rates in their areas and that people should not blame the councils if the Minister decided to strike a very high regional rate.

It will be the Assembly's fault if we decide to increase the regional rate. The DUP has been very clear on this issue from the outset. There are no grounds for defending this decision to increase the rate.

Mr Speaker: This is a time-limited debate, and I regret that a number of Members who wish to speak will not have the opportunity to do so.

Mr Durkan: I thank everyone who contributed to the debate. The Assembly has before it the Regional Rates Order, and we are setting the rate poundages for next year. Although many councils disagree with the level at which the regional rate has been set, they recognise the importance of formally fixing the rate since they depend on this information for planning purposes. As I explained, there has been some delay in relation to the Order. It is important that we undertake that business today.

12.15 pm

Quite a number of points were made. Mr Molloy, as Chairman of the Finance and Personnel Committee, took up the point about the review of rating policy. I have written to the Committee about that, and officials will

discuss it further with its members. The review will take place in several stages. We will consult with the Committee at each stage and will come back to it on points raised. It will be, as Mr McElduff said, a root-and-branch review looking at the whole rating policy. This is not a new announcement, as Sammy Wilson seemed to think. I announced it some time ago, and it is contained in the Programme for Government. It was drafted and proposed in the Programme for Government before we tabled increases in rates as part of the draft Budget precisely because we recognise that anomalies and inequities exist in the rating system. Those apply in the non-domestic sector, as well as in the domestic sector and we are determined to overcome them. However, there is an underlying imperative that we raise money from our own resources, such as rates, in addition to that which the Treasury allocates us under the Barnett formula.

We have to be realistic in the representations that we make on the Barnett formula. However, we also have to be determined in our representations, and many people in the House have on previous occasions urged me, the Executive and the First and Deputy First Ministers to take a fairly aggressive line. We want to take a strong line in order to increase the resources that we get from the Treasury. We have to argue that we need the money for valid public expenditure purposes. We must say that our service programmes and our communities need it. Our infrastructure, which, as everybody tells me, has historically been underinvested in, needs it, as does our service infrastructure, which has also suffered from underinvestment. If we choose not to raise additional resources ourselves and concentrate our argument instead on what the Treasury will view as raising additional money from English taxpayers, the Treasury will argue that that is not a convincing demonstration of our belief in the necessity of additional public expenditure.

The argument has been put that that represents only a small amount of money. I deal with lots of bids for small amounts of money that are equal to or less than the amount discussed here. There are many additional outstanding bids, many of which were supported by the Committees during the Budget consultation. Many cases are being made for additional public expenditure. I hope that when people argue that it is only a small amount, they will also realise that all the so-called small amounts of money and bids add up, unlike the contradictory positions of some Members in today's debate, which do not always add up.

We have historical underfunding in a number of areas. All the Ministers have been emphasising that. Most of the Committees that have been looking at the Departments' programmes and historical spending profiles have emphasised that. Many different policy makers have emphasised that. In these circumstances, we need to put more money into those programmes. That is what the Budget does. We are increasing public expenditure by

some 8% in the next year. The original domestic rates increase that we were talking about was 8% and the non-domestic rates increase — to contradict Mr Close — was 6.6%. That is what we announced in October. That was to fund public expenditure increases of some 8%. We are still proceeding with those.

Contrary to what Sammy Wilson suggested, not only in December but as far back as October I said that if the buoyancy figures showed that we could raise the same amount of money with a lower rates increase, we would do so. I said that at the draft Budget back in October. I obviously was not believed then; people believed their propaganda rather than my assurance on that point. I repeated that again at several Question Times, in the context of the monitoring round and again in the debate on 18 December on the Budget.

I again made the point that if the figures showed we could raise the same from less, we would. The figures indeed showed that; hence the reduction in the domestic regional rate. We also took advantage then of the figures which became available in the December monitoring round. A number of Members have said today that all sorts of money becomes available in monitoring round, so the best tactic is to assume that that money will be available and budget accordingly for a low rate increase. That would be a very convenient thing for me as Minister of Finance and Personnel. It would suit me fine to do that. It would save me a lot of hassle and bother. However, it would not be entirely fair to the rest of the Executive. Nor would it be entirely fair to other ministerial colleagues, because we cannot always rely on the sort of out-turns from monitoring rounds that we have had this year. In fact the out-turns from monitoring rounds this year have been quite exceptional in comparison with those of previous years.

I could be bold and pretentious and claim that this is something to do with the fact that I am Minister of Finance and Personnel. I do not believe that it is.

I hope that the devolution factor is making a positive difference, in particular to recognition of the monitoring rounds — I do not think that many people knew very much about them before devolution. I also hope that a positive contribution is being made to the decisions taken in those monitoring rounds by the fact that the monies which become available are recycled to good use elsewhere to give sound public expenditure that is focused on public needs. This is the difference from direct rule.

I have listened again to this lecture about social conscience from Mr Close, as though I parked my social conscience when I took ministerial office. This applies to Mr Hay as well. Mr Hay knows that in Derry City Council debates on the regional rate, we always argued that direct rule Tory Ministers were cutting back on public services and areas of public expenditure while

imposing regional rate increases at the same time. That is not happening with this Executive. There are public expenditure increases right across the board that are well above the rate of inflation.

In areas like health and education where we are under serious pressure, all parties recognise that the Barnett formula does not give us what we need. We have managed to achieve increases in health and education expenditure over and above our Barnett consequential for those areas. The Executive has not done the same as direct rule Ministers. A number of years ago direct rule Ministers were, for instance, cutting back on elective surgery and imposing cuts in health services while imposing high regional rate increases. There is therefore no comparison whatsoever.

Rev Dr William McCrea: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Durkan: No. I have listened to a lot of points including those from the Member's Colleagues.

Let us also be very clear about the choices we have faced with public expenditure. For instance, in monitoring rounds one hobby-horse question has been "What can we do with the money?" In the December monitoring round we held money over because we had to address the deficits of the health and social services trusts, particularly on the acute hospital site. We held some £28 million back at that point. As it turned out we only needed £18 million to deal with the deficits so there was then £10 million available.

If I wanted to suit my own purposes entirely and if, as Members have suggested, I was running scared of the rates increase, I would have been proposing to use the spare £10 million to reduce the rates right across the board.

However, I recognised that there was a strong case for moving further and faster with the scheme to permit free travel for the elderly, and I proposed that we use £3 million of that £10 million to start the scheme this October, rather than in April 2002, and said that it would be fully funded. Members are suggesting that I should not have made this proposal and that my priority should have been to bring the rates down to keep myself right in the eyes of the Assembly and the public.

I believed that there were strong public policy grounds for prioritising the earlier commencement of the free travel scheme for the elderly rather than decreasing the regional rate. In the December monitoring round I also proposed that £2 million be used as a safety net to cover the interim funding arrangements that we want to make for the European programmes.

Again, people may think that that money might have been better spent on reducing the regional rate. It would have given me an easier time today. However, it would not necessarily have made it easier for those who are providing excellent projects and facing the difficulties created by the funding gap between our European programmes. That is why we made those decisions.

I recommended that we use the additional £5 million from the December monitoring rounds to reduce the regional rate, particularly in the non-domestic sector. Mr Sammy Wilson and Mr Dodds seem to be questioning my motive and whether I examined this issue myself. I used the £5 million to reduce the non-domestic regional rate because when looking at the figures, not least in my advanced work on the rating policy review, I recognised that arguments based on comparisons between our domestic regional rate and council taxes or water charges across the water do not apply when comparing our respective business rates. Therefore, our allocations under the Barnett formula would not be jeopardised. That was why the Executive, advisedly, went for that proposal. This point was not made in the Assembly or by anyone lobbying on the rates issue.

Further moneys will become available in future monitoring rounds, and those moneys will be used for public expenditure. There is no shortage of bids or calls for those moneys, and there is no shortage of need. Contributors to this debate seem to be suggesting that there is either a shortage of need or an excess of moneys. It has been claimed that all sorts of funding is washing through the system, that we have no good means of spending it, and that we are wasting it. I hope that I do not find myself in a situation in which the Treasury makes the same claims to me as have been made in this debate and elsewhere.

The Executive are determined to reduce the cost of administration. We are carrying out a review of public administration with a view not just to reducing cost but also to improving performance and responsiveness. This is one of the objectives of devolution.

There have been arguments that money which might be a drop in the ocean where public expenditure is concerned is not so insignificant when it comes to individuals. I accept that even a marginal increase in the rate can significantly squeeze the domestic finances of families in hard-pressed households, whether they are single occupancy households, as in the case of pensioners, or more standard family households. Let us be clear that there will be an average increase of less than 30p per week per household and that the least well-off families will be protected through the housing benefits system. We will be trying, in the wider policy review to deal with other inequities — and not least with Mr Close's point about single pensioner households.

I have written to the Finance and Personnel Committee about the rural relief scheme.

12.30 pm

That is permitted under existing legislation, but many of the other forms of relief which have been suggested are not. We are now making moves to implement that legislation, notwithstanding the imminent wider rating

policy review. I did not think that it was fair to start moving on the rural rates relief scheme until we had completed the wider review. That was simply because the recommendations of the wider review will take a long time to implement. It must be remembered that that will cost us money. Some estimates suggest that the rural rates relief scheme will cost around £4 million per year. We need to recognise that we are making changes and advances in this important area.

I know that I have not covered all the points raised by Members — I will write to them individually on those I have left out. Let me underline that the Budget was about securing spending increases right across the range of services. Members ignore that fact when they just concentrate on North/South expenditure.

Not all of the North/South expenditure is entirely new. If we were not conducting that expenditure on a North/ South basis, we would be spending it through Northern Ireland Departments, agencies and other arrangements. That was the case before the North/South bodies came into place, and it is wrong for people to misrepresent that spending in this way. I have made that point on previous occasions.

As an Executive, we will also have to come forward with Budget proposals later this year and again in future years. In presenting the indicative figures for the next two years, we indicated the type of rates increases that we were looking at. Obviously, pulling back on the rates this year will have consequences for future years. We know that we face difficult Budget rounds in the future. We will not have the same uplifts in future years as we have had from the spending review this year. Things are going to be difficult and money will quite possibly be tight after future monitoring rounds.

When we deal more fully with the full Budget cycle over the course of the year, I hope that Members will realise that the Executive have to be prudent in seeking their target rate increases. More importantly, they should realise that the Executive are being strategic in putting our total public expenditure, both from the Barnett allocation and from the rates, to the best possible use for much-needed public services. People will welcome this investment right across the region, regardless of the fact that they are again having to pay higher rates. However, people know they would probably have been asked to pay additional money on the regional rates in any case, without necessarily receiving the benefits of our new additional expenditure.

It must be remembered that we are spending in areas in which Whitehall is not. For instance, we spend on free transport for the elderly, and we are making very distinctive moves on student financial support. Contrary to what people suggest, therefore, we are not absolutely handcuffed to Whitehall. However, nor are we entirely free agents. Not all public expenditure comes entirely free.

Question put.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 54; Noes 29.

AYES

Ian Adamson, Billy Armstrong, Alex Attwood, Roy Beggs, Billy Bell, Esmond Birnie, Joe Byrne, Joan Carson, Fred Cobain, Robert Coulter, Annie Courtney, John Dallat, Ivan Davis, Bairbre de Brún, Mark Durkan, David Ervine, Sean Farren, John Fee, Sam Foster, Tommy Gallagher, John Gorman, Tom Hamilton, Carmel Hanna, Denis Haughey, Joe Hendron, Derek Hussey, Billy Hutchinson, Danny Kennedy, James Leslie, Patricia Lewsley, Alban Maginness, Seamus Mallon, Alex Maskey, David McClarty, Donovan McClelland, Alasdair McDonnell, Barry McElduff, Alan McFarland, Michael McGimpsey, Eddie McGrady, Gerry McHugh, Mitchel McLaughlin, Eugene McMenamin, Francie Molloy, Jane Morrice, Mick Murphy, Mary Nelis, Dara O'Hagan, Eamonn O'Neill, Ken Robinson, George Savage, John Tierney, David Trimble, Jim Wilson.

NOES

Eileen Bell, Paul Berry, Norman Boyd, Gregory Campbell, Mervyn Carrick, Seamus Close, Wilson Clyde, Nigel Dodds, David Ford, Oliver Gibson, William Hay, David Hilditch, Roger Hutchinson, Gardiner Kane, Kieran McCarthy, Robert McCartney, William McCrea, Maurice Morrow, Ian Paisley Jnr, Rev Dr Ian Paisley, Edwin Poots, Iris Robinson, Mark Robinson, Peter Robinson, Patrick Roche, Jim Shannon, Jim Wells, Cedric Wilson, Sammy Wilson.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Rates (Regional Rates) (No 2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2001 be approved.

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS BILL

Final Stage

Mr Speaker: Order. If Members are not staying for education in this complex matter, will they please leave quietly.

(Mr Deputy Speaker [Sir John Gorman] in the Chair).

12.45 pm

The Junior Minister (Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister) (Mr Haughey): I beg to move

That the Electronic Communications Bill [NIA 9/00] do now pass.

I thank Members for their speedy consideration of the Bill. The Electronic Communications Bill is a vital component of the Administration's transition to the electronic age. It represents a major step towards enabling Departments to offer speedier and more comprehensive services to our citizens on a par with the kind of services that are offered to citizens in Great Britain, the Republic and other EU countries.

I would like to take this opportunity to encourage ministerial colleagues to ensure that their Departments exercise the powers conferred on them by the Bill as soon as possible after it becomes law. Electronic communication is fast becoming a feature of everyday life. We owe it to our citizens and to those in business to ensure that they can take full advantage of the new developments in technology.

I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Electronic Communications Bill [NIA 9/00] do now pass.

The sitting was suspended at 12.47 pm.

On resuming (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr McClelland] in the Chair) —

Oral Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND THE DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

2.30 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: Members may wish to note that questions 4 and 16, standing in the names of Mr Neeson and Mr Beggs respectively, have been withdrawn.

Objective 1 Status

1. **Mr Kane** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister what steps they are taking to secure the return of Objective 1 status for Northern Ireland. (AQO 1142/00)

The Deputy First Minister (Mr Mallon): On 1 July 1999 the European Commission, using strict economic criteria, adopted the list areas eligible for Objective 1 status for the period 2000 to 2006. As our gross domestic product (GDP) in Northern Ireland was above the agreed level of 75% of the EU average, we did not qualify for this support. With the agreement in Berlin to the new peace programme, we gained an extremely important boost to expenditure in Northern Ireland. Later this week Commissioner Barnier will be here to sign the programmes formally.

As for the future, enlargement of the European Union is likely to lead to an increasing focus of structural funds on the new member states. Only an economic reversal of the deepest nature in Northern Ireland will cause Northern Ireland to qualify again for Objective 1 status. Our focus is on continuing to build on the economic growth we have enjoyed, which is the way forward. I know that that is the approach the Member would want us to take.

Mr Kane: I accept the catch-22 nature of Objective 1 status, where the reward for better performance from those funds is to lose the status and accompanying funds. However, can the Deputy First Minister assure the House that the Province's gross domestic product and gross national product will not be so adversely affected by circumstances in agriculture as to entitle the Province to Objective 1 status again? Does the Deputy First Minister agree that Objectives 2 and 3, although not directly targeted towards agriculture, may still contain benefits for rural development?

The Deputy First Minister: Mr Kane, like myself, would not suggest under any set of circumstances that

the problems we face in agriculture with foot-and-mouth disease could in any way lead us to believe that the GDP would be reduced to such an extent that it would equate with our becoming eligible for Objective 1 status again. He can rest assured that the Executive will take every opportunity within the European Union to obtain support for our agriculture industry. The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development will reinforce this in a statement later today.

Dr Birnie: Does the Deputy First Minister agree that the recent increase, above 75% and up to 80%, in our GDP per capita figure is a success, not something we should be ashamed of? Does he also agree that in terms of Executive policies as a whole we should aim to increase that proportion towards 100%? Also, does he agree that the transitional funding package secured from the EU is relatively good, given that we are well above the 75% of the EU average criterion?

The Deputy First Minister: I fully agree that we should look on the GDP growth as something to be proud of and pleased about. The Member is right when he says that it is somewhere in the region of 80% as opposed to the 75% cut-off point for Objective 1 status. We should be aiming at the 100% position. Given the type of growth and stability that we have had, growth and stability that the Assembly and the Executive have brought to the political process in the North of Ireland, I have no doubt that we will be able to maximise the advantages of the transition programme and the Peace II programme. I believe we will be able to do that in such a way that there will be maximum benefit for all sectors of the community in Northern Ireland.

Support for Victims

2. **Mr K Robinson** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister whether the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust will have any responsibility for the administration of funding allocated by the Executive Committee for support to victims.

(AQO 1140/00)

The First Minister (Mr Trimble): The Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister has allocated £420,000 in this financial year to assist victims. None of this money was passed to, or handled by, the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust. Decisions on future funding and the mechanisms for distributing that funding have not yet been taken. The distribution of Peace II money will be made through an intermediate funding body that will be appointed following an open tender competition.

Mr K Robinson: The First Minister will be aware that, given some recent pronouncements, there is widespread concern among the victims of terrorism that there is an imbalance in funding towards ex-prisoners' groups. Will he ensure that any intermediate funding responsibility goes to bodies that have demonstrated a clear commitment to

helping the victims, rather than the perpetrators of terrorism, so that confidence can be restored in this important process?

The First Minister: It is very important that there is confidence in the process that has been adopted. Any concerns that there may be in the community with regard to the equity of treatment of groups should be properly addressed. One of the historical difficulties in this field has been that a number of victims, for a variety of reasons, did not feel that it was appropriate for them to form groups or to agitate for support. Consequently, other groups that were more aggressive in outlook were in existence and perhaps better organised in that respect. That is a situation that is changing rapidly, and I am quite sure that bodies such as the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust will want to ensure that all their activities are absolutely clear and even-handed in their approach.

Mr Gibson: I asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister two weeks ago about its attitude to the private initiative by a victim of the Omagh bomb. Since its launch, four Secretaries of State have pledged not only financial, but personal support. Are the First Minister or Deputy First Minister prepared to make a statement on their commitment and attitude to that initiative?

The First Minister: I am aware of the prosecution being contemplated by a number of victims of the Omagh bomb, and also of the support that is being given in a personal capacity by the previous Secretary of State. I emphasize the words "in a personal capacity". In terms of our official position, we have taken advice on the matter, and we have been advised that it would not be appropriate for our office to be engaged in what is a private prosecution. On the other hand, I must say that I fully understand the desire of the victims of the Omagh bomb to see that justice is done. We are very anxious to see that justice is done in an appropriate way.

Mrs Nelis: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. How many other funding bodies outside the remit of the Victims Unit will be involved in the administration of funding for victims? Will any particular funding body be responsible for the victims of state violence?

The First Minister: The funding that is available for victims is directed towards the bereaved and injured. We deal with people without putting categories on them. As the Member knows, there is a distinction drawn between the work of our own unit and the existing programme that is done through the Victims Liaison Unit. Within the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, we have had a fairly limited programme that we hope will expand.

When Peace II arrives, there will be significant sums available — some £6-67 million in total — to be handled through an intermediate funding body after there has been an open tender competition. We will be very anxious to

ensure that any such body operates in an entirely fair and even-handed manner.

Poverty

3. **Mr Byrne** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to outline how it is envisaged that the Programme for Government can be used to implement a strategy to combat poverty. (AQO 1135/00)

The Deputy First Minister: I thank the Member for the question. The Programme for Government sets out the Executive's commitments as regards reducing poverty. There are many relevant actions throughout the programme. I will specify some of them: the New Targeting Social Need action plan to be implemented by all Departments; work to tackle the problems of unemployment, including the new task force on employability and long-term unemployment; action to improve the delivery of Social Security services to vulnerable groups and a strategy to encourage the take up of benefits; programmes to regenerate disadvantaged urban and rural areas to improve access to decent, affordable housing and to address fuel poverty; and the Executive programme funds, especially the social inclusion, community regeneration fund and the children's fund.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Deputy First Minister for his comprehensive answer. However, can he confirm that the continued absence of the Minister for Social Development from the Executive and his failure to co-operate go against those who need to see a new campaign to combat poverty in Northern Ireland? Many poor families want to see an effective anti-poverty strategy implemented as soon as possible.

The Deputy First Minister: I thank the Member for the question. The Minister for Social Development has, like his predecessor, refused to attend meetings of the Executive Committee. Meanwhile, the Executive as a unit is pressing ahead with the challenging programme of work to tackle disadvantage and promote social inclusion. The Executive will continue to do so, despite the lack of participation by the Minister for Social Development in its meetings.

We are determined that the absence of particular Ministers will not have a detrimental effect on this very important work. Nevertheless, I want to add that the absence from the Executive of the Minister, whose Department is so totally involved in dealing with poverty, must lead to some conclusions about his commitment to its eradication.

Mr Savage: Does the Deputy First Minister agree that combating poverty will require particular emphasis on social development? Does he accept that the contribution to radical thinking in this area in the Programme for Government is practically zero? Can he assure the Assembly that if the relevant Minister is unwilling to address issues such as fuel poverty, the Office of the

First Minister and the Deputy First Minister will take over responsibility for this area?

The Deputy First Minister: I thank the Member for the question. There is a distinct feeling in this House that the absence from Executive meetings of a Minister who is so closely involved in dealing with poverty is a disadvantage to the Minister and his Department. We have made clear in the Programme for Government that we are fully committed to tackling the problems of poverty and deprivation, which affect so many people in our community.

At ministerial level, Northern Ireland has joined with England, Scotland and Wales to develop a draft UK fuel poverty strategy, which seeks to end fuel poverty by 2010. Every Department has responsibility in this regard, and each is working hard to address the problems of poverty and exclusion, which fall within their areas of responsibility.

In particular, the Department for Social Development must be addressing the issue of fuel poverty and is doing so by introducing a new grant scheme from April 2001. *[Interruption]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. This is the Minister's response.

The Deputy First Minister: This, it is hoped, will leave 6,000 to 8,000 householders out of fuel poverty annually, and the aim is to have assisted at least 20,000 householders by the year 2004. In addition, four fuel poverty pilot schemes have been introduced in Belfast, Derry, Aghnacloy and the Darkley area of County Armagh. These schemes involve insulation and heating improvements for over 6,000 low-income households.

Mr S Wilson: I thank the Deputy First Minister for his response. Perhaps he will inform the First Minister — who seems to think that the DUP is participating in the Executive — that we are not participating in the Executive.

2.45 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: Is that a question, Mr Wilson? Can we have a question please?

Mr S Wilson: It is a preface to my question.

I ask the Deputy First Minister to inform his colleague the First Minister that he has noticed the DUP's absence from the Executive, because the First Minister seems to think that the DUP is participating in it. Does the Deputy First Minister also agree that despite that non-participation, which was a commitment made in the DUP's manifesto, the Minister for Social Development has worked to combat poverty? He has done that through DEES II (Domestic Energy Efficiency Scheme) by making sure that the rate of rent increases was not above the rate of inflation — unlike those made by the Member's party — and through urban regeneration schemes aimed specifically at those parts of the community in which there is social deprivation.

The Deputy First Minister: I tend to thank the Member for his question. I am trying to remember the first part, but I think that it went roughly like this: would I inform the First Minister that both he and I greatly miss his Colleagues at Executive meetings? Of course, the answer is that we greatly miss — deeply miss — their input and perennial charm. *[Laughter]*.

Mr Dodds: You did not say that about the First Minister. *[Laughter]*.

The Deputy First Minister: With regard to the second part of the Member's question, I will put it this way: there is no one in the Assembly who is not concerned about social exclusion and poverty. I do not believe that anyone would deliberately try to stand in the way of dealing with those huge problems.

However, I say this to the Member who asked the question: attendance at the Executive and taking a share of the collective responsibility for dealing with matters are much more important to the people of the North of Ireland than any party political stance on the issue. I remind Mr Wilson again that poverty is not an issue with which one should play party politics.

Support for Victims

5. **Mr B Bell** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to make a statement on the strategic approach to meeting the needs of victims.

(AQO 1136/00)

The Deputy First Minister: We are keenly aware of the need for a strategic approach to deal with the needs of victims, and a number of important steps have been taken to achieve that. Among those is the inclusion of specific action points in the Programme for Government, the reconstitution of an interdepartmental working group and the development of a cross-departmental strategy on victims. Work is progressing on that strategy, and it will be issued for widespread consultation so that the views of victims and victims' groups can be taken into account.

Mr B Bell: I thank the Deputy First Minister for his reply. However, has the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister had any further discussions with the Minister of State on the suggestion for a victims' commission? Does he agree that there would be more public confidence in an official commission, accountable to the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister and therefore to the Assembly?

The Deputy First Minister: I thank the Member for his question. We have not yet reached a firm view on the proposal to establish a victims' commission. Junior Ministers Haughey and Nesbitt will meet in the near future with their Northern Ireland Office counterpart, Mr Adam Ingram. It is an idea that merits further consideration and evaluation before any firm proposals are brought forward. In particular, we need to consider

what role a commissioner or ombudsman might have and if the benefits of such an appointment would justify the diversion of resources from providing practical help and support for victims.

I do not share the Member's view on the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust. That organisation has shown a lasting commitment to victims and has done remarkably good work in that area.

Mr McMennamin: Is the Minister satisfied that the measures put in place to assist victims of the Omagh bomb are working, and will he outline the assistance currently being provided to the victims?

The Deputy First Minister: Of course, no amount of activity or support will ever compensate for the horrific loss of life and the suffering that took place in Omagh. However, following that atrocity a co-ordinated response to the needs of the victims was put in place by the Northern Ireland Office, which was responsible for all victims matters at that time.

The victims of the bomb in Omagh can currently avail of a wide range of help and support. This includes the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund; Northern Ireland Office initiatives and core funding; capacity building for victims organisations; the forthcoming Peace II programme, which will include a specific measure for victims; support for the trauma advisory panels; specific projects to be funded by the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister; and help and advice from our Victims Unit.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: I am sure that the Deputy First Minister will be glad that young people from Ballymena Academy in my constituency are watching from the Gallery today. They have been joined by those who have "crossed the Boyne" — from a school in Dundalk that they are associated with. That should make his Nationalist heart rejoice as he sits here today.

Does the Minister feel that victims, including those of the bomb in Omagh, should have to wait all this time before the necessary relief comes to them? Do they have to wait until decisions are made and to see whether there will be a Commissioner, and so on? These people are in need and their needs should be met.

Is it not strange that when the last tranche of money was put out to certain organisations that deal with victims, the Families Acting for Innocent Relatives organisation (FAIR) was discriminated against and got the lowest possible money? Is he not aware — and I am sure that he is because he comes from the region — that in that area there was terrible havoc caused by the IRA in the killings of Ulster Defence Regiment men, policemen and individuals? Does he not feel that those victims have as much right to get fair compensation as anyone else?

The Deputy First Minister: I thank the Member his question and for advising me of the presence of the young people from Ballymena and of those who have

“crossed the Boyne”. I join with him in giving them a very sincere welcome to the Assembly.

In relation to the first part of his question, the hon Member knows — as all Members know — from our discussions about a commissioner for children, that it requires forward planning and perhaps even legislation. It certainly requires a substantial amount of finance — that goes without saying. The First Minister and I do not want to decide on whether that money should go on administration or go directly to victims, without properly looking at and evaluating its ultimate potential. That is something for us to assess when we have all of the necessary information.

In relation to the latter part of the question, I am aware of the organisation of which he spoke. I share with him my concern about those in my constituency who lost their lives through violence from many sources. Victims and “victimhood” should transcend the source of the violence and should not be judged by it. I am aware, as the Member also is, that there were administrative difficulties in that organisation. I hope that it has resolved those so that matters can be looked at and progressed by the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust, which makes these allocations of money.

Community Capacity Building Imbalance

6. **Mr Carrick** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to detail what specific plans are in place to address the imbalance of community capacity building, particularly amongst Protestant communities in urban and rural areas. (AQO 1121/00)

The First Minister: The Programme for Government commits the Executive to take action to develop the necessary community infrastructure in the most disadvantaged areas and where it is weakest. It sets the target of April 2001 for the introduction of a programme of action and support to strengthen areas of weakest community infrastructure with the objective of redressing social and economic disadvantage.

As a result of that work a draft measure on tackling weak community infrastructure has been prepared for the Peace II programme. With regard to the rural development programme, the strategy for the 2001-06 phase includes equality and inclusion as a guiding principle. All sections of the rural community will be encouraged to become involved. One of the aims of the capacity building element of the programme will be to develop diverse and representative community-based organisations in rural areas.

Mr Carrick: I thank the First Minister for his response. Does he agree that in light of the poor uptake of financial assistance by Protestant groups for community capacity building — particularly those in the rural and provincial areas — part of the new round of Peace II funding

should be ring-fenced for that purpose to correct the imbalance and to bring about funding equity.

The First Minister: That is an important point. Pages 24 and 25 of the Programme for Government set out a number of actions that we, as an Administration, hope to implement in order to achieve that objective. It is recognised that there has been an imbalance in take up mainly due to an imbalance of applications and projects coming forward. That issue should not only be tackled by the administration but also by a range of other bodies.

Mr Carrick is a member of Craigavon Borough Council. He will be aware of the studies that have been done in the Craigavon area and of the considerable amount of work that is being done to try and tackle those issues by that council and other groups such as Portadown Local Action for Community Engagement. I am sure he agrees that there is a need for that work to be promoted and for it to proceed as far as possible on a non-partisan basis. It should not be turned into a party political issue. I am reflecting on the imbalance and the difficulties in the Portadown district and if those community issues in that area are going to be satisfactorily resolved there needs to be progress on the Drumcree issue.

Mr Hussey: Perhaps the First Minister can give a small geography lesson to the Deputy First Minister as to the location of the Boyne.

The First Minister answered Mr Carrick’s question to a degree. The First Minister will be aware that in the past the Deputy First Minister has admitted that there has been an imbalance of uptake. At that time, the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister was asked to be proactive in encouraging the Protestant community to seek assistance for community capacity building. What proactive actions have been engaged in to encourage that?

The First Minister: The imbalance in uptake of funding was established through a study undertaken by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency and is the responsibility of the Minister of Finance and Personnel. Action has been taken to examine the problem and its extent, and, as I mentioned, the Programme for Government contains measures that the Executives hopes to develop within the community support programme. The measures will be taken in connection with local authorities but will involve voluntary action by people in the community. People will have to get beyond the stage of complaining about a problem and be prepared to tackle it.

There will be support from official sources — from local Government and the Assembly — for people who are tackling that issue but it depends on a willingness in the community for people to become involved. I encourage that and I am sure that the Member would also encourage people to be involved in that way.

Mr Douglas: It has been brought to my attention by a local community group that the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action has made appointments to the Limavady partnership board of at least 85% Roman Catholics to represent the voluntary community sector in an area which is fifty-fifty.

Given the fact that there is an imbalance in the area of community capacity building, does the First Minister agree that bodies who vet applicants for local boards which manage funds allocated to local groups should take account of the religious make-up in these areas when making such determinations?

3.00 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: The time for Questions to the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister is up. I ask the Ministers to respond in writing to the remaining questions.

Mr B Bell: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. The Deputy First Minister, in his very helpful answer to my supplementary question, said that he disagreed with me on the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust (NIVT), but at no time did I refer to the NIVT. I want to put that on record.

CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Mr Deputy Speaker: Questions 2 and 9 have been withdrawn.

Football: Sectarianism

1. **Ms Lewsley** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail what measures he intends to introduce to deal with sectarianism in football; and to make a statement. (AQO 1112/00)

5. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to update the Assembly on discussions he has had regarding the extension of the Football Offences Act 1991 to Northern Ireland. (AQO 1098/00)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McGimpsey): With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will take questions 1 and 5 together.

I have already expressed, through the media, my deep disgust at the sectarian behaviour of a minority of spectators at the recent international football match between Northern Ireland and Norway. I have since met with the Irish Football Association (IFA) to review events that evening and to explore what practical action can be taken to counter the problem. The IFA agreed to consider a range of measures that could rapidly be put in place, and it has since announced a series of steps that it intends to take.

Prior to the most recent incident, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure had ongoing discussions with the Sports Council for Northern Ireland and the IFA

regarding sectarianism in soccer. These discussions included consideration of issues around the introduction of legislation relating to disorderly conduct and sectarianism at football events. In all these deliberations there has been unanimous agreement that the task of developing effective proposals for removing sectarianism from soccer is far from easy.

Sectarianism is not simply a matter for sport. Sadly, it is an obscenity throughout all society, and we all want to contribute to its eradication. However, the ultimate responsibility for its elimination rests not with sport or soccer but with the community as a whole. In this respect it is important to point out that legislation for dealing with sectarian behaviour is already in place in Northern Ireland.

My discussions with the IFA and others have consistently reaffirmed my view that sectarianism in football is part of a wider malaise facing not just soccer but society as a whole. Legislative needs must, therefore, be considered in terms of the social context and an overall strategy for the development of soccer. This was one of the considerations that led me to announce last autumn a process for developing a soccer strategy for Northern Ireland. Work on the strategy is well advanced, and issues such as disorderly conduct and sectarianism have already been highlighted as particular concerns. I expect that the proposals for dealing with such problems will be brought forward as part of the strategy, which will include the introduction of appropriate legislation.

Ms Lewsley: There is legislation in Northern Ireland, but it is not strong enough. The Minister should consider introducing the Football (Offences and Disorder) Act 1999, which is currently in place in England and Wales. As I said, the present legislation is not strong enough and does not refer to football specifically as an offence; therefore it is harder to get convictions. In any new legislation the Minister should also ensure that it is not only the fans who are reprimanded but also the players on the field.

Mr McGimpsey: The Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 can be used to deal with incidents such as those which occurred at Windsor Park last month. Public order is a reserved matter, but I have no doubt that we will be looking at new legislation once the soccer strategy report is published, as this will allow me to ask the Secretary of State for measures to be introduced.

I do not believe that legislation alone is going to fix this problem; it will be only a part of a wider raft of measures. That is one of the principal reasons why the soccer strategy is being developed; simply passing a law does not mean that there will be no more incidents. There must be a raft of measures that will include actions not just at international level but at club level as well. To replicate Great Britain's legislation in Northern Ireland is insufficient. It needs to be adapted and extended to meet our own special needs, which will be

illustrated by the soccer strategy when it delivers its report later this year.

Mr McCarthy: I did not hear all that was said by the Minister in his initial response because of the hubbub that was going on around us. However, I am disappointed in what I did hear. I asked for the Act to be brought in more than a year ago, but the Assembly is still dragging its feet. Is the Minister aware that police in Britain were able to take effective action against people engaged in racial chanting at the Bradford versus Manchester City match at the weekend because the appropriate sanctions were available? We all welcome the Irish Football Association's new code, but does the Minister recognise the growing clamour — from players, the many decent spectators and sporting officials — for legislation to make offensive chanting a criminal offence and to give clubs the power to ban the racist, sectarian-chanting mobs from Windsor Park and elsewhere in Northern Ireland?

Mr McGimpsey: As I have already said — and I will say it again for Mr McCarthy, because he missed details with the hubbub that was going on — the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 is available and can be used to deal with the incidents that occurred in Windsor Park last month. That is the situation as it stands.

I know that the Member asked a question on the Football (Offences) Act 1991 — which was further amended in 1999 — and I responded. While I said that I did not equate racism with sectarianism, at the same time I believe that there are measures in the Act that will help. However, to simply bring that Act in as it stands — which includes throwing objects on to the pitch, taking part in indecent or racist chanting and going on to the pitch without lawful authority — is not enough. Our Act outlaws incitement to religious hatred and makes it an offence to arouse fear on the basis of religious belief and nationality, including citizenship. There is enough scope within current legislation, but Mr McCarthy is talking about football-specific and sport-specific legislation. I agree that it is likely that we will come forward with those exact proposals, but I believe that it has got to be part of a wider raft of measures. That is what the soccer strategy is all about.

This is an issue that could have been tackled under direct rule, but it was ignored, so we have inherited this problem. I am dealing with this as quickly as I can, and I am trying to ensure that when the legislation is finally passed it will actually work. The ground safety scheme which I brought forward deals in part with sectarianism and training stewards to deal with this. Every club that gets a grant under that scheme has to take part in training provision. Measures are also being brought forward by the Irish Football Association (IFA) specifically for the international match this weekend. However, the IFA has also been involved in campaigns such as "Football for All", which included measures to combat sectarianism, including a community relations officer, who joined the

Football Against Racism in Europe group, and the establishment of anti-sectarianism demonstration projects.

Their next announcement will concern a code of conduct for spectators. Spectators in violation of the code will be liable to eviction. That will include the deployment of professional stewards to help enforce the code, special ticketing arrangements and better closed-circuit television coverage — which will include proper sound, so that the footage can be used as evidence. All of those measures are in place. However, it is not simply a matter of passing a law, whether it is a reserved matter or not. I wish it were, but it is not that simple.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members and the Minister that a large number of people wish to ask questions. If they try to keep both the questions and the answers a bit shorter, we will get through more questions.

Mr Shannon: What measures does the Minister intend to take to deal with other acts of sectarianism in sport, such as the Gaelic sports, and in particular the Gaelic Athletic Association's rule 21?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am not sure whether that is directly related to the question that is down, but the Minister is already on his feet.

Mr McGimpsey: I am the first to agree. I have put it on record that sectarianism in sport is not exclusive to soccer. Sadly, it occurs in other sports and also in society in general. Certainly, the Sports Council for Northern Ireland has a consultation package available for other sports to develop, not least in terms of these measures. I find the GAA's rule 21 offensive, as I have said before. As part of the process that we are all in, and as society develops through that process, I expect that rule 21 will be dealt with to the satisfaction of everybody in this House.

Mr B Hutchinson: Can the Minister tell us how many acts of sectarianism have been carried out at football matches in the last three seasons? Also, when I am returning from a Linfield match in Newry, there are people who continually stone the cars travelling through the town. How does the Minister intend to deal with that?

This subject is grossly exaggerated. The people who have put down the questions about sectarianism have never been inside an Irish League ground. *[Interruption]*.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Mr Hutchinson, this an opportunity not to make a speech but to ask a question. *[Interruption]*. Order.

Mr B Hutchinson: If the Minister were to attend Windsor Park on a Saturday afternoon he would hear Jamie Marks, who plays for Linfield, getting more stick than Neil Lennon ever does.

Mr McGimpsey: This is not simply an international football match problem; it is a problem throughout the sport and across all other sports, including the clubs. I am not aware of the stoning in Newry, but I am not

surprised by it. That is something that happens. That is the problem that we are looking to address. It is not simply chanting and so on.

At an international match where Northern Ireland is effectively on show, this type of behaviour damages the image of Northern Ireland on an international basis. It damages not only football, the club or the ground where the international takes place, but also the social and economic well-being of this society as a whole. A potential investor is not likely to be encouraged when he sees that type of behaviour. Sport can, and continually does, make a significant and long-standing contribution to building bridges between communities. The football league and so on in Northern Ireland has played a key role in that over the past 25 or 30 years. That is one of the reasons why I have brought forward this soccer strategy.

United Kingdom Sports Teams

3. **Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the steps he has taken to ensure that teams which include sports men and women from Northern Ireland bear the name “The United Kingdom” rather than “Great Britain”. (AQO 1103/00)

Mr McGimpsey: Any person who is associated with a Northern Ireland branch or region of a United Kingdom-based sport is representing the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. However, it is the convention in international sports federations — including the international Olympic movement — to refer to the team as “Great Britain”.

In that respect, it is a team name and is not intended as a geographical expression.

3.15 pm

Mr Wells: Does the Minister accept that many of us were very proud when Northern Irish athletes such as Mary Peters won gold at the Olympics but were saddened that the team was referred to as “Great Britain”? She is a resident of Northern Ireland, and the team should have been called “United Kingdom”. What pressure will the Minister bring to bear on the sports authorities to ensure that teams are correctly named?

Mr McGimpsey: I think that my first answer covered that. I said that the team is recognised as “Great Britain” and that that is neither a geographical nor a political expression. It is the name of the team, and that name is subscribed to by England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

I understand that Mr Wells wants to make a point. I am trying to make the point back to him that when Northern Ireland athletes compete as part of the Great Britain team, they lose their Northern Ireland identity and become part of that team. Mr Wells is quite right that it is the national team of the United Kingdom of

Great Britain and Northern Ireland, but it chooses to refer to itself as “Great Britain”. Does Mr Wells want me to apply pressure to change the team’s name from “Great Britain” to the “United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland”? That type of political pressure from me would, at best, be of no value and might well be counter-productive.

Mr McMenamin: Does the Minister agree that any steps by his Department to interfere with the name of any sporting body in these islands would be an unnecessary intrusion into the internal affairs of that body?

Mr McGimpsey: So far as interference is concerned, there are certain principles to which governing bodies have to adhere. I have told Members how I see those issues in relation to sectarianism. We have discussed soccer. Other sports are equally required to adhere to those principles and criteria — not least in order to obtain funding. To say blankly that I cannot interfere or have an interest would be to abrogate my responsibility in many respects.

Mr Hussey: I have noticed lately that in indoor athletics the team is quite often referred to as “Great Britain and Northern Ireland”.

Does the Minister agree that one of the most successful groups from Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom in the international sporting arena is in bowls, both indoor and outdoor? Is he aware of the great concern at the lack of funding for those who move forward in this sport? Will he undertake to meet representatives of the bowling fraternity with regard to that?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Hussey, you are quite aware that that question bears absolutely no relationship to the question on the Paper.

Department: Irish Language

4. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to give a commitment to reply in the Irish language to all correspondence which he and his Department receive in the Irish language. (AQO 1093/00)

Mr McGimpsey: I will consider my Department’s policy in the light of the work being undertaken on implementation of the Council of Europe Charter on Regional and Minority Languages. It would be premature to take a position before that work is completed. The branch in my Department with responsibility for linguistic diversity makes every effort to respond to letters in the language in which they are received.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil leis an Aire as a fhreagra. Ba mhaith liom fosta a rá go raibh eagraíochtaí éagsúla míshásta le freagraí as Béarla.

I thank the Minister for his answer, but at the same time express disappointment. My initial question was prompted

by the fact that a number of organisations contacted me. They had written to the Minister and the Department in Irish and had received responses in English. We are repeatedly told that the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure has the lead role in promoting Irish.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr McElduff, please come to the question.

Mr McElduff: I am coming to my question, which is growing out of the points I make. What is happening at a cross-departmental level to promote the Irish language? We are often told to ask the Minister and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure — and nobody else — about that.

Mr McGimpsey: With regard to complaints from groups, my Department's Linguistic Diversity Branch makes every effort to respond to letters in the language in which they are written, and not just in the Irish language. The Member will be aware that we are bound by, for example, the Belfast Agreement, which states

"the British Government will in particular in relation to the Irish language, where appropriate and where people so desire it:

take resolute action to promote the language;

facilitate and encourage the use of the language in speech and writing ... ;

seek to remove, where possible, restrictions which would discourage or work against the maintenance or development of the language".

In addition, the overriding purpose of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages is cultural. The charter is aimed at protecting and promoting regional or minority languages rather than linguistic minorities, and the cultural dimension is emphasised. The charter does not establish any individual or collective rights for speakers of regional and minority languages.

As Members are aware, as a devolved Assembly we have signed up to some 30 provisions, and reserved matters have accounted for another six provisions. Out of the 65 provisions we were required to sign up to 35 — we have signed up to 36. I have established an interdepartmental charter group to examine the Government's work and to determine what is appropriate to ensure that there is equity of treatment across the full range of regional minority languages. That interdepartmental group will eventually report to me, and I will consider its recommendations and the next steps to take.

The Chairperson of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee (Mr O'Neill): What resources and support are available in the Minister's Department and others to help with questions and letters, as described in the original question? What use has been made of those resources and support? I understand that the Minister may not have the relevant details with him.

Mr McGimpsey: I regret that I do not have those details to hand, but I will respond to Mr O'Neill's question in writing.

Dr Adamson: After all this time I am still not sure what is meant by the term "Irish language". My reading of the situation is that there are several varieties of the Irish language or Gaelic, and I am not sure which one is referred to.

Can the Minister assure me that any measures his Department takes with regard to the Irish language will be replicated in relation to Ulster Scots and Cantonese? "Dor tse" — as he will know — means "Thank you" in Cantonese.

Mr McGimpsey: I assure Dr Adamson, as I have done on other occasions, that my Department's cornerstone principle is equity of treatment, and we will ensure that all minority languages are treated equally.

Closure of Angling Waters (Foot-and-Mouth Disease)

7. **Mr J Wilson** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to make a statement on the closure of the departmental angling waters following the recent outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease. (AQO 1124/00)

Mr McGimpsey: I decided to close the public angling estate waters to support the farming community in the drive to prevent the spread of foot-and-mouth disease. There is a risk that anglers taking part in fishing might unintentionally help to spread the disease, particularly since access to many waters is gained by crossing farmland or passing near it. I hope that the closure will not continue for any longer than is absolutely necessary, and I understand the hardship and concerns of anglers and others affected by the closure. The decision is continuously under review, and I will reopen the waters as soon as possible.

Mr J Wilson: Does the Minister agree that while a small number of angling water owners did not co-operate in recognition of the hardships suffered by some in the rural community, anglers in general were the first to respond positively to calls by the Minister and his ministerial Colleagues for the cessation of a range of activities across the Province?

Mr McGimpsey: I am happy to concur with Mr Wilson's remarks. When I closed the public angling estate I appealed to owners of private fisheries, for example, also to close. We got co-operation from the angling community and from a variety of sports. With one or two exceptions, the responsible attitude of the arts, sports and culture communities to the crisis that agriculture and our economy face because of foot-and-mouth disease is an object lesson to us all.

Children's Sports Code

8. **Mr McGrady** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail what further progress has been

made, in terms of Government assistance, towards the implementation of the code of ethics and good practice for children's sport in Northern Ireland; and to make a statement. (AQO 1090/00)

Mr McGimpsey: The code of ethics and good practice for children's sport, which was launched on 7 November 2000 as a joint North/South sports council initiative, addresses issues relating to the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved in children's sport and underpins the importance of policies and procedures in providing quality leadership for children in sport. It outlines principles of good practice and child protection policy and procedures. The implementation of the code is a matter for the Sports Council for Northern Ireland, which has made good progress in applying the code through extensive training and awareness. The council and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children have co-operated on the matter and have developed proposals for an implementation project, which includes the appointment of a children's development officer, the preparation of resource material, the development and delivery of training, working with clubs and governing bodies to improve policies and practices and providing helpline support with specific regard to child protection issues. These proposals are dependent on additional implementation funding.

Mr McGrady: I thank the Minister for his very detailed reply. I appreciate that voluntary sport is now entering into a complex and difficult area in terms of the child care provisions and the future standards which will be required of voluntary bodies which have children and young people in their custody. Does the Minister agree that a considerable amount of training will be required for people in the voluntary sector who are currently engaged in these enterprises? Does he also agree that this will require a considerable amount of financial support? Where will this come from, and when? At the current rate, it is surely not possible for these codes to be fully implemented by the target date of 31 December 2002. This is a cause of grave concern in the voluntary sector because many of its people will have to withdraw from their voluntary work.

Mr McGimpsey: A central goal for everyone involved in children's sport is to provide a safe, positive and nurturing environment in which children can safely develop and enhance their physical and social skills. That is the child-centred ethos. As I mentioned in my answer, one way in which the NSPCC and the Sports Council propose to implement the code is through a child development officer who will provide specific child protection advice and training to voluntary clubs and associations. This will have an impact on young people at risk. As we try to introduce the codes, we are aware of the volume of work, the difficulties and the risks, but we hope to develop a strategy to reduce risks to young people in sport and, specifically, to provide awareness training. If that type of awareness training is not available to clubs, coaches,

volunteers and so forth, it will have an adverse impact on children's sport.

Mr McFarland: Does the code cover the behaviour of spectators at children's sports? I am thinking in particular of the actions of overzealous parents. Those of us who have watched such sports will understand that parent's behaviour sometimes eggs children on and causes all sorts of problems.

3.30 pm

Mr McGimpsey: I am not specifically aware of measures to deal with overzealous parents egging children on from the sides. Our specific aim is to reduce the risk of abuse to young people in sport. We will do this by providing awareness training to clubs and governing bodies with a sports-specific resource pack to assist them and by implementing the code, building child protection into the quality accreditation package for clubs or schemes and appointing tutors to deliver local advice and guidance. Mr McFarland can perhaps receive some comfort from this about overzealous parents encouraging children from the sidelines.

Soccer Strategy

10. **Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to give his assessment of the report 'Soccer Strategy for Northern Ireland', commissioned from Price-waterhouseCoopers, on the future of football.

(AQO 1123/00)

Mr McGimpsey: This excellent document summarises the views of those involved at all levels of soccer in Northern Ireland. It provides a comprehensive picture of the key issues facing the game and is helping to frame the agenda for action which will form the backbone of the soccer strategy.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The time is up.

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 12 has been withdrawn.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease

1. **Mr McGrady** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she has any plans to introduce compensation to those affected by the foot-and-mouth crisis. (AQO 1091/00)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers): We have started paying compensation to those who have had livestock slaughtered as a result of the disease outbreak and we have examined the subsidy aspects of these cases to ensure that the producers in question do not lose out. Farmers receive full market

value for slaughtered animals, whether they are infected animals or dangerous contact animals. Compensation is also paid for any feeding stocks or any other material destroyed or seized as contaminated. As I said in my statement to the Assembly last week, we are also arranging to pay out as many subsidy payments as we can as soon as possible to help farmers' immediate cash flow problems.

Mr McGrady: I thank the Minister for her reply. I note that compensation is beginning to flow in relation to this terrible crisis in the farming industry. The French Government have initiated their own response under EU approval. This is a matter for the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Treasury, but I ask the Minister to take that fact on board and to make her best endeavours in that respect. In view of the fact that many small rural businesses have been hugely affected by the foot-and-mouth disease, is there any likelihood of a relaxation in the restrictions which would enable the economic life of our rural communities to breath more freely?

Ms Rodgers: I am not exactly certain what the French are doing, but clearly I will be looking at all avenues that can be explored within the European regulations in order to deal with the problem.

I agree with Mr McGrady's point about restrictions, and I recognise the problems faced by many small businesses and sectors such as the tourist industry. I want to pay tribute to those people for the manner in which they have responded and the solidarity which they have shown despite the difficulties this situation has presented them.

In the context of the veterinary advice I am getting and of the situation on the ground, I intend to respond in a proportionate, reasonable and effective manner as I have attempted to do so far. I stress the importance of not dropping our guard, particularly at the farm gate and point of entry from GB which make up the main front line of defence against this disease.

Taking account of that, I expect to bring forward revised guidelines to Executive committee next Thursday. Those guidelines are being discussed within the interdepartmental group which I chair. I want to see what relaxation we can bring in to ease the restrictions presently being suffered by the public in general, and by sporting bodies and industry.

However, we always need to do this within the context of not moving too fast — with the possible result of undoing all of the good and effective work that has been done with the support of the whole community and with industry.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development (Rev Dr Ian Paisley): I welcome the Minister's statement that she is proceeding to give money to those farmers who need it urgently, and those who have had their cattle slaughtered. Does she have any

reason to believe that the Agriculture Ministers in other parts of the UK and Europe are in favour of the enlargement of the compensation scheme so that those farmers who have directly met serious financial embarrassment, without actually having lost their cattle, will be compensated? Can she confirm the rumour that was abroad today in Ballymena about a lamb or sheep which was supposed to have had foot-and-mouth disease but has been declared safe? The abattoir has just confirmed that to me now — and the location of the farm from which the animal came.

Ms Rodgers: I thank Dr Paisley for his question. Compensation which is not direct compensation for the loss of destroyed animals or foodstuffs is really about consequential loss. I am not aware of the thinking in Europe. However, in the case of the UK Government, if there were to be a consequential compensation payment, it would have to be as a result of a UK-wide decision; the resource implications would be so huge that the Northern Ireland block could not withstand them.

If it were to be done — and clearly that would be desirable, if possible — there would have to be a UK-wide decision, and it would have to come from the Treasury. I have to be honest and say that I do not see any stomach for consequential compensation in the UK at the moment. That is the position as I see it. If it were to be done, it would have to be done on that basis.

On the second part of the question about the sheep in Ballymena — the animal is clear of the disease.

Mr J Wilson: I would like to tease out the question of compensation. The Minister will accept that the economic impact of this crisis is felt well beyond the farmyard. The knock-on effect has been devastating on the owners and those employed in livestock markets. Are there any means by which these people can be assisted?

Ms Rodgers: I thank Mr Wilson for his question. We have looked at the various areas where assistance could be given. For example, I have had a meeting with the auctioneers, and they have mentioned the issue of rates relief. Rates relief was raised within the interdepartmental group, and it is clearly not an issue for my Department. It is an issue for DFP in particular, but, as I understand it, there is no legislation at present which would allow for rates relief on that basis. I am not aware of any other avenue of relief that we can currently go down. I understand the question and the anxiety of those who have suffered, but I am afraid that, at the moment, I cannot see how anything can be done in the Northern Ireland block in relation to consequential payments.

3. **Mr Armstrong** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to give her assessment on the progress of the interdepartmental committee of officials on foot-and-mouth disease. (AQO 1118/00)

Ms Rodgers: I have chaired six meetings of the interdepartmental committee since its inception on 2 March.

The committee has provided an extremely useful means of allowing me to brief representatives of all Departments on developments in the foot and mouth outbreak, regularly and concisely. It has also allowed me to learn from those representatives about issues emerging in their areas of responsibility and to ensure that the actions of all Departments were properly co-ordinated in addressing a range of aspects of the outbreak.

The committee was responsible for producing the guidance which has appeared widely throughout Northern Ireland in newspapers and on television and has made a valuable contribution to the handling of this difficult and complex issue.

The committee's work has also allowed me to provide comprehensive briefing to my Executive colleagues. I am grateful for their support for our efforts to prevent the spread of foot-and-mouth disease and take this opportunity to pay tribute to the efforts of all those involved in helping to tackle what is a serious problem.

Mr Armstrong: I commend the Minister and her Executive colleagues on the seriousness with which they have been dealing with the problem. Will the Minister confirm that the committee of officials has been working closely with its counterparts in the rest of the United Kingdom to ensure, as far as possible, that we have no further cases of foot-and-mouth disease here?

When an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease occurs in the European Union, all exports of livestock and meat are immediately banned from entering the area concerned. Can the Minister tell the House whether Northern Ireland has imported meat from any country that has, or is at risk of developing, foot-and-mouth disease?

Ms Rodgers: On the last part of the Member's question, I am not aware that we have imported food or product from any area that has the infection. As the Member knows, the EU has banned all product from the area of France that has had an outbreak. I am not aware that we are importing product from any other area that has had a similar outbreak.

The question on the interdepartmental committee is, in a sense, irrelevant because foot-and-mouth disease control in the EU is a separate issue. The committee is dealing solely with such controls in Northern Ireland.

Mr Douglas: Can the Minister assure the House that everything possible is being done including the spraying of disinfectant and the putting of precautions into place, especially in Scotland at the ferry crossings? Can she confirm that that is the case and not, as we have heard on the radio, that the precautions currently in place are unsatisfactory?

Ms Rodgers: I have heard such stories. I hope that I will be forgiven for using my native language, but here is an old Irish saying: "Dúirt bean liom gur dhúirt bean léi gur chuala sí bean a rá." That means "A woman told

me that another woman told her that she had heard another woman saying." In other words, there is a lot of anecdotal evidence about what people have been saying.

People have told me that they have arrived at airports and that no announcements were made and that no precautions were in place. Many of my staff and I have travelled on many planes during this outbreak, and we have never encountered that. If there are any specific incidents that can be brought to my attention, they will certainly be investigated.

Our controls at all points of entry are continually under review. Last Saturday evening, while most people were off, the Chief Veterinary Officer was once again at the port to check that everything was in order and assume himself that the controls were working. We will step up the controls if necessary because, as I have already said, the front lines preventing the disease getting into Northern Ireland are at the points of entry and, I must stress again, at the farm gate.

Mr Shannon: Can the Minister indicate, through the interdepartmental committee of officials on foot-and-mouth disease, what steps have been taken to assist the tourist industry, particularly given the fact that the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in the UK has agreed to give compensation to that sector?

Ms Rodgers: I am not aware that the UK Government have done anything of the sort. In fact, it has been made very clear to me that the UK Government are not prepared to look at consequential compensation of any description.

3.45 pm

The tourist industry issue is clearly a problem. Tourism is affected by foot-and-mouth disease more than any other sector at the moment and I will be discussing that with my Executive colleagues on Thursday. Sir Reg Empey will be giving his views, and because tourism forms part of his responsibilities he will want to discuss the issue with me.

I am reviewing the guidelines to see where easements can be made in order to make life more comfortable for the sectors that are suffering from the consequences of foot-and-mouth disease. All action must be taken in the context of veterinary advice whilst ensuring that our response is in proportion to the problem. We must make sure that we do not go too far but that we do as much as possible to make life easier for those who run bed-and-breakfast accommodations and hotels. I am not aware that the UK Government are giving compensation to the industry.

Agrimonetary Compensation

4. **Mr Leslie** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail when payments under the

agrimonetary compensation package, announced on 5 March 2001, will be made to farmers. (AQO 1116/00)

Ms Rodgers: The agrimonetary compensation in respect of sheep will be paid in early April, subject to EU approval. Seventy per cent of beef sector compensation will be paid in late April/early May 2001 following the payment of outstanding balances under the 2000 suckler cow premium and beef special premium schemes.

The UK is seeking a derogation from the EU Commission to bring forward payment of the remaining 30% of beef agrimonetary compensation. This could not normally be paid until after 16 October 2001. The intervention board will handle dairy compensation on a UK-wide basis, and it is expected that this will be paid in two stages, in April and May.

Mr Leslie: I am glad to hear that some money will be forthcoming in April and May. I trust that the schedule outlined by the Minister will not be subject to any slippage. It has taken a long time to get any agrimonetary compensation. Whilst any money of that kind is welcome, does the Minister think that the £1million being allocated in respect of Northern Ireland sheep is going to be anywhere near adequate, considering the difficulties that the sector faces as the result of foot-and-mouth disease?

Ms Rodgers: The £1million that will be allocated to the sheep sector is all of the possible agri-money that could have been drawn down. At the beginning of the foot-and-mouth crisis the UK Government took a decision to draw down all the optional money that was available. In relation to next year's agrimonetary payments, I will again make the case that the Treasury draws down all optional money that is available.

Mr Gibson: One week ago the Minister assured me that all moneys owed to the farming community would be paid as soon as possible. Is this now happening? The rural community are lobbying me with the words "cash flow", "cash flow", "cash flow".

Secondly, we will need a long period of recovery. Has the Minister approached the major banks with the idea of setting interest rates at 0% for one year, 1% for a second year, and 2% for a third year, so that the farming community can have a recovery programme and financial package?

Ms Rodgers: I recognise the importance of making premia payments to farmers as quickly as possible, especially in the present circumstances. My Department continually works to that end. Priority is currently being given to the processing of premia payments in respect of the new less favoured area (LFA) compensatory allowance schemes that are worth £22.1 million and balance payments under the 2000 sheep annual premium that are worth £5.5 million. Producers can expect to receive those payments by the end of March 2001.

I am aware of the cash flow problems that farmers are facing. I met with representatives from the grain trade and the banking organisations and they have assured me that they will be flexible when dealing with farmers who encounter problems due to the present situation.

I have endeavoured to ensure that no farmer will be penalised over premia payments because of the present situation regarding paperwork or inspections. We placed a question-and-answer brief in a press release and it is available on our web site. If any farmers are in doubt they can contact our helpline or their local office and we will reassure them. It does not mean that records do not have to be kept and that there will not be inspections as soon as is possible. However, I will ensure that no farmer will be penalised at the moment because in the present situation it is not possible for inspections to take place.

Mr Dallat: Can the Minister state the amount of compensation that will be paid to Northern Ireland producers? Has the United Kingdom drawn down all of the agrimoney? Can the Minister assure the House that she will seek further compensation if and when it becomes available?

Ms Rodgers: The question relates to what I will do about agrimonetary compensation in the future. I have argued over the past year — with a good measure of success — for the payment of agrimonetary compensation on each occasion it became available. It is a means of assisting the industry through the immense difficulties it has faced, and it brought an additional £8.5 million into Northern Ireland last year. It is one of the few ways of putting money directly into the pockets of our hard-pressed producers without contravening the strict EU rules.

I will continue to push for the payment of agrimonetary compensation for as long as it is available and for as long as it is needed by our industry. The amount of payment will depend on the exchange rate between the euro and sterling. So far as I am aware, it will no longer be available after next year, but for as long as it is available I will keep pressing the case to have the full amount drawn down by the Treasury.

Farmers' Markets

5. **Mrs E Bell** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail what steps she is taking to encourage the establishment and growth of farmers' markets. (AQO 1106/00)

Ms Rodgers: My Department is continuing to work with interested farmers and growers to explore the opportunities for farmers' markets in Northern Ireland. It co-ordinated a seminar on farm retailing that took place at Loughrey College last December, which explained the steps necessary to operate a successful farm retail enterprise. The seminar sparked interest from a number of groups keen to explore the possibilities for farmers'

markets in their areas and we will continue to provide assistance to them.

Technical and financial assistance have been provided through the farming and retailing movement, Farm NI. That assistance has been aimed at developing the retailing capabilities of producers and helping to promote the Belfast Farmers Market that I opened in February 2000. Once the current foot-and-mouth restrictions are over, my Department will continue to work with Farm NI to ensure a co-ordinated approach to the establishment of farmers' markets. My Department would encourage those people who want to develop a market of this kind to liaise closely with Farm NI.

Mrs E Bell: I concur with the Minister. Can anything be done at this time in spite of the foot-and-mouth disease problem — and I congratulate the Minister's handling of that problem — to support the on-farm processing of food to enable farmers to trade at local markets? The Minister, by her answer, demonstrates that she knows that farmers' markets have created thousands of jobs in the USA and Canada, and they are starting to make inroads in Great Britain. Perhaps that is one ray of hope for farmers.

Ms Rodgers: The agrifood advisory section of my Department gives assistance and advice through Farm NI to on-farm processors and those who want to move in that direction.

At the moment my officials are staying away from farms, given the situation on the ground, except where absolutely necessary. Therefore visits to farms by advisers — to use a pun — will be pretty thin on the ground at the moment, except where visits to check for brucellosis and tuberculosis have resumed, as that was becoming quite a problem. Apart from that there are no visits to farms at the moment.

Mr Paisley Jr: I welcome the development of such farm markets, but does the Minister agree that normalisation of trade is essential for the agricultural community? On that basis, can she tell us when the livestock marts will be opened again for trade in Northern Ireland?

Ms Rodgers: I have two responses to that. First, I have already said that when I can move, in a proportionate, reasonable and effective manner, towards relaxing the restrictions in Northern Ireland, I will. As we move further away from our one case of foot-and-mouth here, and if we have no further outbreaks, I hope that such relaxation of restrictions will be possible.

In the second place, there is, as the Member will know, an EU ban at the moment on all marts across Europe. I am subject to that ban. In other words, if I reached the stage where I thought that it might be possible to lift the ban in Northern Ireland because of our situation, I would have to take cognisance of the EU-wide ban, which applies to all member states.

Mrs Nelis: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's commitment to developing the farmers' markets. Is it her opinion that farmers' markets should continue to operate during the current crisis?

Ms Rodgers: The guidelines as to what should or should not operate during the current crisis have been laid down very clearly by the Executive Committee. I have asked everyone, including farmers' markets, to look at the guidelines, apply them to their own situation, and make a decision as to whether, within the guidelines, they should proceed with their market or not. I cannot legislate for every single operation in Northern Ireland. It depends on the guidelines — on whether large crowds are being drawn in from rural communities, and so on.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease

7. **Mr Fee** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to give an update on the present situation regarding foot-and-mouth disease. (AQO 1111/00)

Ms Rodgers: I am very pleased to report that there has still only been one confirmed case of foot-and-mouth disease in Northern Ireland. We continue to have quite a number of suspected cases reported, which is understandable, given that farmers are particularly anxious about any unusual signs in their animals at this time. However, all of these have so far proved to be negative.

There has been much media interest in the so-called missing sheep — in other words, the possibility that the consignment of infected sheep that led to our outbreak may have been larger than we first thought. As I said in my statement to the Assembly on the 12 March, there is no certainty at all that there were any such sheep.

However, we did receive anecdotal reports that there could be, and I am duty-bound to follow those reports. My Department is pursuing this with the utmost vigour, but there is, as yet, no evidence that the sheep ever existed. We do have to consider the possibility that this suggestion is simply wrong.

However, I would appeal to anyone who has any information to come forward with it. Until we know the full circumstances, we cannot be assured that foot-and-mouth disease has been beaten. In the meantime, the biggest single threat is the possibility of the virus getting past the farm gate to susceptible animals, so all farmers must remain vigilant and make sure that they maintain their "fortress farm" procedures.

Mr Fee: I thank the Minister for the intense attention that she has given to this problem and for her selfless and tireless efforts over recent weeks. They have been appreciated in the House and elsewhere.

I will preface my question by saying that everybody here — and in my case, both literally and metaphorically

— will stand shoulder to shoulder with her to beat the disease. The entire country is looking anxiously at what is happening in Meigh, and the first major breakthrough will come when we can ease the restrictions in that area of south Armagh. When does the Minister think she will be able to introduce some easements there?

4.00 pm

Ms Rodgers: I thank Mr Fee for his remarks. I recognise that Meigh is a key area. Provided that there are no further cases in that area, the inner three-kilometre protection zone will be removed on 22 March. If the area continues clear, the 10-kilometre surveillance zone will be removed on 6 April. At that stage, Meigh will be completely clear. The removal of the three-kilometre zone will mean that animal movements can be resumed, but only under licence from the Department, as currently applies to the rest of Northern Ireland.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The time for questions is up. We must move to — *[Interruption]*.

Mr Wells: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I must again express concern at the length of time that some Ministers took to answer questions during these three sessions of Question Time. The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure took 14 minutes to answer the first question, including supplementaries. Ministers are looking at the clock and — I suspect — some are deliberately expanding their answers to ensure that the more difficult questions further down the list are not reached. It is your role, as Deputy Speaker, to intervene when a Minister is clearly over-egging the pudding in his or her answers. You should step in and say “Enough is enough. Let us move on to the next question.”

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Wells, if you had been in the Chamber for all of Question Time, you would know that I brought the matter of the duration of questions and answers to the attention of Members and Ministers.

The time is up.

INLAND FISHERIES

The Chairperson of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee (Mr O'Neill): I beg to move

That this Assembly approves the report of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee on inland fisheries in Northern Ireland and calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to implement the Committee's recommendations at the earliest opportunity.

It may be helpful to Members if I begin with an outline of the background to the report. The Committee embarked on its first major inquiry into the subject of inland fishing in Northern Ireland on 20 January 2000, which is some time ago. The terms of reference were as follows:

“To examine existing policies in Northern Ireland concerning the management and conservation of salmon, trout, eels and freshwater fish”

and

“To report to the Assembly, making recommendations to the Department and/or others on actions which would improve inland fisheries in Northern Ireland.”

The Committee agreed that the inquiry should take particular account of the need to maintain and enhance, where appropriate, biodiversity and the need to maximise the economic, social and recreational benefits derived from salmon and freshwater fisheries. We had to take account of the interests of local communities, local factors and traditions and the need for the management of fisheries to be on a fully sustainable basis.

The inquiry also considered other factors that may affect the development and sustainability of inland fisheries such as planning policy in respect of industrial and housing development along river corridors and lake source, drainage, pollution and tourism.

Finally, the Committee examined the institutional arrangements for the regulation and management of inland fisheries, including the role of the public sector and the need to involve all interested parties.

(Madam Deputy Speaker [Ms Morrice] in the Chair)

The Committee received 76 written submissions from a variety of groups and individuals. Some of them were considerable, bulky submissions. To say the Committee was overwhelmed is an understatement. Following these submissions, the Committee went on to hold 32 oral evidence sessions, which encompassed individuals, large and small angling clubs, Government Departments, organisations with direct and indirect responsibility for inland fishing and related areas and a number of non-governmental organisations.

During the course of our inquiry, the Committee was gravely concerned to discover that Northern Ireland's fish population had declined so dramatically in recent years. It is clear to us that much of the blame for this deterioration can be attributed to man's abuse and

neglect for his environment. It was brought to our attention in particular that the Atlantic salmon is in danger of becoming extinct unless urgent action is taken.

In this regard, commercial netting has been identified as a major contributor to the decline of the salmon population in Northern Ireland's rivers. Pollution incidents are simply far too frequent and are having devastating effects on fish stocks and habitat quality. As I have indicated before to the Assembly, this current year appears to us to be the worst record for pollution incidents. In other words, the situation is deteriorating even as we sit and deliberate on the matter.

There is an urgent need for action on sewerage treatments works, which have already been identified as causing pollution problems. Improvements to infrastructure must be given a much higher priority in the Water Service's capital investment programme.

The Committee also felt strongly that the removal of Crown immunity for the Water Service should be considered. Incidentally, the Public Accounts Committee also referred to this issue in its recent report on the control of river pollution in Northern Ireland.

Farming related pollution is also a serious problem. While Members agreed that we do not wish the agricultural sector to feel that there is any more on its plate at present, there is strong evidence that good farm management is a major factor in preventing river pollution. It is critical that farmers are provided with sound, well targeted advice, that effective farm pollution regulations are in place and that existing pollution control legislation is strictly enforced.

Our inquiry also underlined the importance to the Northern Ireland economy of being able to offer an attractive, recreational fishing product to the tourist industry. It is a geographical fact that we have some of the best rivers on the island. Currently fishermen wish to go to the West of Ireland, where they have made great inroads in improving the river fishing habitats and stocking levels. Indeed, we were given evidence to the effect that each salmon caught was worth £700 to the local economic community.

We can do the same. What a great opportunity this would be for the tourist industry. We argue, therefore, that every effort should be being made to promote opportunities for game and coarse angling, opportunities that should be offered to as wide an international audience as possible.

The Committee considered other issues: the impact that drainage schemes, weirs and artificial sluice gates had on the physical habitat of inland fisheries; the impact of hydroelectric schemes on migratory fish; the complexity of the current licence and permit scheme; and the financing and composition of the Fisheries Conservancy Board. In total, the Committee's report sets out 67 recommendations. We consider their implementation to be essential to the conservation of inland fisheries and the protection of fish.

The Committee accepts that the responsibility for the delivery of many of the recommendations in the report does not fall directly on the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. The Department of the Environment, the Department for Regional Development, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment all have a part to play in delivering a vibrant and sustainable system of inland fisheries in Northern Ireland within the terms of the report, and the Committee urges the Minister to engage with his Executive Colleagues to ensure that their Departments give the highest priority to it. I also urge the Chairpersons of the relevant Committees to take forward the issues that we have raised with their Departments. I have spoken to the Chairpersons involved and was encouraged by their interest and positive response.

To say that the angling fraternity has welcomed the Committee's report is like a fisherman saying that the one that got away was on the small side. The enthusiasm with which it has been greeted has been staggering. I am not simply making this point to bring attention and glory to the work of the Committee. However, the protection and enhancement of Northern Ireland's inland fisheries is an issue that has been neglected for too long, despite many people's deep and passionate interest in the subject. The angling community is like the watchdog of the environment. It amazed the Committee that more attention has not been paid to concerns of its members in the past.

Perhaps this is one of the great benefits of devolution and in particular our brand of devolution — accessibility to the public. From the outset we were encouraged by the level of involvement in the inquiry. I thank all those organisations and individuals who produced written or oral evidence. Their input gave us vital food for thought. I also pay thanks to the staff who serviced the Committee. They were a dedicated and hard-working bunch of people who were of great help and support to us. In particular, I place on record our deep appreciation and thanks to the current Committee Clerk and to her predecessor.

As Chairperson, I also pay tribute to the hard work of my Committee Colleagues in bringing forward the report. It has been a great example of people working together for something which is clearly in all our interests and for the common good. I know that other Committee members will not object if I single out the Member for South Antrim, Mr Jim Wilson. His expertise and guidance on the subject was invaluable to everyone throughout the inquiry.

I commend the report to the Assembly and invite Members to support the motion.

4.15 pm

The Deputy Chairperson of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee (Mrs Nelis): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion and the comprehensive recommendations contained in the report of the inquiry into inland fisheries. As the Chairperson

has already done, I pay tribute to the Committee Clerks, the researchers and to all who gave evidence to the inquiry.

In total, our report has made 67 recommendations, each important in its own right. However, if our work and recommendations are to address the crisis in inland fisheries, then those recommendations that call for the management and development functions of fisheries to be constituted in a new single fisheries body must be addressed as a priority by the Minister and the Department. This report must not be left on the shelf to gather dust like its predecessor.

The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure has indicated that it intends to undertake a review of the Fisheries Conservancy Board. Recommendation 61 of the inquiry report states

“a sub-committee comprising membership of the Fisheries Conservancy Board and the Loughs Agency should be established to review the harmonisation of responsibilities”.

Harmonisation involving the various agencies and cross-border bodies is, of course, essential, but it will not produce the fundamental change needed to resolve the current problems of the fishing industry.

The suggestion of a new body appeared in 56% of the submissions to the inquiry — a sufficient indication that many of those giving evidence have little faith in the major old bodies. The submissions from groups and individuals detailed the advantages that would arise from such a fundamental undertaking. Those who subscribed to the call for a new body did so for sound, pragmatic reasons as well as the expectation that all Government agencies should adhere to the principle of accountability and democratic practices.

The present system of management in fisheries is unnecessarily complex and fragmented. It involves four Government Departments: the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Department of the Environment and the Department for Regional Development. In addition, there are the geographically-based organisations — the Fisheries Conservancy Board, the Loughs Agency, the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission, as well as the Environment and Heritage Service and the sub-bodies of the Rivers Agency and the Drainage Division. That makes some nine organisations of varying status with responsibility for inland fisheries and waterways.

The system is probably unique in the Western World — a top-heavy and bureaucratic oversubscription of bodies which, on face value, appear to be operating on the principle that the left arm need not know what the right arm is doing. If the angling fraternity is confused by so many layers of bureaucracy, one can imagine how difficult it was for members during the inquiry to determine and understand such complicated management arrangements.

The facts of how that management system carried out its duties to protect and develop the fishing estate are contained in our report. They make stark reading. But the report should be read not only in terms of addressing the crisis but as an exposé of undemocratic principles, absentee Government and jet-set Ministers who seemingly left it to the old boy network to run the show.

“Running the show” has almost decimated the fishing estate. The fish population has declined so dramatically that some rivers are only stocked with what anglers describe as “sharpening stones”. The indigenous species of brown trout, peculiar to certain rivers, is almost extinct. The Atlantic salmon is an endangered species. The complexities of the licensing system have contributed to the decline in angling tourism.

The report has been researched thoroughly. It contains evidence on river pollution, water quality, water abstraction, hydroelectric schemes, exemptions, fish farming and other issues of serious concern to the fishing estate and the environment. The report notes the failure of the Fisheries Conservancy Board to use its existing powers to halt the serious decline in fish stocks. There is a feeling among anglers who gave evidence that commercial interests have taken precedence over the future protection and preservation of the fishing industry.

Whatever the reasons for that, one thing is certain: there is a crisis that is producing dead fish, polluted rivers and lakes, toxins in the waters, ineffective legislation, demoralisation among anglers and, in some instances, muzzling of officials. That crisis is exemplified by the statistics and evidence that were given to the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee’s inquiry. Some of the statistics are alarming. Between April and November last year 5,000 salmon entered the Lower Bann. In 1961 — 40 years ago — over 104,000 salmon entered that river. Why is that decline in fish stocks continuing, when there are nine organisations and agencies in operation? Why are the people who try to warn others about the situation victimised and demonised? Those questions will only be answered by a root-and-branch overhaul of the existing management structures.

It is common and economic sense to have a single fisheries body operating in the North with strong cross-border linkages to the regional bodies in the South. The present unyielding bureaucratic system is not working and is not cost-effective. The setting up of a new body would, in the long term, not only begin the process of resolving the problems identified in the report, but also put the fishing estate and industry on a sound economic footing. An enhanced Fisheries Conservancy Board is a non-starter. This report deserves better than that.

Mr J Wilson: I thank the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee Chairperson for his kind words. In anticipation of this report, a journalist who is well known in the angling fraternity said

"These recommendations have taken much longer to produce than anyone anticipated, but we are hoping for major changes in policies after thirty years of decline. Our waterways cannot withstand another three decades of pollution, damage and abstraction, nor policies which favoured industry and commerce over the environment."

Those are telling words.

When the inquiry began, some Members knew that it would lead the Committee to examine matters way beyond the pleasurable sport and pastime of catching a fish with rod and line. The report runs to five volumes. It examines how mismanagement by the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland during the years of direct rule contributed to a decline in angling in Northern Ireland and how silage effluent, pig slurry and heavy and unnecessary dosages of phosphates on grassland contaminated Northern Ireland's streams, rivers and lakes.

The report examines how drainage schemes right across the Province left our rivers' nursery upland habitat looking like canals. This was probably the greatest of all bad deeds. It also examines how mismanagement by the Department of the Environment led to pollution of our waterways by bad planning practice in river corridors and lake and lough shores, by permitting development to take place when it was fully aware that sewage treatment works were designed for much smaller populations, and by permitting industrial establishments to discharge toxic waste into drains, streams and waterways with ineffective monitoring procedures in place.

It examines how the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, over recent years, managed to put itself light years behind Bord Fáilte in promoting angling as a major leisure pursuit and contributor to local economies. It examined how water abstraction, with questionable practices at hydro stations, drained rivers almost dry to the point where the natural process of fish moving upstream to breed was not possible. When a few fish did get upstream their smolts were often crushed to a pulp at the same hydros on their way back down to the sea.

The report examines the relationship between the Fisheries Conservancy Board and its officers on the ground and raises a big question mark over the management practices of that body. It also examines other important issues which will be touched upon by my Colleagues.

I would like to refer briefly to the Black Report, which was the last report of a committee of inquiry into angling in Northern Ireland. It was presented to the then Secretary of State, Humphrey Atkins, on 23 March 1981. It had 65 pages, only 43 recommendations and contained a minority report. The committee had been set up by Roy Mason MP. A civil servant attached to that committee was pulled into an office before the work got under way and told "Here is what we want to come out of this when it is finished." So much for the Black Report.

I would like to look briefly to the future. Minister McGimpsey would be right to say that he and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure cannot put all the wrongs right. They cannot; they will need the co-operation of the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to keep the Northern Ireland Tourist Board focused on catching up with Bord Fáilte.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board recently announced, with much trumpeting, a new web site, and it was not long before I was scrolling through it. With my knowledge of County Fermanagh and the angling pursuits there, I wondered if it would mention "my other office" (as my wife calls it) — the Mayfly Inn in Kesh. It is a very well-known drinking and eating house where anglers gather from all over Europe, and further afield, for information and to meet old friends.

I know the phone number of the Mayfly Inn by heart. When you log on to the Northern Ireland Tourist Board site and bring up the Mayfly Inn it states "Main Street, Kesh, Enniskillen, County Fermanagh". That is miles away. It then gives a phone number. If you ring that number you will find that you get through to the Mayflower Chinese Restaurant in Portrush. That is the new site.

4.30 pm

It goes on to give a description of the Mayfly Inn, and history will show that the Mayfly Inn got its name from the mayfly — if you see the connection. The description of the Mayfly Inn on the site is actually a description of the mayfly. It goes on to tell you where you can find this mayfly all over the Republic of Ireland — this is the Northern Ireland Tourist Board site. I did not search it any further.

The Minister will need the co-operation of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to introduce good farmyard management practices and give encouragement — and perhaps financial support — to farmers who apply fertilisers that do not turn our large lakes into cesspits, such as Lough Neagh. Unfortunately, it looks as if Lough Erne could go the same way.

He will need the co-operation of the Minister of the Environment to ensure that development proposals are not rubber-stamped to proceed willy-nilly where sewage treatment works are known to have been under stress for some time. He will also need the co-operation of the Minister for Regional Development to ensure that sewage treatment works, such as the one in my home town of Ballyclare, are not polluting the rivers.

I doubt whether it is raining outside at the moment. However, if it were raining heavily then in my home town, upstream of the sewage works on the Six Mile Water, a large pipe would be passing items into the river because the treatment works cannot cope with storm water mixed with sewage. I have stood there and watched identifiable personal hygiene, bathroom and

household items pass into the river before they even get near the sewage treatment works. That is what is happening. I am not saying that it is happening right now as I stand here because it is probably not raining, but if it were raining that is what would be happening. Despite that, however, development goes on apace in Ballyclare, as it does in other small towns.

This report has been a personal milestone in my life. Along with other campaigners and correspondents to newspapers and angling magazines, we have manfully tried to bring the destruction of angling to the attention of Northern Ireland Office Ministers and civil servants, making suggestions regarding the improvement of the environment as it affected our rivers and waterways.

I must emphasise that I am talking pre-devolution, because I do believe that things have changed. But pre-devolution they did not listen. Indeed, a well known senior politician once described one of these campaigners as a “b...” nuisance because he was trying to bring these matters to the attention of politicians and the public.

I know that the Minister will take care to ensure that the fate that befell the Black Report all those years ago will not befall this report. But he will need the support of his ministerial Colleagues and all the Members of this Assembly. I believe that all our Ministers now know what has to be done.

I encourage all Members to read this report carefully. It is not just about the future of angling; it is about a starting point to address the neglect of the environment that has occurred for too many years. I support the motion.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am concerned about the time that we have left. Quite a number of Members wish to contribute, so I suggest that they try to limit their contributions to five minutes. But that is only a guideline. I may have to be slightly stricter about the time limit after the first round of contributions.

Mr Shannon: I welcome the Committee's recommendations, and I would like to concentrate on the tourism industry, the potential of which must be realised.

Northern Ireland has a large tourism industry, and we have an abundance of stunning and environmentally significant sites. The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) has made a commendable job of marketing certain areas of Northern Ireland, such as Fermanagh and the north Antrim coast. Those areas attract the lion's share of tourists and enjoy the financial benefits of that tourism. However, more recently, the Board has taken a blinkered approach to the development of tourism in other areas, such as Strangford Lough, where there is game and deep sea angling. Put-and-take fisheries dot the Strangford landscape, but there is a perception that the Northern Ireland Tourist Board is either unwilling or unable to take the resolute action required to maximise the huge potential of such a tourist gold mine.

More than 120,000 visitors arrive in the Republic of Ireland each year with the specific goal of spending their holiday fishing, and that is worth tens of millions of pounds to the Republic's economy. However, there has been no real focus on developing the angling sector in Northern Ireland and realising its potential. Many of the anglers who visit the Republic are from Northern Ireland, and I believe that they go because, apart from Lough Erne, no area of Northern Ireland has been the subject of a NITB marketing campaign. As a direct result of that lack of interest, even people who live here are not fully aware of the opportunities in Northern Ireland. That potential can be realised, provided that the will and commitment is there. Only 8,000 fishing permits were issued last year in Northern Ireland. Why do we fare so badly compared with the Republic of Ireland? How can we raise the profile of fishing in Northern Ireland? That is the object of the recommendations.

We must have money from the Government and from Europe to restore and rehabilitate streams and rivers. There must be grants for work to extend the angling sector and incentives for those who wish to move into that sector. There are people who are willing to make things happen, a prime example being the Ards and Down Salmonid Enhancement Association project, representatives of which addressed the Committee. Members will forgive me for promoting that project, which could create 260 jobs and a turnover of £6 million, making it the biggest fishing project in the United Kingdom. That is the kind of project that is waiting to be realised, provided that the tourist board and others grasp the nettle.

It is essential that plans, targets and timescales be put in place and enforced. The Northern Ireland Tourist Board has shown that it is more than capable of marketing Northern Ireland as a tourist destination. If the board really wants to, it can make a success story of angling in the Province. We have the raw materials, the locations and the people to make it work.

In the past, the tourist board has not delivered on the issue, but I am sure that our goal is attainable. It is time for that potential to be realised. Customers are knocking at our door, looking for exciting fishing locations. We could all benefit from the energetic promotion of the sector by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and the creation of spin-off jobs in restaurants, cafes, boat rentals, bed and breakfast accommodation and hotels. With total commitment from the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, we can make angling in Northern Ireland a success story and bring benefits to everyone.

Mr McCarthy: I am delighted and privileged to have been part of this critical inquiry. For years, fishermen and the angling fraternity have faced very serious problems. As a result of this inquiry nothing less than a root-and-branch overhaul is required, and required now.

Water pollution was the most important concern of the submissions made. On pages 36 and 37 of the report

of 22 February 2001 it is quite clearly shown that 80% of people coming to our inquiry said that quality of water was, in every aspect, the biggest problem. We, as a Committee and now through the Assembly, therefore have a bounden duty to rectify the wrongs of many years.

I am delighted to see the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure present. I know that he will be as determined as the rest of us to put this report into action at an early date.

Water pollution comes about by various means. Perhaps the most common reason is plain and simple carelessness, or thoughtlessness, by some people. There are also instances of chemical pollution from industrial discharges and organic pollution from agricultural and sewerage sources. Undoubtedly pollution of our waterways by sewage provoked the most strongly worded comments from those who gave oral and written submissions. They mentioned the frequency of sewage incidents, lack of policing, the inability or unwillingness to find culprits and prosecute, and the unpleasant visual impact of raw sewage floating around in our waters. A further bone of contention was the low penalties for polluters. The Crown immunity from prosecution for sewage pollution was a thorn in the flesh of many people.

Changes have simply got to be made. In many cases the Department for Regional Development — the Water Service — has got off scot-free, despite being responsible for very serious sewage spills. That is wrong. Every polluter, whether big or small, must be punished.

It is not only our waterways that stink. Management, over the years, has a lot to answer for. The Committee, when listening to those people who made oral submissions, had enormous sympathy with their plight in relation to reducing the incidence of pollution and getting those responsible into court and sufficiently punished for their crimes. Sympathy must go to the bailiffs, who did not, on many occasions, get the support they deserved. One can only imagine the anger and frustration of the fishing and angling fraternity after working hard to provide a good, healthy stock of fish species, only to discover the whole lot wiped out in a single incident of careless pollution. The polluter, if found, will receive little or no punishment.

We have a duty to rectify this anomaly without delay. The Committee has put forward 11 recommendations to eradicate water pollution. They can be found on pages 16 and 17 of the report. Many are plain common sense. One or two will take courage and determination by the Assembly, but the Committee will insist that they be carried out. As a Committee member, I was astounded at what was allowed to go on for years. We have the first opportunity for 30 years to put things right. We cannot — we will not — negate our responsibilities. Let our rivers, lakes, loughs — all our waterways — be the best in Europe. The Chairman of the Committee has charted

the way forward through this report. I hope Members of the Assembly will support it today.

4.45 pm

Mr Agnew: The first thing I want to do is congratulate the Chairman of the Committee, Mr Eamon O'Neill, for the manner in which he chaired the sessions. Many of them were lengthy and tiring, and he showed tremendous stamina. His attitude never changed; he was a very patient individual and always displayed that sense of humour that people in Northern Ireland are noted for.

I also want to thank the past and present Committee Clerks and their staff, as they were always accommodating, and their work was tremendous. I would also like to mention and thank my old friend and colleague Mr Jim Wilson for his input — I think we all realise just how fishy a character Jim really is.

As someone who is not interested in angling — it would not be my sport — I was fascinated by some of the things we learned. When we looked at some of the evidence all of the ingredients for a James Bond movie were there. There were threats and intimidation; we had reports of people diving into other people's filing cabinets to nick files. All of this was going on, and it made the Committee sessions absolutely fascinating and interesting. It was worthwhile, but it was good fun too.

The serious side is that there are many things wrong with the angling industry, and they need to be addressed. This is a positive attempt to resolve many of those difficulties. As someone who is anti-Belfast Agreement I have to say that the work of this Committee embraced all the good aspects of those who are pro-devolution. If all things were equal and working well within the Assembly, that is the sort of thing we would expect. This is an excellent report; the Committee worked well and produced a report that needs to be acted upon.

I know that others will discuss things such as the hydro-electric schemes. That fascinated me, but I do not want to steal someone else's thunder. That is where much of the corruption seemed to exist, and I was interested in some of the names mentioned, because I knew them from the construction industry. When I heard a particular person being mentioned as someone who was corrupt and taking the wee brown envelopes — I have not mentioned his name, Madam Deputy Speaker — I said that I knew him from another era and could believe it.

In the time I have left I would like to raise the issue of pollution. We are told that pollution comes from many sources, those quoted being agriculture and sewage. One of the new words we learned in the Committee — and I have to keep saying it to remember it — is eutrophication. That is a new word for Members, and I am still not too sure what it means, but it is a sort of a scum that appears on places like the Six Mile Water after Jim Wilson fishes it. We have all these problems

with pollution, and I hope that the recommendations deal with them.

One of the simple things that could be implemented would be for the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to offer free soil testing to farmers with free advice following the sample results. A farming colleague of mine here in the Province advised me of this. Other schemes would be useful, but this measure would be simple and easy to administer. I am told that it would be cost effective in the long run. There would also be a place for a voluntary management and enhancement scheme in high-risk areas with proper levels of subsidy being paid. In the long term everyone would benefit. Phosphate fertiliser is an expensive commodity, but if farmers could cut their usage without yield penalties, they would gain financially. This is a win-win situation that will be achieved only by an approach that offers incentives and does not impose penalties. Finally, I welcome the recommendation that the Department should carry out a study into the removal of crown immunity when other Government Departments cause pollution.

My time is up, but I want to make a couple of points on physical habitat. Before new training schemes commence, an environmental impact study should be carried out so that cognisance can be taken of fishery requirements. It has long been recognised that many drainage schemes have created poor physical habitat. There is a need to embrace and promote the concept of river corridors by ensuring that fishery interests are consulted in the planning process. In this way, physical obstacles to fish migration, such as weirs and artificial sluice gates, will be properly assessed.

This is a comprehensive report and one that I am pleased and proud to have been associated with. I commend it to the Assembly.

Mr Davis: In supporting the motion, I register my satisfaction that we in this locally elected Assembly are dealing with an issue of importance to local people, the local environment and the local economy. It has been often said that the measure of the Assembly's ability will be in how we address the so-called bread-and-butter issues. I am pleased that this afternoon we are addressing one of those bread-and-butter issues in a positive manner. The level of cross-party agreement shows that consensus politics can work in Northern Ireland. The primary benefit of devolution — of accountable democracy — is that we can effect change in Northern Ireland. The Committee system, which allows the views of experts and other interested parties to be fed into our considerations, will help that change to be informed.

As with all other members of the Committee, I have an interest in the report as a whole. However, given the time limitations, I will concentrate primarily on the area which has interested me most in our deliberations — biodiversity. Anyone with an interest in the environment

has an interest in biodiversity, and more than one third of the groups and individuals who made submissions to us specifically addressed the topic. In writing our report, we distilled 34 issues into seven broad themes. "Biodiversity and fish predators" is one of those seven themes and accounts for 11 of our 67 recommendations.

The term "biodiversity" is often misunderstood. Simply because it includes the word "diversity" it is often taken to mean a process whereby the countryside is opened up to every possible pursuit and our rivers filled with every kind of fish and aquatic biota. Nothing could be further from the truth. Biodiversity is not about turning the countryside into a Garden of Eden theme park. Rather, it is about conserving what we already have. It is about ensuring that our natural habitat and our long-introduced species, whether flora or fauna, survive in abundance for the enjoyment of future generations.

There is nothing more alien to biodiversity than filling our loughs with bucketloads of zebra mussels. Indeed, one of our recommendations is that full support be given to current initiatives to limit their spread. My Colleague, Jim Wilson, has been assiduous in tackling the problems caused by zebra mussels, which upset the natural balance of our inland waters. The knock-on effect on long-established species has the potential to be devastating. I trust that if current initiatives to limit their spread prove unsatisfactory the Minister will consider other initiatives. It should always be remembered that once a species has been introduced, it is more or less impossible to remove.

We make a number of recommendations with regard to fish populations and the need to protect, or enhance, their habitats. In terms of biodiversity, the most important fish to Northern Ireland are undoubtedly the Lough Melvin brown trout and the Lough Neagh and Lough Erne pollan.

It is essential that action be taken to improve the habitats of these populations. Atlantic salmon is also considered to be of biodiversity interest. Northern Ireland is a renowned destination for overseas anglers. We have good fishing and a good reputation for unspoilt waters. However, we should remember that, compared with the inland fisheries of continental Europe and Great Britain, we are relatively species poor. This means, of course, that the introduction of new species can have a relatively larger negative impact on habitats.

This was highlighted by the argument surrounding the Minister's decision to allow the introduction of carp for angling. Understandably, there was a considerable level of concern among the local angling community about this decision. Anglers were worried that the carp would have a damaging impact on those species that we think of as indigenous. I was one of a number of members who tabled questions on that issue.

In endorsing the recommendations of our report on the introduction of new fish species, I commend the Minister for weighing his decision with safeguards in line with the recommendations — for example, only allowing carp into lakes which have no fishery value or a very low fishery value; adequate screening to prevent escapes; and each new request for introduction to be considered on a case-by-case basis. I am pleased by the Minister's assurance that all fish will be checked to ensure that they come from disease-free stock.

Mr McMenamin: May I start by saying that prior to the inland fisheries inquiry my knowledge of fishing was limited, but I can put my hand on my heart and say that that is certainly not the case now. For several months the Committee has assessed written submissions and has listened to oral presentations from a variety of organisations across Northern Ireland. I can now say that I have an extensive knowledge of the concerns and issues faced by our anglers throughout the island of Ireland.

I would like to comment on hydroelectric schemes. I will explain briefly how a typical hydroelectric scheme works. First, the natural river flows into a weir, where the water is extracted. The water goes through a turbine at which a volume of water falls approximately 12 feet. It then turns a rotor that makes the turbines drive a generator or an alternator to provide power.

Submissions from angling groups expressed fears that extracting too much water from our rivers to power these turbines would prevent fish from moving upstream and downstream. It would also prevent them from spawning. If the fish did make it upstream, on their return the turbine blades would kill juvenile and spent fish. A turbine operator who gave a presentation to the Committee argued that the installation of smolt screens would deter smolts from entering the turbine blades. He also maintained that returning salmon were denied access to the turbines, running rotors, by the use of electric fish barriers.

The Committee found that while hydroelectric schemes are to be welcomed on renewable energy grounds, they can have a serious negative effect on migratory fish and they can lead to direct mortality because fish pass through the turbine blades. Operators could extract up to 80% of the water of a river, and this would have a clear impact on the ecosystem and fish life. In dry periods there is evidence of up to 100% abstraction, which does not bear thinking about.

Our report highlighted several recommendations. Legislation must be introduced to ensure that abstraction is controlled so that the main river always has a residual flow sufficient to ensure the unimpeded movement of migratory fish both upstream and downstream. Abstraction based on agreed rates of flow should be addressed on a case-by-case basis. Every abstraction point should have a flow meter controlling the amount of water abstracted. Levels should be set at a minimum of 50% of the river

flow over weirs and at all water heights. Amendments to legislation aimed at preventing fish from getting into abstraction systems whether for potable water, hydroelectric or fish farm purposes, should follow the best aspects of equivalent legislation elsewhere.

5.00 pm

Where damage to fish occurs, hydroelectric operators must be required by law to contribute to restoration programmes. Recommendation 37 in the report states

"The impact of existing hydro-electric schemes on fish passage and mortality should be determined by the collection of appropriate quantitative, objective data and the appropriate action taken to ensure safe fish passage and decrease mortality if required."

Moreover, the issue of exemptions to hydroelectric operators and fish farms must be carefully monitored and exemptions should be issued through any new fish bodies established.

Any identified significant impacts of existing hydro-electric schemes on fish passage and mortality should be addressed and mitigated as a matter of high priority. Random inspections should be carried out, with severe penalties for non-compliance. Any proposals for new electric schemes should be required to undergo a thorough and independent environmental impact assessment, prior to any approvals being granted. It is imperative that the impact of schemes on fish populations be assessed as a matter of urgency.

I compliment the Chairman of the Committee and the staff who worked tirelessly to help the Committee compile the report. As a Member for West Tyrone, and a native of Strabane, I will quote from a submission of June 2000 that referred to angling tourism:

"If we are ever going to develop angling tourism, we need to look at areas like Strabane. Strabane could be another Ballina if we could get this right. There is great potential there to attract tourist anglers because they probably have some of the greatest fishing in Northern Ireland or, indeed, Ireland. Thousands of tourists go to Ballina, and they are spending millions of pounds."

We need to look at that and develop it here.

I support the motion.

Mr Hilditch: I also support the motion.

At the outset, I join others in paying tribute to the efforts of the Committee and support staff for their outstanding and sterling endeavours in getting the report to this stage.

It is just over a year since the inquiry was announced, and I never thought that the issue would generate the level of interest shown. With 76 written and 32 oral submissions, I assure the House that every aspect of inland fishing has been fully explored and scrutinised. Once we scratched below the surface, it was plain that, from an early stage, we were dealing with an issue of immense passion. That was clearly conveyed time and time again during evidence sessions.

However, that is all in the past. We have identified a section of the Northern Irish economy that includes leisure and tourism that is in serious decline, a decline that must be arrested immediately. To that end, the inquiry has come up with 67 key recommendations. I appeal to the various Departments with responsibility for work to begin immediately in preparation for the implementation of those recommendations if we are serious about reclaiming lost ground.

During the inquiry, seven themes cropped up time and again as the evidence was gathered. I want to comment on biodiversity and its associated problems with inland fishing. I draw Members' attention to a couple of recommendations.

First, the potential impact of salmon farming on natural wild salmon and sea trout populations, with regard to escapees and the spread of parasites — notably sea lice — is a matter of serious concern. The maintenance and enhancement of wild salmon and sea trout populations should take preference over the expansion of salmon farming operations. It is interesting to note that 34% of written submissions specifically wanted to see that matter addressed.

One example, recently highlighted in the press, was a report on the effect of sea lice on sea trout stocks that linked infestations with salmon aquaculture and farming. That particular report revealed that sea trout stocks have continued to decline with the development of aquaculture in all the major bays in the western seaboard.

Between 1974 and 1999, while tonnage of farmed salmon appeared to have rocketed, the number of trout caught by anglers at one location had dropped from 12,000 to fewer than 2,000.

The most important fish population in Northern Ireland for biodiversity has already been mentioned — the brown trout. Brown trout populate Lough Melvin, as do the sonaghan and gillaroo trout. Pollan inhabit Lough Neagh and Lough Erne.

Having studied the report and the detail of the submissions I share the view that there are concerns about the water quality status at all three locations. In addition to the concerns about the Arctic charr at Lough Melvin and Ballyarton, it is imperative that consideration be given to recommendations three to eight immediately in order to protect the natural stocks of our native species as well as the salmon and sea trout.

Attention should be paid in particular to recommendation seven that deals with the introduction of new species. There is no doubt that requests to introduce new species to Northern Ireland should continue to be examined on a case-by-case basis, and movement restrictions should be strictly adhered to. New fish species should never be permitted in open or closed waters where there

is a significant risk of escape. The introduction of new species in fish farming should be resisted.

The other recommendations deal with two areas of biodiversity that are dealt with extensively in the submissions. The problem with zebra mussels is unpredictable. They can cause damage when they are introduced as they have an impact on native species and other aspects of the freshwater environment. Full support should be given to the current initiatives to limit the spread of zebra mussels and aqua-biota that might impact on the freshwater habitat or biodiversity of inland waters.

Cormorants are still a problem. Not surprisingly, this complex issue was raised in 28% of submissions, so there is a fair level of concern about it. Various reports and studies over a period of years have looked at different ways of managing and controlling the damage these birds do to inland fisheries. However, none of the management issues listed in the report are feasible for fisheries that operate by naturally reproducing fish populations in natural habitats.

Studies of similar problems in other northern European countries should be researched, and, in line with recommendations 10 and 11, where best practice can be identified elsewhere it should be implemented in consultation with the Environment and Heritage Service as a matter of priority to reduce the problem.

The inquiry has adhered to its terms of reference well and has taken into account the need to maintain and, where appropriate, enhance biodiversity. The inquiry also considered the need to maximise the economic, social and recreational benefits derived from salmon and freshwater fisheries and the need for the management of fisheries to be on a fully sustainable basis.

I support the motion.

Mr M Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion, and I welcome the report. I congratulate the Committee on producing a comprehensive report, comprising five volumes and containing 67 recommendations. The recommendations were based on the evidence given by the fishing fraternity, angling clubs, individuals, farmers, business people, the Government and statutory agencies.

If we did not already know how serious the situation had become for inland fisheries then this report should alert us to the state of the rivers and lakes, the quality of the water, the decline in fishing stock and the diminishing angling-tourism industry. The evidence given during the enquiry is alarming. Our rivers have been destroyed and, as the report states, the destruction can be attributed to man's abuse and neglect of the environment.

Those of us who watched the recent BBC television programme, by Julian Pettifer, were shocked about the effect fish farming is having on wild salmon stocks. The programme painted a picture of collusion, greed, vested

interests and attempts to prevent the public from receiving information on the depletion of stock and other serious environmental concerns. The practices of some inland trout farms have implications for public health. We need to know the precise nature of such concerns.

Fish farming was an issue that occurred in 34% of submissions, and, according to the report, some strong views were expressed about the impact of discharges on water quality.

Most concerns ranged around the process of water abstraction and the potential for the entrapment of young salmonids. The current legislation to prevent such entrapment is inefficient, and recommendation 35 of the report highlighted a number of ways of addressing that serious problem. The suggestions included flow meters to control the amount of water abstracted and the setting of levels at a minimum of 50% of the river flow over weirs and at all water heights. It is particularly important that the Minister should take steps to introduce legislative amendments on these issues to ensure that we follow the best aspects of legislation elsewhere.

I pay tribute to all those involved in the inquiry: the Clerks to the Committee, the Chairperson and the other members. I include the Deputy Chairperson, my party colleague, who I know worked hard on the report, even if others refuse to acknowledge it. I support the motion.

Dr Adamson: I speak on behalf of the North Atlantic salmon. As a Committee, we were gravely concerned to discover that Northern Ireland's fish population had declined so dramatically in recent years. As the Chairperson and others have said, it was brought home to us that the Atlantic salmon in particular is in danger of becoming extinct unless urgent action is taken.

As a boy I was brought throughout the Highlands and Islands of Scotland by my grandfather, and I was introduced to the Gaelic language that is so much part of the Presbyterian tradition there. There I first heard the beautiful poem 'Song of Summer', published by Alexander Macdonald in 1751. In its original form it is one of the most beautiful poems written in Gaelic. In English it reads

"The swift slender salmon on the water is lively,
Leaping upside down, brisk, in the scaly white bellied shoals,
Finny, red-spotted, big-tailed, silvery lights clothing it,
With small freckles, glittering in colours;
And with its crooked jaws all ready,
It catches flies by stealth."

That is the fish that the ancient Irish thought was the source of knowledge, wisdom and power. Man, however, has changed the very nature of the salmon. Those that are raised in hatcheries have more aggressive feeding habits. They spend most of their time at the water surface looking for food, unlike the wild salmon that spend most of the time under cover in deep water. As a result, escaped hatchery-raised salmon consume most of the food that the wild salmon need to live, and, at the

same time, this aggressive feeding makes hatchery salmon more vulnerable to predators because they are near to the surface. Hatchery salmon usually has less genetic diversity than wild salmon. That leads to lower resistance to disease and other environmental hazards, so that they are easily infected with fish lice.

The Atlantic salmon is unique because, unlike the various species of Pacific salmon, it does not die after its first spawning, but returns year after year to its breeding places with a remarkably specific migratory instinct.

I have fished in the Puget Sound in the North Pacific Ocean with one of the finest local fishermen, George McShane, who is of Irish descent, though he does not hold a candle to Jim Wilson. One of the greatest sadnesses of his life, and that of the Indian tribal chief Douglas Luna, is that less than 2% of the wild salmon population of the Columbia river basin — including parts of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming and British Columbia — remains. Only one individual sockeye salmon returned to the Snake River in Idaho in 1994. Coho salmon has been declared extinct in the Snake River by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, as have 106 other salmon populations across the West Coast of America.

We must not allow that to happen in Northern Ireland. Our inquiry has identified commercial netting as a major contributor to the decline of the salmon population in Northern Ireland's rivers. The River Bush salmon project makes an outstanding contribution to research and the management of salmon stocks, and its continuation is a matter of priority. However, it remains important that angling interests are given due consideration when managing and marketing the River Bush.

5.15 pm

The recommendations arising from our inquiry into North Atlantic salmon are as follows: salmon net fisheries should be closed by buy-outs, and the Government should accept responsibility for initial capital investment; salmon conservation measures, including catch-and-release rules and bag limits should be considered for implementation, particularly for spring run fish; the salmon carcass tagging scheme should be implemented as a significant tool in the interests of conservation and the fight against poaching. In addition, the River Bush salmon project should be examined in relation to the management of salmon stocks and the impact of the Bush salmon and other indigenous brood stock; stocking programmes should only be implemented with the appropriate habitat assessment; and restoration, when it is necessary, should always use indigenous livestock.

I hope that the decline in the salmon population will unite environmentalists and fishers with industries which extract natural resources to reach a compromise that will save the wild salmon populations and the fishing industries that depend on the species' continued

health. Our inquiry has given us the knowledge that the salmon represents in ancient Irish lore. I hope that we will find the wisdom to implement it.

Mr A Maginness: I congratulate the Committee on its report to the Assembly. It has performed a great service to the subject of debate, inland fisheries, and highlighted the appalling state of some of our rivers and the sewage pollution which exists in certain areas. The report makes disturbing reading for anyone, because it relates to problems which affect the quality of life of many people throughout Northern Ireland. The issue also affects the quality of the service and the environment that we can offer tourists. That could have a very disturbing effect on our local economy, and particularly the economy of rural areas.

As Chairperson of the Regional Development Committee, I find the extent of sewage pollution within Northern Ireland most disturbing. I have often highlighted the poor state of Northern Ireland's water and sewerage infrastructure, as have my Committee colleagues. For at least three decades, the water and sewerage systems have been starved of proper funding. If we had had proper funding of these services, this might not have been such a disturbing report. For that reason I support this report's proper criticisms of Northern Ireland's Government Departments and, in particular, the Water Service — I am sure that my Committee colleagues share this opinion.

Whether or not we have proper infrastructure, there needs to be better policing by the Departments involved. They need to be more conscious of the problem of sewage pollution and the effect this has on our waterways and the tourist industry. It is important that Government Departments, particularly the Department for Regional Development and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, do their duty and deal with the problem of pollution.

European measures go some way towards dealing with the problem of treating water and waste water. I hope the Department for Regional Development can fully implement the relevant directive, which should be a top priority. If the Department does not act proactively we will be unable to stem the problem that affects our inland rivers and waterways.

As Chairperson of the Regional Development Committee, I will continue to support the demand for further investment in our water and sewerage infrastructure. The Assembly should press the Executive to accelerate their programme of renewal through the Programme for Government.

Mrs Carson: I welcome the inquiry into inland fisheries in Northern Ireland and congratulate the Committee on this excellent report. Some Members may wonder what relevance an inquiry into fishing has to our situation in Northern Ireland. First, this report clearly shows an urgent need for the people of Northern Ireland to have

control over their own environment. Secondly, it shows that Government Departments should be accountable for their actions. Thirdly, it shows that civil servants need local direction, something that has been lacking for the past 30 years, much to the detriment of all our lives here.

In the report's executive summary one sentence says it all:

"Much of the deterioration can be attributed to man's abuse and neglect of the environment."

This excellent report must not languish on a shelf or in somebody's cupboard, or be relegated to the long finger. It must be given an immediate timetable. The Departments directly concerned must work out a combined strategy, decide priorities and produce a programme that will show results. The summary of recommendations gives the Departments a working framework, and I urge that that work commence as soon as possible.

Of the 11 recommendations in the section dealing with pollution, nine are the direct responsibility of the Department of the Environment. They include the implementation of the European Water Framework and planning permission; I will not expand on those issues. What would we do without our weather? Not many people know that if we did not have a good wind blowing over Lough Neagh to disturb, aerate and oxygenate the water, it would become a polluted pond.

I want to touch on two issues concerning my constituency of Fermanagh and South Tyrone — zebra mussels and the Ballyshannon hydroelectric scheme. I have spoken in this Chamber before about zebra mussels. This is an infestation from outside our jurisdiction which the Department of Agriculture knew about; it knew where the infestation was emanating from. What did the Department do? It put a few leaflets and pamphlets in some guest houses and hotels. Who cared that boats and cruisers sailed in from the Shannon with zebra mussels clinging to the bottom of those boats and to their buoys and ropes? Was even one of the cruisers travelling from the Shannon system inspected? If not, why not?

I can draw a comparison with the present foot-and-mouth disease. The Republic of Ireland took immediate action against the disease on the land frontier. What happened in Northern Ireland? Did the Department of Agriculture take precautions on the roads? No. All traffic entering the Republic is disinfected at checkpoints. When coming back to Northern Ireland, there are no precautions. That is what happens with us — we do not look after ourselves. We must protect our environment.

The hydroelectric scheme at Ballyshannon in Donegal is a monument of folly. It was a memorial to the destruction of game fishing in Lough Erne. That same hydroelectric scheme has probably caused the demise of the common scoter from Lower Lough Erne. The Erne problems caused by the Ballyshannon hydroelectric

scheme have been known for years. But what was ever done to address them?

I recommend that these two problems be immediately put on the agenda for a North/South meeting, and I look forward to a speedy implementation of the solution to them in my constituency. I look forward to the Ministers concerned giving their support to the recommendations for actions which fall within their Departments' remits.

If the recommendations of this report are implemented quickly, I look forward to the return of leaping salmon in Lough Erne; hands not bloodied from zebra-mussel-covered buoy ropes; and islands and shorelines of the lower and upper Loughs Erne not fringed with pea-green algae. I look forward in the knowledge that Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly can ensure that appropriate and immediate actions will produce the desired results.

I support the motion.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McGimpsey): First, let me make it clear that I welcome this report on inland fisheries and thank the members of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee for the work they have done in filtering out the key issues from 76 written submissions and 32 oral presentations.

However, I want to state in the strongest possible terms that I have great disquiet about the credence which the Committee has given, perhaps unwittingly, to the comments of a few individuals during the process of taking evidence. I will return to that.

I will now deal with the substance of the report. Leaving aside the comments I have just made, there can be no doubt that the significant number of organisations and individuals who took the trouble to submit evidence to the Committee reflects a widespread interest in inland fisheries. The number and diversity of issues raised reflect the fact that we are dealing with a dynamic subject with many different facets which pose many challenges for fishery managers and policy makers.

With regard to the Department's overall response to the report, the key issues raised are largely what we had anticipated. On the substance of the report, the Assembly should be aware that only about half of the recommendations are solely within my area of responsibility. Some will require action by my Department working in conjunction with others, while a substantial number of other actions that are recommended fall completely outside my remit. I have not had an opportunity in the short time available since the report was published to seek the views of ministerial Colleagues on those matters.

Furthermore, action is already being taken on many of those recommendations which are my responsibility. Others relate to problem areas which have been recognised, but the levels of resources available are inadequate to address them.

I will now comment in further detail on some of the key issues and recommendations following the order in which they appear in the report. Paragraph 4 deals with biodiversity and fish predators. This Department actively supports and promotes the concept of biodiversity and sustainability through restrictions on fish movements and through encouraging the propagation and restocking of indigenous genetic strains into their native catchments, as happens under the Salmonid Enhancement Programme.

Another example is the work carried out at the Erne and Melvin hatchery, where the aim is to stock Lough Erne with genetically distinct Lough Erne trout reared at the hatchery.

5.30 pm

All fish farms must have a fish culture licence that indicates the species that may be farmed. The Department's policy is to refuse the cultivation of non-native species. However, applicants do have an independent route of appeal to the Water Appeals Commission in cases where the Department is not minded to grant an application. In fact, the Water Appeals Commission recently overruled the Department and granted a licence for American Brook trout — a non-native species — to a fish farm on the River Faughan.

I note that the Committee has some concern about my recent decision to allow the introduction of common carp. This decision was taken following detailed consultations with the Environment and Heritage Service. The Department undertook a technical and environmental analysis of the impact of carp before the decision was taken. Each application will be considered on a case by case basis following rigorous assessment. I do not believe that my decision is in conflict with the Committee's recommendations.

Predation by cormorants is a problem that must be addressed. Everyone is aware that cormorants are a protected species under EU and national legislation. Fishery owners can apply for a licence to cull cormorants. They also currently have the right to take action to prevent birds from attacking their fisheries providing that they can show that the birds were causing serious damage to the fishery and that the Department of the Environment is notified immediately.

Section five of the report deals with physical habitat, drainage issues and obstacles to migration. The Committee highlighted the need for habitat restoration to compensate for the negative effects of unsympathetic drainage works in the past. I am pleased to note that the Committee has recognised the important contribution that the salmonid enhancement programme has made to the restoration of fisheries habitat. As the Committee stated, this is a long-term approach, and the impact on fish populations will not be immediate. The report recommends that further EU funding should be sought to continue this work. This has already been done. In fact, the Department will

launch an angling development programme later this year which is funded by the new EU Peace II programme.

Drainage works are a matter for the Rivers Agency. Procedures on the ground have improved considerably following the major drainage schemes undertaken prior to the mid-1980s. There is now closer liaison between fisheries technical staff and Rivers Agency staff in relation to the requirement to protect fisheries. These procedures have been in place for the previous 14 years. Any review of the operation of sluice gates and flow management regimes is also a matter for the Rivers Agency. However, the agency has a statutory duty to protect fisheries in the execution of its works. There are other legitimate interests to accommodate, for example, farmers who might be at risk from flooding. It is not always possible to regulate flows at the optimum condition for fish migration.

Section six of the report deals with pollution. I note that water quality was the most frequently raised issue in the submissions. The Environment and Heritage Service of the Department of the Environment has overall responsibility for water quality and pollution issues. While none of the 11 recommendations in this section of the report fall under my remit, I, as Minister responsible for inland fisheries, emphasise that I support the Committee's comments. Again, I have not had an opportunity to discuss the issues with Colleagues. I will be interested to hear what they have to say, but I realise that many of the matters are complex.

Section seven of the report deals with other environmental impacts and is concerned mainly with fishery protection measures at water abstraction sites, including hydroelectric power schemes. The report rightly highlights the fact that current legislation is inadequate in its provision of regulatory controls for water abstraction. This matter concerns more than one Department. The Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 makes provision by way of regulation to control, restrict or prohibit the abstraction of water from underground strata or waterways. The Department of the Environment's Environment and Heritage Service is currently reviewing the matter of abstraction licensing in Northern Ireland.

The determination of fishery protection measures at water abstraction sites is a matter for my Department. The Department recognises that the fishery protection measures in the Fisheries Act (Northern Ireland) 1966 are outdated. In fact, when they were introduced in 1966 they applied mainly to the regulation of linen mills.

The Fisheries Act (Northern Ireland) 1966 is also deficient in relation to regulatory controls. For example, we have no powers to introduce flow regimes. The Department will review the Fisheries Act as soon as practicable with the objective of providing more comprehensive powers to protect fisheries at water abstraction sites, and

the Department will consult with a wide range of interest groups in this process, including anglers.

Amendments to the legislation will take time to pursue, and in the interim the Department is working on the issue of a code of good practice to hydro operators and other river water abstractors. Nevertheless, we have been able to introduce modern fishery protection measures by negotiation and with the co-operation and agreement of operators through conditions contained in exemption permits. This has enabled, for example, the introduction of angled screens and abstraction channels, electric barriers and smolt bypass channels at specific sites.

I agree with the comments in the report that compliance with these conditions needs to be carefully monitored, and I have recently obtained some core funding to enable the Fisheries Conservancy Board (FCB) to devote more resources to this. I also wish the Committee to note that the Department has already made good progress in implementing the sites-specific improvements at hydroelectric plants recommended in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment study report. For example, new fish passes have been constructed at the Blackwater and Randalstown hydros, and alterations have also been made at Harperstown. All these were installed by the FCB, mainly for fish counting purposes under the salmon management plan. They have the added benefit of assisting fish passage. Furthermore, the Department has commissioned consultants to continue trials to monitor and evaluate the operating regime and flow factors at Randalstown hydro.

With regard to the section relating to the questionable legality of fattening ponds, the Department is not aware of any illegal ponds. The Department does not license fattening ponds. The Department is responsible for licensing owners of fish ponds who wish to stock them with fish for their own consumption. It is a condition of such licences that the fish will not be sold or used to develop any business in the production, processing or marketing of fish. If there is anecdotal information that there are people operating outside these requirements, then the details must be furnished to the Department for investigation.

Section eight of the report deals with tourism issues. I share the view that our salmon rivers and coarse fisheries have a significant contribution to make to the development of tourism in Northern Ireland. In developing the tourism potential, there are two distinct aspects: first, having a quality product to sell; secondly, the promotion and marketing of that product. My Department is primarily concerned with the first.

Again, the Committee recognises how the salmonid enhancement programme has helped improve angling facilities and has encouraged private fisheries to be more accessible to visiting anglers. As I mentioned earlier, I will be launching an angling development programme

later this year that will release further resources for the development of tourism angling.

Promotion and marketing of the angling product is primarily a matter for the Tourist Board. My Department will assist the board in this important task in whatever way it can, although I am aware of the criticisms. I agree with the report's recommendations that the complexity of the existing licence and permit arrangements are not customer-friendly, and I have already indicated that I will be looking to the FCB to review the licence system as a matter of priority.

Section 9 of the report deals with a range of inland fishery matters, particularly the conservation and protection of fish stocks and the need for scientific research. The Committee will be interested to note that the FCB decided at its last meeting earlier this month to proceed to introduce a salmon carcass-tagging scheme as soon as practicable.

I am pleased that the Committee has recognised the outstanding contribution that the work carried out at the River Bush salmon station has made to the scientific knowledge and management of wild salmon stocks and the international reputation it has achieved. I also note the Committee's recommendation that research on the eel and other exploitable fish populations in Lough Neagh and Lough Erne should be undertaken as a matter of priority. There is work ongoing in these areas.

The Committee has recommended that the commercial salmonids should be closed by buyout and that the Government should accept primary responsibility for the initial capital investment.

I am actively pursuing this issue. I bid for funding in the 2000 spending review but was not successful. I will continue to bid for funding at every opportunity.

The closure of the nets combined with the implementation of the salmon management plan — which was not mentioned in the report — and salmon tagging and restrictions in angling exploitation represents the best way forward in the management of declining wild salmon stocks. The Committee must understand that there is a serious problem with marine survival, but this is not within the control of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Department.

I was interested to note the Committee's presentation of the institutional issues in section 10 of the report. The report indicates that many people who made submissions consider that the present arrangements are unnecessarily fragmented and complex. It drew attention to a repeated suggestion that management and development functions should be transferred to a single fisheries body, either as a newly created organisation or as a very much enhanced Fisheries Conservancy Board. I note that the Committee did not recommend a preferred option on the way forward.

The report also states that the funding arrangements for the Fisheries Conservancy Board are far from satis-

factory. As the Committee is aware, I said some time last year that I intended to carry out a review of the Fisheries Conservancy Board, but I delayed starting that review until the Committee had completed its inquiry. I now intend to proceed with that review, but I do not wish to prejudice the outcome. However, I will consider whether the terms of reference need to be amended in the light of the Committee's report. In the interim I have secured some core funding for the board for the next financial year.

I cannot comment on the references to the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission, as it is not within my area of responsibility. The Executive Committee's plans to undertake a review of public administration in Northern Ireland are also relevant. That review will look at all Government Departments, their non-departmental public bodies and other statutory bodies and the functions they deliver.

The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure appreciates that the new EU Water Framework Directive will have significant implications for inland fisheries. The Department will liaise with the Department of the Environment and other relevant bodies regarding its implementation.

The Committee has put a great deal of emphasis on the frequency with which issues were raised. I do not object to there being a bias towards angling, but there are very few references to commercial fishing or aquaculture, which also play a major part in inland fisheries and which make an important contribution to the economy.

There could also have been a better understanding and appreciation of what the Department has done and is seeking to do as it works alongside the Fisheries Conservancy Board and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development fishery scientists. The absence of any reference to the salmon management plan is a significant omission in addressing wild salmon conservation. I am disappointed that there is scarcely any reference made to the public angling estate, which provides an excellent range of fisheries for the public at affordable prices and appeals to many who cannot afford to fish in private fisheries.

It is a pity that the Committee did not examine the work carried out by the Culture, Arts and Leisure Department's inland fisheries branch and the resources deployed. I have only six fisheries technical staff and three policy staff to cover a very wide range of inland fisheries duties. I am trying to address that chronic level of underfunding, so support from the Committee would have helped. I do not think that the report has a single reference to the Culture, Arts and Leisure Department's Inland Fisheries Branch.

The report points up many of the problems and issues, but it does not come forward with many concrete proposals or solutions.

One issue that is crucial to the successful management of Northern Ireland's inland rivers for fisheries and other interests is the co-dependence on landowners and the farming community. Access to many fisheries depends on the goodwill of farmers. The concept of integrated management of river corridors and the problems associated with reducing farm-sourced pollution all need the constructive involvement of farmers. Farmers must be consulted about proposals to create river corridors through their property.

We need to think how the farming community, which is already on its knees because of the BSE and foot-and-mouth crises, can be encouraged to engage positively in this process — for example, through financial incentives. I see this as a major challenge, but I do not see it addressed in the report.

5.45 pm

I conclude by returning to my concerns about the consequences of the Committee's evidence process. I have already made it clear that I welcome the thrust of the report and acknowledge the commitment and efforts of those who produced it. I stand over that. However, notwithstanding the need, which I recognise and support, for the Committee to function separately from the Department and to act with a high degree of autonomy, there is an overriding need to act, and to be seen to act, responsibly.

I fear that the Committee has not done itself a service by giving credence to a few individuals who made wild, scurrilous allegations against people in the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure during the evidential process. Some of those allegations were of the utmost seriousness and were without a shred of evidence. The provision of a platform for a few individuals to air their grudges and vent their malevolence has resulted in baseless and false allegations appearing in print while the substance of the report, which is worthy, hardly gets a mention. I am sure that that is not what the Committee intended.

If people have allegations to make I recommend that they report them to the police as a matter of urgency. My Department is fully aware of the need for everyone involved in fisheries to act responsibly and within the law.

I welcome the report. I am determined to do all in my power to ensure that the inland fisheries industry in Northern Ireland is developed responsibly, that it will be one of our greatest resources and an asset that we can all take pride in.

Mr O'Neill: I am very pleased by the response, particularly from members of the Committee and others who contributed to the debate. It has been a very useful extension of the work that the Committee has been involved in over some months.

I will quickly go through some of the general comments made by Members and will pick up on a few of them. In

the time allocated it will be difficult for me to do justice to all the comments. The Committee decided, as this was an extensive report, that we would attempt to cover individual sections between us in some depth. I thank the Committee members for that. My Deputy Chairperson, Mrs Nelis, gave a very good presentation on management. She carried it out with the same competence as she did when helping me in the Committee and when she covered for me on a number of occasions.

Much of the report has to be historical. When we began, very little work had been done by the new Department, because we were all new at the time. We began this process over a year ago.

The Deputy Chairperson said that the report should not be left on the shelf to gather dust. Mrs Carson made a very energetic suggestion that it should not be put on the long finger, that a timetable should be prepared, with a programme set up to produce results.

The Committee is determined, through its relationship with other relevant Departmental Committees, to push the recommendations made in the report and monitor their implementation among all Departments across the areas of responsibility that the report covers, to ensure they are put in place.

The Committee believes that, as many Members have said, there have been many difficulties. It is time to set things right. The Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee must make an impact, so that the environment that we leave to our children is a worthy testament to our work and to that of the Assembly. We will not baulk at the task, and I assure Members that we are committed to ensuring that it is followed through.

Mr Jim Wilson, who can always come up with a good point, said that the outcome of the Black Report was predetermined. Our Committee listened to people who took considerable time and trouble to make substantive representations supported by a wide range of evidence. The Committee listened to their views and ideas. Those people know the difficulties. Many other Members made worthy points, but I cannot do justice to them in the limited time that is available.

It is significant that the Chairman of the Regional Development Committee, Mr Alban Maginness, is present today, as well as the Minister. I thank the Minister for giving us his time today, and I thank Mr Maginness for his support, which is — in fairness to the other Committee Chairpersons — a reflection of their interest. It is critical that the Committees concerned should take a full interest in the issues that fall within the responsibilities of the relevant Department.

I welcome the Minister's proposal to launch an angling development programme under the Peace II programme later this year. That was one of the more encouraging things that the Committee heard about. We have seen

the good work that has been done by similar schemes, particularly in Galway and the Corrib catchment area. On behalf of the Committee, I welcome that announcement. I also welcome the Minister's intention to consult other Ministers about the report's recommendations. There are 11 recommendations on pollution in the report, nine of which fall within the Department of Environment's responsibilities. The Minister has not had time to speak to them yet, but he has said he will support all nine recommendations. That is very hopeful, and it is also good to see that there is a code of practice for water abstractions.

The Committee recognises that the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure has been working hard on many of the issues while the Committee was working hard collecting data. The Committee's views have been expressed to the Minister and the Department. The Committee was pleased that a review of the complicated licensing system has been given priority.

I am heartened, as the Committee Members will be, to see the nets buy-out. We have placed a lot of emphasis on that as a means of making the single greatest contribution to the preservation of at least the Atlantic salmon stock. It may help encourage some growth in that area. The Minister has continued to make bids. I know that it is in the Executive Programme bid for the full amount. I was pleased to see that. I hope that with the pressure that both the Minister and the Department are applying, combined with the pressure that we are also trying to apply, we will begin to see some progress in that vital area.

The Minister said that, while we made a couple of comments in relation to the Fisheries Conservancy Board — and we were certainly entitled to do that, given the evidence that we looked at — we did not recommend a preferred route. We felt, as he did himself, that we did not want to prejudice the outcome. We felt

that it would be a bit restrictive to make any suggestions when the Minister had already launched an inquiry into possible new arrangements for the Fisheries Conservancy Board. There was not much point in our saying something about that and then expecting the review to come up with something. We were conscious of prejudicing the outcome as well, and that is why we did not make any recommendations as to a preferred route. However, the Minister can be assured that when the review is completed, we will have something to say.

There was also criticism about the quality of some of the evidence that we accepted and examined. Perhaps the less said about all of that the better, as there were quite a few things that we looked at that helped us to get a background. We looked at all the evidence. We could not be too censorious in terms of what came up from the public. If people had submissions to make to us, we accepted them. The important issue is what we did with them. The recommendations were made on the basis of the generality of the evidence that we received — evidence that was presented to us in a way that was proven and would stand up. In fairness to the hard work of the Committee, I must make the point that its recommendations and judgements could not be said to be unevenly influenced by uninformed comment. The reality is very much the opposite. I hope that this will not, as the Minister suggested, taint the overall work of the Committee. That would be a serious wrong.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly approves the report of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee on inland fisheries in Northern Ireland and calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to implement the Committee's recommendations at the earliest opportunity.

Adjourned at 5.59 pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Monday 26 March 2001

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

ROYAL ASSENT

Mr Speaker: I wish to inform Members that Royal Assent has been signified to the Planning (Compensation, etc.) Act, the Health and Personal Social Services Act, the Fisheries (Amendment) Act and the Ground Rents Act, which became law on 20 March 2001.

Royal Assent has also been received for the Government Resources and Accounts Act and the Budget Act. These became law on 22 March 2001.

FOOT-AND-MOUTH DISEASE

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development that she wishes to make a statement on the current position in relation to foot-and-mouth disease and the implications for Northern Ireland.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers): I have had to make some adjustment to the statement that was put into Members' pigeonholes early this morning. We are dealing with a moving target, and I have to take account of new developments.

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

As always, I am grateful for the opportunity to bring the Assembly up to date with the foot-and-mouth disease situation in Northern Ireland, which I last did on 12 March. Since then I have had a number of sessions with the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee, and have been in regular and frequent contact with the industry and with other Departments. As Members will doubtless be aware, the foot-and-mouth disease situation in Northern Ireland has remained static, with only one confirmed outbreak. Despite that, the situation has become potentially more serious, with the confirmation on 22 March 2001 that the disease had been found in sheep just across the border in Ravensdale, County Louth. That location falls within the 10 km surveillance zone that we imposed following the outbreak in Meigh. Unfortunately, the time that has elapsed between the two outbreaks — about 21 days — indicates that there may be an intermediate source, or sources, of infection as yet unidentified.

On foot of continued liaison between the two Departments, the Department of Agriculture in Dublin has now advised us that it has located a number of sheep which, in its view, are the missing animals to which I referred in my last statement to the Assembly.

My staff are working closely with the authorities in the Republic to try to establish the position and to prevent the further spread of the virus. I have had discussions with the Republic's Agriculture Minister, Joe Walsh, over the weekend and will be meeting him to discuss the situation later in the week. In the meantime the authorities in the Republic have established 3 km protection and 10 km surveillance zones around their outbreak in County Louth. While the new surveillance zone extends into our jurisdiction, almost the entire Northern Ireland portion falls into the already existing Meigh surveillance zone.

Because of these developments, the retention of movement controls in parts of Northern Ireland where the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland zones overlap will be necessary. The further slaughter and destruction of dangerous in-contact animals in Northern Ireland cannot be ruled out. I have also put border

controls in place to monitor crossings from the Republic within the 10 km surveillance zone.

The Department for Regional Development has assisted us in arranging disinfection procedures on the A1 road entering Northern Ireland, for which I am indebted to Mr Campbell. My officials have been in touch with the police to enlist their further support in controlling movements of livestock and products across the border. I have spoken to the Secretary of State and to the Security Minister, Adam Ingram, and I will speak again with the Secretary of State later today to discuss the latest developments.

Although we, and the authorities in the Republic of Ireland, will be doing our utmost to deal with this latest development, it is vital that farmers reinforce the “fortress farming” measures which many farmers, but not all, have in place. I have been advocating “fortress farming” since the disease first appeared. Farmers must assume that such measures are all that stands between them and foot-and-mouth disease. It may be stating the obvious to say that foot-and-mouth disease is highly unlikely to reappear in a Northern Ireland farm if “fortress farming” is fully implemented by every farmer.

Looking ahead, the EU’s response to the outbreaks in other member states, culminating in its decision to regionalise the County Louth outbreak, stands in stark contrast to what has happened in relation to the outbreak here. It is indefensible that we are still caught up in EU-imposed export restrictions when every outbreak in other member states has been treated as a regional phenomenon. Members will recall that on 28 February I secured a commitment from the Prime Minister that the UK Government would support a case for regionalisation for Northern Ireland as soon as practical and possible. On the following day we confirmed our first and only outbreak. Following my meeting with the Prime Minister and the UK Agriculture Minister, Nick Brown, on Thursday last, I wrote to Mr Brown to raise this matter. He arranged for the UK delegate at Friday’s standing veterinary committee (SVC) to register the fact that Northern Ireland would be pressing forcefully for a regional approach to be adopted at the next SVC meeting tomorrow.

I also spoke personally yesterday to Commissioner Byrne to press our case, and I am confident of his support. Senior Department of Agriculture and Rural Development officials, including our Chief Veterinary Officer, are currently in Brussels discussing our case for regionalisation. The Chief Veterinary Officer is a member of the SVC and will present our case to that committee tomorrow. I cannot predict the outcome of that meeting, but my view is that the Northern Ireland case for regionalisation, leading to an immediate lifting of the generalised controls on exports and an early lifting of most of the rest, is irresistible. In the meantime the Executive Committee will meet later today to discuss the foot-and-mouth disease

outbreak. We will, as always, keep our efforts to eradicate this disease under constant review.

The Chairperson of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee (Rev Dr Ian Paisley): I

thank the Minister for her statement. Does she not think that it is now a bit late in the day for the Southern Government to say that they have located the missing sheep? Surely this should have been a matter for immediate attention, and it is very disconcerting to have this statement come out weeks afterwards.

I welcome the statement which the Minister has made about regionalisation, but I wonder why we did not press for it immediately. The Southern Government were able to press for it immediately and get it. Can she tell me whether veterinary inspectors from Europe are over here at the moment? Has she any information on whether they have already been to the South of Ireland and looked at its position? I am sure that she has heard the comments of the president of the Ulster Farmers’ Union, whose members are saying to him that they are treated as second-class citizens by Europe. It seems to me that the South of Ireland has got all the advantages of Europe by getting regionalisation promised immediately, while we still have to queue up to get it. It is a strange thing that the Commissioner can tell the South and the world that it will get it and then just say that he will give his support to our case. Why does he not say that we can get it? He was able to say “Yes, you can get it” to the Government that appointed him, but he evidently cannot say that to us.

Northern Ireland is in the most favourable position in the whole of Europe with regard to regionalisation. If ever there were a watertight case to get it, then surely we have that case, as the Minister herself said. We ought to be pressing in every way for the lifting of the ban so that Northern Ireland can benefit from regionalisation. If France, the Netherlands and the South of Ireland can get it, so can we. We should have been first on the list.

Ms Rodgers: I thank Dr Paisley for his comments and questions. As I have already explained on a number of occasions in the House, the missing sheep were illegally traded and, because of that, it was extremely difficult to trace them. We worked very closely with the authorities in the South in order to have them traced. I do not want to apportion any blame whatsoever to anyone. The fact that they have now been traced is a result of very good investigative work by both authorities working together. We gave any information that we were able to get here to the authorities in the South and they reciprocated. As a result, the gardai have now been able to trace the sheep. My information from the authorities in the South is that some of them were slaughtered immediately, which is good news. The rest of them have now been slaughtered, which is also good news. It is extremely good news that we have managed to have them traced — that was a very clear worry.

The second issue that Dr Paisley raised was why we did not get regionalisation immediately. Dr Paisley, more than anyone else in this House, will recognise that we are part of the UK. I agree that until there is the consent of the Northern Ireland people under the Good Friday Agreement for a change, that should remain the case. Since we are, therefore, not in the same position as the Republic, which is a full member state and is in a position to make its case immediately, we have to make our case via the UK. When the ban was placed on exports from the UK we, as part of the UK, were included in that ban. I immediately — I stress “immediately” — made the case to the UK Government that I felt that Northern Ireland, separated by the sea, should be regionalised. I got a commitment from the Prime Minister that, within a week of the ban being placed, he would back the seeking of regionalisation. Unfortunately, the very next day we had the first case in Northern Ireland.

10.45 am

The European Commission is now taking a slightly different view in the light of changing circumstances in Europe. When it was announced that there would be regionalisation for France, at least one Member here complained that I had not criticised the Commission's decision. Rather than complain about the decision, I welcomed it because it opens the door for us to seek regionalisation in Northern Ireland, which is precisely what I have been doing. *[Interruption]*.

Mr Deputy Speaker, if people want to make points of order —

The Deputy Speaker: Order. We want to hear the Minister's response.

Ms Rodgers: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I have been working with might and main since that first week to get regionalisation for Northern Ireland. I repeat that I am not in the same position as the Minister of a full member state to do that, and unless Dr Paisley is suggesting that I seek a more radical solution to our problems, I cannot see that there is anything else that I could have done, or should have done.

I assure the House that, as I speak, my officials in Europe are following up the conversation I had yesterday with Commissioner Byrne. I am confident of his support, and I look forward to getting the regionalisation that I have been working for since the beginning.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee (Mr Savage): I welcome the Minister's statement, but I am concerned by her reference to what are seen as the missing sheep. At the outset, nobody, north or south of the border, knew how many sheep were missing. In order to achieve regionalisation, I would seek to confirm that the matter has been cleared up. I hope that this is the case.

Comments were made in a newspaper yesterday about the origins of the foot-and-mouth outbreak. The public and the two Governments want cheap food. It was revealed by the press that leftover food was being dumped at an identified location, which I do not want to name at the moment. There is certainty that food from this dump was being fed to animals as swill and that this was the source of the foot-and-mouth outbreak. This cheap swill food was being imported from outside Great Britain — perhaps from outside Europe.

The British and Irish Governments have a big responsibility on their shoulders — all they want is cheap food, and they do not care where it comes from. Stringent regulations are placed on factories in Northern Ireland and elsewhere, so importing cheap food from elsewhere constitutes unfair competition. The Minister may think that I am deviating from the current crisis, but a firm line needs to be taken on this.

From the dump I referred to, which is in the north of England, there is free access into this country —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Savage, please come to the question.

Mr Savage: I will come to the question now, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Insufficient action is being taken to eradicate the disease in Northern Ireland. I am fed up telling officials that not enough disinfectant precautions are being taken at the ports. In addition, when travelling to the South, there are disinfectant mats across the roads at the border, but no such precautions are being taken with cars travelling into Northern Ireland. We are so close to being granted regionalisation, so surely we should make an extra effort and use disinfectant to try to alleviate this serious problem.

Ms Rodgers: A good deal of Mr Savage's speech was actually a discussion about sheep food, which I am not going to deal with today. I hope that we will be dealing with the aftermath of this issue when we get the disease under control, and my focus must be on that.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I will take the liberty of responding to Dr Paisley's other question: the veterinary inspection here has been postponed, and I cannot answer for the Republic of Ireland.

Mr Savage talked about pigswill. We are keeping that under review and will be looking at it very carefully. At the moment only 10 people have a licence for swill in Northern Ireland, and that is being kept under very strict surveillance. We are not 100% sure what the source of the epidemic was. It may well have been illegally imported meat, but the source is not clear. In relation to the missing sheep, I have to thank my staff for the very effective tracing which they did in very difficult circumstances and without full co-operation. They managed to locate the lost sheep, so that a reported figure of 271 animals became 60 and then fell to 30-odd. The authorities in the

South have now informed me that those 30-odd sheep have been accounted for in the South. Again, that is good news.

Mr McGrady: Like my Colleagues, I welcome the Minister's statement very much. I would like to place on record my knowledge of the enormous gratitude and support that the Minister has throughout the community. This is not always reflected in the House, however.

The Minister is earnestly seeking regionalisation. As EU regulations place this Government in a subsidiary to that at Westminster, we are forced to make a second-hand input. Is the Minister, therefore, confident that the undertakings given by the Prime Minister and the Ministers there are sufficiently strong for Northern Ireland? She will recall our experience of the same Ministers — or Ministers of that ilk — who made noises of support in the fishing round and then welshed on that deal last December. I hope that the support promised will be translated into very, very strong action. I would like to think that if that does not happen, the renegeing on the commitment given will be properly exposed for what it is.

I know we are constrained by UK budgetary rules and regulations, et cetera. However, to address the downfall in income in sectors outside farming, is there any chance of relief being given to businesses such as tourism, as announced for the Cooley peninsula by the Minister there? I hope sincerely that no one will attempt to make this a party political issue, as the DUP has a tendency to do. This matter needs the concern and support of the entire community.

Ms Rodgers: The full commitment of the Prime Minister that the UK will back our lobby for regionalisation was reiterated to me recently at Downing Street. I have written to Nick Brown. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) will be in Brussels today, as will the United Kingdom Permanent Representation to the EU (UKRep); they are already working with my officials to ensure that we get regionalisation, and I have no reason to think that they will change their view and go back on that. I am confident of the full support of the UK Government in seeking regionalisation for Northern Ireland at tomorrow's standing veterinary committee (SVC) meeting.

I will now turn to the rates relief which has been announced in Dublin and also across the water. Owing to the restrictions and guidelines, many industries other than agriculture are suffering severe difficulties — tourism in particular.

The position on rates in Northern Ireland is different from the situations in Great Britain and the South because we do not have the powers to grant discretionary relief from rates in response to the present circumstances. This issue has been raised previously in the House, and I have addressed it. I have also brought it to the attention of interdepartmental meetings and of the Executive. The

issue is not specifically a matter for my Department. It is one for the Department of Finance and Personnel which would eventually call for a collective decision by the Executive because it would require legislation in the House. If we come to a position where we have legislation and the Department of Finance and Personnel is prepared to make rates relief available, other parts of the Budget will have to be adjusted. The Executive will discuss this issue this afternoon.

Mr McHugh: A Cheann Comhairle. I also welcome the Minister's statement and in particular her comment that it is unlikely that foot-and-mouth disease will reappear in the North if we adhere to "fortress farming". Given that the Chief Veterinary Officer in Britain has said in the past week that foot-and-mouth disease is out of control in Britain and that, at the weekend, Bertie Ahern criticised the controls in place at the ports, will the Minister adopt an all-Ireland task force and a "fortress island" approach? Given that the South has received regional status, will the Minister accept that we must adopt a radically different approach from that of the British to foot-and-mouth disease so that we can get regionalisation for ourselves?

Ms Rodgers: Mr McHugh has raised several issues. In relation to the Taoiseach's comments on the ports, we have strict controls at all points of entry. We have kept them under constant review and we will continue to do so. The Agriculture Departments in the North and South have liaised closely throughout this crisis, and there have been discussions at official and ministerial levels about port controls. At no time have any concerns about those controls been raised with me.

I reiterate that we have rigorous controls at ports and airports. All passengers are required to walk over disinfection mats, and all vehicles have to cross similar mats. On ferries, foot passengers and vehicular passengers must also cross mats soaked in disinfectant. All commercial vehicles must have a disinfection certificate, and those that do not have such a certificate are not admitted. The wheels of all vehicular traffic passing through the ports are disinfected, and all this is conducted under the supervision of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Announcements are made on ferries and aircraft. All passengers are handed leaflets on foot-and-mouth disease and asked if they have been on farms or in contact with animals in Great Britain. If they have been, they are offered disinfectant spray. However, having put all those measures in place, we also require the co-operation of the public. If people insist on going across the water unnecessarily to areas where the infection is rampant, I cannot stop them. It is a free country, and I cannot stop individual movement. I can only appeal to people's good sense, common sense and sense of responsibility towards our industry. The vast majority of people are co-operating.

As for our taking a radically different approach to that in Great Britain, we are taking our own approach and have been doing so from the outset because we have a devolved Administration. I must pay tribute to my Executive Colleagues, who at all times have worked closely with me and have given me whatever support has been necessary. The Executive have worked together as a team in fighting this disease.

11.00 am

The Member raised the issue of an all-Ireland task force. Under the present arrangements — the Good Friday Agreement and our new institutions — we have an all-Ireland task force. Before this outbreak happened I was working with Joe Walsh on joint animal disease strategies for the island of Ireland, and we are proceeding to bring forward a strategy for that. Since the outbreak of the disease we have met at regular intervals and have spoken almost on a daily basis. Both Departments are working closely together. Therefore, it could be said that there is a task force in all but name, in the sense that the North/South institutions are working effectively in this crucial time.

Mr Ford: I would like to put three points to the Minister. First, she talked about regionalisation and the support being given by UkRep to the regionalisation of Northern Ireland. Will the Minister assure us, if there is a difficulty at the SVC meeting tomorrow because of the Ravensdale outbreak, that she will seek regionalisation for as much of Northern Ireland as possible, even if Newry and Mourne district has to be excluded so that the rest of Northern Ireland can benefit — as has happened in the Republic?

Secondly, on the issue of border control, she talked about the disinfection point on the A1 and the checks currently going on in south Armagh. Is that adequate? I am not talking about border controls in the same way as the DUP. Farmers' representatives have raised a serious issue that while the South currently has an outbreak — and we are almost four weeks on from the start of ours — there may be further difficulties if we are not seen to be doing more than we are at present by way of border controls outside the south Armagh area.

Thirdly, the Minister talked about the issue of aid — specifically rates relief — being granted in England and Wales. Will she assure the House that she is taking that matter to the Executive urgently this afternoon to seek emergency legislation if necessary? Will she assure the House that she will urge the Minister of Finance and Personnel to seek appropriate aid from the Treasury, as is being given to the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions in England and Wales?

Ms Rodgers: I thank Mr Ford for his questions. First, as regards regionalisation, I do not want to get into specific details at the moment because negotiations are ongoing with the Commission as I speak. The results of

those negotiations will be discussed tomorrow. It is my aim to get regionalisation for Northern Ireland as soon as possible. I take the Member's point that, given that there is an outbreak in one area, we could find ourselves in a difficult position regarding that area. However, I do not want to comment any further on that at this stage.

Secondly, the Member referred to border controls. As I said in my statement, my officials have been having ongoing discussions with the RUC. I have spoken to the Secretary of State and Adam Ingram. I will be meeting the Secretary of State again at lunchtime today.

I have been informed that border patrols are taking place, but it is not a static situation. Over the weekend, quite a large number of vehicles — I cannot state the exact number — have been stopped, inspected, and then allowed to go on. I am not aware of any illegal movements of animals. Nevertheless, those inspections are happening across the border area, not just in the specific area of the outbreak. However, in that specific area the measures are more stringent — and perhaps more numerous — as one would expect. I think it is acceptable that there will be patrols operating throughout the border area.

I have made my position clear on the issue of rates relief. I will be discussing this with the Executive Committee and it will be a matter for decision by the Executive Committee — specifically for the Department of Finance and Personnel. I will be discussing the issue and putting my views forward, but it will be a matter for collective decision.

Mr Douglas: The Minister has been encouraging “fortress farming”, which I support very much. At the same time I am a little concerned about the reports I have been hearing from people who have been coming in and out of Northern Ireland through the ports.

I am encouraged by the Minister's statement that those things are in place. However, they have not been in place in the way that people would have liked them, until now. That is one of the most serious aspects of this whole episode. We need to make sure that we have good precautions in place. That will be the case for the next two months, even if we do not have any more foot-and-mouth cases.

Like other Members, I hope that the Minister will keep the pressure on and that she will be able to tell this House that those precautions are in place. They have not been in the past, but I am glad that she has said that they are. People that have been coming to and from have been very concerned, and I hope that the Minister will assure us that those precautions will be kept in place in the months ahead to protect Northern Ireland, and make it “fortress Northern Ireland” as well as individual “fortress farms”.

Ms Rodgers: I share Mr Douglas's concerns about the ports. Obviously, it was not possible to have everything in place immediately within ten minutes, half an hour or

even ten hours of the outbreak. However, as soon as it was humanly possible, everything was put in place, and it is being constantly reviewed.

When I have received specific complaints that something is not right, my staff and I have dealt with them immediately. We all depend on one another in these circumstances to make sure that we have a watertight situation. However, if a specific problem is brought to my attention then I will have it dealt with.

Many of the issues that have been raised have been based on, as I said previously in the House, “Dúirt bean liom gur dhúirt bean léi gur chuala sí bean a rá”, which means “A woman told me that another woman told her that she heard another woman saying”. I cannot deal with that sort of thing, but I will deal with specifics. If people bring specific issues to my attention, they will be dealt with, because it is important that we keep up the “fortress Northern Ireland”.

As I have already said, and as the question seems to recognise, the ports of entry are important, but the front line of defence remains the farm gate. We cannot keep the virus entirely out. People can carry it on their clothing and in their nostrils. People who have been in infected areas should not go near live animals at all until they are sure that they are free from the disease. You can disinfect your clothes, but you cannot disinfect your nostrils. Therefore, if farmers have been across the water — why they should go across the water is beyond me, but if they feel that they must — then those farmers should keep away from their animals when they come back, because they are in danger of carrying the disease back.

Mr Ervine: As we are dealing with specifics, and the Minister likes to deal with specifics rather than what some wee woman said, I will ask a specific question. Can she tell us whether the Department of Agriculture in the Republic of Ireland has told her how many sheep have been located, where those sheep have been located, and how long ago those sheep were located?

Depending on the Minister’s answers, does she think that a ten-kilometre surveillance zone around the border is enough? Are we correct in assuming that those missing sheep that Little Bo Peep has not been able to find have been in contact with a contaminated animal?

There are those of us who have believed, for a long time, that in European affairs the United Kingdom Government plays cricket when many other Governments do not. It has been suggested that there is a thought process in Northern Irish people’s minds that perhaps the Irish Republic is not being as absolutely open about this as it might. Of course, we can dispel that notion depending on the Minister’s answers.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members, particularly on the Front Bench, that it is discourteous to read newspapers or magazines at this point in time.

Ms Rodgers: I was referring to being specific so that I could deal with specific complaints.

Mr Ervine referred to specific numbers of sheep. I have made it clear in the House over recent weeks that my problem was that I was unable to be specific because of the very nature of illegal trading and the fact that some of the people involved were not co-operating with the authorities. In such a situation it is very difficult to give an exact figure.

Last week we narrowed it down to 30-odd missing sheep. We have worked with the Republic of Ireland authorities on this matter and it is their view that the 30 missing sheep have been accounted for. Some of the sheep had been immediately slaughtered in an abattoir in the Republic and the rest have now been slaughtered. That is as specific as I can be. The Republic of Ireland moved immediately to deal with the situation once the position had been established.

In relation to the 10 km exclusion zone, I am not sure what Mr Ervine meant by the question. I hope he will forgive me if I am not dealing exactly with what he said. There is a statutory 30-day restriction on the 10 km zone around Meigh as a result of European regulations. That restriction is put in place from the disinfection period, which was a few days after the slaughtering. The 30-day restriction around Meigh comes to an end on 6 April. If there have been no further cases by that time, we will be able to say that Northern Ireland is completely clear of foot-and-mouth.

Mr Kennedy: I would like to raise a matter of extreme concern with the Minister. Some of my constituents who returned to Northern Ireland at the port of Larne from the mainland of the UK last week had to insist that their vehicles were sprayed. Will the Minister confirm that adequate measures are in place and ensure that they remain in place at all points of entry to Northern Ireland?

Is everything being done at local, national and European levels to make sure that Northern Ireland’s agriculture industry will receive regional status? Will the Minister update the Assembly on any proposals she has to extend any of the current compensation schemes?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I would like to ask Mr Peter Robinson whether his magazine is directly related to foot-and-mouth disease. Does he not think that it is inappropriate to be reading unrelated material, considering the serious nature of the debate?

Mr P Robinson: Mr Deputy Speaker, if you had had the courtesy to find out what I was reading, you would know that it is not a magazine. There are several people in the Chamber with papers that do not directly relate to the debate, but I have not heard you tell them that they should not be reading such material.

Mr Deputy Speaker: It is not the duty of the Speaker to ask which magazines Members are reading. I said

earlier that it was inappropriate for Members to be reading newspapers or magazines. It is even more inappropriate that that should be happening on the Front Bench, and still more inappropriate that Members do not give their full attention to the debate when we are discussing one of the most important issues that Northern Ireland faces.

Ms Rodgers: Mr Kennedy says that people have had to insist that their vehicles were sprayed. I regret that the people concerned did not bring the matter to the attention of my Department. If they had done so, I would have looked into the situation. I cannot comment on the matter any further because I do not have the details. I do not know how many vehicles were involved, what kind of vehicles they were or where they had been. We do have a helpline in the Department. If such an incident happens again, I will expect people to immediately make me aware of that through the helpline.

I can assure Mr Kennedy that I will do everything, and have been doing everything, in my power to achieve regional status. The case is being proceeded with today. My officials are in Brussels, and the Chief Veterinary Officer will put the case to the standing veterinary committee tomorrow.

11.15 am

As I have already said, I spoke to Commissioner Byrne at some length over the weekend, and he is sympathetic. At the moment the only compensation that is agreed is full compensation for slaughtered animals at market value, with the addition of the slaughter subsidy that would be missed because of the fact that the animals are not going for normal slaughter. Consequential compensation is a matter to be dealt with on a UK-wide basis, and I have no indication as yet that the United Kingdom Government is in any way disposed to grant consequential compensation. There would be absolutely enormous resource implications, but I have mentioned it to the United Kingdom Government. It has been raised at a ministerial meeting, but I have not met with any enthusiasm for it as yet.

Mr Fee: It is unfortunate — but welcome — that the Minister is again here to deal with this matter personally on the Floor. I do not want to go over old ground. I welcome the commitment to full compensation, to the slaughter subsidy and to the review of the rating liability, and I look forward to seeing the result of the consideration of consequential losses. However, these are global responses to the problem, and we have very specific problems in the south of County Armagh and in County Louth.

Will the Minister and her Colleagues consider, in the longer term, not just the problems for the agricultural community, but the impact on local shops, restaurants, bed-and-breakfasts, hotels and businesses that have been badly affected? Will they also consider the houses in that vicinity that were badly affected by the stench and smoke from the livestock pyres? Will the Minister

consider putting together the equivalent of a mini Marshall plan for south Armagh?

Ms Rodgers: The impact of the present situation in all areas will, as Mr Fee will understand, and as I think he has accepted, be a matter for wider discussion in the Executive and on a collective basis. It will be dealt with on another day, and it is not a matter for me alone.

Regarding the issue of the stench and smoke from the pyres, we are currently taking legal advice to see what our obligations may or may not be. I cannot, therefore, give a direct answer.

Rev Dr William McCrea: May I bring the Minister back to a question that was asked and not answered? Where precisely were these sheep found — those that have now been found in the Irish Republic? Were they outside the County Louth area? That may have implications as regards regionalisation for the Irish Republic.

Is the Agriculture Minister, as the Minister with overall responsibility for dealing with this crisis, not permitted to speak personally to the RUC? She has ultimate control. Is she not permitted to speak personally to the Army? She said that she has spoken to the Security Minister, Adam Ingram, and to the Secretary of State. Surely she should be able to deal hands-on with our Chief Constable to take the measures that are essential for the control of this disease?

When it comes to rushing through the legislation, I assure the Minister that my Colleagues will help to ensure that the alleviation of the rates for businesses in general is given a welcome response.

When it comes to setting an example — and political points were mentioned here this morning — I want to say this: when I arrived here on Thursday morning the Minister of Finance and Personnel and some of his colleagues were holding a photocall at the Members' entrance. Why this was being held at the Members' entrance when these were European Commissioners, I believe, I do not know, but I asked where the disinfectant mat was.

I looked for the mat; there was none. I asked for it; I received no answer. I found out that it had been removed for the photograph. The Minister and his SDLP colleagues were standing for a photocall at the Members' entrance. There are other entrances to this Building, and it is disgraceful that when I looked for the mat it could not be found. When I had entered the Building, I found out from an official that the mat had been thrown aside for the photocall. Surely, that is not acting responsibly. What action will the Minister, or the Executive, take in relation to the Minister of Finance and Personnel?

Ms Rodgers: As regards the Member's first question, the sheep were found in Meath. Some had gone immediately to slaughter; others were slaughtered as soon as the facts were established.

As regards speaking personally to the RUC, I inform Mr McCrea that if I had to speak personally to everyone who is involved in dealing with this situation, I would not even get my six hours' sleep at night.

Rev Dr William McCrea: I did not ask you —

Ms Rodgers: I am going to answer the question if the Member will wait and listen.

With regard to my speaking personally to the RUC, Mr McCrea may or may not be aware that security is a reserved matter and that I have no function in relation to it. My senior officials have had meetings on a daily basis with the RUC and have been liaising with them.

Rev Dr William McCrea: I thought it was a reserved matter.

Ms Rodgers: Security is a reserved matter, as the Member will be aware. My officials have been in daily contact with the RUC, and I get daily reports on everything that is happening. I have spoken to the Minister responsible for security, Mr Adam Ingram, and to the Secretary of State — and I will be meeting the Secretary of State today — because they are the people in charge of the security forces.

I do not have a personal problem with speaking to the Chief Constable. I have often spoken to him on constituency and other issues, as Mr McCrea may well be aware, and he may also be aware of the constituency issues that I have spoken to the Chief Constable about. *[Interruption]*.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. May we hear the Minister's response?

Ms Rodgers: In relation to the present crisis, I am dealing as effectively as I can with everything that needs to be done. It would be a pure waste of my time to start having discussions with the Chief Constable. I have full confidence in my staff, who are liaising with him. I have confidence in the Secretary of State, who has assured me that everything possible will be done. Security is a matter for the Secretary of State and the Minister in charge of security. I am dealing with the other agriculture issues, the Commission, regionalisation, and all of the other issues that have been raised in the House today.

Rev Dr William McCrea: What about last Thursday, and the removal of the mat?

Ms Rodgers: The mat may have been removed. I have been informed that it was not removed by the Minister of Finance, or on his instructions. I do not know who removed the mat, but I will make enquiries and will let the Member know if I find out.

Mrs Nelis: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her report. Is the Minister aware that the current strain of foot-and-mouth disease is of Asian origin; that it is one of the most virulent strains of the disease; and that the British Government have, as usual, been economical with the

truth in respect of what they have said about the outbreak? Is the Minister suggesting that the Taoiseach's comments are not correct? How confident is she in Tony Blair's statement that the UK Government would support the case for regionalisation of the North as soon as it was practical and possible to make such a case?

Ms Rodgers: With regard to the UK Government's support, I have already replied to that question — twice, I think — and I refer Mrs Nelis to my reply to Mr McGrady's question.

I was somewhat surprised by the Taoiseach's comments. I have been in constant contact with the Department of Agriculture in the Republic at both ministerial and official level about all these matters, including our port controls, and at no time have any concerns about those controls been raised by me. That is my position.

I do not want to comment on the suggestion that the British Government has been economical with the truth, except to say that I regret the tone that is being used. I do not think that this is the time for point-scoring against any Government, north or south, east or west. I have the greatest sympathy with the farming community in Great Britain and what they are going through at the moment, and with the politicians who are trying to grapple with a very serious situation.

I can only say that I am not aware that the origin of the disease has yet been discovered. I know that it is being looked in to. I am not aware whether it is the Asian strain or what strain it might be, where it came from, or whether it came from a piece of food that was brought in. So far as I know, that is not yet clear, so I cannot comment on Mrs Nelis's assumptions.

Mr Armstrong: We have come to expect a statement from the Minister every morning now, since we are in such dire straits. How confident is she that the Republic of Ireland's borders with Northern Ireland are manned so that foot-and-mouth does not cross over? I know that there is a problem with policing the borders with RUC officers, as this disease was encouraged by Republicans in the border areas. We all know that Department of Agriculture and Rural Development officials do not have the powers to stop and search vehicles, and might need to have RUC officers with them.

Why do we not stop the use of swill? We do not know whether it is the problem or not. We know that it can be a problem. I believe that lorries are being sprayed if they are coming from agricultural areas, but cars are not.

At the time of BSE I asked whether the Minister could assure us whether meat of Northern Ireland or United Kingdom origin was being used by Government bodies. Are not many of our problems due to importing produce that does not come up to the standards that we practice here in the UK? We expect a lot from our farmers, but then the Government's cheap food policy brings in

produce that does not come up to our standards. That is why we have diseases and problems that are not related to Northern Ireland.

I believe that we have valuers coming in who have been valuing foot-and-mouth-infected stock in the UK to value the stock in Northern Ireland. If the disease can be carried in the nose, then they have it. I do not know how long it stays there.

Ms Rodgers: I am glad that Mr Armstrong has run out of questions, for I have difficulty in keeping up with him. There are no valuers being brought in from the UK to deal with this outbreak. It is being done by our own valuers.

Rev Dr William McCrea: They are UK valuers. They are our valuers.

Ms Rodgers: I beg the Member's pardon. It was a slip of the tongue — it is just the way I am made. It depends on where you are coming from. I will rephrase that to keep Mr McCrea happy. There are no valuers coming in from Great Britain.

There have been in-depth interceptions of vehicles along the border, and mobile patrols are there. There have been 140 interceptions over the weekend. That area is being dealt with in relation to the border controls.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) is actively considering banning the use of pigswill. That is being considered for the short term — during the current outbreak — but the long term will also have to be considered. I have already said that we are monitoring that area very closely at the moment.

There are only 10 licensed pigswill dealers in Northern Ireland at present. We are keeping a close eye on it at the moment.

11.30 am

Mr Byrne: Like other Members, I want to congratulate the Minister on the work she and her officials are doing at this trying time. Does she agree that the Ulster Farmers' Union has been supportive and encouraging of the "fortress farm" policy, which is very welcome? Can she outline the difficulty that the Veterinary Service is having in Northern Ireland and say whether there are any plans to hire private vets to assist with the workload?

Ms Rodgers: The Veterinary Service has been working flat out, and the vets have been under a lot of pressure. My Chief Veterinary Officer assures me that we have not yet reached that stage, but if it becomes necessary, we certainly will employ private vets.

Mr Paisley Jnr: Three times in her statement the Minister boasted of her very close and cosy working relationship with the Irish Republic. However, today it is one step ahead of her on regionalisation. With friends like that — well, we know the adage.

The Minister says it is up to the UK to make the bid for regionalisation for Northern Ireland. If that is so, then farmers are asking if it is not about time that the Minister worked even more closely with the UK Minister and the UK Prime Minister to ensure regionalisation? She should do that instead of working as closely as she is with the Irish Republic and achieving nothing.

Ms Rodgers: I never mentioned a cosy relationship, but if the Member thinks that it is cosy, fair enough. With regard to working closer with the UK Minister, Mr Paisley should recognise, from everything I have said in the House so far today, that I am working very closely with the UK Minister, the Prime Minister and MAFF officials. The Member should also recognise that we are on the same land mass on the island of Ireland and that it would be absolutely stupid, not to say foolish, for me not to be working equally as closely with my counterpart in the Republic, which I am doing.

Talking about having friends like that, I welcome the fact that the Republic has got regionalisation — on foot of France and Holland — as that strengthens my case. Rather than play dog in the manger, I welcome it. By the way, I have the full support of Joe Walsh. He told me on Friday evening that he would fully support me in Europe, at the Commission and the committee, in seeking regionalisation.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat. I appreciate the measures outlined by the Minister and echo the comments of Mr McGrady. He recognised that there are limitations on what the Minister can do as she is subject to restrictions from Westminster. Given that, I am not taking away at all from any of the work that the Minister has done in the last number of weeks.

Nevertheless, a very serious matter has been addressed over the last number of days by the Chief Veterinary Officer in Britain and the Taoiseach. I am not trying to score points and would prefer the question to be dealt with. On the question of an all-Ireland task force, clearly there is a different imperative at work in Britain than there is in the rest of Ireland. There is no doubt in my mind that Tony Blair is as concerned about when he needs to call an election as he is about the foot-and-mouth problems. I have heard some silly descriptions here this morning about "fortress farming", "fortress Northern Ireland", fortress this and fortress that. The other day I even heard Danny Kennedy trying to rationalise how a farmer in north Down or the Ards Peninsula can be treated differently from somebody in Monaghan because of the regionalisation policy.

Returning to the question of an all-Ireland task force, given the serious comments from the Chief Veterinary Officer in Britain and the Taoiseach, can our Minister assure us that there will be immediate discussions with her Irish counterparts with a view to establishing an all-Ireland task force? Such a task force could deal with

this matter in the most thorough way possible, making sure that no stone was left unturned.

Ms Rodgers: I sometimes think that people believe that the answer to everything is to set up a committee. We are facing an emergency situation on the island of Ireland. The most effective way to deal with it is the way in which we have been dealing with it so far. We have been doing what we need to do as a Government to deal with the immediate problem in Northern Ireland.

The Republic has been doing exactly the same thing. As a result of the very close relationship and, indeed, converging interests and the threat on the island, under the Good Friday Agreement and the new institutions I am working very closely with the Irish Minister for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Mr Joe Walsh. I am in discussion with him on a daily basis. I have met him and will, I hope, be meeting him again early this week. My Department is probably in touch with the Department in the South as we speak.

Thanks to modern means of communications, rather than have to prepare papers for a task force and go through the whole process of setting that up, we are able to deal with it much more effectively than if we had to set up yet another task force, thereby adding to the bureaucracy at a time of emergency.

Mr Leslie: I thank the Minister for coming to the House again to update us on progress. However, I am perturbed that she referred just now to a state of emergency. I had thought and hoped, from the state of things at the moment, that we were still a few dramas short of an emergency on the island of Ireland.

Clearly, the situation is different across the water. It seems to be more a matter of luck than good judgement that we have prevented further importation of foot-and-mouth, to the best of our knowledge. The Minister said earlier that one can carry the virus on one's clothes, but we are not spraying the clothes of people coming through the ports. If I understand correctly, she said the other day that that would cause a human rights problem. For example, the spray might adversely affect asthmatics. I am an asthmatic myself, so I have some sympathy with that position. However, I recall clearly that in 1967 everybody coming into Northern Ireland walked through a mist of disinfectant.

If that is unsuitable for certain people, then an exception should be made for those people and some other approach could be adopted. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the majority of people, and as many people as possible, should be subject to a precaution of that kind.

I am also concerned that while efforts are at last being made to spray high-sided vehicles, we must recognise the intensity of the infection in the parts of Scotland through which people perforce travel if they are coming to the ferries to Northern Ireland. Can the Minister assure this

House that she is confident that it is sufficient only to spray those vehicles? Should we not be spraying all vehicles coming into Northern Ireland by that route?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Again, Minister, I am looking at the time.

Ms Rodgers: I will answer as briefly as possible.

In my view, we are still in an emergency situation for as long as we do not have an assurance that we have completely eradicated the disease. Therefore, I am dealing on a daily and hourly basis — and, indeed, over the week-end — with new issues arising. To me, that is an emergency. It is not something that you can sit down coolly and deal with, on the basis that you do not have a moving target.

Perhaps “emergency” was a bit strong. However, I do not want people to get the view that we are over the crisis in Northern Ireland, because we are not. That would be unfortunate. However, I like to think that we are in a better position than we were three weeks ago, since we have not had further cases.

As regards the spraying of clothes, I have been told that on a health basis it would not be possible, and that on a human rights basis it would not be allowable. However, anyone coming from across the water who has been in touch with farm animals or with farms should report to our facilities at the ports or the airports and will be sprayed.

If there are people in the farming community who have been away across the water, they should have their clothes dry-cleaned, and they should not go back to their farms without taking all the necessary precautions. I have to stress again that the farm gate is the first line of defence against this disease.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The time is up.

Mr Hussey: Mr Deputy Speaker, you will be aware that this is the third statement on the matter. I have noticed that it is often the same Members who are called to ask questions. Will the Speaker's Office consider adopting the excellent policy of the Chairperson of the Agriculture Committee? Will you look at which Members are being called to ask questions, and perhaps allow others to ask questions on this important subject?

Mr Deputy Speaker: That decision is taken by the party Whips. It is the norm to call the Committee Chairperson, followed by the Deputy Chairperson. The Speaker receives a list of Members wishing to speak from each party Whip. If the Member has a problem about not being called by his own party, I suggest that he bring it to the attention of his party's Whip.

STUDENT SUPPORT

Mr Deputy Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment that he wishes to make a statement on student support proposals.

The Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Dr Farren): Members will recall that 13 months ago, on the eve of suspension, I announced my intention to conduct a review of student financial support. The details of the review's terms of reference were published approximately 12 months ago. Notwithstanding suspension, we have proceeded expeditiously to complete the review and formulate the set of proposals which are being announced today.

(Mr Deputy Speaker [Sir John Gorman] in the Chair)

Members will acknowledge, I trust, that in formulating this package of new methods of financial and other support for further and higher education students, we are serious about making a difference in student support in both sectors. I also trust that the seriousness of our determination to make a difference for the better will be acknowledged outside the Assembly.

Members will recall that, before Christmas, I announced the broad framework of my proposals to change the arrangements for student support. I indicated then that further work on the detail of the proposals needed to be done by my officials in liaison with the Department of Finance and Personnel and the Economic Policy Unit in the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. Thereafter, it would require final clearance by the Executive.

I am pleased to say that the Executive fully endorsed my package of proposals last Thursday, and my purpose today is to inform the Assembly of the content of that package. I thank my Executive Colleagues for their support and, in particular, the officials in my Department, in the Department of Finance and Personnel, and in the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister who worked hard to ensure the finalisation of this package.

I will begin by recalling the key aims that underpin my proposals. Those aims are social, economic and educational, and I was encouraged by the support that they received in most quarters. My key aims are to widen access to further and higher education — especially higher education — in Northern Ireland and provide greater equality of opportunity and greater equity of treatment by reducing the barriers to participation and retention that exist for those from lower socioeconomic groups.

I wish to increase the contribution that higher and further education makes to economic development in Northern Ireland, particularly by enhancing the skills base. I wish to promote lifelong learning through increasing participation in higher and further education.

11.45 am

In support of those key aims, my proposals are designed, first, to target resources in higher education to those from lower income groups, thereby widening access to higher education from among the under-represented and those with specific needs; secondly, to upgrade support to those over 19 years of age wishing to participate full-time in vocational further education to boost the skills base of the economy; thirdly, to increase support for certain categories of students who are under-represented in both higher and further education, including part-time students; fourthly, to provide potential students and parents with a clearer, simpler system of administration for student support, particularly in relation to full-time education.

As Members are aware, my Department, along with other Departments, operates in a world of finite resources and many competing pressures for those resources, not only in higher and further education itself but in other areas such as health, schools, transport, and so on. I have made no secret of the fact that I wished to go even further than I have done. However, I would not have been fulfilling my ministerial responsibilities if I had come forward with proposals which did not have careful regard to affordability and to the need to ensure that any additional resources were indeed targeted on clear and pressing priority areas. That has meant that options such as abolishing the loan-based system or the total abolition of fees in higher education were not real options for me.

I trust that Members will appreciate that we are at the beginning of a new political era and that the changes that are being announced today do not mark the end of a process but rather the beginning of a process of change.

Student loans were first introduced in 1990 in recognition of the growing cost to taxpayers of higher education. The present loan-based system is a response to the crisis in higher education funding, identified by Dearing in his report in 1997, as more and more school-leavers each year move into third-level education. It costs some £90 million each year to fund loans to students in Northern Ireland. It is a simple fact that neither the Northern Ireland Executive nor the Executive in Scotland nor the UK Government in Whitehall could afford to operate a student support system without a strong loan element.

Furthermore, the current loans offer a good deal to students in commercial terms, a situation acknowledged by student representatives and by a departmental Committee. They are not repaid until the graduate is in employment and earning £10,000 per year. They are repaid at a zero rate of real interest, and no more than 9% of income above £10,000 is taken annually in repayment.

Some 75% of students now take out a loan, and the average loan is about £3,200 per year. Let me remind Members that the private rate of return to those with a

degree is some 20% above those without a degree. Dearing, Cubie and many other commentators, including the departmental Committee, agree that those who benefit most from higher education should pay something towards their upkeep during their course.

In theory one could change unilaterally the basis on which the loans are repaid, but in practice this would of necessity have to be done on a UK-wide basis since the Inland Revenue is unlikely to accept collection on a different basis in each jurisdiction. The Scottish Executive accepted this position despite the Cubie recommendations.

We have covered the ground on fee contribution before, but it is worth repeating that I did not feel that complete abolition would help the least-well-off members of society who aspire to higher education. Expenditure in that area would not be appropriately targeted, and it would be extremely divisive to make the change, as in Scotland, for locally domiciled students at local universities and colleges. European Union regulations mean that the many Northern Ireland students who have recourse to further and higher education opportunities outside Northern Ireland would be precluded from so benefiting. That would be a divisive and politically unacceptable position to move to.

Having set the context for my proposals, both in terms of aims and objectives and financial constraints, I shall now set out the detail. My proposals are based on a new targeting social needs/skills approach. There are three main elements to the overall package within which my proposals can be grouped.

First, there are measures to promote greater full-time adult participation in further education in order to improve equality of opportunity, to enhance the skills base and to promote lifelong learning. I wish to place much greater emphasis on the further education sector as a significant engine for economic development. Members will be aware that I have taken many opportunities — both inside and outside the Assembly — to express that emphasis. I have begun this process through a range of measures designed to upgrade the sector's information and communication technology capacity, to restructure its staffing profile, to improve facilities and to identify centres of excellence relevant to regional economic need.

I have been successful in increasing part-time enrolments of over-18-year-olds. However, I wish to secure an increase in adult full-time enrolments. Therefore, I propose to abolish tuition fees on a broad range of vocational courses at levels 2 and 3 for full-time students aged over 19. In so doing I will be pleased to have been able to go further than my pre-Christmas proposal, which was to confine fee abolition to courses in certain key skill areas.

In combination with fee abolition, I propose to introduce around 3,000 discretionary further education access bursaries. Those will be decided on a sliding scale of up to £1,500 each for full-time students aged over 19 on incomes below £10,000, up to £1,000 for those

whose incomes are between £10,000 and £12,500 and up to £500 for those whose incomes are between £12,500 and £15,000. The bursaries will replace the current further education discretionary awards and will be administered by the education and library boards.

In addition to fee abolition and the introduction of discretionary bursaries, I intend to increase the access funds — the support funds — administered by the further education colleges by a further £0.5 million a year. That will bring the total to approximately £1.7 million and focus them specifically on hardship in order to provide a greater safety net drop-out for those students who find themselves in financial difficulties after starting their courses.

Full-time course provision provides a much better opportunity for adults to reskill completely and to change career direction. This will be an essential element in meeting the needs of the new knowledge-based economy by providing adults with the incentive to make the necessary change. I expect, therefore, that this combination of fee abolition and bursary provision across the broad range of vocational provision, together with the increase of £0.5 million in the access funds of the further education colleges, will provide the necessary incentives and represent a significant step forward in narrowing the gap between further education and higher education student support.

I have not concentrated my attention purely on the full-time aspect of further education. As well as the increase in access (support) funds, to which I have referred and which will be equally accessible to part-time students, I will take action to ensure that a consistent fee remission policy for part-time students operates in every college across the further education sector. This will remove uncertainty about entitlement and eliminate local variations. It will provide for the tuition fees of students on low incomes or benefits, or who become unemployed after starting their courses, to be met by the colleges.

I will also provide individual learning accounts to help pay fees for part-time further education students in certain vocational courses to encourage greater participation in important skill areas and enhance lifelong learning.

The second broad category of the new arrangements is the introduction of access bursaries and other measures in higher education to widen access for the under-represented and provide greater equity of treatment for those in higher education from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Social groups IV and V make up 25% of the overall population, but students from these groups represent only 11% of the student population. There are a number of factors in this under-representation, but finance and debt aversion are included in them. Evidence from the recent student income and expenditure survey, which covered Great Britain and Northern Ireland, demonstrates

that students from these groups get less financial support from parents and relatives, have to assume more debt, have to undertake significantly longer part-time hours of paid work and are more likely to drop out for financial reasons than students from better-off families.

I intend, therefore, to address these elements of inequality of opportunity and inequity by introducing means-tested, non-repayable access bursaries on a sliding scale of up to £1,500 per annum for full-time undergraduates whose parental or spouse residual income is £15,000 or less. It is estimated that such bursaries will be taken up by over one third of the full-time student population. The amount of bursaries and the income thresholds at which they are payable will be along the same lines as the discretionary further education bursaries which I have already mentioned. They will interact with loan-based support. For example, someone whose family or spouse has a residual income of less than £10,000 will receive a total support package of £4,320, which is made up of £2,820 in loan and £1,500 in bursary.

To interact with these new bursaries I intend to reduce the loan available by up to £250 for students whose parents or spouses have residual incomes of over £46,000 per annum. This will enable resources to be targeted on assistance for students from lower-income families. The full reduction of £250 will apply to those with earnings of £47,700 per annum and above. Average earnings in Northern Ireland are around £18,700 per annum. It is estimated that reduced loan entitlement will affect only 20% of the student population.

I intend to raise the residual income threshold at which a student contribution towards tuition fees becomes due from £17,805 per annum to £20,000 per annum. Currently the maximum is £1,050. Therefore, more than 50% of students will not pay anything towards the cost of their tuition. It will also mean that many students who are required to pay a contribution which is less than the maximum amount will benefit from a further reduction.

12.00

Residual income is gross income, before tax and National Insurance, reduced by certain allowances, for example, superannuation payments that qualify for tax relief or for adult dependants.

In addition to these measures, I will introduce a childcare grant to assist students on low incomes with dependant children and to help to reduce the disincentive to full-time higher education. The grant will be based on 85% of the actual costs of registered or accredited childcare in term-time and 70% of actual costs during the long vacation, subject to a maximum of £100 per week for one child and £150 per week for two or more children. For those students who, for whatever reason, cannot avail of registered or accredited childcare, assistance is available through the access (support) funds of their institutions.

In addition to these measures for full-time higher education students, part-time students will be assisted by individual learning accounts (ILAs). ILAs were introduced in September 2000 to encourage lifelong learning by helping those aged 18 and over to meet the costs of a wide range of part-time courses. In Northern Ireland, learning eligible for ILA support is extended to vocationally relevant part-time higher education courses including the Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and part-time Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) offered by universities and higher education colleges as well as courses offered by the Open University and vocational courses studied through distance learning. For the initial 20,000 Northern Ireland account holders, up to £150 is available towards the first course costs, provided the learner pays at least £25. For subsequent eligible courses a discount of 20% will be available.

Where a part-time higher education course extends over several years, each complete year is regarded as a separate course for ILA purposes. Employed students may get a contribution from their employer towards fees and other course-related costs. If that is for a course purchased through an ILA, the employer may offset the contribution for tax purposes.

Thirdly, an increase in domestic higher education places, in order to widen access and increase the contribution of higher education to regional economic development, is proposed.

It has been argued by a wide range of commentators, including Lord Dearing, that there is a shortage of higher education places in Northern Ireland. This has the effect of driving up the grades required for entrance to our universities, leading to the phenomenon of “reluctant leavers” — those who must go outside Northern Ireland to take up a higher education course. It is impossible to quantify the exact extent of the problem, but I have been successful in bidding for an additional 1,000 higher education places on top of the 4,400 already announced in the Programme for Government.

In my view this is a reasonable estimate of the need at this time. I have not yet decided how these places will be allocated, but the majority will certainly be targeted at disciplines regarded as important for economic development.

In addition to the proposals I have already covered, I intend to ensure that we do everything possible to make clear and concise information and guidance on the student support system easily available to all those who need it. Therefore, I will be commissioning the education and library boards, assisted by student representatives including the National Union of Students (NUS), the Union of Students in Ireland (USI) and others, to review the nature and distribution of the financial information they provide to students, potential students and parents.

I am also conscious of the special needs of mature students and I intend to ask the Educational Guidance Service for Adults (EGSA) to provide a guidance service, again in co-operation with student representatives, to ensure that such students receive full information about the costs and other aspects of entry into higher education. I am delighted at the positive response of the student representatives to this proposal.

I will also open discussions with the education and library boards and the Student Loans Company with a view to re-engineering the administrative system for higher education loans to make the process simpler and more transparent, and to develop its capacity for the electronic delivery of services.

The cost of implementing my proposals will be some £65 million over the next three years. I trust that Members will agree that this represents a significant investment in the future of our young people. It is an investment that has been secured with considerable difficulty given the competing pressures on the Executive. I hope, therefore, that I can rely on the support of the Assembly as I move towards a public equality consultation as required by my Department's equality scheme.

In conclusion, I thank the Assembly again for the opportunity to speak today and, more importantly, for the contribution that the Assembly and its Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment Committee have made to this debate. I also extend my thanks to my Colleagues in the Executive, the Department of Finance and Personnel and the Office of the First and the Deputy First Ministers. I know that I have not delivered everything that the Committee sought in its report, but I have attempted to give effect to several of its key recommendations. I have tried to seek a conclusion that I believe to be in the best interests of our students and our wider society.

The Chairperson of the Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment Committee (Dr Birnie): I congratulate the Minister on the completion of this most recent, and lengthy, part of the review process. I note the extra resources that he has secured from both the Department of Finance and the Executive. The Committee welcomes those. I want to ask two brief questions. Will the Minister confirm that, since his previous statement on this matter on 15 December 2000, he has significantly widened the scope of the provisions for further education students in respect of access bursaries and the non-payment of up-front tuition fees? If so, I am interested to know why he has broadened that. The Committee will welcome that change.

Will the Minister provide an assessment of the level and generosity of his bursary scheme? The Committee welcomes it in principle, but I am concerned about how it compares with the situation in another devolved administration — namely Scotland — where, as I understand it, the bursaries are set at £2,000 for family

incomes less than £10,000 and do not taper down to zero until the family or spouse income reaches as high as £25,000.

Dr Farren: With respect to the first question, we have widened the scope for the abolition of tuition fees in relation to courses in further education. We did so because, on reflection, it appeared that it would be more appropriate to be as broad as possible rather than to approach the issue on the more restricted basis that I initially thought might have been necessary.

The same answer applies to the question of access bursaries in the further education sector. With respect to the comparisons that the Member has drawn with the situation in Scotland, one of the most important challenges that I met in formulating these proposals was their affordability — there are many competing bids and demands for the funds that are available to the Executive. Furthermore, as a basis for my proposals, targeting social need had to be clearly demonstrated. That was the challenge put to me on behalf of the Executive by both the Department of Finance and Personnel and the Economic Policy Unit. I had to clearly demonstrate that I would be targeting the resources that would be made available to me at those students from the lower income groups in our society, particularly income groups IV and V. As my figures illustrate, these groups are badly under-represented in further and higher education. For that reason, the thresholds are drawn at a lower level and the amounts available are within the limits of affordability. As and when greater resources are available, we can look at the amounts that we make available and the thresholds below which they will apply.

Mr Dallat: I too welcome the additional support for students attending colleges of further education. Can the Minister indicate how much money has been set aside to cover the cost of the bursaries? Also, has a quality impact assessment of his proposals been carried out? If so, when can we see it?

Dr Farren: Approximately £3.8 million is being made available with respect to the access bursaries. On the second point, an equality impact assessment has been carried out. I drew that to the attention of the Committee when I met it this morning. The more positive impacts of the proposals should be self-evident in terms of those who are below the different thresholds who will now gain access to fee remission and to bursaries, when the bursaries are introduced. Those in need of childcare and those in further and higher education will be able to benefit from the extension of Individual Learning Accounts to higher education courses.

There are some other possible impacts that must be addressed. These issues will receive the attention of the Equality Commission and all those who will be involved in the consultation process — those listed in my Department's equality scheme, with whom we are

obliged to enter into consultation. The proposals involving a means test may impact more positively on Catholics than on Protestants, given the likely religious balance in the income scales targeted. I am informed that some Muslims may have difficulty with the retention of a loans-based system of support in higher education because of inhibitions or prohibitions in some of their sects on availing of loans.

12.15 pm

On a gender basis, and despite the fact that more women than men study full-time in higher education, the targeting of additional higher education provision on skills shortage may impact more positively on men. The areas of science, engineering and technology, where men predominate, are likely to attract many of the additional places, but we may well ask ourselves what we are doing to attract greater participation by women in such courses.

The introduction of a childcare grant may have a more positive impact on women, who are traditionally the primary carers. With respect to age, the childcare grant as currently proposed may have a negative impact on some older students since, due to current regulations, it will not be available to those aged over 55.

The positive and negative impacts will have to be considered. There may well be others which will be identified by those with whom we consult in the process.

Mr Poots: Much of what the Minister has said today has been based on what the parents of students earn. Does the Minister not recognise that university students are not dependent on their parents? Has he given any consideration to situations in which, for example, parents may be divorced and the young person may live with either the mother or the father? That parent may not be the main earner and may not have a particularly good relationship with the other parent, who may not want to pay for his or her child's time at university. In such an instance, a young person can be discriminated against.

Has the Minister also given any consideration to parents in the wealthier band who may have two, or even three, children at university at one time?

Furthermore, the repayment of student loans has been set at £10,000, which is a fairly low point if housing costs, in particular, are taken into consideration. Will that be reviewed on a yearly basis with a view to raising that band? Students would not then have to make any repayments until a higher level of earnings was reached.

Dr Farren: I am very sympathetic to students who find that parental support is not available on the scale which might appear possible. Under existing regulations, there is provision for students to be assessed completely on their own means. Account can be taken of circumstances if it can be demonstrated — with respect to whatever means from whatever source — that students are not receiving the full degree of support to which it might initially have

appeared that they were entitled. It is not a case of students' finding themselves disregarded if they are in such circumstances as the Member has indicated.

With respect to the repayment of student loans, I have in the course of my remarks indicated that, for reasons associated with procedures in the Inland Revenue, we have to follow a UK-wide basis for the repayment of loans. I certainly believe that the threshold at which loan repayment becomes obligatory should be kept — and it is being kept — under review.

I think there were three questions. With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, perhaps the Member would repeat the second of those.

Mr Poots: It concerned people in the higher tax band who have more than one child at university.

Dr Farren: Residual income is what remains when certain commitments have been taken into account. That will vary, depending on the particular circumstances of the families involved. Families with greater levels of dependency than others will have lower levels of residual income on which their commitments to their student children will be determined.

Mrs Nelis: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's announcement as a first step towards implementing the many recommendations of the Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment Committee, and accepting students' demands that maintenance support is required to promote third-level education.

Given that the Minister is retaining up-front fees, does he share the view that there is still the major problem of the perceived deterrent effect of up-front fees among families and communities that are under-represented in participation in higher education in the North? What plans does the Minister have for challenging this perception?

Does the Minister share the Committee's view that the abolition of up-front fees and their replacement with an income-contingent graduate endowment with a payback threshold of £25,000, together with the restoration of maintenance, should be the ultimate policy objective for targeting social need?

Dr Farren: The package of proposals is a challenge to the perception identified by the Member. In terms of the access bursaries, the package is very clearly targeted at meeting the perception that debt aversion deters. People who might enter third level education are being deterred because they perceive that they will have a burden of debt. The access bursaries go a significant way towards removing that perception. People will now know that, depending on the level of parental income, they will receive degrees of support not previously available. These will be the primary means of addressing that perception.

In theory, there are attractions for a graduate endowment fund. The Committee proposed that such a fund would kick in at an income of £25,000. However, given that the average income in Northern Ireland is approximately £18,500, it would take a long time before there would be any significant return to the public purse. During that lengthy period there would be such pressure for additional finance on the bids from my Department that I doubt it could be met. The graduate endowment fund meets the widely supported proposition that those who benefit most from education should repay to the system for the benefit of future generations. It is a proposal that has received a lot of attention, not just in Scotland, where it originated, but also in our own considerations and in the recent deliberations of UK universities in the form of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors. That proposal has a number of significant problems associated with it.

On the issue of the abolition of tuition fees, when considering the abolition of any charge the key question that we need to ask ourselves, whether in education or elsewhere, is who will benefit most from that abolition. At present, approximately 50% of our students do not make a contribution to their tuition fees, and if we increase that figure to 100% by abolishing the contribution to tuition fees completely we are only going to benefit those in the higher income brackets. That does not seem to me to meet the challenge of targeting social need, which is a fundamental principle on which all our social policies have to be based. I ask the Member to consider the immediate effect of abolition. It would be to benefit those who are better off, at the expense of making more resources available to those who are least well off, which is, in fact, what I have been trying to do with this package.

Mrs E Bell: First of all, I welcome the Minister's package. It is comprehensive and far-reaching, and I hope that it will improve access to third-level education. Unfortunately, I got the paper less than an hour ago. It is very specific, and I will need to look at it in more detail before returning to the Minister.

I welcome a number of things: the abolition of tuition fees for full-time students on vocational courses, the increase in access support grants and bursaries, and the childcare grant. However, although the Minister has been very definite in his remarks about the abolition of fees, I ask him not to think that it will be impossible in the future. Perhaps it is difficult in the short term, but I hope that it will not be impossible in the future. For instance, if we get tax-varying powers here as they have in Scotland, we may be able to look at it again.

The Alliance Party has called for the abolition of tuition fees. However, there is a problem from the equality point of view. The Minister is abolishing tuition fees for students on a broad range of vocational courses. However, students on university courses and other vocational courses do have to pay tuition fees. Obviously, the Minister will be looking at this within the Department's equality scheme.

The Cubie Report suggested that the student loan system should be replaced with a graduate endowment fund. The Minister has also commented on that. However, the Scottish Executive said that that could only be accomplished on a UK-wide basis. In his further deliberations, will the Minister be working with the Scottish Executive to bring about this change in Westminster so that true equity can be achieved?

I welcome the growing number of further education places. The Minister says that he has not yet decided how those places will be allocated, but certainly the majority will be targeted at disciplines regarded as important for economic development. As well as looking at the disciplines, the Minister should look at places such as Magee and Coleraine, so that all further education courses and campuses will be adequately served. The Minister will be looking at the full resourcing of all the campuses so that we have not just the students but also the buildings and libraries and so on that go along with them.

A Member: Was there a question?

Dr Farren: I thank the Member for the —

Mrs E Bell: I was asking questions.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Please sit down.

Dr Farren, please answer the questions rather than deal with the general matters in Mrs Bell's statement.

Mrs E Bell: With respect, Mr Deputy Speaker, that was included in my question, as the Minister knows.

Dr Farren: There were several questions in the Member's comments.

I am not opposed in principle to the abolition of tuition fees. Indeed, in my statement I announced that I am proposing the abolition of tuition fees for a broad range of vocational courses in the further education sector at level 3 and below. The question as to whether we should plan for their total abolition right across the whole of the further and higher education sector is one that, in principle, we can say that we will keep under review.

However, we have to bear in mind that any steps taken towards significantly increasing the numbers to whom tuition fees do not apply, or abolishing fees completely, would raise significant affordability questions and questions related to targeting social need.

12.30 pm

We certainly want an increase in the number of places in our universities and colleges. Over the 1999 base, we have announced an increase of 4,400 places, to which I am now adding an additional 1,000. We need to address where these additional places should be made available and to which courses they should apply.

Ms McWilliams: I am afraid that I do not welcome many of these proposals — some of them are a step backwards, rather than forwards. I do welcome the proposal

relating to childcare, and I am pleased that the Minister took up my recommendation that provision be extended to all those with dependent children, and not just to those over 21. I made this recommendation to the Committee on the grounds that restricted provision might not be in line with the equality impact statements of these proposals.

I also noted this morning that the SDLP states on its web site that it is committed to the abolition of student loans and to the introduction of a proper grant system. I assume that that remains the case. Unfortunately, however, the only evidence of this commitment is the abolition of part of the student loan in a new proposal to step backwards by taking up to £250 from those who are not deemed to need the loan. Therefore, I remain concerned that in the future people will have debts and not degrees. A Select Committee of the House of Commons has already pointed to the fact that there is a serious problem with regard to retaining students, and that one — but just one — of the factors which affect this issue is debt.

Does the Minister not consider that it is extremely difficult to ask parents and education and library boards to administer a system of access to bursaries which range between £500, £1000 and £1,500 and are based on a means test? According to that Select Committee, in any year a student will have debts of between £3,000 and up to £7,000 by the time he leaves. In the light of this, would it not have been better to consider a decent package of access to bursaries which, I assume, could be considered, to some extent, as replacing student grants. We know that the problem will not be resolved by throwing a tiny bit of money into this sector, and we may continue to have serious problems with retention, never mind initial recruitment to universities.

Did the Minister succeed in raising in the British-Irish Council the issue of parity throughout the devolved Administrations? I share Members' concerns that systems in Scotland, England and Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland are now different from one another. That is a step backwards, particularly when one is trying to work out in simple terms what students are entitled to if they go to different universities. Does the Minister also consider that his proposals to give financial assistance to some further education courses, and not to others, might be discriminatory?

I welcome the extra 1,000 places that have been created. However, does the Minister accept that none of his proposals address the skills shortage crises affecting the Health Service — particularly in such fields as speech therapy and nursing — that have been debated in the Assembly?

Finally, has the Minister set in place any monitoring to assure us that mature students, those with disabilities, and young entrants from disadvantaged backgrounds will be attracted by these proposals? I do not believe that this is the case. Why did the Minister not take up our

proposal to have a joint funding council for the further education and higher education sectors, given that many of his proposals now relate to both sectors?

Dr Farren: Mr Deputy Speaker, at some stage a ruling on the number of questions that may be asked at any one time may be necessary. It is very difficult for a Minister to keep track of seven or eight questions, as I have tried to do with Ms McWilliams and others.

I will do my best, and if I miss any of the questions I will be only too willing to have the Member remind me of them.

Approximately 17,000 students will gain access bursaries — 14,000 in higher education and 3,000 in further education — and these numbers could well increase over the next few years. All will find these proposals a very helpful source of support to them in the course of their studies. I do not believe that they will be as disappointed as the Member suggests. In fact, I believe that the introduction of access bursaries will be welcomed in both the higher and further education sectors. It is not the case that we have missed an opportunity to target our scarce resources at those in greatest need, and I have not heard any proposals which would, on the grounds of affordability, indicate how we might better target the resources available to us towards those groups.

As to the level of take-up, quite obviously that remains to be seen; therefore I cannot give a 100% assurance to Ms McWilliams or indeed to any other Member that the take-up will be of level X or level Y. We are addressing the perception of aversion to entering higher education that is claimed to exist among many in the lower income brackets due to a lack of adequate support. I trust that by moving as we have done we will at least dent that perception, and that as more resources become available they too will be targeted. I certainly believe very strongly in targeting social need. As I have already indicated, I am not in principle opposed to the complete abolition of tuition fees, and the replacement of a loan system by a generous grant system for all remains an objective that we can certainly work towards. I would indeed welcome that, should the opportunity arise.

However, the Member, who herself holds a wide range of concerns for many social issues, must tell me and other Ministers how resources are to be made available for us to move more rapidly towards that objective than seems possible at present. At whose expense are we to move? At whose expense in the Health Service, the social services, or the rest of the educational services are we to proceed in order to get those resources? I do not hear that solution from Ms McWilliams or indeed from any other Members.

Ms McWilliams: On the issue of take-up, most academic research studies show that when you increase means-testing and complexity in the system, it is the

middle classes rather than the lower socio-economic groups who benefit. Does the Minister agree with that?

I must also point out that the Committee did in fact make proposals to the Minister which did not suggest that all of the money should come out of the block fund. Indeed, we recommended that students repay their access grant money through an endowment fund after graduation.

Dr Farren: I have dealt with the issue of a graduate endowment fund and the difficulties associated with the proposals of the departmental Committee, particularly the huge gap with respect to public finance which would exist if we were to adopt its proposal to set a threshold at £25,000.

The Member claims that it is the middle-income groups who benefit most from means-tested benefits. On the contrary, these benefits are deliberately targeted at those in the lower income brackets.

For the purposes of access bursaries, they are below the residual income of £15,000. It will be very difficult for people with incomes much greater than that to demonstrate that they have residual incomes as low as £15,000 in order to avail of such bursaries. In a few years' time, whether I am Minister or not, we could be open to accusations that if we do not significantly increase participation, we will not have met our key objectives.

How else can we ensure that those who need most receive most? It is likely that lower-income students will benefit from the remission of tuition fees because they will fall within the 50% who do not have to pay those fees. Lower-income students will benefit from the remission of tuition fees and also from maintenance support through access bursaries. However, this would not be the case if tuition fees were totally abolished.

As I indicated some time ago, my Department is actively considering changes to the current further and higher education advisory councils and also to training procedures.

Mr Weir: While sharing some Members' concerns about whether these proposals go far enough, I welcome the fact that additional resources have been made available and that we have been given more details.

Potential students and parents will be looking for clarity and certainty in these proposals to see how they will affect them individually. The Minister has indicated that in the further education sector, tuition fees will be abolished for full-time students over 19 years of age on a broad range of vocational courses at levels 2 and 3. First, can the Minister confirm that this will take effect from the start of the next academic year? Secondly, among a plethora of points raised by Ms McWilliams, there was a question that was not answered. If fees are to be abolished on a broad range of vocational courses, it follows that fees will still be payable on some courses. Is that not discriminatory, not only within the further

education sector but also between the further education sector and the higher education sector? Finally, potential students will want to know for which courses fees have been abolished. When will the Minister's Department be in a position to publish a list of such courses?

Dr Farren: My Department is working towards a broad interpretation of which vocational courses will qualify, but it is not currently in a position to publish a list. I hope that we will be able to introduce this part of the package from September 2001, when most further education proposals will be introduced. Legislation is necessary for the higher education proposals, and we will not be in a position to introduce those bursaries until September 2002.

A major information campaign will be put in place to help potential students to work out their entitlements and to plan the management of their finances. This will involve the Education Guidance Service for Adults, student representatives and the education and library boards. They will be as well prepared as we can possibly assist them to be at a point prior to entering their courses.

12.45 pm

I take the point about the potential for what the Member described as "discrimination" between courses. That is why we are looking very carefully at how we should approach this. We do not want to run into difficulties in this regard.

On the issue of any distinction between further education and higher education because of the abolition of fees, I do not anticipate that an equality assessment will cause difficulties. If it does, we will have to look again at a major part of the scheme. However, the soundings that we have taken indicate that we should not have difficulties. The process of formal consultation is only beginning now.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Five Members have notified me that they want to ask questions. We have 14 minutes, so I ask Members and the Minister to limit their remarks. In particular, I remind the Assembly that it is nugatory to repeat a question that somebody else has asked.

Mr Byrne: I welcome the Minister's package, particularly its focus on targeting social need. How much will the extra 1,000 higher education places cost, and how many of these new places will there be in each of the next three years? I invite the Minister to make sure that the extra places are spread across Northern Ireland and ask that County Tyrone — where there is actually no full-time higher education — be considered as a location for some of these places. Finally, can the Minister confirm that the 1,000 places are in addition to the 4,400 that were included in the Programme for Government?

Dr Farren: The cost of the additional higher education places is estimated at around £7.5 million in a full year. On the question of whether they are included in the 4,400, I trust that I have made it clear in my remarks that

they are additional to those which are already being put in place. Where they will be assigned is a matter that is still under consideration. Members will know that a number of initiatives are being undertaken to expand the provision of higher education courses, both full-time and part-time, and the colleges of further education are deeply involved in this expansion with us. The introduction next September of foundation degrees, which will be on an experimental basis for the next two years, will see 100 full-time equivalent places available this year and a further 100 the following year. These courses, which will be delivered exclusively within the further education college sector, will add to the places, and I understand that the college in the area referred to by the Member is one of the colleges in which foundation degree places will be made available.

Obviously, that is an issue that needs to be kept under close review. The places need to be made available in order to meet particular demands. Of course, some of those demands are skill-specific, and some of them are also specific to the needs of different university campuses. We need to bear a number of factors in mind before we will be able to say precisely where all of those additional places will be allocated.

Mr J Kelly: Go raibh agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Along with others, I welcome the fact that the Minister has accepted our demand that maintenance support is required to promote participation in third-level education for disadvantaged sections of our community.

We also welcome plans to introduce childcare grants, provide additional student places and simplify administrative arrangements for student support. However, we are disappointed that, despite evidence from many informed sources, including the recent report from the Select Committee on Education at Westminster, the Government will continue to charge many students and their families tuition fees in respect of higher education.

As regards education, no one is suggesting that the rich should be made richer and the poor poorer. However, given that the Minister's party, the Committee and, indeed, the Assembly are committed to the abolition of tuition fees, can the Minister instigate a defined programme over the next few years that will lead to the abolition of tuition fees for our students?

Dr Farren: I am not at all averse to considering proposals for the further extension of the new arrangements that I have announced. Nor, indeed, am I averse to considering the objective that the Member and many others have referred to.

I have a particular responsibility, as Minister, to negotiate proposals with my Executive Colleagues that can be broadly acceptable to them, and that can be broadly endorsed by the Assembly itself.

I understand that targeting social need is one of the fundamental bases as regards social policy that emanates

from the Good Friday Agreement. Indeed, even without that agreement, I am a strong proponent of looking at social policies in the context of addressing the needs of those who are less well endowed with resources than others. That is a priority.

When we have addressed that priority, we should then move to address the needs of others. However, in targeting social need we need to be very clear as to what we are asking for, and, indeed, how affordable that is at any one time.

All political parties have aims and objectives. They all recognise that most aims and objectives take time to be achieved. Indeed, some may never be fully achieved. In my area of responsibility, social justice is a key principle that I will argue for, and work to ensure that all my proposals are based on, as a first and essential criterion.

Mr Savage: I congratulate the Minister on his statement. Does he agree that a primary move that the Department could make, in the award of enhanced discretionary grants, would be to review grant applications refused by education and library boards in the current round? That would rectify injustices that have occurred, mainly due to artificially early closing dates.

Dr Farren: The Member's question refers to an issue with which I am frequently confronted — that is the efficacy and efficiency with which loan applications and applications for other forms of support are processed.

Closing dates are necessary for the efficient operation of the system, although, as I understand it, many of them can be treated flexibly. The dates are there for good reasons, and they are announced well in advance. Those who intend to apply for courses should become as aware of the requirements for securing financial support as they are of the academic requirements that they must meet.

It would not be easy to allocate what are limited resources without the closing dates. This is particularly true of discretionary awards. Those are very limited — they are not mandatory — and must be considered within a time frame in order to stop people from being disadvantaged. Such a situation would not be tolerable, and we need to observe the time frame. Whenever administrative difficulties have arisen they have been willingly addressed by those responsible.

Mrs Courtney: I welcome the package of measures that the Minister has announced. I particularly welcome the introduction of a childcare grant to assist students on a low income who have dependent children. Does the childcare grant apply only in term time, and how many people will benefit from the grant?

Dr Farren: The terms that were announced show that support is available at a level of 80% of cost in term time and, I think, 70% of cost out of term time. The introduction of such support will be of considerable

assistance to those who, because of family commitments, find it difficult to participate in higher and further education. Approximately 1,000 students are thought to be in those circumstances at present. I hope that this will be seen as a significant measure of assistance to those who are already in the system and those who might currently be deterred from entering it.

Mr Beggs: I thank the Minister for his announcement and, in particular, for the additional £65 million that will be spent in the higher and further education sector over the next three years. Is he satisfied with the residual level income that will apply to families that have two or more children? Will this area be kept under review, and is he satisfied that the information is easily available to students and their families so that they will know which grants apply to them?

Will the 1,000 extra student places be affected by any subsequent review by the Health Minister, who is investigating the number of nursing and speech therapy students? Will any announcement by her be in addition to what the Minister has announced today? Does the Health budget cover the students in health areas?

Dr Farren: With regard to the second part of the question, we will have to consult the relevant Minister and, indeed, the universities, because all places are university places, notwithstanding the source of the financial support that they receive. I think that it was Prof McWilliams who raised a question about the supply of professionals to the Health Service. Often when we examine the situation, it is a question of availability rather than supply. The question is whether the people with the professional qualifications are making themselves available in Northern Ireland for the positions that are advertised. I am prepared to look at that issue with the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

1.00 pm

Advice and guidance are given to ensure that parents, and, indeed, the students themselves, whether mature or still at school, are as fully informed as possible, and we are engaged with both the Educational Guidance Service for Adults and student representatives to ensure that that information is available. The whole system is individually related, because the commitments that parents have can vary depending not just on their income but on family circumstances. You cannot say that somebody with an income of £25,000 will be treated in the same way as somebody else with an income of £25,000, because circumstances may vary. Therefore, what is taken into account or disregarded will vary because of those circumstances. It is a complex system because individual circumstances vary.

DEPARTMENT FOR LEARNING AND EMPLOYMENT BILL

First Stage

The Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Dr Farren): I beg leave to lay before the Assembly a Bill [NIA 12/00] to rename the Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment as the Department for Learning and Employment.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Bill will be put on the list of pending business until a date for its Second Stage has been determined.

TRUSTEE BILL

Second Stage

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):
I beg to move

That the Second Stage of the Trustee Bill [NIA 11/00] be agreed.

The Trustee Bill reforms the law to make it easier for trustees to administer their trusts efficiently. The fundamental obligation on trustees dealing with trust property is, of course, to act in the best interests of the trust. Sometimes, however, trustees find that their ability to do so is hampered by restrictive rules dating from 1961, 1958 or even earlier. That can happen especially when trustees do not have the benefit of modern, professionally drafted trust deeds that invariably give wider powers to trustees than the statutory regime allows.

The intention is that these proposals will enable all trustees to enjoy the advantages of wider powers on a default basis when the trust documents themselves do not make such provision. At the same time there will be counterbalancing protection for beneficiaries through a new statutory duty of care.

The Bill is the result of a long and detailed process of consultation with interested parties. Public consultation looking at powers of investment was carried out by the Law Reform Advisory Committee for Northern Ireland in May 1996. The scope of investigation was later widened to include other powers and duties of trustees as it became clear that extending powers of investment alone would not remedy the situation for trustees. The Office of Law Reform examined the issues in liaison with the Law Commission and the Scottish Law Commission.

The subsequent Law Commission report No 260, 'Trustees' Powers and Duties', published in July 1999, contained a comprehensive draft Bill that was passed, with some amendments, as the Trustee Act 2000. In Northern Ireland a consultation paper was produced in September 2000 to investigate whether a similar package of reforms would be welcome here. The response was supportive, hence the Bill before the Assembly today.

The impetus for reform in this area of law began with dissatisfaction as regards trustee powers of investment. Investment of trust funds is central to proper administration of a trust. The conduct of investment business has changed dramatically over the last 10 to 15 years with the introduction of new technology and other developments. Unfortunately, the law has not kept up with these changes. Until now, trustees have not had easy access to the expertise of professional advisers, such as discretionary fund managers, or been able to react quickly to movements in the market. As a result, trustees relying on the default

regime have not been able to maximise returns for their beneficiaries. The Bill seeks to remedy that situation.

The Bill contains a comprehensive package of reforms. The core proposal is a wider power of investment. That general power of investment is supplemented by new powers to purchase land, to appoint agents, nominees and custodians, to insure trust property, and to make payment to professional trustees. The new powers will be overseen by a new statutory duty of care in order to protect beneficiaries against abuse.

There will also be powers for beneficiaries to direct the appointment or retirement of trustees. The new trustee powers and duties will apply to all trustees on a default basis; that is to say that the powers will be available to them automatically, unless the trust instrument excludes them. The powers will apply to existing trusts, as well as those to be set up in the future. It is expected that the powers will be of most benefit to older trusts and home-made trusts.

Part I of the Bill introduces a statutory duty of care, to be imposed on trustees carrying out a range of functions described in schedule 1. In summary, those functions relate to investment, acquisition of land, use of agents, nominees and custodians, compounding of liabilities, insurance of trust assets and powers involving reversionary interests, valuations and audit. This duty of care is a safeguard for beneficiaries. It is a counterbalance to the wider powers conferred on trustees by the Bill. However, it will apply not just to the new powers, but also when a trustee is exercising similar powers given by the trust instrument itself. It will not apply where the trust instrument says that it should not. The standard expected of a trustee will be to use such care as is reasonable in the circumstances, bearing in mind any special knowledge or experience the particular trustee may have or claim to have. There is a degree of flexibility built in, as more will be demanded from expert trustees than from others.

Part II of the Bill deals with powers of investment. At present, unless the trust instrument provides otherwise, trustee powers of investment are governed by the Trustee Act (Northern Ireland) 1958, the Trustee Investments Act 1961, and the Trustee (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 1962. There are schedules of specified, authorised investments and a network of rules. The regime is complicated and expensive to administer, and severely restricts the investment opportunities open to trustees. Not surprisingly, it is always rejected by advisers drawing up trusts nowadays in favour of wider powers.

The priority of the Bill is to replace this regime with arrangements reflecting modern needs, still on a default basis. Clause 3 is fundamental in this. It gives trustees the general power of investment — that means the power to make any kind of investment that they could make if they were absolutely entitled to the trust assets. Investments in land are excluded from the general power of investment, but not barred to trustees, because they

are given the power to invest in land separately, in Part III of the Bill. The reason for separate treatment of land transactions is to facilitate the making of consequential amendments to other legislation.

Clauses 4 and 5 impose specific duties on trustees in making investment decisions. They must review the investments from time to time; they must bear in mind suitability and diversification; and they must obtain and consider proper advice where appropriate. These provisions are valuable safeguards for beneficiaries. They are in addition to the duty of care.

Clauses 6 and 7 define the scope of this new investment power. It is a default provision. Subject to contrary provisions in the trust instrument, it applies to both existing and newly created trusts. However, the wishes of the person setting up a trust should be respected. The Bill allows for that, except in one particular situation. In the case of trust instruments dating from before 3 August 1961, restrictions on the scope of powers of investment are set aside. The significance of that date is that it was when the Trustee Investments Act 1961 came into operation. At that time, all pre-existing restrictions on investment were swept away and replaced by the 1961 Act regime. It would be wrong to reactivate those old restrictions now, forty years later, so clause 7(2) confirms their demise.

More recent expressions of intention, and those to be made in the future, are to be fully taken into account. For example, a settlor may say that there should be no investment in a certain type of shares — perhaps those of tobacco companies or arms manufacturers. In such a case, a trustee's power of investment will be qualified in line with the wishes of the settlor.

I want to refer to another issue arising out of clause 7. There are some bodies that are not actually trustees as such but which have powers of investment based on trustee powers under a statute. The investment powers of these bodies are to be updated in line with the new approach, giving them the general power of investment too. Some bodies with statutory investment powers have been individually identified and their powers duly amended in schedule 2.

Part III of the Bill is concerned with land transactions. Trustees are given power to acquire land as an investment, for occupation by a beneficiary or for other purposes.

Part IV deals with the use of agents, nominees and custodians. Again, in this area, professional practice has moved ahead of the current law. Under the Trustee Act (Northern Ireland) 1958, an individual trustee can delegate his or her responsibilities, but it is collective delegation by trustees as a group that concerns us. At present, the trustees are not permitted to delegate their fiduciary discretions, such as the choice of investments or the decision to sell or lease trust property, without

express authority in the trust instrument. This can be a serious obstacle to good administration.

In line with most modern trust deeds, the Bill now allows trustees to delegate their powers to administer the trust — including investment and management powers — to agents. However, this does not apply to powers to appoint or replace trustees, or to decide on the distribution of the income or capital of the trust.

For charitable trusts, the scope for delegation will be different — to include certain fund-raising activities. Trustees will have to keep any delegation arrangements they make under review. They will also be subject to the statutory duty of care and additional restrictions to protect beneficiaries. Trustees will also be able to employ nominees and custodians, subject to protection for beneficiaries.

Part V of the Bill makes provision for the remuneration of trustees. It deals with two issues in particular. First, it sets down rules for the interpretation and application of express charging clauses, for example, in wills.

1.15 pm

Secondly, it allows payment to trustees in some areas where the trust documents expressly cover that. Under the Bill, trust corporations will be entitled to receive reasonable remuneration for services provided to or on behalf of their trust. Other sole trustees will not have that right unless the trust instrument authorises it. Where there are a number of trustees, they will be able to authorise one of their number, acting in a professional capacity, to receive payment — again, at a reasonable rate. As far as charitable trusts are concerned, different considerations apply, and more discussion is needed. The Bill provides for regulations to be made in the future, if appropriate, to allow payment to charity trustees who are trust corporations or act in a professional capacity.

Part VI of the Bill deals with a different kind of problem in the present law. The Trustee Act (Northern Ireland) 1958 makes provision for the appointment and retirement of trustees, but it has become apparent that there are gaps in that provision. In particular, there is the situation where the beneficiaries of a trust are all of adult age, and between them, as a group, they are absolutely entitled to the trust property. It is anomalous that, at present, they have no power to direct the appointment of a new trustee, even where there is no one nominated to do so. They can bring the trust to an end and then set up a new trust, but that is not always the best course of action. The purpose of clause 34 is to give such beneficiaries the power to direct a trustee to retire from the trust or to direct the appointment of a new trustee.

The specific problem addressed by clause 35 is the situation where a trustee has become incapable of acting because of mental incapacity, and there is no one available

to appoint a replacement. Again the solution is to enable the beneficiaries to direct the appointment of a replacement.

Among the miscellaneous and supplementary provisions contained in Part VII of the Bill is an updating of the existing power to insure trust property found in section 19 of the 1958 Act. There are also provisions on the application of the proposals to special cases, such as personal representatives and pension schemes.

There is provision in clause 44 for the Department of Finance and Personnel to make Orders, subject to negative resolution, to amend legislation in connection with powers of investment or acquisition of land. On commencement it is provided that the provisions should come into operation on a day to be appointed. I have already referred to the significance of schedule 1, which details the situations where the new statutory duty of care applies. Schedule 2 consists of minor and consequential amendments; schedule 3 contains transitional provisions and savings; and schedule 4 has repeals.

In conclusion, I commend this Bill to the Assembly. It is a substantial and technical piece of legislation, but it tackles problems faced by trustees and beneficiaries in a realistic and pragmatic way. It is the result of detailed consideration in this jurisdiction and elsewhere. It aims to improve the position of trusts struggling without the benefit of modern trust documents drafted by expert advisers. Throughout the consultation process, the proposals have been widely welcomed. Members may have points to raise, and I will try to answer as many of those as I can in winding up at the end of the debate. If there is anything to which I am unable to respond today, I will write to the Member concerned.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Finance and Personnel Committee (Mr Leslie): I thank the Minister for his thorough introduction of the Bill, which to me seems to be a very worthwhile piece of legislation. It will contribute significantly to improving the way in which trusts can be run in the future.

I particularly commend the Minister and his Department on the way the build-up to the Bill was handled with the Committee. This is the appropriate model for all legislation, although, as far as I can judge from comments made by members of other Committees, it is not necessarily followed elsewhere.

The Finance and Personnel Committee was consulted about this proposed legislation last summer, which is over six months ago. The Office of Law Reform returned to us about a month ago to discuss the outcome of the consultation process. Only then did the Bill come forward. Therefore, there was every opportunity for the Committee to express opinions on the final Bill that came forward. I would like to think that all of our legislation could be handled this way. I commend the Minister for ensuring that that is what happened with this one.

However, this is such a complicated subject that there were not a great deal of precise recommendations coming forward from the Committee on this occasion. Nonetheless, having looked through the Bill, I think that the outcome is good. In particular, it realistically acknowledges that trusteeship is a professional activity for which trustees expect to be remunerated. That is very clearly acknowledged in the Bill and facilitated through it. It is to the benefit of the beneficiaries of trusts that this should be so, and the measure is welcome.

I also note good provisions for the delegation of the functions from trustees to specialists. As far as I can see, these provisions are drawn fairly widely. That is appropriate. This is a changing environment and it would not be sensible to have narrow legislation in this respect. It is appropriate to rely on the duty of care as the overriding arbiter and overriding measure, which places responsibility on the trustee should anything go wrong.

As a former practitioner in the area of investments, I was interested in the way the opportunities to delegate investment management were handled. I noticed a reference to something called "the policy statement" in the Bill. That is a fairly wide term. I imagine that in practice it will include the investment objective and will have to be agreed between the trustees and the delegated investment manager. It will be up to the manager to ensure that what he is being asked to do is reasonable. I imagine that that will normally be dealt with by negotiations before the investment objective is finalised, so that both parties should be in the position to feel comfortable with it.

Furthermore, I note that the Bill did not make any attempt to specify the type of investment manager, trustee, or nominee to whom delegation could be made. There may have been a temptation when the Bill was being drawn up to look towards the Financial Services Act 1986 and, perhaps, restrict appointments to businesses regulated by that legislation.

You could argue that that would be helpful to the trust in that all of the mechanisms for investor protection contained within the legislation would be a burden upon any investment manager and therefore potentially, or theoretically at least, a benefit to the trust.

It is appropriate that it is not being done. Many worthy investment managers do not operate within the United Kingdom under the authority of the Financial Services Act 1986. In relation to custodians, I would opine that the best custodians are found elsewhere, specifically if you wish to invest, as you reasonably might do, in south-east Asia. The type of custodian you might want to use might not be located in the United Kingdom and there is no reason why that should not be entirely appropriate.

I welcome the broad terms in which those parts of the Bill have been drawn up. I also commend the draftsmen for the clarity of their work, and, although it is quite

lengthy, I do not think that the Committee will find it difficult to deal with this Bill, unlike some others that have been sent in our direction. It is my pleasure to support the Bill.

Mr Durkan: First, I welcome the broad support for the Bill, as expressed today by Mr Leslie, the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel. As Mr Leslie has recognised, it is a technical piece of legislation. Nonetheless, it is to be welcomed because it deals with a technical and difficult area, and it is an attempt to remove a number of anomalies that are hampering best practice and the interests of beneficiaries in the operation of trusts.

I appreciate the Member's commendation of how the Bill has been handled so far. As indicated in Mr Leslie's remarks, the consultation that was involved for this Bill predated the Assembly, but that does not remove the need for proper consultation with the Assembly. When proposals for legislation concerning trustees were pending we consulted the Committee, and we did so again when we deferred the original legislation in order to take account of wider changes. The Committee's advice was to delay the legislation to allow a more comprehensive and complete Bill to be drawn up. The Committee's interest in this matter has always been helpful.

With regard to the observations about more professional requirements in this field, particularly in the light of the pressures and practices of the modern environment, I can only agree with what Mr Leslie said. It is precisely that sort of consideration which underlies the Bill's proposals. That is why it includes provisions to deal with the remuneration of trustees, the delegation of trustee functions to agents and so on. I note Mr Leslie's point that it is right that the Bill should not unduly define who might be, or should be, appointed in any given instance.

The policy paper on asset management was also mentioned. Obviously, there will be, and should be, scope for consultation between trustees and investment managers in advance of appointment. The exact requirements described by Mr Leslie are envisaged in the Bill. If the issue needs to be clarified, the matter can be followed up at Committee Stage.

Mr Leslie also emphasised the reliance on the duty of care, the importance of which I emphasised several times in my opening remarks. The protection of beneficiaries here will be based upon that duty. It is important that this be made clear when people are appointed to these positions of responsibility and in relation to any future undertaking. This is appropriate given that the Bill deals with the area of law concerning trustees. While we try to modernise the legislation to take account of modern realities and professional requirements, it is important that we avoid being overly restrictive by trying to tie everything into, for example, the provisions of the

financial services regulatory regime. I found Mr Leslie's insights in that area particularly helpful.

1.30 pm

I do not think that there are any other outstanding points. The Committee will be considering this Bill further, and while I appreciate, as Mr Leslie said, that there have not been too many comments by the Committee to date in relation to this, I think that that reflects the fact that the Committee recognises the broad welcome that there has been from all the relevant interested parties for this legislation. Nevertheless, the Committee will want to show due diligence when the Bill comes to it for consideration. Notwithstanding all the other pressures that the Committee has to contend with, I look forward to receiving its considered and positive views on the measures.

I hope I have covered all the points that were made today. If not, we can pick them up later. On that basis, I again commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Second Stage of the Trustee Bill [NIA 11/00] be agreed.

The sitting was suspended at 1.31 pm.

On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —

Oral Answers to Questions

2.30 pm

Mr Fee: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The House will see that my name is listed against question No 1 on the list of questions for oral answer. However, I have been told that a decision was made to transfer that question to another Department for reply, and therefore I have been issued with a written response.

I have problems with this process, and I should appreciate it if you, Mr Speaker, would examine this matter to see if there is a more efficient and effective way of doing things.

I am disturbed that the Executive can alter the published list of questions for oral answer and that a question that has been accepted as being competent by the Business Office can subsequently be transferred to a different Department. I am also disturbed that the Executive can decide that there will be one lead Minister, with the result that Back-Benchers cannot question other Ministers who are involved in a matter.

I am disturbed by the manner in which a question for oral answer, which may elicit supplementary questions and sudden debate on the Floor, can be transferred to become a question for written answer, thus denying Members the opportunity for debate. I am also disturbed that the Minister — who is well able and, I am sure, willing to answer the question — is not in a position to be queried about why the question was transferred.

It seems that the system fundamentally thwarts the rights of Back-Benchers to hold Ministers and Departments to account. The system subverts the authority of the Business Office, the Standing Orders Committee and, to some extent, the Speaker's Office. I would appreciate it if you, Mr Speaker, would take the lead and try to establish what is best practice and good precedent. It would be of benefit to the House if you liaised with the Departments and Offices of the Assembly so that Members can ensure that what Ministers do is fully transparent and that they are accountable.

Mr Speaker: The Member has rightly identified that it would not be in order to question this or any transfer. However, I understand that he is not querying that; he is querying the procedure. The procedure, as the Member says, is that when a question is tabled and judged to be competent it is then forwarded to the Executive, to identify the lead Department in respect of that question. Even if some other Department has a role to play, the question will be transferred to the Department that has the lead role. What the Member says about that is correct, and it is therefore difficult in practice to ask a

question about any Minister's role in a matter if he or she is not the Minister of the lead Department.

A question for oral answer that is transferred will receive a written response rather than an oral reply. However, when that matter is indicated to a Member, he may withdraw the question and resubmit it as a question for oral answer to the Department identified by the Executive as the lead Department. At a later stage, the question goes into the lottery, as one might say, for the ordering of items.

I accept the Member's identification of the Speaker's responsibility to defend the rights of the Assembly and the responsibility of Back-Benchers to hold the Executive to account. That is a long-standing tradition.

I will take seriously what the Member says and will endeavour to carry it through. I have received indications that the process of asking questions is regarded as not wholly satisfactory, not only by Mr Fee and other Back-Benchers, but also by some Members of the Executive. For this reason the matter has been raised at the Business Committee on many occasions. Business managers in that Committee have been asked to provide, to my office, their thoughts about how the process of asking questions can be improved. I trust that I will receive a number of thoughts in that regard, and I will try to facilitate some improvements. As I said, it is not something that is seen only by Back-Benchers as being not wholly satisfactory, but is also regarded by business managers and by some Members of the Executive, in a wholly constructive way, as not being sufficiently open and satisfactory.

Mr Fee: On a further point of order, Mr Speaker. With regard to the Business Committee's deliberations, I would like to point out that my question to the Minister, who I know is very capable of answering it, was transferred to the Minister for Social Development, who will also be answering questions today. Would it not have been more appropriate for it to be directly transferred for an oral response subject to supplementaries on the Floor of the Assembly later today?

Mr Speaker: The practical dilemma is that, given the current procedures, by the time the decision on transfer was taken it would not have "made the shuffle", as they say in the Business Office. The Member is identifying practical operational problems with regard to questions. As this matter has been aired, I trust that all those with thoughts and queries on the matter will put them forward so that they may be taken into account. Some queries may result in requests to the Procedures Committee to look at Standing Orders. Some may not necessitate any changes to Standing Orders.

Mr Fee has identified that question 1, standing in his name, has been transferred to the Department for Social Development. Question 4, standing in the name of Ms Lewsley, has been transferred to the Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment.

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Economic Development Agencies

2. **Mr Neeson** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail what progress has been made in establishing a single development agency in Northern Ireland. (AQO 1176/00)

12. **Mr Dalton** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail what further progress has been made towards the restructuring of Northern Ireland's economic development agencies. (AQO 1181/00)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Sir Reg Empey): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will take questions 2 and 12 together.

The first draft of a Bill has been produced. Five working groups have been established in the Department, and they have started work on the practicalities of the reorganisation. Consultation on the equality impact of the proposed restructuring will commence soon. Advertisements will shortly appear for the appointments of a chairperson, a shadow board and a chief executive designate.

Mr Neeson: Has the Minister established a timescale in which the restructuring can be carried out?

Sir Reg Empey: It is hoped that the equality impact assessment will commence tomorrow. I am hopeful that legislation, subject to Executive approval, can be brought forward to the House before the summer recess so that it can be sent to the Committee over the summer and that the remaining Stages will be completed in the autumn. It is hoped that it will receive Royal Assent before the end of the year. That will enable the organisation to be up and running as soon as possible at the beginning of next year. In the meantime, the existing boards of the existing organisations will continue until they are formally replaced at the beginning of next year.

Mr Dalton: While we all want to see increased inward investment in Northern Ireland, I am sure that the Minister will agree that small and medium-sized enterprises are the backbone of our local economy. Can the Minister assure me that the new agency will continue to give priority to assisting business development in the small and medium-sized enterprise sector?

Sir Reg Empey: The hon Member is absolutely right. The backbone of our industry and business is small businesses. It is a much higher proportion here than in the rest of the United Kingdom. I can give the Member that assurance with pleasure. The reorganisation is not designed to simply work for and on behalf of the big battalions. That would be counterproductive, as the structure of our industry is based on small and locally owned businesses.

Mr S Wilson: Will the Minister give us some indication when he intends to have the IDB, as part of the reorganisation, moved from its existing premises in the centre of town? Has he liaised with the Minister for Social Development to ensure that such a move is not so delayed as to affect the regeneration proposals for the Victoria Square area?

Sir Reg Empey: That is a very valid point. I have had direct meetings with the Minister for Social Development. We have discussed this particular problem, despite the fact that premises are primarily a matter for the Department of Finance and Personnel.

The Member will also wish to know that the current proposal is for the new agency to be a non-departmental public body, which means that it will be outside of Government. It will, therefore, be technically responsible for its own premises. However, I am concerned about initial proposals put forward that would involve two relocations — a move to temporary premises and then to permanent premises. I am resisting that because of the obvious additional cost and disruption that it would cause.

I have no reason to believe, at this stage, that the proposals that we have are in any way going to conflict with the timetable for the redevelopment of Victoria Square, and I can assure the Member that I have no desire to hold that up in any way.

Tourist Board Chairman

3. **Ms McWilliams** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail what action he intends to take against the chairman of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board given the report to the Northern Ireland Assembly by the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland (NIA 36/00). (AQO 1157/00)

Sir Reg Empey: The short answer is none. The Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) reported deficiencies in the Northern Ireland Tourist Board's procurement systems. These had been identified earlier by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) and corrected. That is acknowledged by the C&AG. The C&AG also accepts that the chairman of the NITB acted properly throughout. More generally, the C&AG highlights the importance of codes of conduct for board members and the need to guard against conflicts of interest. My Department fully supports those points.

Ms McWilliams: Does the Minister agree that the perception among the general public, as a result of this report, is that there has been a conflict of interest? Does he also agree that it is necessary to assure people that such behaviour should never be condoned, even though the report itself has a finding that suggests that? Does the Minister have any concern that the public has not been reassured on that point?

Sir Reg Empey: The public perception has been influenced to some extent by the comments made by a number of representatives. Many of those comments were grossly inaccurate. The Member should also be aware that when the chairman was appointed, it was well known to the Department and the Minister who appointed him that his company had a relationship with the NITB going back to 1948. The amount of activity between his company and the NITB has actually diminished since he became chairperson.

On the wider question, I said that my Department fully supports the concept of codes of conduct on conflicts of interest. The Member will be aware that when you ask members of the public to serve on a number of public bodies, whether it is the Industrial Development Board or something else, you cannot exclude people who have some knowledge of or role in those particular sectors. For instance, when we appointed the partnership boards to deal with the peace and reconciliation procedures we appointed people from the voluntary sector to sit on those. Having sat on one of those boards, I vividly recall that people were moving in and out of the room when various items were being discussed. It is very hard to ring-fence things completely.

In this case there was a failure in procedure. This was identified by the board, which called in my Department's internal auditors. It then carried out a report before transferring the purchasing procedures to the Government Purchasing Agency and placing a finance director in charge of all procurement. I understand that the system failed the chairman, rather than the chairman's having failed the system. However, the board and the Comptroller and Auditor General have assured me that there was no misuse of position, and that procedures now in place are of the best practice available. I hope that this will resolve the matter in the future.

2.45 pm

Mr Dallat: Is the Minister aware that in the Northern Ireland Audit Office's 1995 annual report, attention was drawn to a conflict of interest? That report dealt with selective financial assistance for tourism, and it revealed that a board member had not handled his conflict of interest properly. In view of this, does the Minister accept that although this was tolerated under direct rule, there is no excuse for this type of practice in the present arrangement? Does the Minister agree that Mr Bailie — who has, without doubt, many talents to offer — should have been appointed to another body where there was no conflict of interest? Will the Minister please outline to the Assembly what steps he intends to take to restore public confidence in the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and the methods by which it makes appointments?

Sir Reg Empey: There is no evidence in the Comptroller and Auditor General's report that there was any inappropriate conduct by any member of the board, and

that is acknowledged. The failure lay in the procedures that the board had been following with regard to its procurements. That was identified by the board's staff, who called in the internal audit side of this Department, which, in turn, drew it to the attention of the Comptroller and Auditor General. This was in the course of the Comptroller's normal reporting procedures for any public body.

The chairman was appointed a number of years ago. As I pointed out in my previous answer to the Member for South Belfast (Ms McWilliams), if you took all of the boards in the Province and removed from them people who had an involvement in their particular board's area you would not have many people left. For example, take the people who sit on the IDB — their companies may very well apply for and receive selective financial assistance. The same applies to LEDU and other boards — so there has to be a way of managing it. In the case of the tourist board, the fact was that the procedures were defective. That was identified.

I cannot comment on the 1995 report, as I am not aware of its particular details. I can assure the Member, however, that the procedures that are now in place are up to the mark as the ones that are best practice — or believed to represent best practice. I am satisfied that those procedures, now that they are in place, will protect the board members and the public from finding themselves in difficulty in the future.

Mr Speaker: I do not see Mr Gibson in his place, so we will move on to Mr McClarty.

Tourism: Foot-and-Mouth Disease

6. **Mr McClarty** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to give his assessment of the impact of the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease on the tourism sector. (AQO 1180/00)

Sir Reg Empey: The impact of foot-and-mouth disease on the tourism sector is widely acknowledged. Economic consequences are factored into risk analyses constantly being reviewed by the Executive group chaired by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. I have maintained close contact with tourism industry representatives and discussed recovery plans at a recent forum with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board.

Mr McClarty: I commend the Minister for meeting with tourism representatives last week and for his concern for this sector. Does he agree that my constituency of East Londonderry — which markets itself as the "Causeway Coast" — is suffering more than most in the present difficulties? Following the meeting the Minister said that compensation for the tourism sector was a UK-wide issue, with which I agree. Will the Minister assure me, however, that he will raise the matter at the

earliest opportunity with Tourism Minister Janet Anderson to see whether compensation may be available?

Sir Reg Empey: I am aware of the matter that the Member referred to, and of his constituency's involvement with tourism. Representatives from his area were in evidence at the meeting last Tuesday of the various interests in tourism. It was an emotional meeting, insofar as many of the members there with small businesses dependent on tourism were in dire straits. Some of them were contemplating signing on the dole, while a number of them indicated that their turnover for the month had been as low as £100.

Anybody who confines the problem surrounding foot-and-mouth purely to the farmers is mistaking the point. The tourism industry is in severe difficulties, as we have seen from the remarks of my colleague Janet Anderson and the comments of Jim McDaid, my opposite number in the Republic. They are suffering great difficulties there. I assure the Member that we are in constant contact with the Department in London. I have raised the matter with the Executive before and will be doing so again later this afternoon. We are looking at this question, which must be put in the national context. We are also working on a recovery plan, which we will put into operation as soon as it is possible to lift restrictions, so as to help the industry get back on its feet before much more damage is done.

Mrs Courtney: The Minister has already acknowledged the damage that has been done to the tourism industry, particularly in rural areas. Last night, the Minister of Tourism in the Republic of Ireland announced measures to provide compensation — possibly grants — to those affected. In view of that, will the Minister — I understand that it is not his decision alone, that he will have to work with his Assembly Colleagues — see whether a similar scheme could be adapted for those affected in Northern Ireland?

Sir Reg Empey: Today I followed up comments made by Mr McDaid with regard to compensation. He was referring specifically to parts of County Louth. The suggestions that were floated were not dissimilar to ones that are being mooted in London — delayed VAT payments, rates issues and other matters. We are closely monitoring those, although VAT and revenue issues are not the responsibility of this Assembly. The Minister of Finance and Personnel is aware of this and if there is any package on a national basis, we will expect our share of it and will take whatever action we can. However, the Executive is constantly monitoring the situation in the hope and expectation that we can get an early resolution.

Mr McHugh: A Cheann Comhairle, in consultation with other Ministers, does the Minister see the opportunity to do something in relation to tourism? If we can get some sort of regionality for part of the North, will there be

scope to look at certain sectors, such as areas of County Fermanagh? Maybe something can be done to allow some inward movement of people into areas that will not affect agriculture and have no connection with livestock. That might alleviate some of the pressure on areas that are designated for tourism in particular. What they are suffering is serious, but we must not allow anyone to cause more problems in relation to foot-and-mouth itself.

Sir Reg Empey: I am conscious of the difficulties in the Member's constituency. I have had a number of representations from that area in the past few days. Last Thursday, I hoped to be in the position to begin removing some of the restrictions, but then we were confronted with the County Louth case. There was also a threat over the weekend in regard to County Donegal, which I am pleased to say has now passed.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development has made it clear that as soon as veterinary advice permits, she will bring forward proposals. I fully support that. I know the damage that is being done. I was talking to the Northern Ireland Tourist Board this morning. We are actively involved in the preparation of a recovery plan dealing with people taking holidays in Northern Ireland.

I am aware of the fishing interests, in particular in County Fermanagh, where it might be possible to go ahead at an earlier stage with wet fishing. Members will understand, however, that, for obvious reasons, my Colleague the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure felt compelled to close down the public fishing estate. All these things must be put in the balance, and I hope that the Executive will address them later this afternoon.

Mr Close: Following some of the Minister's comments, I am concerned that the message that will be going out is that we in Northern Ireland are somewhat restrained or curtailed in what we might be able to do for the tourist industry, which is suffering as a result of the foot-and-mouth crisis, and that we will have to wait for the actions of others in the Departments across the water or in the South. Surely, as tourism is a devolved issue, can our Executive not take direct action to help those who have suffered? That is the message people would like to hear.

Sir Reg Empey: What the Member says is technically correct, and I agree. We are not currently restricted by what is or is not happening in London, Dublin or anywhere else. To begin with, in relation to movement we have had a more strict regime here than that in Great Britain. The evidence all around us clearly indicates that that was the right thing to do. The Republic was able to get regionalisation in 36 hours. That is the only way in which we are restricted. We believe that there is a very strong case for regionalisation, but that must be sought from the Commission by the United Kingdom Government. I believe there is a meeting tomorrow, at which such a decision could possibly be taken.

That is the key issue, because the kind of promotion that you do must be linked to the availability and ability of people being able to move around, and the desirability of allowing them to do so. Therefore our own regime with regard to restrictions on movement is the key deciding factor. We are not looking over our shoulder to see what London or Dublin is doing. I can assure the Member that I am in daily touch with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, which is actively pursuing their programme. There is a meeting of the various tourist interests later this week to plan the campaign, and resources have been made available. The programme will be announced when it is ready.

Tourism: Funding

7. **Mr Poots** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the steps he is taking to ensure equality of funding for tourism projects throughout Northern Ireland. (AQO 1173/00)

Sir Reg Empey: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board approves funding for projects which meet published criteria and follows standard appraisal procedures. This process is applied equally and consistently to all tourism projects in Northern Ireland where financial support is sought.

Mr Poots: When will the Minister stop paying lip service to this issue? There is abundant evidence that those promoting tourism in Lagan Valley have not received a slice of the cake commensurate with their effort. Will he even indicate a willingness to lift the current moratorium on grant aid for hotel development in that area? This is inhibiting the growth of tourism in Lagan Valley.

Sir Reg Empey: I am not paying lip service to anything. The Member raised this issue last November. My response at that time was that the moratorium on grant aid to hotels in the Greater Belfast area was in place because hotels are being built without recourse to public money —

Mr Poots: Not in Lagan Valley.

Sir Reg Empey: That may be the case, but the problem is that there are no applications from Lagan Valley. There is not one before the Department at the moment.

I said last November, and I repeat, that the decision to have a moratorium is not a statutory one. It is an administrative decision, based on what has been the practice with the commercial sector and what has been the best judgement. I do not think that the Member would want to see subsidies being paid to companies to build hotels when, commercially, they can stand on their own two feet.

We should bear in mind that the moratorium does not apply to the entire Lagan Valley area. It probably applies up to Lisburn town, but thereafter it is not included. If a

project or a proposal comes forward, I am quite prepared to look at it on its merits.

3.00 pm

I attended a meeting of Lisburn Chamber of Commerce last week when the Member of Parliament, Mr Jeffrey Donaldson, and others in the audience raised this matter. Some Assembly Members were also present, and I indicated that if a particular proposal were put forward it would be looked at on its merits. It is in the public interest to ensure that where it is commercially viable and possible for projects to proceed without recourse to public funds, they do so, and that will be entirely consistent with the views of Members.

Employment: Former Textile Workers

8. **Mr Hussey** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail what action he has taken to assist the creation of alternative employment in those areas affected by job losses in the textile industry. (AQO 1155/00)

Sir Reg Empey: The IDB is promoting employment opportunities in areas affected by job losses in the textile industry to potential investors at home and overseas. The IDB is working with the Department of Further and Higher Education, Training and Employment to ensure the availability of retraining and is working with councils to address local issues. LEDU is stimulating the development of smaller businesses and opportunities for self-employment.

Mr Hussey: Can the Minister give an assurance that the infrastructure will be available and will be assisted, given the benefits of the growth of the information and communications technology (ICT) sector of the economy? Will skills be available to meet the challenge, and at the same time will he ensure that there is not an overdependence on a single industry type and that we have a diverse economic base?

Sir Reg Empey: The point the hon Member makes about dependence on a single industry type is well founded. In Northern Ireland, overdependence on certain areas has been a pattern over the years.

On the question of infrastructure, I was recently in Strabane, in west Tyrone, and announced that we are trying to procure further factory space in that area. That flexible facility at Orchard Road in Strabane could take ICT-related businesses. We also have available space in Omagh, and I can assure the hon Member that one of the objectives of the Programme for Government is to ensure broad-band capability. We are pursuing a national approach with Patricia Hewitt, the Minister for Small Business and e-commerce, and others. A target has been set to have the best facilities in the G7 countries in place by 2005. I have endorsed that, and my Executive Colleagues are actively considering what access can be

made to the Executive programme funds to ensure that adequate facilities are made available in remote rural areas to create a level playing field.

My Colleague Dr Farren is acutely aware of the skills issue, and his Department is actively taking steps to ensure that a broad range of skills in particular areas is available. Where people have run into difficulties, particularly in the textile sector, they are offered retraining so that they can avail of the opportunities arising in newer industries.

Small Businesses

9. **Mr Armstrong** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if he has read 'Barriers to Growth and Survival', published in November 2000 by the Federation of Small Businesses; and to make a statement.

(AQO 1188/00)

Sir Reg Empey: As the hon Member knows, I was at the launch of this report, which highlights the key factors influencing the survival and growth of businesses. Given the importance of small firms to our economy, I welcome the report's findings and believe that they will help inform the work of both the new single agency and the existing agencies.

Mr Armstrong: Does the Minister accept that the high rate of bank interest charged to small and medium-sized enterprises is undermining the potential of this vital sector in our local economy? Will he give a commitment to encourage the banks to see it is to their advantage in the long term to contribute to the economy and to end their seemingly short-sighted approach to small businesses?

Sir Reg Empey: I am aware that interest rates are a major concern to many small businesses. LEDU is sponsoring, and in the past has sponsored, schemes to offer interest rate relief as part of its package of measures to assist businesses. The report highlighted a range of issues about bank charges, which can be a significant cost for businesses.

It is my intention to meet the banks soon to raise a whole range of issues with them, not least those issues that will arise if the foot-and-mouth disease outbreak continues. The outbreak directly affects tourism, as do the banks' decisions on how rigorously they press for repayments and whether they are prepared to reschedule loans. I notice that that action is being taken throughout the rest of the United Kingdom and in the Republic.

Electricity Supply Interruptions

10. **Mr McGrady** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the nature of his discussions with Northern Ireland Electricity following the prolonged interruptions to mains electricity supply at the end of February 2001.

(AQO 1149/00)

Sir Reg Empey: I spoke to Northern Ireland Electricity (NIE) management early on 27 February about the action being taken to restore electricity supply to customers. I intend to review thoroughly with NIE its response to the February disruptions. That review will include a visit to the NIE incident centre in Craigavon later this week.

Mr McGrady: I thank the Minister for his reply. He may not be aware that in the first week of March there was also a failure in the Saintfield and Ballynahinch areas. On 21 March there was a failure in the Kilkeel and Annalong areas, and in rural areas around Downpatrick. That is a consistent pattern, and the people there are no longer satisfied with the promises made by NIE after the 1998 debacle. They want an independent review of the infrastructure, which is obviously not adequate for the modern-day delivery of a basic utility.

In addition, will the Minister take on board the fact that the compensation scheme for those who were deprived of electricity in those periods is at the behest of consumers? In many cases they are old people who are not capable of understanding the procedures. Should it not be in NIE's power to make automatic payments to people whom it knows from its records were off supply?

Sir Reg Empey: That last point is valid. I will ask my officials to draw that matter to the attention of the regulator, who, as the Member knows, is currently conducting a review of NIE's current transmission and distribution charges. I have probably received more correspondence on the issues referred to by the Member than on any other subject in recent months. In particular, I have had letters from people from all over County Down complaining about interruptions to supply. That is why I am visiting NIE's incident centre this week. I indicated to the House in a statement following the worst of the delays that I would be vigorously following it up. However, I felt that it was appropriate to wait until the dust had settled, until people were back on supply and until an analysis could be conducted. Despite the fact that we all understand that our rural network is spread out and that nobody can entirely predict the weather, we have to accept that what we currently have is unsatisfactory.

HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

Mr Speaker: Question 4, standing in the name of Mrs Joan Carson, has been transferred to the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister.

Training Centres

1. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to give his assessment of the impact of the merger of training centres with the

institutes of higher and further education; and to make a statement. (AQO 1185/00)

The Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Dr Farren): The merger of training centres and further education colleges took place in September of last year. Since then, steps have been taken to integrate the facilities and resources of those organisations fully. That process is continuing. The Department is satisfied that the merger has further enhanced the key role played by the further education sector in the delivery of vocational education and training.

Mr Beggs: Will the Minister say whether the merger has resulted in a reduction in the capacity of technical and vocational training facilities in Northern Ireland? Can any of the funds generated by the sale of the property involved be used to upgrade further education access in borough council areas such as Carrickfergus and Larne and in constituencies, such as East Antrim, where there is no permanent further education campus?

(Madam Deputy Speaker [Ms Morrice] in the Chair)

Dr Farren: The East Antrim Institute, which serves the area that the Member is concerned about, is continuing to explore the options for the provision of further education facilities in Larne. In response to the Member's first point, I reject any suggestion that the merger has reduced physical capacity or the level of personnel available to provide the range of courses normally offered by the further education sector. I argue that the merger has considerably enhanced the further education sector's capacity to deliver the range of courses for which it is responsible.

Higher and Further Education: Student Places

2. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail what steps he has taken to increase student places at higher and further education institutions. (AQO 1152/00)

Dr Farren: Over the next few years, there should be an increase of as many as 13,000 student places in the further and higher education sectors in comparison with the 1998-99 levels. The increases will be as a result of my endorsement of the comprehensive spending review expansion plans, my support for the Springvale project and the additional resources which I secured during the 2000 spending review and the student support review. The additional places include 7,400 enrolments for full-time or part-time study at existing further education colleges.

Mr Dallat: How does the Minister intend to divide these places between the further education and higher education sectors? Will the places be distributed according to need across Northern Ireland?

Dr Farren: Some 2,800 places are to be made available in higher education institutions, and over 9,000 will be created in further education colleges, including the 7,400 enrolments referred to in my initial answer. These figures exclude the 1,000 extra places which have been secured through the student support review, which I announced this morning, the distribution of which has still to be decided. The allocation of these places will be based on several issues of need, including the capacity of institutions to provide the necessary accommodation and the personnel necessary to deliver the courses. There is, of course, the overriding consideration that these extra places should be allocated to the kinds of courses that will serve economic development needs.

Dr Birnie: The Minister has outlined his belief many times, and as recently as this morning, that increased numbers should be provided in conjunction with wider social access to those additional places, and I am sure that the House would support this view. Is the Minister convinced that the two local universities have done as much as their counterparts in England, Scotland and Wales to promote wider social access to additional places through such mechanisms as close liaison with schools which hitherto have not had a tradition of sending pupils into higher education?

Dr Farren: I assure the House that both universities have been very active in this respect. In fact, to some extent, the local universities could be described as having pioneered the promotion of wider access, both through the access courses that they provide in conjunction with further education colleges and in more recently established relationships with schools that serve socially disadvantaged backgrounds. I am very aware of universities' contacts with schools from such backgrounds — for example, through summer schools — in order to make pupils aware of the opportunities in universities that they can avail of. I assure the Member that steps have been taken along the lines he suggests and that we will be monitoring the effects of those steps in conjunction with the universities.

3.15 pm

Mr Dodds: Many students would otherwise have gone to other parts of the United Kingdom or, indeed, further afield. What steps is the Minister taking to encourage people from the Province to stay here and use their skills and abilities for the benefit of Northern Ireland and fill the extra places that are being created?

Dr Farren: It is precisely because of the concerns raised and highlighted by many survey reports on this issue that we have added so considerably to the number of places available in institutions of both further and higher education. The total I quoted indicates that significant additional places are being made available in further education and in higher education. The most recent announcement — that of an additional 1,000 places —

was made in the House this morning. I believe that these places will be taken up by many students who are described in the literature as “reluctant leavers” — those who find that they have to seek courses outside Northern Ireland because of the competition in our colleges and universities for higher education places. Given his experience, I am sure that the Minister will agree that it would be unfortunate if we were ever to place formal inhibitions on the pursuit of higher education outside Northern Ireland.

A Member: Of course, Dr Farren meant former Minister.

Dr Farren: Yes.

Student Finance

3. **Mr J Kelly** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to ensure that his proposals to abolish fees in certain skill areas for further education students do not disadvantage their future educational prospects. (AQO 1168/00)

8. **Mrs Nelis** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail how much of the additional funding secured for student support will be absorbed by additional administration in terms of means testing and targeting. (AQO 1166/00)

12. **Ms Lewsley** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to outline how his proposals on student finance will target people who have been under-represented in third-level education; and to make a statement. (AQO 1154/00)

Dr Farren: With your permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will take questions 3, 8 and 12 together.

I refer Members to the details of the statement I made earlier this morning. I put in place a series of proposals. I trust Members will agree that the effect of these will be to widen access to further and higher education; to provide greater equality of opportunity and equity of treatment by reducing the barriers to the participation and the retention of those from less well-off backgrounds; and to increase the contribution which higher and further education can make to regional economic development and the promotion of lifelong learning.

With regard to the points mooted by these questions, I do not believe that my proposals for fees in further education will disadvantage the prospects of students. It would be perverse of me to introduce measures likely to have that effect. On the contrary, I am convinced that the provision of this incentive to full-time students over 19 years of age undertaking vocational qualifications can only be to their advantage.

It is not yet possible to quantify in detail the costs of additional administration since negotiations over the changes to the administration of student support are at

an early stage, but I will seek to constrain such costs as much as possible. I have, however, set aside £300,000 to fund the necessary changes to the IT systems which serve the administration of loans and grants.

The Member for Lagan Valley (Ms Lewsley) has asked how my proposals will target people who have been underrepresented in third-level education. This is a key element of my proposals. They include the introduction of individual learning accounts (ILAs) for part-time students in certain vocational areas in further and higher education; the introduction of a childcare grant to assist students in higher education on low incomes with dependant children; and the raising of the threshold for fee payment and the £0.5 million increase in access funds. All these measures will assist in retaining such students and attracting them to further and higher education. The introduction of further and higher education bursaries which are deliberately targeted at those whose families or spouses have less than £15,000 of residual income will be central in establishing greater equality of opportunity for students from less well-off backgrounds who have traditionally been under-represented in further, and more particularly, in higher education.

Mr J Kelly: Could the abolition of fees and the exclusion of certain disciplines and skills be thought of as discriminatory, and has the Minister sought the views of the Equality Commission on this issue?

Dr Farren: I hope we will not be being discriminatory in a negative sense. The intention is to focus on a range of vocationally relevant courses, which I think is right for the needs of the system. Fees can start at zero and go to whatever limit, which is normal for the further and higher education sectors. The fee bands vary considerably, from the lower levels through to postgraduate research levels. So the element of discrimination — if the Member wants to describe it thus — is an inherent part of the current system.

As I indicated this morning, we are trying to encourage participation in certain courses that will be economically relevant to the needs of a rapidly changing workforce. Work on the courses is ongoing, and I will report the final outcome of our deliberations to the House.

Mrs Nelis: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister elaborate on how his proposals might increase the administrative complexity of student finance and add to the difficulties of students and parents alike? There are several layers of administrative bureaucracy here.

Dr Farren: Our intention is not to add to the complexity of the system but to simplify it. As I explained this morning, this will be achieved through consultation with representatives of student organisations, notably the National Union of Students and the Union of Students in Ireland, the Education Guidance Service for Adults and the education and library boards. We will put in place what

is intended to be an effective advisory system to ensure that students and their parents fully appreciate their entitlements. Students will also be given advice on the management of their finances during the course of their studies.

The intention is to make the system easier to understand and to give advice directly to those who seek to avail of opportunities within further and higher education. Ultimately we will move to a one-stop shop which will address the determination and allocation of loans and grants.

Mr S Wilson: Is the Minister aware that under the existing grants legislation, people who have been living overseas and have studied for their primary degrees overseas, so receiving no financial help with their higher education, are not eligible for a student loan if they come to Northern Ireland to study for a postgraduate qualification such as the postgraduate certificate in education? Given the fact that these people have never received financial assistance at higher education level, does the Minister have any plans to change the existing student finance system to allow them access to funding at some stage during their higher education study?

Dr Farren: The Member's question is somewhat peripheral to the issues we are addressing, but nonetheless, if this matter needs to be addressed, I will ask my officials to address it. My understanding is that domiciliary requirements are attached to the allocation of grants and applicants must be resident in Northern Ireland for a specified period of time. A student's country of origin may well be the source to which to turn for grants for certain courses in the postgraduate sector so that students from overseas and from outside the European Union bring grants with them. There is a degree of discretion associated with postgraduate awards, which, I assume, are the key interest of the Member. We would want to examine any change in the current regulations very carefully, but, in light of the fact that the issue has been raised, I am willing to examine it.

Young People: Basic Skills

5. **Mr Close** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail what measures are in place to improve the basic skills and work-readiness skills of young people in Northern Ireland. (AQO 1169/00)

Dr Farren: Improving the basic and work-readiness skills of young people in Northern Ireland is paramount as regards my Department's policies and the measures that we are taking in order to address this area of concern. A number of measures are in place, including basic skills education provided by the further education sector; the development of a basic skills strategy for Northern Ireland; Curriculum 2000; the Northern Ireland Business Education Partnership (NIBEP); New Deal 18 Plus and the access strand of the Jobskills programme. All of these provide forms of support regarding basic skills education.

Mr Close: I thank the Minister for his reply. Is he satisfied that the steps that he has outlined would adequately deal with the 34% of people who fail to get employment because of poor attitude, lack of motivation or personality problems?

Dr Farren: Within my Department, and across all Departments, a task force has been established to address the issue of employability, and the first meeting took place last week. The concerns of those who experience significant deficits in basic skills and who find themselves at greatest risk of immediate unemployment — and of drifting into long-term unemployment — are high on the agenda of the task force.

The basic skills committee of the Educational Guidance Service for Adults is due to report. I understand that the report is on its way to my desk. That report will outline in detail how the strategy, which was published last autumn, with respect to addressing basic skills, should be taken forward. While we still have to test the effectiveness of these measures, a lot of advice has been sought and given, and measures are now being put in place. I trust these measures will remove what we would all regard as a matter of concern and a challenge to us — that we have so many school-leavers and adults with very low levels of basic skills.

Mrs Courtney: Will the Minister outline the progress in the development of a Northern Ireland basic skills strategy and explain how it will benefit young people attempting to gain employment?

Dr Farren: The measures that I outlined in response to the previous question apply to this question. The basic skills unit within the Educational Guidance Service for Adults, together with the basic skills committee chaired by Richard Sterling, have been working very hard on this issue to give us advice on the broad strategy that we need to adopt. It involves the number of tutors required, the kinds of courses necessary to deal with the deficit of basic skills in the adult community, how and where courses can be provided, the kinds of resources — particularly in terms of electronic delivery — that we might use, and the number of tutors and places that we can make available over the next few years.

When that has been worked up to a series of implementation procedures, I will be in a position to announce what we will be doing in each of those regards to the House.

3.30 pm

Mr McHugh: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Given that up to one third of our long-term unemployed have qualifications at national vocational qualification (NVQ) level or higher and yet remain unemployed, can something be done to change that deficit?

Dr Farren: All the measures with respect to New Deal programmes, both those for 18- to 24-year-olds and the introduction of modifications, made in the light

of local consultation, to New Deal for 25-plus, are intended to ensure that the numbers will be reduced even further. It is important that Members appreciate that significant reductions have taken place in the level of unemployment over recent years.

Much of the reduction coincides with the introduction of the New Deal programmes and most people would agree that they are responsible for it. New Deal has made a considerable contribution to the reduction and we are monitoring the situation very closely indeed. The task force that I referred to earlier will be taking forward many of the concerns that underlie the Member's question.

New Deal

6. **Mr Byrne** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to explain what elements of the New Deal for 25-plus provisions are unique to Northern Ireland. (AQO 1153/00)

Dr Farren: There are two main unique elements. First, early entry on a voluntary basis will be permitted for a number of special categories to New Deal 25-plus: lone parents, returners and those with basic skills needs.

Secondly, our normal 13-week intensive activity period is to be increased to 20 weeks, with an option for a further six weeks. That can be contrasted with the situation in Britain, where the normal period will be 13 weeks, with a possible extension to 26 weeks.

I want to emphasise, in response to many representations made to us, that 13 weeks were not adequate for the intensive activity period. That period, again in response to representations, is to be relabelled "Preparation for Employment Programme". The most important unique elements are the voluntary early entry, which will include a broader range of categories than across the water, and the different use of the 26-week period.

Mr Byrne: I welcome the fact that we have a variation in the arrangements for New Deal in Northern Ireland. How successful has the New Deal programme here been in assisting young people, and the long-term unemployed, to get into work? Does the Minister accept that it is in the interests of trainees and industry that we have longer-term, better-quality training schemes in general?

Dr Farren: To pick up on a point I made in response to the previous question: New Deal has made a significant contribution to the fall in unemployment. That is evidenced by the fall in numbers in the target groups for the two main New Deal programmes, that is New Deal for 18- to 24-year-olds and New Deal 25-plus, since April 1998 when New Deal was first introduced.

The fall in numbers in the target groups from April 1998 to January 2001 are 61% and 57% respectively.

The fall cannot be attributed solely to New Deal. However, its effect is demonstrated by a comparison with the

fall in the non-New Deal claimant group over the same period, which stands at a much lower figure of 4%. We need to ensure that our training programmes are as effective as possible, and there is constant contact with employers and training organisations in the public and private sectors on that matter. We monitor our provision to ensure that we are providing the best range of options to those who qualify for the New Deal programmes.

Further and Higher Education Colleges: Funding

7. **Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail the level of funding for colleges of further and higher education. (AQO 1161/00)

Dr Farren: In the 1999-2000 academic year the total capital and recurrent funding allocated to colleges of further and higher education was almost £106 million.

Mrs I Robinson: The new further education funding method — student powered unit of resources — has had a varied impact on colleges. Some have done well out of it and others have done badly. Does the Department know what factors are contributing to the differential? Is the funding methodology equitable in its impact? Are the differences the result of failures or successes by individual colleges in marketing and management or are they random?

Dr Farren: I can assure the Member that the funding mechanism was worked out in agreement with all of the colleges. I am aware that there are some concerns — as would be expected with any new system. Those concerns are being monitored and any changes that might be made to the funding mechanisms should, and could, only be made following full consultation with the colleges. We are in regular contact with the colleges, and we are aware of the concerns.

We need to take the matter forward — though we will not be imposing anything because the Department did not impose the funding mechanism in the first place. We must take it forward in conjunction with the colleges so that they are fully aware of, and in agreement with, any modifications that might be made.

Mr McGrady: I am sure that the Minister would like to be able to announce much greater funding for this sector of education. However, is he satisfied that the provision is adequate, considering the disparities in funding between urban and rural areas? Will the Minister undertake a review of the regional variations in funding, particularly in areas such as east Down? There are several different campuses for the East Down Institute of Further and Higher Education, and that adds enormously to the costs involved. Will he take that on board in an overall review?

Madam Deputy Speaker: The Minister has only about 10 seconds to answer.

Dr Farren: I reiterate that the current funding mechanism was agreed in consultation with the colleges. I was not responsible for the Department at that time, but, as I understand it, the colleges agreed to disregard the multi-campus basis on which several of them operate. If this is now emerging as a particular concern it will certainly be taken into consideration in any review. The review needs to be taken forward in full consultation with the colleges.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Regional Regeneration Task Forces

1. **Mr Berry** asked the Minister for Social Development when he will announce the setting up of new regional regeneration task forces and to confirm that there will be one in each district council area. (AQO 1189/00)

The Minister for Social Development (Mr Morrow): My Department will be consulting widely in the coming months on a revised strategy for urban regeneration policies and actions targeted at the most deprived areas in the Province.

The core aim of the strategy is the creation of broadly representative regeneration task forces to operate at neighbourhood level. I cannot confirm that there will be one task force in each district council area. However, the outcome of the research work that has been commissioned to update the existing data on areas and levels of multiple deprivation will determine where the limited resources available for urban renewal should be targeted.

Mr Berry: Can the Minister indicate the timescale for the creation of the neighbourhood regeneration task forces? What will their remit be?

Mr Morrow: In line with the Programme for Government, we hope to launch the new strategy and begin the process of establishing neighbourhood task forces in the autumn. It is hoped that each task force will initially secure meaningful local representation, carry out a robust analysis of local circumstances and agree on a vision of the area. The task forces will specify outcomes, devise and implement related business plans and co-ordinate and integrate the activities of the relevant agencies and organisations that are involved in the regeneration process.

Mr McGrady: I am sure that the Minister is aware that certain district towns, such as Downpatrick, were excluded from the analysis in the original document on town centre management. Can he give an undertaking that regional regeneration task forces will be set up, funded and staffed in district towns such as Downpatrick? Can he confirm that the task forces could link in partnership

with the reorganisation and redevelopment committees in other towns, such as Warrenpoint, Kilkeel and Newcastle, in my constituency that do not have district status? This would ensure that their good work in regeneration and economic development is fully exploited and developed.

Mr Morrow: The towns that the Member referred to, such as Downpatrick, will of course be scrutinised. That is not to say that they will be included, but similarly that is not to say that they will be excluded. I accept the Member's point. The work that has been done by other partnership groups was more than useful; it will be learnt from and, I hope, if possible, improved upon.

Mr Beggs: Will the Minister ensure that the new regional regeneration task force will give particular advice and assistance to those council areas that were unable to take up earlier funding opportunities through, for example, the Community Economic Regeneration Scheme, despite the fact that they were entitled to do so? Will he ensure that the Department for Social Development proactively assists council areas, such as Carrickfergus and Larne, that were in the past entitled to draw down money but did not do so?

Mr Morrow: The quick answer to the Member's question is yes. The more elaborate answer is that we hope that through the scoping study we will be able to ascertain a range of views across the Province. That will, of course, include the towns mentioned by Mr Beggs and Mr McGrady. Needless to say, I expect that every Member will also want certain towns to be included, so we hope that when our final analysis is made we will not have missed any. We will be able to learn from partnership schemes of the past. It will be a great opportunity to rejuvenate many of the areas that Mr Beggs and other Members are concerned about.

Housing (Mixed Marriages): Housing Executive Policy

2. **Mr Neeson** asked the Minister for Social Development if he will outline the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's policy on housing couples in mixed marriages. (AQO 1174/00)

Mr Morrow: There is no specific policy on the housing of mixed-marriage couples. As with other households, mixed-marriage couples' applications and needs for social housing are considered under the common selection scheme. That scheme provides for, among other things, applicants to declare preferred areas of choice.

3.45 pm

Mr Neeson: While recognising the problems, I would like to know if the Minister's Department is taking a proactive role in trying to develop integrated housing areas in Northern Ireland, thus promoting the principle of sharing over separation.

Mr Morrow: Neither I nor the Housing Executive can determine where people live or where they want to live, any more than we can determine whom they want to marry. People are entitled to choose where they wish to live. Therefore, while there are many examples of areas in the private sector where people of different community backgrounds live side by side in harmony, the majority of applicants for social housing still choose to live in areas where their community background predominates.

Energy Efficiency (Households)

3. **Mr Ford** asked the Minister for Social Development what measures are in place to encourage energy efficiency in private households. (AQO 1190/00)

Mr Morrow: The current Domestic Energy Efficiency Scheme (DEES) provides physical measures to improve the energy efficiency of dwellings and offers advice to householders on how to save on fuel costs. The new DEES scheme, which will come into operation later this year and will provide a more comprehensive package of energy efficiency measures designed to alleviate fuel poverty, will continue to provide energy-saving advice to the householders.

A number of schemes are also linked to the encouragement of energy efficiency. I can read them all out today or send a list of them directly to the Member. Madam Deputy Speaker, it is entirely in your hands.

Mr Ford: I will happily accept the remainder of the answer in writing, so that other Members may have answers to their questions.

When the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 came into force, there was an expectation of a 30% improvement over some 10 years. Can the Minister give us an indication of the level of improvement there has been and, specifically, how much has been achieved in privately owned houses, given the large number of privately owned houses that suffer from fuel poverty, especially in rural areas?

Mr Morrow: I do not have the exact figures, but the Member is quite right when he asserts that the greatest need is in the private sector. My Department hopes to make an impact on energy efficiency in the next 10 years. I will write to the Member to let him know what impact has been made to date and whether or not his assertion of 30% is accurate.

Mr S Wilson: Will the Minister also give a commitment to review the level of available grant aid? Many people suspect that one of the reasons for the lower take-up in the private sector is that the grant available often does not cover the full cost of the work. This is especially true in rural areas, where contractors cannot achieve the same economies of scale as they can in urban areas.

Mr Morrow: The Member is aware that we will be launching the scheme in a few day's time. It will then go

out to the company that has the installation contract, and we hope to go on site with installations in July. We have some £4 million to kick-start the programme. We will monitor it closely to ascertain the answers to the questions that the Member has raised this afternoon. We will keep the programme under constant review to check if the amount of money allocated for each home is adequate. Neither I nor my Department want a partly done job or, worse still, a job that has not tackled the problems it was designed to tackle.

That will give comfort to no one. That is not the aim. We feel that we would fall far short of the mark if we achieved that. I can assure the Member and everyone else in this Assembly that the costs per property will be kept very much under scrutiny. We will keep an eye on this.

Travellers

5. **Mr Hussey** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail progress by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive on the acquisition of responsibility for council-owned traveller sites since October 1998. (AQO 1156/00)

Mr Morrow: It is my Department's intention, as set out in the report, 'New Policy on Accommodation for Travellers', that responsibility for council-owned traveller sites should transfer to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. However, this requires legislation, and the necessary provisions will, therefore, be included in the proposed new housing Bill.

Mr Hussey: I am slightly concerned. As many in the Chamber will be aware, the Government announced in 1998 that the Northern Ireland Housing Executive would take over responsibility for council-owned traveller sites. The Minister will be aware that many councils were very welcoming of such a move. However, I have noticed in my own district council area that more travellers are beginning to apply for normal housing. There has been an acceleration in this process. Can the Minister tell me if this is something that is common throughout Northern Ireland? Does it bring into question the need for specialist traveller sites?

Mr Morrow: The Member raised a point in relation to more travellers applying for housing. It is no secret whatsoever that this is the design that we would like to see — more travellers applying for settled housing. We hope that in the future, this will be the way forward. I take the point that the Member raises, however, because if you go down that road, and you conclude that there are more travellers applying for settled housing, then should you be going ahead on the other route? It is a catch-22.

However, I believe that the balance that we have got and the programme that we are currently taking forward is just about right. The Member is aware that we have a

number of pilot schemes for settled housing which will be exclusively for travelling people. I believe that when those schemes are fully operational, we will be able to clearly ascertain if our whole programme is working. It will be closely monitored by my Department and the Housing Executive. I hope that more travellers will take up the offer of settled housing, as, indeed, normal families — or other families — do.

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I find it incredible that the Minister for Social Development has just referred to non-travellers as “normal families”. That is a disgraceful use of language. Given that there has been a lack of progress on the part of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in relation to taking on responsibility, and given that there may be an increase in the number of traveller families applying for housing, is there not still a need for sites? This is a well-established way of life, so we need to deal with the issue immediately.

Mr Morrow: I am probably in a better position to comment in relation to travellers than the Member who has spoken. The last time she submitted herself to the electorate in respect of Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council, she was rejected. I have been there for some 27 years, and I am well aware of what the needs of the travelling people are and of what my council has done in relation to supplying those needs. I do not need any lectures from her whatsoever. She may feel that it is abnormal to say that they are not “normal families”, but she should perhaps recall that I quickly corrected that. She should not try to make cheap, snide remarks. It would be far better if she tried to deal with people’s problems.

Mr Shannon: Can the Minister indicate the take-up amongst those from the travelling community in relation to Northern Ireland Housing Executive tenancies in council areas? Does he agree that it is desirable to set aside certain areas where there is a demand, rather than place a responsibility on every council in the Province to set aside land and housing, if necessary, for the travelling community?

Mr Morrow: My Department will try to respond to need where it arises. We will not try to manufacture a need where it does not exist, which would be totally irresponsible. My Department’s responsibility is to respond to demand in areas in which there is an obvious need. The Member is quite right — it would not be right to say that there must be a travelling site where there are no travellers. That would be ludicrous, and a bad use of public funds.

New TSN: Funding

6. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail those reviews which he has undertaken or is undertaking to build New TSN into funding formulae. (AQO 1191/00)

Mr Morrow: New TSN remains a high priority and is integral to the Department’s approach to bringing about social, economic and physical regeneration and redressing disadvantage in cities, towns and villages. However, the Department for Social Development is not currently undertaking any specific reviews of New TSN-related funding formulae. Nevertheless, my Department, together with other Departments, is participating in a New TSN central research study, led by the Department of Finance and Personnel, which is reviewing the relevant funding formulae used by Departments.

Mr Dallat: Although I am disappointed that no work has been done, I am pleased that there are some plans. Can the Minister provide details of how New TSN is to be built into the formulae?

Mr Morrow: That is constantly under review, and I will write to the Member and tell him exactly how my Department proposes to tackle the issue. We have said repeatedly, and will say again, that New TSN is a priority for all Departments; therefore no aspect of it will be left out. I can assure Members that my Department will treat the matter seriously.

Mr Paisley Jnr: Will the Minister share with other Members the information that he intends to send to the Member for East Londonderry (Mr Dallat)? It is important information, and I hope that he will place it in the Library. Can he explain why his Department has not undertaken reviews to build New TSN into the funding formulae? The reasons will be of interest to the House.

Mr Morrow: I am quite happy to make the information available by placing it in the Library or sending it to all Members. My Department has not undertaken any specific reviews because targeting social need is already an integral part of our normal approach to business. The Department complies fully with human rights and the statutory equality obligations imposed by section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. It undertakes an assessment of any implications, including New TSN, when policy proposals are developed, subject to wide consultation. That assessment also accompanies policy proposals brought to the Assembly.

Minimum Income Guarantee (Pensioners)

7. **Mrs E Bell** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the action he is taking to encourage pensioners to apply for the minimum income guarantee. (AQO 1175/00)

Mr Morrow: As part of its targeting social need programme, the Social Security Agency is working in close partnership with groups representing pensioners on a range of measures to encourage the uptake of the minimum income guarantee (MIG). We have conducted a major publicity campaign to highlight the minimum income guarantee, including mailshots to potential

customers and a television advertisement campaign. Pensioners can also complete an application for MIG on a free telephone line.

4.00 pm

The Social Security Agency is now also providing presentations to pensioners' groups, advertising through local newspapers and providing posters and leaflets to be displayed in areas that pensioners visit. Finally, the agency will be writing to pensioners who might now be entitled to the benefit due to the legislative changes from April 2001.

Mrs E Bell: I thank the Minister for his very encouraging answer. It is estimated that over 500,000 elderly people across the UK are eligible for the benefit but are not claiming it. Will the Minister let us know what he and the agency are doing to overcome the complexity of the 44-page form? Can he ensure the House that the most vulnerable elderly people are in full receipt of the support they deserve?

Mr Morrow: It is extremely important, especially when you are dealing with the elderly in society, that any form they are given to complete be simple to understand, self-explanatory and not intimidating in any way. I fully take the Member's point.

I take the opportunity to state that there has been a figure appearing in some of the press relating to an estimated 39,000 pensioners who are eligible. The figure is mythical. Seven thousand people have applied for the MIG in Northern Ireland. Of that number, an extra 4,000 people are receiving MIG. However, I want to make it quite clear that the figure of 39,000 is inaccurate.

Mr Carrick: I listened carefully to the Minister's response. Does he agree that it was expected that there would be a greater take-up? Can he explain why there has been such a poor response when it was estimated that a "mythical" 39,000 pensioners were eligible?

Mr Morrow: I welcome the question because, again, it gives me an opportunity to deal with this particular matter. Seventy-four thousand people already receive MIG. The additional 39,000 were only an initial and very early estimate of the number of pensioners who might — I emphasise the word "might" — be eligible.

The figure was based on information from one computer system, which does not hold details of other incomes pensioners might have, such as savings and occupational pensions, that would affect entitlement to MIG. Information sent to all 39,000 pensioners allowed them to decide if a claim was worth pursuing.

This is where the figure of 7,000 comes in. Seven thousand people have applied for MIG in Northern Ireland since the campaign began. The result has been that an extra 4,000 people are now receiving MIG. I hope that that clarifies the position. If not, I will be prepared to speak to any Member afterwards and to put it in writing.

Housing Executive Dwellings: Kitchen/Bathroom Replacements

8. **Sir John Gorman** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of kitchen/bathroom replacements which will be carried out by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in the next financial year.

(AQO 1183/00)

Mr Morrow: Single-element kitchen/bathroom replacement starts planned for 2001-02 have had to be deferred. However, there will be a carry-over programme from contracts let before 31 March 2001, resulting in 1,050 completions in 2001-02. In addition, 1,900 capital general improvement programmes are planned for 2001-02. Replacement of kitchens and bathrooms will be carried out as required as part of the general improvement programme.

Sir John Gorman: I am sure the Minister will agree that that number, while a good attempt, is far below the level of need, as in so many of the housing requirements in the Province. Can the Minister tell the House whether the initiative taken by his Colleague, Mr Gregory Campbell, the Minister for Regional Development, is being followed by the Department for Social Development, bearing in mind that many hundreds of millions of pounds have been directed toward housing in the Province through PPP and PFI schemes in the past?

Mr Morrow: I reassure the Member that there is no deviation at all from the housing programme, either in build or improvements. I want Sir John Gorman to be certain that my Department is vigorously pursuing the programme that it has set out. Therefore, there is no deviation from that programme. This year's Housing Executive budget of £160 million for improvements will enable it to deliver a robust improvement package.

Mr Tierney: In the Minister's first answer to Sir John Gorman he mentioned that it was being deferred. Is it being deferred due to a lack of funds, and is the reason for that a cutback in the increase in the Housing Executive budget?

Mr Morrow: I can only reiterate what I have already said. I know that some say that it is because there has not been the usual hike in Housing Executive rents that has happened every other year. I decided that Housing Executive tenants had been punished enough and that it was time to break that cycle of increases. I want to make it clear that I have no apology to make for breaking that cycle, and that I would do the same if I had to make the decision again. I know that the Member would be in complete agreement with that. The 3% increase that I imposed was the smallest increase for a decade. It was time to reward those hard-paying Housing Executive tenants; they should not be continually penalised.

There are arrears in Housing Executive rent. I am paying particular attention to that area, because I am

firmly of the opinion that if everyone paid their share then the whole housing programme would continue unchallenged and Housing Executive rents would not have to be increased by more than the rate of inflation, as has happened in the past. *[Interruption]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Housing Executive Dwellings: Heating Systems

9. **Mr Armstrong** asked the Minister for Social Development what budget has been allocated to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive for the replacement of Economy 7 heating systems with gas or oil-fired central heating in the next financial year. (AQO 1182/00)

Mr Morrow: When the Housing Executive replaces room heaters in an estate, it takes the opportunity to replace any Economy 7 heating systems that are there. It is usually only a small number of dwellings. In addition, a dedicated programme of 500 starts to replace Economy 7 heating systems is being developed, but there is no finance available in 2001-02 to commence the programme. I intend to bid for money for this scheme at in-year monitoring rounds.

Mr Armstrong: Given the level of fuel poverty in Northern Ireland, does the Minister not regret his refusal to commit to the extermination of this problem? Does the Minister not realise that it is often those already in deepest poverty who are stuck with expensive electric heaters? Will he take the opportunity to state in the Chamber today that he will eradicate fuel poverty in five years?

Madam Deputy Speaker: The Minister has 23 seconds in which to respond.

Mr Morrow: I was of the opinion that I was tackling the problems that the Member raised. I assure him that I have not held back and have put all the resources that I possibly can at the Housing Executive's disposal. I have no doubt that when I finish my time as Minister the housing programme will be in much better shape and up to the Member's standards. Therefore, I assure him that the subject of his question is one of my top priorities. I will deal effectively with it.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

PROCEEDS OF CRIME BILL: AD HOC COMMITTEE

Mr McGrady: I beg to move

That this Assembly appoints an Ad Hoc Committee to consider the draft clauses for a Proceeds of Crime Bill referred by the Secretary of State and to submit a report to the Assembly by 28 May 2001.

Composition:	UUP	2
	SDLP	2
	DUP	2
	SF	2
	Other parties	3

Quorum: The quorum shall be five.

Procedure: The procedures of the Committee shall be such as the Committee shall determine.

This motion stands in my name and that of Dr McDonnell. It is being moved on behalf of the Business Committee representing the parties of the House and is to enable the Assembly to give an opinion on the Proceeds of Crime Bill referred by the Secretary of State. Standing Order 49(7) provides the mechanism whereby the Assembly can deal with this matter on an Ad Hoc Committee basis, which — according to Standing Orders — specifically time-bounds such a Committee.

I draw the Assembly's attention to the fact that the Committee would have to report by 28 May. That may be possible, but there is an Easter recess intervening. I mention this now, given that we may have to come back to the Assembly to ask for an extension of time. I hope that that will not be the case, but I am sure that the Assembly will bear with us if it becomes necessary.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly appoints an Ad Hoc Committee to consider the draft clauses for a Proceeds of Crime Bill referred by the Secretary of State and to submit a report to the Assembly by 28 May 2001.

Composition:	UUP	2
	SDLP	2
	DUP	2
	SF	2
	Other Parties	3

Quorum: The quorum shall be five.

Procedure: The procedures of the Committee shall be such as the Committee shall determine.

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.— [*Mr Speaker*]

HELICOPTER RESCUE SERVICE

Mr Wells: Every time I rise to speak on the Adjournment, it seems to be a signal for the House to clear. I had the dubious distinction of recording the lowest number ever to attend a debate in the House — the debate on the Ballynahinch bypass. However, at least it enabled me to tell my local press that I was speaking to a hushed Assembly.

It looks like that is exactly what is going to happen this afternoon, which is unfortunate as this is an extremely important issue.

On the Order Paper the debate subject is listed as “The future of the helicopter rescue service in South Down.” Because of the procedures of the House, the wording had to be specific to a constituency. However, this is a matter of concern not only to the people of South Down but to all who live in coastal areas in Northern Ireland. I am sure that Colleagues from constituencies such as Strangford, North Down and East Antrim will wish to join me in expressing their concern on this issue.

Before going into the substantive part of my contribution on this matter, it is vital that this Assembly establishes who exactly in Government is responsible for the search and rescue helicopter service. Mr Berry, the very hard-working Member for Newry and Armagh, wrote to Mr Adam Ingram about this matter on 13 February 2001, and it is important for me to quote from the reply he received:

“Dear Mr Berry,

Thank you for your letter dated 13 February regarding the removal of search and rescue helicopter facilities from Northern Ireland. As the matter is now the responsibility of the devolved administration, I have transferred your correspondence to Ms Bairbre de Brún, Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.”

Therefore it would appear that the Northern Ireland Office believes that this is a matter for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. However, on 8 March, Miss Melarkey, the private secretary in the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, replied to Mr Berry:

“Your letter of 13 February initially addressed to Mr Ingram was forwarded to Ms de Brún for reply. While the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety certainly deal with air ambulance matters, we have investigated the issue of Search and Rescue Helicopter Facilities and find that this service is a reserved matter and falls within the remit of Mr Ingram.

Ms de Brún is therefore unable to respond to your query, and your letter has been returned to Mr Ingram’s office for consideration.”

It appears that no one in the Northern Ireland Office or any other Department in the Administration knows who is responsible for helicopter rescue services.

4.15 pm

Since the 1970s the Province has had a helicopter search and rescue service provided by 72 Squadron based at Aldergrove, and it used Wessex helicopters. That service has participated in numerous rescues, particularly at sea and in the Mourne. Many injured trawlermen have been winched from the treacherous seas by this service, and I have had first-hand experience of such a rescue by Wessex helicopters in the Mourne.

I was walking in the Mourne in July 1998 when I came across a lady who had been injured. She had fallen and broken her ankle. Using my mobile phone I contacted the rescue service, and in a very short time a helicopter was despatched, and the lady was winched to safety. Had it not been for the presence of that service, the lady would have had to endure a long route through very rough terrain on a stretcher, and that would not have helped her condition. Therefore, many people have come to appreciate how important the helicopter rescue service is in Northern Ireland.

At the start of this year, when it was first mooted by the Ministry of Defence that the service would be withdrawn in 2002 and replaced by a service based in Prestwick, there was, quite rightly, a great deal of concern. The issue has united all the bodies affected. Ards Borough Council, Down District Council, the Mourne rescue team and Newry and Mourne District Council are united in their opposition to the change in the rescue services.

Hon Members may wonder why the helicopter rescue service is such an important issue and why replacing Wessex helicopters at Aldergrove with Sea King helicopters at Prestwick is causing so much concern. That concern can best be encapsulated by recounting an event that took place on the evening of Sunday 7 January 2001, when a Mayday signal was received from a Spanish trawler, FV Itxas, which was in difficult conditions of 25-foot waves in the Irish Sea. One of the crew, who had a heart condition, was experiencing severe chest pain. The Donaghadee lifeboat was launched, and the coastguard requested helicopter assistance. Normally assistance would have been provided by the Wessex helicopter based at Aldergrove, but it is not capable of winching injured people off boats at night. Therefore, the Prestwick service was contacted and asked to send a helicopter, but it refused to do so.

The reasons given for the failure to despatch a helicopter from Prestwick were twofold. First, the service made it clear that it did not wish to land on Northern Ireland soil, and, second, it would have taken Prestwick’s Sea King helicopter up to 2.5 hours to reach the scene — 75 minutes outside the “golden hour”. The “golden hour” is a set of targets included in the maritime and coastguard business plan for 2001. Those targets are as follows: if an emergency call is received during the day

the helicopter must be capable of being dispatched within 15 minutes of the message being received and of arriving at the incident within one hour. That applies to incidents within 40 nautical miles of Prestwick. Those conditions have to be met during the day. At night the helicopter must be capable of being dispatched within 45 minutes of the message being received and of arriving within two hours at an incident within 100 nautical miles.

The response to the Donaghadee lifeboat's request was that the Sea King helicopter at Prestwick could not meet those targets, and it did not want to land on Northern Ireland soil. Fortunately, the coastguard was able to lift the sailor from the trawler and get him to hospital. Had that not been possible, a difficult situation would have arisen.

What happened on 7 January has given the coastal communities of south Down — indeed, all of Northern Ireland — an insight into what would happen if the Aldergrove service were withdrawn and replaced with the Prestwick one.

The air-sea rescue unit at Kinloss has denied that there was reluctance to land on Northern Irish soil, even though that was one of the reasons given on the night of 7 January. However, it admitted that it could not meet the standards, as it would have taken it two and a half hours to get to the incident in the Irish Sea. Many maritime communities in South Down, and further afield, are asking whether, if that was the case on 7 January, it will also be the case when the Aldergrove service is permanently withdrawn. Will fishing communities, climbers and those walking in the Mourne be left with no helicopter rescue service in Northern Ireland?

It has been said that if we do not avail of the Prestwick service, there are services based in Donegal and Dublin that can be used. I do not wish to make a political point, but it is important that we have control of our own service. Other incidents might arise in the Irish Republic at a time when the rescue service is required in Northern Ireland, and the Dublin authorities or those in Donegal will, quite rightly, give precedence to their own problems. Even if a Prestwick service could launch a rescue attempt in the "golden hour", priority would be given to incidents on the west coast of Scotland or northern England.

Following the incident on 7 January, Mr Cunningham, who is the leading figure in the coastguard service in Northern Ireland, said that the Prestwick service had refused to come to the assistance of a trawler in Northern Ireland on a previous occasion. He said that we could not consistently rely on Prestwick to respond to our requests. It would appear that we are losing the service in Aldergrove with absolutely no guarantee that the replacement service will meet the needs of the coastal communities of Northern Ireland. In the 'Mourne Observer' of 31 January, the Mourne rescue service expressed the fear that people could die if the service

were removed. It is unacceptable that, having enjoyed this service for 30 years, people could be left in life-and-death situations without a rescue service.

There are those who argue that the Wessex helicopters are past their sell-by date. To a large extent that is true, but the solution is not to withdraw the service completely. The solution is to upgrade the Aldergrove service with new helicopters that will enable it to continue providing the excellent service that it has given for the past 30 years.

There are those who say that we cannot afford this service. However, I would have thought that the Ministry of Defence's budget could easily have covered it. With the present situation in Northern Ireland, it could be argued that large-scale savings have been made in the Ministry of Defence's budget due to the deployment of fewer troops in the Province. Some of that additional windfall could be used to fund this service. We face a difficult and confusing time in the year 2002. We need a commitment from the Ministry of Defence. The coastal communities of Northern Ireland require a proper rescue service. Northern Ireland will be the only part of the United Kingdom without this service, and something must be done before it becomes a *fait accompli*.

In addition to the admirable campaign that has been launched by the district councils, I propose that a petition be drawn up and signed by the South Down community and sent to whoever is responsible to urge them to maintain this service. We do not yet know who is responsible. This issue unites the entire community in South Down and further afield. I do not want to see a situation arising in a year's time where a Kilkeel-based trawler is in great difficulty in the Irish Sea and lives are being lost or people being seriously injured due to the lack of this service. It is a vital service to the community and it must be maintained.

Tomorrow we will be debating the plight of the white-fish trawlermen in Kilkeel, Ardglass and Portavogie. The fishing industry is having a dreadful time at present as a result of the cod recovery plan and the ban on fishing in almost all normal fishing waters until the end of April. The last thing the sea fishing industry in Northern Ireland needs is to have grave doubt placed on the entire future of the rescue service on which it has depended for 30 years.

We need to get the matter settled before the final decision is made in 2002. I am certain that I can rely upon Members to join the campaign to ensure that in 5, 10 or 15 years' time anyone out on the high seas earning a living or climbing or walking in the Mourne can be confident that if the worst happens, there will be a quick and efficient rescue service that can save lives.

Mr Shannon: Although the debate title refers to South Down, the issue applies equally to my constituency. The sea rescue helicopters play an invaluable role in

air-sea rescue and can continue to do so, given the opportunity. We bring the matter to the notice of the Assembly so that Members can register their concerns.

The withdrawal of the helicopter will have a devastating effect upon all search and rescue teams in Northern Ireland. They do a superb job, but, at times, they depend on the helicopter service. The helicopter is an integral part of local air-sea rescue operations. It is prepared for active service 24 hours a day and 365 days a year. During daylight hours, the helicopter can be ready in 15 minutes. The Maritime and Coastguard Agency business plan sets out the following requirements:

“for all helicopters including coastguard and still air by day to be ready within fifteen minutes of notification to scramble to arrive at the scene of an incident up to 40 nautical miles from the United Kingdom coast within one hour of notification and by night to be ready to proceed within 45 minutes of notification to scramble to arrive at the scene of an incident up to 100 miles off the United Kingdom coast within 2 hours of notification.”

Can those standards be met if the service is taken away from Aldergrove? We believe that they cannot.

It is certain that lives will be put at risk by the withdrawal of this service. A major concern in my constituency is the safety of fishermen on the County Down coast, specifically those from the Portavogie area. They work in the open sea every day, and the job of the fisherman is one of the most dangerous. Many of us, especially those from the Strangford constituency, will recall with sadness the sinking of the *Amber Rose* off the Isle of Man three or four years ago. The services of the Wessex helicopter were required on that occasion. It was successful, as on previous occasions, in tracing and rescuing survivors. The helicopter is by far the most effective and efficient way of getting injured people to hospital. Time is critical when life is in danger.

If people get into difficulty out at sea, the services of the Wessex helicopter at Aldergrove can be called upon at very short notice. The response will be immediate. If the service is withdrawn, we will be forced to depend upon helicopters from Prestwick airport in Scotland, if there happen to be any available. Will that helicopter be able to get people to hospital as quickly and as efficiently as our trained team from Aldergrove?

The retention of the service is also important to the tourist trade. The air-sea rescue services are frequently called upon during the summer months, due to the increased number of visitors to the area and on the sea. For example, the Ards Peninsula is the second most popular area for caravanning in the Province. Many visitors to the Ards Peninsula go there because of the variety of water sports and other activities available at Strangford Lough and on the Irish Sea. Many visitors use boats and have an interest in fishing. Unfortunately, every year people find themselves in trouble, and the services of the Wessex helicopter are often required. If the service is withdrawn, the lives of those visitors will be put at risk.

Everyone recognises that the main use of the helicopter is at sea. Another important role that the Wessex helicopter performs is in mountain rescue. What impact will the withdrawal of the Wessex helicopter have on those who find themselves in dire straits in the Mourne? The Wessex team has great experience and knowledge of flying across Northern Ireland, including the Mourne. A helicopter crew from Scotland will not have the same knowledge or be on the scene in the same time; it will have to cater first for problems in Scotland.

4.30 pm

Lives will inevitably be put at risk, which is neither advisable nor acceptable. The plan to withdraw the Wessex helicopter represents a worrying development, and I suggest, Mr Speaker, that the Assembly contact the Secretary of State for Defence and urge him to rethink this disastrous move.

Mr Speaker: Regarding the matter that the Member mentioned at the end of his speech, it is my practice when there are debates in the Assembly which refer to non-devolved matters to send a copy of Hansard to the Minister involved. I propose to do so following this debate.

Mrs I Robinson: I want to thank my Colleague Mr Jim Wells for raising this matter. The issue has an impact beyond his own constituency and would have a detrimental effect on a number of coastal areas in Northern Ireland, not least my own constituency of Strangford. I am not an expert on helicopter search and rescue, but I know, even if I never have to use this service, that it provides a necessary and important emergency service function.

What we do not want is to be left with the equivalent of ‘Budgie the Helicopter’ — a great story of fictional deeds, but not to be depended on for anything real. In all the literature that I read on the subject, one line of an article stood out:

“At no stage in the past has any rescue been placed in jeopardy thanks to the dedication and speed of response from the current service at Aldergrove.”

That is an important remark about the service that is currently enjoyed. Here is an honourable record provided by members of 72 Squadron. Another comment that is also significant says

“We have come to the conclusion that we can not consistently rely upon Prestwick to respond to our requests.”

The key phrase there is “can not consistently rely”. This is what happens when it is not possible to utilise our own helicopter service. You find you are at the mercy of others who can decide according to their own priorities and may well not be able to help out. When you put those two statements together you have an overwhelming argument for not only the retention of our own service but also for updating and upgrading that service.

I understand the comment that the helicopter that is currently in use is now somewhat out of date and, in

certain circumstances, inadequate. However, that is an argument for upgrading the service, not removing it.

Some may ask if there is much justification for this service. I suggest asking those whose lives have depended on being rescued. Even more so, try asking those who could not get a helicopter from Scotland to help them in a number of rescue missions.

Search and rescue has a number of areas to cover. Take the leisure industry and the increase in sailing around the coast. Is this not a reason for retaining our search and rescue service? There is also mountaineering. How often have we heard about climbers caught out in bad weather having to be rescued? Is this not a reason for retaining our search and rescue service? There are those who have fallen off cliffs, and the only way to get to them was by helicopter. What about the fishing industry? At times, it is a very dangerous activity. Again, how often do we hear of a sick fisherman having to be airlifted to hospital for emergency treatment?

Over the years many lives have been lost, but many have been saved because of the search and rescue services. What we are dealing with here is life. Has it become so unimportant that we can afford to have our helicopter service provision simply removed without any objections?

Mr Kennedy: I am glad to have the opportunity to speak in this important debate, and I congratulate Mr Wells for bringing it forward. This matter was discussed at a Newry and Mourne District Council meeting, where it was unanimously agreed that the helicopter rescue service should be supported and maintained, given our historic links with Mourne.

The air ambulance and helicopter rescue service has been in use for many years, and it would be greatly missed. It would be a huge mistake to have the service withdrawn. In addition to the efforts of the helicopter rescue team, there have been occasions when the Army has been called out in extreme emergency conditions and has rescued, or rendered assistance to, mountaineers or people who have been caught at the top of a mountain without adequate resources. There is clearly a need. The Mourne Mountains are world-famous. They are also extremely dangerous at times, and there is a clear requirement for this service to be retained.

An air ambulance service is also essential for Northern Ireland. I have written to Adam Ingram and the Minister of Health. No one can decide whose responsibility it is. I simply say that it should be sorted out and the provision made as quickly as possible. There is a need for both a helicopter rescue service and an air ambulance to support health provision in the area. We are dealing with a mountainous rural area which is subject to adverse weather conditions. Only a matter of weeks ago, a group was stranded in the Mourne Mountains and had to be rescued. This is a constant and pressing

need, and I commend Mr Wells for bringing it to the attention of the Assembly.

Mr Berry: I too thank Mr Wells for bringing this important issue to the Floor of the Assembly. The matter was first brought to my attention by Newry and Mourne District Council, which supported a motion to retain the service. I was then aware that it was going to be taken further by my Colleague Mr Wells in the Assembly Chamber. As Mr Wells said, I, along with other Members, raised the issue with the Security Minister, Adam Ingram. The Minister wrote back to me saying that he had passed the letter on to the Health Department. The Health Department then wrote to me stating that it had passed the letter back to Adam Ingram.

Evidently there is confusion as to who is responsible. It is important that we find out exactly who is responsible for this matter. I believe that it is the responsibility of the Security Minister, Mr Adam Ingram — but we will find out. I am sure that your office will find out, Mr Speaker. It is also clear that all those who are involved in this area are fully in support of the Adjournment debate today. The issue is made all the more important by the fact that the service based in Prestwick will not readily be available for work in Northern Ireland should something happen in its area. In an emergency you cannot sit around and wait for a couple of hours to see whether a helicopter is going to be sent from the mainland. By the time help arrives, it will be much too late.

The Minister responsible should take up this serious issue and pursue it until there is a satisfactory outcome and until the requests from this Chamber are carried out. If we cannot rely on provision from the mainland, we will be in a much worse position if we do not have a local provision. Local provision in this area is crucial. We have a local fishing industry, with ports that are in operation along the coast, a thriving leisure industry and a number of marinas. It is therefore only sensible to retain for ourselves an air-sea rescue operation. Until now, that provision has never been in doubt, and it has never been faulted. The service personnel have always been professional in their duties.

We now have the serious and worrying development that there will not be an air-sea back-up in Northern Ireland after 2002. That is not a matter that can be left in limbo. It is imperative that the decision be taken to maintain the service for the good of all the people in Northern Ireland.

Mr Hamilton: I support what Mr Wells has said. For many years Northern Ireland has watched as public services have been contracted until we have been left with a second-rate service that cannot usually deliver the goods. I think particularly of the Health Service with its long waiting lists for hospitals. Here is another example of the contraction of public Government money, which will leave us with a second-rate air rescue service.

I represent the Strangford constituency. We have a long coastline, with a most important fishing fleet at Portavogie. Mr Shannon will bear witness to the fact that a member of Ards Borough Council is a trawler owner who will quote instances of the treacherous seas in which he has often had to operate. However, he is secure in the knowledge that should something go wrong there is a very good chance of the air-sea rescue service's coming to his aid. For that to be moved away from Northern Ireland to Prestwick, from where it will not be possible to deliver the service, should worry the Assembly.

Moreover, during the summer many people in the Strangford area use pleasure craft. Sometimes those people are not by any stretch of the imagination experienced sailors, and they can quite often — and very easily — get themselves into difficulty at sea. We hear cases of people putting out to sea who have not even the right lifesaving equipment on board. The air-sea rescue service plays a very valuable role when that happens.

I am disturbed to hear from Mr Wells that the present air-sea rescue facilities have no winch material to enable them to operate at night. That should concern the Assembly, and, as has already been said, we should look for the system to be upgraded rather than for its removal.

Finally, I must draw a contrast between the Ministry of Defence, which has a huge budget and is reducing the service it provides, and the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, which depends upon voluntary contributions to keep it going. It is continually striving to expand its services, not to reduce them. If a voluntary organisation like that can and does expand its services, based solely on the money it manages to raise, surely to goodness the Ministry of Defence with its huge budget can find the money to keep that very valuable and much-needed service here in Northern Ireland.

I have no hesitation in supporting Mr Wells.

Mr McGrady: I support not only the continuance but the enhancement of an air-sea rescue facility — as the proposal so subtly put it — not only in South Down but in other areas where it is needed, and that means the entire territorial area of Northern Ireland, because we know not where tragedy will strike.

Members have covered all the salient points concerning our fishing industry and the risks that the Irish Sea poses, which have from time to time been very considerable for commercial seagoers as well as for the fishing fleet. Mr Hamilton spoke of the enormous number of visitors to the Strangford Lough area and to the marinas along the Down coast and up to Antrim and beyond where, year on year, pleasure craft get into difficulties and require urgent and immediate rescue. It is hard to conceive of a situation where that facility would not be available.

4.45 pm

Other Members have indicated the tourist element of the requirement for such a service. The south-east area of Northern Ireland has the highest number of tourists visiting and engaging in outdoor pursuits — as opposed to lying on a beach, as they are wont to do in other climes. When tourists come to our locality they are more active. Activity, be it in the sea, in the forests or in the mountains, of which we have an abundance, carries physical risk with it. The rescue services, on land, sea, or in the air must be available to us.

There is also the normal requirement of the general community for such a facility. Circumstances, such as the recent snowstorm or the breakdown of electricity services, sometimes dictate the need for the rescue services. I have mentioned the breakdown of electricity services to the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. This occurs with monotonous frequency in the area that I represent. Many people are totally dependent on the supply of energy, and when that is suddenly cut off they are at immediate risk. A helicopter rescue service would be much speedier than that provided by road and would be required. For all of these reasons it is necessary that a helicopter service be available in South Down.

Another concept that I have been pursuing for some time, which would fall within the ambit of the devolved Administration, is the provision of an air ambulance service to Northern Ireland. I believe that this is equally necessary for our own community, never mind the visitors to our shores. We do not have a great transport infrastructure, particularly in South Down, where it takes many hours, especially in summertime, to get an emergency case from the Mourne area, or from the east Down area, to a medical centre of excellence. The retention of acute service facilities at our hospitals is continually put into doubt.

All these factors add up to the necessity for the provision of an air ambulance. I must keep to the topic or you will be looking at me, Mr Speaker. However, this is a very necessary broadening of that concept. Several private companies would be quite willing to provide such a service on an economic basis if the Departments involved could take that on board.

For all those reasons I totally support this case, as would my Colleagues from South Down in other parties, some of whom cannot be here today.

I have been corresponding for some months with the Northern Ireland Office as, in my opinion, there is no doubt that this is a reserved matter and their responsibility. There has been great hesitancy in replying. The Northern Ireland Office has not denied its responsibility, as on other occasions. In fact, it is holding up the operation until it can come up with a good reason for saying no. It is our job to ensure that that does not happen.

However ill I may think of other people, I cannot conceive of any Department, be it a Westminster Department or a Department in Northern Ireland, denying the community the services of an air rescue operation of some nature. I am confident that the representations made here today, our concerted efforts and, indeed, the articulation the community has made in many quarters about this matter will win through. We must keep up the pressure. On behalf of myself and my Colleagues who are abroad I am happy to give total and whole-hearted support this case.

Mr Speaker: Mr McGrady, with his customary elegance, has highlighted that Adjournment debate subjects are constituency matters and that Members should stick to their terms.

Mr Wells: It is too late.

Mr Speaker: Indeed.

Adjourned at 4.50 pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 27 March 2001

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

FOOT-AND-MOUTH DISEASE

The Chairperson of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee (Rev Dr Ian Paisley): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. As Chairperson of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee, I want to put a question on record and ask about the matter which has now taken place at Westminster. It is thought that the Government have been acting illegally in killing healthy animals. If this is so, will it hinder the immediate payment of compensation for those animals? Will it lead to a blockage in the courts, with arguments as to whether the farmers wanted this, or can the matter be resolved in such a way that no compensation hold-ups will take place? This is a matter which must be put on record. I had a brief word with the Minister and informed her that I was doing this.

Mr Speaker: Some of the matters to which the Member refers are not matters of order, but there is a matter of order in this. The Minister made remarks yesterday about some activities that will be taking place, and, to some extent, the Member's question is whether those will be covered by legal authority.

The second question is whether, if further legal authority is needed, it can be provided by this House or has to be provided by Westminster. I do not know the answer to his question on either front — either whether the statement that the Minister made yesterday is covered by legal authority or, if not, whether legal authority can be provided by early legislation in the Assembly or will require early legislation in another place. I shall have to make enquiries and take advice, and I will respond to the Member when the advice is clear.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: Thank you.

EU STRUCTURAL FUNDS

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of Finance and Personnel that he wishes to make a statement on current issues relating to EU structural funds.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):

I would like to make a statement about some important developments on the European structural funds. In this Building last Thursday, we were able to mark, with the European Commission and the Irish Government, the completion of the negotiations with the Commission on the new round of structural funds. On that occasion, the two member states and Commissioner Barnier formally recorded their agreements to the new Peace II programme and to the Northern Ireland Programme for Building Sustainable Prosperity. This was an important stage in a long and complex process, which began with the Good Friday Agreement. Following that agreement, the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister set out to ensure that the European Union acknowledged and gave practical support to the efforts to build a lasting peace in Ireland. In that endeavour they were given strong support and practical help from the two Governments, MEPs and many others.

The two programmes signed last week are the Programme for Building Sustainable Prosperity and Peace II. They both come under the umbrella of the community support framework, which was agreed by the Commission in December. Now that the programmes have been agreed, the next stage is the production of programme complements which will set out details of the types of projects that will be supported. The programme complements will be approved by the monitoring committees.

The first of the operational programmes, formally known as the transitional Objective 1 programme, will be worth £862 million, including the match funding. It will focus on the key areas of economic growth and renewal, employment and social inclusion, and the environment and rural society.

The Peace II programme, which is worth £366 million — again including the match funding — will have the twin objectives of addressing the legacy of the conflict and taking the opportunities arising from peace.

The possibility of continuing support and assistance from the European Union was signalled through the conclusions of the European Council meetings at Cardiff and Vienna during 1998. At Berlin in March 1999, in the culmination of the spending settlement for the entire European budget for the forthcoming seven years, it was decided that Northern Ireland would receive support as an Objective 1 region in transition. In addition, Northern Ireland was given a unique and distinctive privilege in the form of a further special package of funding to continue and develop the work begun under the first EU Special

Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland. This was secured through the determined efforts of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister in conjunction with the two Governments and supported by MEPs and many others. Therefore even the process of securing the new round of funding involved working together in Northern Ireland and on a North/South and East/West basis.

In their negotiations with the Commission and the Presidency in Brussels and Bonn, the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister sought assistance with a unique transition. The strong support from the European Union for the process and the Good Friday Agreement has been essential and unique. It allows us to see our place in the future European Union. David Trimble and Séamus Mallon argued that the context called for a new peace programme with some differences from the previous programme. This has been confirmed in the operational programmes that were agreed last week.

The strategic aim of the new Peace II programme is to reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society and to promote reconciliation. It will do that by promoting and supporting economic and social development with a special focus on those groups, sectors and areas that have been most affected by the conflict in our society. The aim of the new Programme for Building Sustainable Prosperity is to help to create the conditions for sustainable prosperity in a modern, competitive economy.

Since the Berlin Council we have made a good beginning on the transition. We can already point to the creation and continuation of the institutions and to the difference that the Executive are making through the ambitions in the Programme for Government. The new structural funds operational programmes that were agreed last week should be seen in that context.

Last February, when the Executive addressed the approach to Peace II, we committed ourselves to ensuring that the new programme would deliver progress on social inclusion — and with particular respect to the needs of children, women and young people — on North/South co-operation and, most important of all, on the maintenance and development of the local delivery mechanisms which were a unique and successful innovation under Peace I.

These commitments clearly can, and should, guide the use of this programme, and which is relevant to our wider Programme for Government. The Executive returned to those issues in detail in July and December 2000 when the approach to the Peace II operational programme and the transitional Objective 1 programme was confirmed. The direction of the new programmes is therefore based on careful consideration and discussion by the Executive.

In putting in place arrangements for the management and delivery of the new programmes we have also sought to ensure that we have built on the lessons that we learned from the last round of EU structural funds

support. New monitoring committees have been appointed for each operational programme and for the community support framework. The membership of those committees reflects proposals drawn up by the social and economic partners in consultation with my Department and agreed by the Executive. The Executive have also retained and built on the unique combination and diversity of organisations involved in planning and managing the delivery of the new structural funds programmes, particularly Peace II. Thus, the combination of local partnerships operating at district council level, intermediary funding bodies and Government Departments, that have been used for Peace I, has been retained in the new peace programme. Additional roles have been specified for the special EU programmes body, in line with its statutory responsibilities.

In implementing the new programme for building sustainable prosperity we will also seek to work in close partnership with local communities, business, trade unions, the voluntary and community sectors and our universities and colleges to help ensure that the activities funded are used to best effect.

In this context, I want to address directly the concern that, in some sense, the Peace II programme represents a step away from the successful approach to local delivery taken under Peace I. On the contrary, Peace II represents an extension and development of important steps we took as a community with Peace I. Within the context of the new institutions the partnership approach can — and, I believe, will — be extended with new dimensions to gain increasing influence on the way in which we do business. They will have a vision and impact that will last well beyond the horizons of the Peace II programme.

Peace I arrived during direct rule, and the opportunities for influencing the business of Government by local politicians, social partners or district councils were minimal. In the context of the new institutions, I see an opportunity for the partnership process to be widened and deepened at both regional and local level. That is the Executive's vision for this aspect of the Peace II programme. Throughout this process we have sought to work with the European Commission and many in the community who have displayed an unfailing commitment to the exploration of the opportunities that European funding gives.

We were consistently determined to ensure that the principles of partnership and local delivery were developed. We do not want the partnership approach to be confined to European funding, nor do we want it to wither away when that source of income has ceased.

I shall now outline how we envisage the development of this programme at local and regional level. The new round of funding provides an opportunity to radically extend the role and influence of the partnership approach. At local level, the Executive have agreed that the new

local strategy partnerships, which will take forward priority 3 of the Peace II programme, will be given the opportunity to develop a strategic approach at local level. Those local strategy partnerships will be encouraged to develop a wider perspective, including increased interaction with the regional Administration and between district council areas.

10.45 am

They will work with the Special EU Programmes Body on North/South co-operation. As set out in the operational programme, their remit includes new dimensions of work on the social economy and human resource development which represent a marked advance and a new opportunity for development of social cohesion at local level.

The new local partnerships being created for the new Peace II programme both acknowledge what has been achieved in the past and reflect what the Executive want to see achieved for the future. I am on record on several occasions as making it clear that I do not see the principles of local partnerships and partnership working as something that we can apply only to European funding and then throw away once that funding ends. Instead, I want to see partnership work becoming an integral part of how we, as a devolved Administration, ensure that local community voices are heard and influence priorities for spending at local level — not just from European funds but from other sources of public, and indeed private, finance.

The whole purpose of our approach is to increase the scope and significance of decision-making at local level. The principles underlying this new approach to partnership work have also been strongly endorsed by the European Commission during our negotiations on the new Peace programme. Both we and the Commission want to see a strong “bottom-up” approach to partnership work under Peace II, which will ensure that the final decisions on local priorities are taken by local communities operating at local level. However, to achieve that we must make some key changes to how the partnership model developed under Peace I operates under the new Peace II programme and beyond.

First, we must ensure that district councils become involved in the operation of the local partnership model, not just through the participation of individual district councillors, but through the engagement of the district councils at a corporate level in the processes of partnership work, and particularly in supporting the preparation and agreement of the locally based strategies that will underpin the work of the new partnerships. The input of district councils will be particularly important, especially given their wider responsibilities — for example, for local economic development under the transitional Objective I programme.

Secondly, we must ensure that statutory agencies operating at local level become actively involved in partnership work — not in a controlling way, but in a

way that will ensure that the broader strategic direction of the Department and its agencies take full account of the view and priorities of local communities operating at local level.

Neither of those changes involves a diminution of the influence of the community at local level. On the contrary, they will provide for that influence to be made more effective through a stronger partnership model. Some are concerned that by having a different structure from those which have gone before, the new partnerships will lose some of their strength. I do not believe this to be the case. The approach that we are taking includes an emphasis on reaching agreement on the details of arrangements for local partnerships at local level. We have agreed in the Peace II operational programme that there should be an equal partnership on a fifty-fifty basis between two strands — on one hand, government in the wider sense, and on the other, the social partners, the business sector, the trade unions, the voluntary and community sector and representatives of agriculture and rural society.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: If you have that balance, is it not the case that the statutory bodies and those associated with them on the voluntary side will put the elected members of the councils into a minority position for all time?

Mr Durkan: I will cover that and explain it fully during the rest of my remarks. When I spoke of a fifty-fifty balance, I referred clearly to government in the wider sense. That will be local government and central Government, or the agencies of central Government as they operate at local level.

The balance between them will be determined locally. Under the existing partnership model it is not the case that local councils form a majority of membership. Those proposals have been developed through working group arrangements.

The proposals for the various stages of developing the new local partnership model have been developed in consultation with representatives from local councils, existing district partnerships, intermediary funding bodies et cetera. Therefore, council numbers for the Government side are to be agreed locally between local government and the statutory agencies. That is welcomed by many in local government, because they believe it puts them in a stronger position to co-ordinate and liaise with the statutory agencies.

I want to emphasise that I fully understand the concerns expressed by many in the voluntary sector about aspects of that approach. Under the Executive’s proposed approach, the scope for the voluntary and community sector, and for the other social partners, to influence what is evolving is strengthened, because the terms of reference for local strategy partnerships are wider. Therefore, through those partnerships, those participating from the social partner side will have important influence not only on the work

on priority 3 by each local strategy partnership but also on the wider policy environment.

I am aware that the fifty-fifty arrangement has been taken to imply that each pillar of the social partners will have 12.5% of the membership. *[Interruption]*

Mr Speaker: Order. It is not appropriate to get into the habit of intervening when Ministers are making statements. There will be an opportunity for questions afterwards. If Members wish to ask questions on the ministerial statement, they should advise me and I will try to accommodate them. I will note the Member's name.

Mr Durkan: I want to make it clear that we have been at pains to note that membership should be decided at local level rather than be imposed. One size does not fit all. Just as local agreement will be needed on the composition of the Government strand of the partnership, I am confident that local agreement can be reached by the social partners on the composition of their strand. If, working on further guidelines, the social partners can agree on a particular formula to be applied at local level, we shall be happy to accommodate such agreement. That could then be reflected in the final guidelines for the local strategy partnerships and incorporated in the programme complement.

Turning to the relationship between the local and regional dimensions of partnership, again I emphasise that the context is different. At the beginning of Peace I, regional partnership was non-existent. I pay tribute to the Northern Ireland Partnership Board, which came together at that time and played a crucial role in establishing and developing the district partnerships and in overseeing the unique process that that made possible.

We still need the commitment, expertise and enthusiasm of people from many sectors to move forward. However, many things are different now. The Assembly and the Executive are in place together with the North/South institutions and the Special EU Programmes Body. By placing co-operation on European matters right at the heart of the agreement's institutions, we are emphasising how significant those issues are for us.

Consistent with the new structural funds regulations, the Executive have decided that the new regional partnership board should have a major role in encouraging the ongoing development of effective partnership working at local level. At regional level, its key contribution will be to support the development of strategies and action plans that work effectively with other sectors. Those include the Departments, other statutory agencies and the private, voluntary and community sectors.

The Executive have decided that a new regional partnership board should be established not only to build on the good work of the Northern Ireland partnership board but also to take it wider and deeper. Just as the local strategy partnerships can work on a wider canvas

and influence the planning of other activities in their areas, so the regional partnership board will have a wide remit to promote partnership working. It will work with local strategy partnerships to ensure that this development happens as effectively and as clearly as possible and to ensure that that way of working can be sustained beyond the period of Peace II and become a permanent strength of our Administration.

As the scope of partnership working at regional and local level is now intended to be wider, it was clearly less appropriate for the interface between the partnerships and the regional administration to be located in any one Department. Since the chairperson for this new partnership board is from the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, the board is at the heart of the new institutions. It is also intended that membership of the new regional partnership board will strongly reflect the perspective, experience and insight of the social partners engaged in the local strategy partnerships.

The Special EU Programmes Body, which is the managing authority for Peace II, will be the secretariat to the new Northern Ireland regional partnership board. It will benefit from close working relationships with the local strategy partnerships in its wider responsibilities for other aspects of EU programmes.

The preparation for the new round of funding has been a long process for all concerned. After the package of support was agreed at the Berlin Council in March 1999, the first main stage was the preparation of the structural funds plan, which was first submitted in November 1999 just before devolution took effect. Following consideration of the key issues by the Executive in February 2000, negotiations on the community support framework (CSF) began last March, and the CSF was approved by the European Commission in December. Those were all necessary stages in the process, and similar steps have been required in respect of structural funds assistance in all member states.

Now that agreement has been reached on the operational programmes, we can look forward to completing the process and ensuring that the new programmes take effect as soon as possible. I have provided a timetable, along with Members' copies of this statement, to show what will happen next. Under the EU Regulations, the programme complements must be approved by the monitoring committees within three months of the approval of the operational programmes, and we will seek to complete that stage by the end of May. Those will include more detail on the measures making up the programmes and set out more fully the criteria for applications. When the programme complements have been approved, the way will be clear for applications to be invited, so that the first calls for projects can go out in June. The first payments from the new programmes will be available from September.

That timetable for the process sets the context within which the issue of gap funding has arisen. It should be clear to all by now from what I have been saying that the Executive are determined that there should be continuity and development between the Peace I programme and the Peace II programme. These are important changes, designed to ensure that the resources secure sustainable development and important emphases on aspects of economic development, which will make use of the opportunities provided by the new context of peace. However, the fundamental purposes of promoting peace and reconciliation and the inclusive and bottom-up nature of the programme remain very important. Sustaining the work that has gone before under Peace I is important. It is not the case that the peace programmes are about keeping organisations in business or simply maintaining employment. The touchstone has always been the contribution that the organisations and the projects could make to the objectives of the programme.

During the 2000-01 financial year the Executive provided £9 million of gap funding — half for the peace programmes, and half for the mainstream programmes. In my statement to the Assembly on the follow-up to the December monitoring round, I announced a new approach to gap funding to apply for 2001-02. I want to update the Assembly on developments on that front.

11.00 am

Since 12 February the Department of Finance and Personnel has discussed the issue fully with other Departments to ensure that the approach is known and understood. I have also written to the monitoring committees and others concerned to emphasise the Executive's commitment to making this situation work.

Advertisements have been placed in the press seeking applications from eligible projects. Bids have been sought, and, consistent with the timetable that I have just explained, this scheme can cover the period up to October 2001, by which time the new programme will be fully on stream.

The approach to gap funding is about making sure that those who have been fulfilling the criteria of the Peace I programme — and who are likely to fulfil the criteria of the Peace II programme — will remain in place, fulfilling their objectives and the objectives of the programme without a loss of continuity.

The unique contribution of the European Union to supporting the agreement is something we should celebrate and acknowledge fully at every stage. We thanked Commissioner Barnier last week for that unique and ongoing commitment, which is helping to ensure the continuity of peace and reconciliation funding. It is also helping us to adopt new approaches in our region and lift our eyes beyond our narrow horizons. It is true to say that the assistance of the European Union with the process of peace and reconciliation has been vital and

effective. Much credit is due to all who sought and obtained the new round of funding, including the MEPs, the two Governments and especially the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister.

We now have a clearer basis on which to move these new programmes forward. With the negotiations with the Commission complete, the responsibility now lies entirely with the region to get on and complete the programme complements and to ensure that the call for applications goes out as soon as possible so that the benefits can begin to flow without delay.

I ask all concerned to push these objectives and to unite in working with the Executive, the local councils and social partners in order to achieve important collective objectives. This is a tremendous opportunity for us all. It also poses significant but welcome challenges.

The Chairperson of the Finance and Personnel Committee (Mr Molloy): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I want to speak as Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel and to thank the Minister for his statement, which is most welcome. A large gap is appearing between Peace I and Peace II, which has been discussed many times here, and that gap is increasing, because the new moneys will not be in place until September of this year at the earliest. The Committee will be meeting with departmental officials today to get further briefing on this matter. Our role will be to monitor what is happening in the structural funds.

The Minister spoke of the Northern Ireland Regional Partnership Board and district partnerships. I want an assurance, as a member of a district partnership and of a district council, that that is not just an extension of the partnership board. I know that in a number of councils there have been difficulties identifying the roles of the partnership board and the district council. In my area that was not a problem, and we were able to put together all the political parties and the district sectors of the partnership board, but I want the Minister to ensure that statutory agencies coming to the partnership board will be actively involved in promotion. The Minister should ensure that the two sectors operate on a fifty-fifty basis. The statutory agencies should come to the partnership board with money — not just to block and control and not simply knocking back and ensuring mainstreaming.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for his points and, in particular, for the long-standing and helpful interest that the Committee for Finance and Personnel has had in the structural funds and in the peace programme. Over the present financial year we have addressed the concerns about gap funding. We have introduced new arrangements for interim funding for the next financial year so that we can actually make progress towards Peace II. Obviously, last week's announcements make that all the more significant and provide an even more encouraging backdrop for all concerned.

I recognise Mr Molloy's point that there has been an uneven relationship between councils and their local district partnerships. That was partly because membership of the partnership boards was based on individual councillors, and boards depended on the quality of an individual's performance more than that of councils at corporate level. We want to improve that.

It must be remembered that it is not just that new partnerships will have a say in managing Priority 3 and the funding for that. The strategic thinking of the Departments will inform and influence the work of local councils, in their wider areas of responsibilities, and that of other statutory agencies and Departments.

Representatives of statutory agencies participated in partnerships in the last programme and feedback from various sources indicates that there were uneven levels of involvement and interest. One of the things that we have been concerned about in going for the fifty-fifty option is that we did not want to allocate a fixed proportion to the statutory agencies. We felt that that would just invite the danger that they would simply attend in the numbers allocated to them. We believe that they need, through negotiations with local government, to earn their places in the partnerships. We felt that they would, by participating on an agreed basis, show much greater commitment, and that local government would be put in a much stronger position by virtue of liaising at that level.

We want to make everyone's involvement in the partnership boards more meaningful; not to give local government or the statutory agencies of regional government more control. We want to make them more amenable to the whole partnership ethos. It will mean that they can reflect the important and positive influences that the perspectives of the other social partners on the partnership boards can bring.

Dr Birnie: I think that it was an American politician some decades ago who said that the best form of social welfare programme is a well paid job. Can the Minister inform us whether a similar philosophy underpins the general approach to the use of these European moneys?

Will he also confirm that since the transition moneys are, by definition, something of a final bite of the cherry that they will be soundly invested to promote the economic competitiveness and growth that will, in future, generate sustainable funding?

I ask that question because there is a perception that at least some of the previous structural funds in the 1980s and 1990s were, in effect, deadweight spending — that is, money that was given to already profitable private companies for investments that they would have found profitable to pursue anyway.

Mr Durkan: We are dealing with two programmes. The programme formerly known as the Transitional Objective I Programme is now called the Northern

Ireland Programme for Building Sustainable Prosperity. That programme is what we are getting in order to compensate for the fact that we no longer qualify for Objective I status. It is a special transitional measure. We must use the money well, and we are trying to use it for sustainable economic development. The money for the programme is not additional money, unlike that for the Peace Programme. Nevertheless, it does not relieve us of any of our obligations to make sure that we spend the money judiciously and not on investments that would have been taking place in any event.

We want to spend the money in a way that makes the biggest and most positive difference possible, particularly given the number of serious structural issues that we face as a region. We face many challenges in improving our competitiveness. That is the focus of that particular programme. There will be an improved economic focus on the peace programme and no compromise on the important emphasis that the programme must have on social inclusion. Nor will the integrity of the programme as one that is geared towards peace and reconciliation be undermined.

Mr Byrne: I welcome the Minister's statement and congratulate him and those involved on bringing forward the two programmes, transitional Objective 1 and Peace II. The EU resources that come in the form of those two programmes are very welcome and will help underpin peace, prosperity and the concept of joined-up Government — the connection between local government and central Government.

The new arrangements are an opportunity for local voices to be heard and local issues to be reflected in the policies that are formulated and actions that are taken. The House knows that I am a member of the Northern Ireland Partnership Board (NIPB) — *[Interruption]*

Mr Speaker: Order. This is an opportunity for Members to ask questions, and not for them to make prepared statements. The Member must ask a question.

Mr Byrne: How thorough has the process of consultation been between the officials of the NIPB, the Special EU Programmes Body and the Department of Finance and Personnel? Does the Minister agree that there has been rumour and counter-rumour that is not in the spirit of peace and reconciliation?

Mr Durkan: I am concerned that there has been rumour and counter-rumour, but it is not my place to address that here. I have been perturbed by some of the feedback, but throughout the process I have been determined to ensure that the social partners and the Northern Ireland Partnership Board were fully involved in the transition from Peace I to Peace II.

I acted to ensure that the new monitoring committees were representative of the social partnerships in a new way. The Northern Ireland Partnership Board, the district

partnerships and the district councils were fully involved, in the autumn, in the working groups that decided on the agreed way ahead on local strategy partnerships. The group's proposals were adopted by the interim community support framework (CSF) monitoring committee and then approved by the Executive in December.

I met the Northern Ireland Partnership Board in mid January, and that was followed by the colloquy that I convened at Ballymena on 31 January. A full explanation of the proposed way ahead was given at that meeting, which was attended by representatives from all of the district councils, district partnerships, intermediary funding bodies and Departments.

The secretariat of the NIPB has been represented at the meetings of two groups. One is the department that is concerned with the transition at regional level and the other is the group that is concerned with the preparation of draft guidelines for local strategy partnerships led by the Special EU Programmes Body. The secretariat of the NIPB is responsible for keeping that board informed.

There has been some discussion with the Department for Social Development, and I met the Minister for that Department to hear his views and concerns about some of the issues. It has been, and it remains, my intention to ensure a smooth transition from Peace I to Peace II at local and regional level. I shall be doing that in all good faith and in terms that are consistent with the proper and right decisions that have been taken by the Executive Committee.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: I want to ask some very pointed questions, and I am not dealing with rumour. The Minister is well aware that I have been keeping a close eye on the process. At every partnership meeting that I have attended I have pointed out the unfair allocation of money that has been given to one side of the community. The Unionist community has been held to ransom. For example, at Castlereagh, there was no money for the victims of the La Mon bombing, but there was money for Irish dancing. I have been involved in this since the beginning, and Jacques Delors made me a promise that the money would be for victims. Unionist victims have not had that money.

11.15 am

I am not alone in that; I have raised the matter at one meeting after another. The Minister had much to say about the uneven allocation of places. What will he do about the uneven allocation of money? Why did he not move on the ring-fencing of grants so that each community would get a fair allocation? Will he do that? What will he do about the two members who were appointed by each of the MEPs to the regional board? So far, I have had no communication from him about that matter. There is an imbalance that must be faced and remedied. I find it amazing that the two Ministers who are responsible for that, Minister Haughey and Minister Nesbitt, are not

even in their places today, and they are the people who are looking after the appointments to those boards.

Mr Durkan: Dr Paisley has asked several questions, and I think that that was as close to being a speech as any other question asked here this morning.

I will mainly address the Peace II issues. There is a specific indicative Peace II allocation, at this stage, of £6.7 million for victims. The Executive agreed that in February 2000. That money will be distributed using objective criteria, and the details of the criteria and precise measures will be developed at the programme complement stage that we are now entering.

In our work with the interim community support framework monitoring committee on our proposals for the CSF and the other programmes, we developed and agreed several horizontal principles. Those proposals addressed equality and balance considerations. I made it clear in our work with the committee that those principles partly reflected the need that was identified following Peace I to overcome the obstacles that existed, for whatever reason, and ensure that there was a better balance in the applications for the funds and their distribution. We agreed to take that forward.

I acknowledge the role of the MEPs, not just in making helpful interventions and showing interest in the current round of funding that we are talking about, but also in the Peace I programme. We are beginning a new programme. We are in a new context with new arrangements. Therefore not all of the arrangements for Peace I will be the same for Peace II. The role of the regional partnership board will be different, and the two junior Ministers at the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister will be chairing it.

I am addressing the issues in these programmes that are part of my responsibility as Minister of Finance and Personnel. I would again point out that we are going to finalise the programme complements. There will be a period of consultation, and the monitoring committees must agree the complements. Dr Paisley says that he has not heard from me on this; I have written to the MEPs seeking a meeting with them at this significant stage in the process.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The Minister should know that my office has been in touch with his office and has arranged a time for that meeting. I was not dilly-dallying.

Mr Speaker: It sounds as though the Minister is looking forward to the meeting.

Mr Close: I think it might be useful, Mr Speaker, if Peace II were to break out here, with all the funds that are going around.

Mr Speaker: I am encouraged that the Member thinks it is Peace II. Some people are still waiting for "peace I".

Mr Close: Hope springs eternal, does it not? I welcome the Minister's statement. It is fair to say that this is a good news day. A package of £1.23 billion cannot be sneezed at, nor should it be sneezed at by anyone.

How can the Minister assure the House that sustainability will be seen to be the key? The reference to gap funding in the previous round is a clear demonstration that sustainability was not really taken seriously. In the immortal words of the Rolling Stones, "This will be the last time". Therefore it is essential that sustainability be the key and that that message be really drummed home.

Finally, can the Minister further assure the House that proper and verifiable appraisals will be carried out on all the projects, thus ensuring that there will be a clear demonstration that the bad habits that crept in under previous rounds have been eradicated?

Mr Durkan: I welcome the change of Rolling Stones tune from Mr Close. Normally I hear "I can't get no satisfaction" in the Chamber. I am glad that he welcomes the stage we are at with these programmes, but we have still more work to do. He rightly identifies the important principle of sustainability. It is important not just for us but also for the European Commission. Essentially, part of the contract in Peace I was meant to be sustainability, and people receiving funding under Peace I were meant to make arrangements to ensure the sustainability of their projects and to provide exit strategies.

However, the difficulties that we are witnessing show that that has not happened. In fairness, all the blame cannot be laid at the doors of the individual projects. One of the things that we must do in the next round is to not just address the issue of sustainability as a hard economic test, the burden of which falls solely on each individual project, but also develop a wider framework for sustainability. We must see how we can ensure the sustainability of the sort of programmes, models, measures and mechanisms that have been developed under Peace I and that we want to see developed under Peace II. It is in the wider context of ensuring the sustainability of that sort of approach that organisations will find themselves even better equipped and even better motivated to concentrate on maximising their own specific grounds for sustainability.

Mr B Hutchinson: I welcome the statement. Can the Minister elaborate on the role of the intermediary funding bodies? What percentage of the peace funds will be channelled through them, and how will they be chosen?

Mr Durkan: The intermediate funding bodies are being chosen on the basis of competitive tender in this round. That was agreed by the Executive. I know that some of the existing bodies were disappointed by that decision, but we believed that it was important, given that this is a new programme. We also believe that it is important given the European Commission's requirements and our own public procurement requirements, because

in a sense the work of these bodies really is an important contract.

We are looking at an indicative distribution of 34% of the programme being managed by intermediary funding bodies.

Ms Morrice: I too rise to welcome the securing of the European funding and to congratulate the team for the work they have done to get it. I also thank Europe and the European Union for this commitment to Northern Ireland.

The Minister has concentrated most of his efforts on changing the partnership approach. My argument is this: if it is not broken, why fix it? What is the Minister doing to keep his own house in order? He will be aware of the findings of the Public Accounts Committees on European funding. I refer to what Seamus Close called "bad habits" in Government funding.

How much money is going to be channelled directly through the Government? How will the Minister ensure that that money actually goes to peace and reconciliation and not to pet Government projects? How can he ensure that funding is not blocked? We have some projects still waiting for money to be channelled from certain Departments which was promised months, if not years, ago. How can the Minister guarantee that the process will flow smoothly?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for the welcome that she gave to the announcement and for her thanks to the officials involved, who have undertaken an enormous amount of work. It is appropriate that thanks are expressed here by Members. The European Union is also due proper recognition.

Following on from the last question about how much the intermediate funding bodies are going to handle, in the next programme, the Department will be handling, on the basis of the indicative allocation that we are working on, some 39% of the funding in the next round.

I also point out, as I indicated in my speech, that the Executive undertook last February to monitor what the Departments would do about their measures on social inclusion, and especially the inclusion of women, children and young people, North/South activity, and using local delivery mechanisms. As I have tried to stress, we do not see the only funding going to and through local delivery mechanisms as being the funding under priority 3. We want to see that used more widely.

We are going to manage this programme in a meaningful way, and we have much more robust and more meaningful monitoring arrangements in place for this programme than was the case for the last one. The monitoring committees in the last round did not have a clear remit. They had very big and unwieldy memberships. We have, with the help of the social partners, designed a

much more streamlined and coherent role for the monitoring committees.

There will also be clear reportage. The European Parliament will require annual reportage on how we are managing these issues and spending the moneys. There are problems with completing the spend in Peace I. All the allocations under Peace I have been made, but not all the money has been drawn down. My Department, other Departments and the Special EU Programmes Body are working with the district partnerships and intermediary funding bodies, to try to ensure that that money is drawn down and well spent.

Dr O'Hagan: Go raibh maith agat, Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's statement. Many groups and organisations will also welcome that we have at least reached this stage in the process.

I have looked at the timetable that the Minister has provided. There are concerns that the bulk of the money will not filter down to the ground until around January 2002. Given those concerns, does the Minister believe that the existing arrangements are adequate for the gap funding, given that he has acknowledged the valuable work of the voluntary and community sector? Can the Minister assure the House that that European Union money will be truly additional and that it will not be used by Departments and statutory agencies to do what they should be doing already?

Finally, in the last line of paragraph 13, the Minister refers to the use of "private finance" in the future. Can he give more details on how he envisages that finance being used?

11.30 am

Mr Durkan: I will first deal with the issue of additionality. Peace II moneys, as with Peace I funds, are additional, and we respect that fact. We have been at pains to ensure that the peace programmes and the programme for building sustainable prosperity were distinctive in this way. As a result, significant changes had to be made to the draft of each programme, precisely to ensure and underpin the necessary distinctiveness, which is part of the guarantee of additionality.

We have now made arrangements to build on the £9 million of gap funding that we have allocated for the current financial year. That allocation of funding from the Executive's budget shows that the Executive are sensitive and responsive to those problems. A different approach is to be taken in the next financial year, which will be geared towards facilitating the transition to Peace II, particularly in the context of the operational programmes. The funding to be available under that mechanism can last until October, and we expect that that money will be allocated in September, based on the timetable I have outlined. This progression will, of course, be subject to our getting the necessary agreement on the

programme complements on time in May, but with a big effort we can do that. If there are any other difficulties we will simply need to stretch the transition funding arrangement that we are planning. We are, therefore, dealing with the Member's concerns about gap funding.

We have no plans to use private finance on any particular project or in any particular way. However, the strategic partnerships are meant to be local, which should have an influence and a strategic bearing on a number of issues in their areas — not just priority 3 — and all the social partners, including businesses, should be involved. Several measures being taken at local level already involve some private financial investment or activity. In the light of that, all such positive developments should be within the purview of those local partnerships.

Mr Leslie: I thank the Minister for his statement, although I regret that he did not see fit to mention in his statement the fact that the structural funds were not additional. Before we throw our hats in the air with joy about that £860 million, we should remind ourselves that the funding is simply a mechanism by which the European Union graciously allows the United Kingdom to spend its own money, albeit that the amount spent in Northern Ireland is higher than it would otherwise have been.

The Minister referred to match funding, although not in quantum. In the context of his comments on sustainability, does he believe that when those programmes end, the part of the spending that was represented by match funding might continue to be applied to the same measures in the future? It could be argued that that would not be a further burden on public expenditure as provision for such spending is already there.

Mr Durkan: I regret that I was unable to cover every detail on match funding in the statement. I assumed that most people knew that Peace II money was additional while the transitional Objective I funding was not. There was no attempt to mislead by omitting to mention that fact in my statement.

Secondly, match funding is obviously a requirement that we must meet in respect of these programmes. Europe requires that. If the emphasis on the programme for building sustainable prosperity, which Mr Leslie seems to be most interested in, is to underpin sustainable economic development, when we come to the end of it, all those measures, areas of activity and sectors that have been benefiting under that programme will still have to be taken forward, depending on what stage of development they are at.

We will have to take decisions at that point. How do we sustain that development? I do not think anybody is pretending that all areas of those programmes will involve a finite commitment, within the life of these programmes, to those areas. There will be ongoing commitments with consequences. That is one of the reasons for, when deciding what measures we are going to adopt or support under

these programmes, having an eye to longer-term sustainability.

Mrs Courtney: I welcome the Minister's statement and congratulate him and his team on the management of a complex and lengthy process. Although there are still a couple of months to go on those programmes, today's announcement will be of immense significance to how we progress. I am also conscious that there is a challenge ahead with sustainable prosperity. Given that a sound energy infrastructure is vital for economic development, equality of opportunity and access to prosperity, can the Minister confirm that those programmes can be used to support gas pipeline development so that people from outside Belfast, and especially those in the greater north-west, can enjoy a level plain field?

Mr Durkan: A notional sum of five million euros has been included in the new programme for building sustainable prosperity precisely for energy.

Once proposals for pipeline development have been evaluated, funding for economic growth and competitiveness — a priority of the programme — can be redistributed to allow for the implementation of gas pipeline expansions. The key issue is the appraisal of realistic proposals from the private sector.

My Colleague the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Sir Reg Empey, will ensure that that receives proper attention, not just from his Department, but also from the Executive, at the proper time. I also remind Members that in the Budget and under the Programme for Government, we established an Executive Programme fund, which includes money for infrastructure and capital renewal.

Mr Poots: Not for the first time is the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister showing gross discourtesy to the House by not turning up this morning for something in which it plays such a key role. I also have to say to Mr Close that we are not receiving manna from heaven. Perhaps the people of Northern Ireland are just getting back some of the money they have paid in taxes.

Does the Minister accept that while he intends to build on the strength of partnerships, he needs to eradicate the weakness of partnership? I bring to his attention accountability, fairness and equality, which we have not had in the past. Millions of pounds have been squandered, yet the Protestant community was so discriminated against in Lisburn that it ground the whole partnership system to a halt. What steps does the Minister intend to take to ensure that that does not happen with the Peace II money?

Mr Durkan: I have already dealt with the point about balance. There are horizontal principles that will apply in the new programmes, not least in the Peace II programme. They aim to respect our equality obligations fully and to

ensure that there is an optimum balance in the use and share of those resources.

With regard to some of the criticisms that have been made about some allocations, obviously a number of measures were taken under Peace I. It would be unfortunate if whatever legitimate concerns or criticisms there may be were now laid at the door of local partnerships. The fact is that the district partnerships faced an enormous task during the life of Peace I, not least because of the novelty and the difficult circumstances that there were in the early days of the partnership enterprise.

However, important lessons have been learnt, including some about deficiencies in the partnerships. Those deficiencies were not in the commitment or the qualities of those involved in partnerships but were deficiencies in the structures. We are trying to make that good by establishing a new and more strategic form of partnership at the local level. That will serve local communities in their fullest and broadest sense and not just in relation to European funding and the Peace programme — the partnerships will go far beyond those measures and will outlast them. I hope that people will recognise that, by bringing forward these changes, we are trying to respond to some of the difficulties and frustrations experienced by the partnerships and others in the last round. We are also trying to improve every other measure under this programme.

Mr Beggs: I too welcome the Minister's statement advising that Northern Ireland taxpayers' money will be returned from Europe through the transitional Objective 1 and Peace II programmes.

Does the Minister accept that the intermediary funding bodies in the Peace I structure were highly bureaucratic and that local groups often had to apply to several bodies to achieve a total funding package, thus wasting time and effort? Will the Minister advise that there will be a reduction in the overall amount of money spent on administration in Peace II so that more money can be directed towards the groups and projects on the ground? Is the Minister aware of the inequalities of the previous systems, particularly the money spent by intermediary funding bodies? For example, the Educational Guidance Service for Adults spent a total of £4.3 million but only £26,000 in my constituency. Will he ensure that there will be equality in future spending by intermediary funding bodies?

Mr Durkan: In acknowledging the important questions raised by the Member, I make the point that intermediary funding bodies had a range of responsibilities under Peace I. They managed different types of funding over a range of sectoral areas. It is not the case that all allocations made by intermediary funding bodies — which are made at a regional level — are subject to a detailed breakdown at local level. Some allocations can be represented at constituency or council level, but that is not always the

case. It is common for Departments to be in a similar position. Therefore it would be unfair to use that test against intermediary funding bodies. We must remember that we are dealing with different types of programmes and funding.

We are trying to make sure that any deficiencies that existed in Peace I are rectified and improved upon. In response to the early part of the question, we recognise that there were problems of “cocktail” funding for both funders and applicants. We are trying to streamline those matters. Part of what is being attempted with the new local strategy partnerships is to enable them to respond to the interests and ideas of different groups locally — not just in relation to the funding managed locally by the local strategy partnerships but wider EU programmes. That is why they will be in a strong position to work with the Special EU Programmes Body, which is the managing authority for the wider Peace programme.

We want to see a stronger network of information and contact, so that people will not have to make lots of speculative applications all over the place and so that they will receive better advice and direction. The Special EU Programmes Body is an important asset in this round of funding, and it rectifies a clear deficiency in the last round. The programmes body, particularly as the secretariat of the regional partnership board, will be in a strong position to work closely with the local strategy partnerships.

11.45 am

Ms Hanna: I too welcome the Minister’s statement and appreciate his work and that of his team. Can he outline more specifically how the stronger economic focus of Peace II will be given effect?

Mr Durkan: The stronger economic focus in Peace II is not there to the exclusion of the emphasis that needs to be there for our own purposes and, indeed, in the European Commission’s interests on social inclusion, nor will it in any way impair the quality of this programme as one that clearly has to be centred on peace and reconciliation. With an emphasis on regeneration as well as reconciliation, this programme can contribute to economic improvement, and those improvements will, in turn, underpin social inclusion.

As other Members have said, sustainability will obviously be a fundamental principle that underlies the programme, and project sponsors will be required to ensure that, where possible, projects and actions can continue beyond the life of the peace programme. That is particularly relevant when we are talking about those measures that are in the more economic area.

I must point out that under priority 3 there are local economic initiatives that can be taken that will specifically come in to the social economy area, for we have responded to some of the concerns that were expressed about earlier drafts of Peace II that had local economic development in under that measure. That measure has, in turn, been

transferred to the transitional Objective 1. We have, therefore, been able to maintain that economic focus, while at the same time ensuring that it does not skew against the strong social inclusion emphasis that has to be there.

If we are serious about taking advantage of all the opportunities that arise from peace, and if we are serious about building on the successes of Peace I, we should want to build new ways that sustain both economic as well as social growth.

Mr Hay: I would like to bring the Minister back to the issue of ring-fencing. I want to say very seriously to the Minister that in my constituency of Foyle, if it had not been for myself and others in our district partnership fighting to try to ring-fence some money for the Protestant community, that community would have lost out desperately.

There is no doubt that in my constituency, when money was ring-fenced — and not only for the Protestant community, for some Nationalist groups lost out as well — it worked. You were able to go to a community and say “Here is your money; you come up with a project or programme to fit around it” rather than “Come up with a programme or project, and we might get you the money”. Under Peace II, that is an important issue to be looked at, especially in a community that is coming from a very low base and one that is, perhaps, not as active as the Nationalist community in filling in application forms and going for funding. We could argue here all day as to why that is happening.

The Minister has to try to build on success. In my community and in the Foyle constituency we all saw money —

Mr Speaker: I urge the Member to put his question to the Minister.

Mr Hay: I want the Minister to take a serious look at ring-fencing money for communities that are coming from a very low base.

I have another question. There are councils and partnerships who, for whatever reason, will find it difficult to form a partnership to try to draw down this money. If that happens and the partnership is not formed, what does the Minister intend to do?

Mr Durkan: The Member raised several points, some of which have been touched on by others. I refer the Member to the horizontal principles that are meant to govern the use of this funding. I also stress that we are talking about having the partnerships, not just as local delivery mechanisms, but as local decision-making mechanisms.

The Executive are trying to ensure wider understanding of that point and issue. Therefore, at this stage, it is not for the Executive, the Department of Finance and Personnel or the Special EU Programmes Body to start ring-fencing money that might be allocated by

particular partnerships. As the Member's last question indicates, the Executive are trying to encourage people to reach the agreement required to create new strategic partnerships locally. Therefore the Executive are trying to take account of people's needs and concerns and reflect those in a positive and pragmatic way consistent with all of the principles.

Stronger monitoring arrangements are in place for this programme than was the case for the last programme. Notwithstanding the problems that Members have legitimately identified, there has also been significant progress in respect of some of the problems associated with Peace I — not least through some innovative interventions and allocations by local partnership boards. In those cases more was done to make good the deficit in application of funds to particular areas and communities.

The intermediary funding bodies have seen the same improvements in making progress against that problem. It would be wrong for the Executive to suggest that there has not been progress on that issue just as it would be wrong for me to imply that more progress is not needed or would not be welcome.

Mr Dodds: I welcome the statement's commitment to new partnership arrangements that will enhance and increase the role of local government and district councils. That is important given the democratic nature of local councils and the important role that elected representatives and councillors have to play. There is concern among others who played a significant role in the previous partnership arrangements at the make-up of the new boards. Will the Minister indicate in more detail his thinking on the role that those other sectors will play in the new partnership arrangements?

Paragraph 24 of the statement states that the secretariat to the new Northern Ireland regional partnership board is to be the Special EU Programmes Body. Will the Minister explain the thinking behind that? Does he accept that that will not be viewed by some people in Northern Ireland as a positive development, but could rather cause some alienation with regard to the inclusiveness of the arrangements?

Will the Minister take on board the comments made by my Colleagues on this side of the House about the need to ensure that the lack of community infrastructure and capacity in the Protestant and Unionist community is recognised and acknowledged in the new arrangements? Will the Minister ensure that positive steps are taken to redress the deficiencies of the previous arrangements?

Mr Durkan: The Member raised several points for which I thank him.

The Executive are trying to ensure that local government's role at a corporate level is bedded more strongly in the partnership model for the future. The Executive do not want local government to dominate the partnerships

or displace the influence of any other sector. The Executive want more of the capacity of local and regional government through the statutory agencies to be brought to the table of partnership.

With regard to the fifty-fifty model, it must be remembered that the Executive are saying that it will be for local government and the statutory agencies to determine locally what the balance should be. Some Members have suggested that the Executive should opt for a model that allocates a fixed 25% to local government, a fixed 25% to the statutory agencies, et cetera. That is not the best way to go because there is a danger of revisiting the situation where people from the statutory agencies turn up only to make up the numbers, rather than properly working their passage and engaging in the real spirit of partnership. Also, I am very conscious that we are talking about reviews of public administration and reviews of local government that might well see a change in the balance between the functions and capacities of local government and the statutory agencies. That is why, in setting the partnership on a fifty-fifty basis, we will have a model which can develop not only over Peace II but also beyond Peace II. We need to take account of the wider factors.

With regard to the interests of other sectors, we have been asked to embrace the principle of social partnership throughout all consultations that we have engaged in. I have also been urged by people in working groups, by social partners — and this reflects the district partnership perspective and the local government perspective too — not to impose a one-size-fits-all model. In that respect it is now 50% participation for social partners. Some people have suggested that we should fix the partnership at 25% for the community and voluntary sector, and 25% for business, trade unions and the rural and agriculture sector. I have no problems if people agree that level locally, or if at regional level the social partners, in the negotiations that will take place on the programme complements, can agree that.

It would be wrong if we imposed that model. Many people have told me that they believe that different levels can be arrived at locally. I am happy to look at building in threshold guarantees to particular sectors. It is something that I looked at but was dissuaded from because people told me to allow it to go forward and be negotiated. I hope that reassures people. Like Mr Dodds, many people have been in touch with me, and when I have explained what we are doing and why we are doing it, they are reassured and wonder why others have been telling them yarns.

BEEF AND PIG SECTORS

The Chairperson of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee (Rev Dr Ian Paisley): I beg to move

That this Assembly accepts and endorses the findings and recommendations contained in the two reports published by the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development — ‘Restoring Profit for the Beef Producer’ (2/00/R) and ‘Restoring Profit for the Pig Producer’ (3/00/R) — and urges the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (and others involved in the beef and pig sectors) to take all the necessary steps to implement the recommendations.

Let me make it clear that this motion was unanimously agreed by the Committee. It is the Committee’s motion, and it was agreed by all parties who attended the meeting.

Last year, as Chairman of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee, I tabled a motion in the House seeking the Assembly’s endorsement of the Committee’s first major report, ‘Retailing in Northern Ireland — A fair deal for the farmer’. The motion was agreed without a division. That report was the first of a series of three to come out of the Committee’s inquiry into debt in the agriculture industry.

Today I have tabled a similar motion, on the Committee’s behalf, seeking the Assembly’s endorsement of the final two reports and asking that the Assembly seek the implementation of the 15 recommendations contained in the beef sector report and the nine recommendations in the pig industry report. I was asked if now was the appropriate time to introduce those reports? My answer is emphatically “Yes”. Farmers are in desperate need of some hope for the future. Even before the current crisis, hope was a rare commodity in the farming community. Some farmers are going out of business, and others are struggling with crippling debts. The recommendations in both reports offer hope for the future, but only if they are implemented.

I firmly believe that the Assembly’s endorsement of the reports and recommendations, and the momentum for change in those recommendations, will be too great for the Department and others in those industries to ignore.

12.00

The title of each report says it all — “Restoring profit”. Would any of the Members here expect to run a business, support a family and uphold their local economy without the prospect of a fair return for their labours? Not one. That is all that farmers are asking for, and all that my Committee is being a voice for in the House. The Committee has investigated those important matters and has given a real insight into what is happening in agriculture today.

The report on the beef industry was launched on 15 December 2000, the report on the pig industry two months later. Those reports were the result of the Committee’s

consideration of 14 long written submissions and 13 very long oral evidence sessions. That represents a significant body of evidence from all sides of the industry. The Minister must lend her ear to the evidence. I commend all those who took part in the inquiry and I commend those in the Committee who worked hard at their task.

The Committee made 15 recommendations on the beef industry. They covered a wide range of subjects including EU matters, herd improvement, the creation of effective and efficient partnerships, opening new markets, branding, quality and strategic involvement of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in the industry. I only have time to concentrate on a few of those today.

First, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development’s strategic role. Based on the evidence before it, one of the Committee’s firm conclusions was that the massive superiority of the market power of both processors and retailers was leading to the poor returns faced by beef farmers. We also found that the fragmentation of beef production was a real obstacle to the creation of a modern responsive supply chain.

Therefore one of our main recommendations was that the Department should set a high priority on the transformation of beef production from a collection of individual farmers with no market power to a market-oriented organised force, able to respond with a quality product. We recommended that the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development should create and lead a task force to help that to happen. What is the use of having the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development if it is not going to help the farmers? What is the use of turning the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development into a police force to look after and monitor farmers, rather than helping them to win markets?

Within the existing supply chain, Northern Irish beef is being processed and sold profitably but without an acceptable return for the producers. They are the Cinderellas of the high business strategy employed by large companies in our Province today. Those large companies are not going bankrupt, but the farmers are. The directors of those companies are not committing suicide, but some farmers are. Those companies give a tremendous return to their shareholders while the farmer has a pittance and his income is cut by over 50%.

Another issue that the report highlighted was the alleged price differential between Northern Irish beef and that sold in Great Britain. The Committee defends Northern Ireland’s farmers — their beef is second to none. They deserve the same reward for their labours as their fellow farmers in the rest of this United Kingdom. We have recommended that the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development investigate the allegations with a view to securing comparable returns for similar livestock.

The Committee was most concerned about evidence regarding the deterioration in the quality of beef cattle presented for slaughter. There are several reasons for that, including the high percentage of input from the dairy herds. Another significant factor is the lack of price incentives from processors to encourage farmers to present animals of a higher quality. During evidence sessions even the processors agreed that there was not a wide enough gap in prices in Northern Ireland.

Therefore the main thrust of the Committee's recommendations in that area is twofold. The Department must prepare an overall strategy for herd improvement that involves the whole industry, and processors must alter their pricing policies to offer stronger incentives. The Committee welcomed the Department's beef quality initiative, announced in the Programme for Government, as a major step in the right direction. However, when the Committee questioned officials about the proposed scheme at the beginning of March it was disappointed to learn that processors had not commented on the individual proposals, although they supported the principle of the scheme. We want to see the principle not just supported but transformed into action.

That demonstrates the importance of the fully developed involvement of processors, as recommended by the Committee. If processors do not act, we fear, the initiative will not succeed, as the main tangible benefits to encourage farmers to undertake quality production — a premium for their animals — will not exist.

I am pleased to inform the Assembly that the Minister has responded positively to the beef report. In her letter of 22 February, Ms Rodgers congratulated the Committee on producing a concerted and concentrated examination of the issues. Although it may appreciate those remarks, the Committee is more interested in action. Of the 12 recommendations directly relating to the Department, the Minister either will act or is already taking action to implement four of them. Those involve agrimonetary compensation, swift dispersal of payments to farmers, supporting efforts to reopen new markets and, crucially, conducting an investigation into the price differential between Northern Ireland and Great Britain. The Committee welcomes those actions.

On a further three recommendations — those relating to herd improvement, farm quality assurance and traceability — the Minister appears to accept the Committee's findings but is not necessarily committing herself to taking to the action proposed in its report. The Committee will be interested to hear today whether the Minister will expand on those areas. In any event, it will seek to ensure that the actions taken by the Minister meet the objectives of its recommendations.

In her reply, the Minister appeared unconvinced about the recommendation to brand Northern Ireland beef. In hearing evidence, the Committee learned about a

successful branding exercise to sell our beef in Holland. The Committee also heard that the Great Britain market was largely based on a known-label strategy.

The Committee firmly believes that branding offers the only real protection against product substitution by the big retailers and that it must be pursued. Despite the Minister's apparent reluctance, the Committee welcomes the fact that the Livestock and Meat Commission is to undertake a study of the scope of branding Northern Ireland red meat. That study should not be delayed, and Members will take a close interest in its findings.

The Minister appears to have rejected three of the Committee's recommendations. Those recommendations included the banning of imports of foreign beef if there is a risk to consumers or a threat to the industry. That is all the more important today, when meat that has not been properly handled — even under EEC rules — is coming from the continent into Northern Ireland. We also recommended that the Department become a more proactive participant in the beef sector and that producers should be organised into a market-orientated force.

It could be argued that only three rejections out of 12 recommendations is not a bad result for a Committee report. However, recent events, including the importing from Germany and other European countries of beef from which the spinal cord had not been removed, make our recommendation on that all the more valid. As recently as last Thursday, the Ulster Farmers' Union called for the suspension of EU beef imports. Stern measures are called for.

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's involvement and leadership in creating a modern, responsive and powerful production force is crucial to the Committee's vision for a better future for the beef farmers of Northern Ireland. If the Minister does not accept that our task force recommendation is the right way to go, the members of the Committee and I will be interested to hear her alternative suggestions for improving co-operation among producers and securing real partnership arrangements with powerful processors and retailers.

The final report, 'Restoring Profit for the Pig Producer', was launched at a press conference on 16 February. In that report, there were nine recommendations. The Committee has not yet received the Minister's response to that report, which puts me at something of a disadvantage. I do not criticise the Minister for that; we all know and appreciate that she has been preoccupied in recent weeks. Nonetheless, we look forward with interest to her response today. The Committee will find out only today what the Minister plans to do about our recommendations, so we look forward to meeting her again and having further discussions.

The Committee's findings covered four areas: the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's strategic involvement in the industry; the Department's

response to the crisis faced by pig producers; producer-processor partnerships, and reserved matters outside the direct control of the local administration. As was the case with the beef sector, the Committee found that the Department should be more proactive in certain areas of its dealings with the industry.

12.15 pm

The Committee was most impressed by the efforts of the United Pig Producers' Co-operative to make a significant change in the supply chain. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development would appear to agree, as it has allocated significant moneys to the co-operative to make it work. However, like the beef sector, there is an imbalance of market power. Pig producers have to either take it or leave it when processors offer them a price. Members felt that there must be a real advantage for processors in the assurance of a ready and consistent supply of quality pigs at an agreed price. However, we heard that the major processor, the Malton bacon factory, had not engaged in a meaningful way with the co-operative. Without such co-operation, further progress is impossible. For that reason, one of our main recommendations is for the Department to become much more closely involved in the negotiations. That processor has benefited from a very large grant assistance from the Department, and the Committee believes that the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development therefore has the right — indeed, the obligation — to intervene in that matter.

The Committee also heard evidence on the disparity in prices between Northern Ireland and Great Britain. As was the case with beef, the Committee would have recommended that the Department investigate that differential. However, before the report was finalised, the Minister announced an investigation into the conformation of Northern Ireland pigs. The Committee welcomes that. If the findings reveal — as we expect they will — that the processors' allegations of poor quality are absolutely unfounded, the Committee in its recommendation has urged the Department to follow that up most vigorously.

During our inquiry, there was much debate about the Government's handling of the crisis in the pig industry, particularly in relation to the catastrophic fire at the Ballymoney processing plant. Northern Ireland pig farmers look endlessly across the border to their counterparts in the Republic of Ireland. The welfare scheme offered for pig farmers was nothing in comparison with that, and should not be likened to it. The pig farmers believe that the Government there understood the problems and acted accordingly. They do not believe the same could be said of the Administration here.

Our report calls for the Minister to put in place a scheme that will take into account the specific difficulties faced in Northern Ireland. That would be in addition to the UK-wide pig industry restructuring scheme and would

ensure that our producers are not disadvantaged compared to those in the south of this island. I will be particularly interested to hear the Minister's response to this recommendation which, I believe, has the full support of the pig farmers.

The UK-wide scheme I have just mentioned will have an effect on the overall industry in Northern Ireland. The Minister told the Committee recently that there had been some 800 applications for the outgoers element of the scheme. It is obvious that the Northern Ireland pig industry will be much smaller when that scheme concludes. The Committee believes that its recommendations lay the foundations for more profitable times for those who decide to continue rearing pigs.

It is essential that support be given to the pig farmers quickly. It is now a year since Nick Brown, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food announced the UK scheme. Such a delay, I trust, will not be the fault of the local Minister, and the Committee finds it acceptable and recommends that she lobby Colleagues to ensure that funds reach their destination much sooner in the future.

In conclusion, these reports are important milestones in the hopes for the recovery of the two important sectors of our industry, which at the moment are in turmoil. I commend them to the Assembly. I ask the Assembly to support the motion in order to send a clear message to the agricultural and wider rural communities that it is aware of, and is seriously concerned about, the future of our greatest industry in Northern Ireland. The Assembly must show that it is seeking to help farmers remain in the industry and give those that have given their lives to farming a proper retirement. It must bring new people into the farming industry who wish to remain in the farming community.

Mr Speaker: This is a time-limited debate and a substantial number of Members wish to participate. I have to put a limit of seven minutes on subsequent speeches, save for the Minister, to whom the usual rule of thumb of 10 minutes per hour of debate will apply. Even with that limit, all who wish to speak may not be able to do so. We must adhere to the time limit.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee (Mr Savage): As Deputy Chairperson, I support what the Chairperson of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee has said. Our recommendations in the two reports were not made lightly. I hope that our efforts have gone some way towards providing a new beginning for the two parts of our industry that are in grave need.

As we pursued the two elements of our inquiry, the similarities in the problems faced by pig and beef producers in Northern Ireland made an impression on Committee members. Farm debt in both sectors had its roots in many different fundamental causes. Some of these were outside the control of farmers and others in

Northern Ireland. However, it also became clear that in both cases producers were not getting a fair crack of the whip when it came to making profit from the food chain.

The Chairman has rightly concentrated on the Committee's recommendations to the Department and I would encourage the Minister to implement them without delay. It is also worth noting that we made several recommendations to others in the industry and I wish to highlight some of those. In the beef report we recommended that the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development should create and lead a task force to organise production. We followed that through by recommending that producers co-operate fully with that initiative and make any investments necessary to ensure its success.

There is a saying about leading a horse to water. Similarly, one cannot make farmers co-operate or participate even if the best of schemes are provided. However, our report recognises that producers must get involved and act together rather than stand alone. They are at the mercy of more powerful forces.

Making investments will not be easy decisions for farmers, but I fully expect that farmers will put their hands in their pockets if they are convinced that it will ultimately secure a better return. I say that again: they will do so if they are convinced that it will ultimately secure a better return.

When we made recommendations on beef herd improvements, we asked the Department to prepare the strategy and asked the processors to play their part by offering the right incentives. We have also asked producers to pay more attention to improving the overall quality. Even if the incentives are there, it is the producers who will still have to make them operable. Farmers should not fall into the trap of saying "Why should I bother?" A far more valid response would be "Make it worth my while." Farmers must throw out the challenge to factories and processors and say "If you make it worth my while, I will produce the best beef this country has ever seen." That is where the crux of the matter lies.

We continued this theme in our report on the pig industry. We included two recommendations aimed at the producers and processors: to take their product and to make their product. We have urged the establishment of an equal partnership between processors and co-operatives. We have encouraged those involved in co-operatives to stick to their task. If co-operatives can provide a quality supply on which processors can fully depend, processors must see the attractions eventually.

A team effort is required from both the beef and pig sectors. All sides must have equal standing and respect for each other if the supply chains are to operate to their full potential. These are two good reports that have gone to the heart of the problems faced by local farmers and have offered some solutions. The problems will not go away because many aspects of the industry are currently

outside the control of the producers. However, in the coming days I hope that those problems will be overcome. I urge all farmers to take on board what the Committee has been trying to do. We will not walk away from the problems. I hope that farmers will rise to the challenge that lies before them and make Northern Ireland a place where we produce only the best.

I have great pleasure in supporting the motion.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I have consulted with the Committee Clerk. We did not receive the letter to which the Minister referred. I have also sent word to my office, and we did not receive a letter there either. I would be grateful to the Minister if she would let us have a copy of the letter.

Mr Speaker: The Minister may respond.

Ms Rodgers: I have a copy of the letter here which was issued by my Department.

Mr Speaker: I cannot be responsible for the Post Office or for whatever service delivers — or in this case does not deliver. However, since we are now due to break for lunch, I trust that it may be possible for a copy of the letter to be conveyed to the Chairperson, and then all needs will be satisfied.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.28 pm.

On resuming (Mr Deputy Speaker [Sir John Gorman] in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Mr Bradley: I will not dwell on the beef aspect of the motion since the announcement made in Brussels at lunchtime has rather overtaken us. I am pleased to be one of the first Members of the Assembly to welcome the announcement that regional status has been granted to Northern Ireland. As a South Down MLA and a Newry and Mourne district councillor, I accept the Minister's explanation that the entire Newry and Mourne area will have to wait a short while before it too can enjoy this regional status. I am, however, satisfied that we will not have to wait a moment longer than is necessary before the restrictions are removed.

Now that regional status has been granted, I thank Ms Rodgers, who is not present at the moment, and her team for their endless efforts and for overcoming the unforeseen problems which arose on the way to achieving this. Well done to the Minister and to everyone else concerned.

On the question of profit creation and who should have a role in the recovery of the beef industry, we all agreed that the process should start with the farmers. However, that responsibility also extends to the processors, the retailers and the housewives — particularly the

Northern Ireland housewives — who need to ensure that profits return to the farmers.

The obstacle presented by the strength of sterling will continue to burden the agriculture industry and all local industries that depend on export markets. It is an obstacle that we could do without, but it would be pointless to ask Tony Blair or Gordon Brown to do anything about it.

The report highlights the level of mistrust between the farmers and the rest of the supply chain. A united approach to supplying the market with adequate quantities of top quality produce at the right time for a mutually agreed price is an important piece in the jigsaw of recovery. However, as I said at the outset, we held our breath today as we waited the outcome of the Standing Veterinary Committee's deliberations in Brussels. The decision in our favour gives us a new foundation upon which to restore profits. Without knowing the full details of the regional status announcement, and despite the current gloom, this is a good day for Northern Ireland farmers.

On the section of the report which deals with the pig industry, the fight to restore profits to this sector will be more difficult than our long fight for beef recovery. I recall the evidence of Mr Forbes of the Ulster Curers' Association in response to a question about the role played by such supermarkets as Sainsbury's.

Mr Forbes's reply reflected the views of many when he pointed out that the multiples pushed for quality assurance but then failed to pay the price for quality goods. They buy foreign products as an alternative. Until we can break the stranglehold which the multinationals have upon the agriculture industry, we will continue to have a non-profit situation on our farms.

I have decided, in the short time available to me, to deal with labelling and branding. I wish to look at the evidence given by the President of the Ulster Farmers' Union, Mr Douglas Rowe, on that issue. Mr Rowe's view is that everybody in the agriculture industry must explore the branding concept. I share his view that Northern Ireland needs a brand of its own — a brand name that will indicate quality produce at a glance. I call upon the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to lead on the issue of branding. It has the necessary finances at its disposal and the marketing expertise to back it up.

That gives me an opportunity to raise an old hobby horse of mine and to re-emphasise a point that I have often made in the past — although it is probably an issue for another day. I refer to the stamping of our pork and the tagging of our animals for live export. All references to being UK born and bred will have to be removed from the identity tags and replaced by an Irish or Northern Irish identity if we really want to cash in on our many advantages and new regional status.

I want to express a personal view — that the demise of the small producer was the beginning of the end for the pig industry. The disappearance of the 10 to 12 sow units is a factor that has probably led to the current problems. Why did they exit the industry? I believe that the people who would be most embarrassed if they were asked that question today would be the millers and the grain traders. They ate into the profits of the small producers with weekly increases in feed prices until they eventually put the farmers out of business. Northern Ireland producers had to pay up to £15 per tonne more than their counterparts in the Republic of Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales. Is it any wonder that they went out of business?

The vast majority of young people in Northern Ireland under 20 years of age and living in the countryside have not seen a sow or a pig in their lifetime — that is how serious it is. As I look around the House, I would say that there are many Members who have not seen a sow or a pig in the last 30 years. The return of the pig to the small farms in Northern Ireland could well be the lifeline that the industry needs. I believe that that aim — albeit somewhat ambitious at this stage — should be addressed by those designated with the responsibility of regenerating the countryside.

From our numerous sessions of evidence, there emerged the belief that the setting up of producers' groups and co-operatives would be to the overall benefit of the industry. I agree, but it is my belief that this is not completely achievable if the small pig producer does not return to the industry. I repeat that regionalisation is the key to restoring profit to the beef industry. I thank the Minister and her team for their success on that issue. Restoring the pig industry to what it was in the late 60s and 70s may well be the way to reinstate profit for the pig industry.

Mr Paisley Jnr: This is a most opportune time to debate agricultural issues, given the crisis that is being experienced in our country. It is unfortunate, however, that many of the Benches in the House do not seem to reflect the seriousness of this crisis as they are empty today. I hope that Members realise that if they are going to appear on television and go to other places and talk about a crisis in agriculture yet fail to turn up here and debate the crisis, then people will read into that that their only interest is a self-interest.

I am very pleased that our Committee was able to come to unanimous recommendations on restoring profit to both the pig and beef sectors. It is good that we have had this debate, and I commend to the House the report that has been proposed by the Committee Chairperson and supported by the Members who have spoken so far. If anyone takes a moment and goes into the Senate Chamber of this Building —

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: Does the Member not find it strange that no representative of the Government is in the House today to sit at the Bench and listen to this

debate? That would not be tolerated in any other Parliament in the United Kingdom. The Minister responsible — or someone she has deputed — should be here to listen to the debate. How can she reply to anything said in this debate if she has not even heard it?

Mr Paisley Jnr: I am bitterly disappointed that there appears to be a lack of interest, particularly on the Front Benches.

I think that that should go on the record. We are supposed to be in an era of joined-up Government, but where is it? That is evidenced by today's debate on this serious issue. If one takes a moment to go into the Senate, one will see three representations on the gallery backdrop of the prime industries that ran Northern Ireland when this building was first opened: the industries of textile, shipbuilding and agriculture. If we in this House are not careful, we will be writing an obituary for the agriculture industry. It is very unfortunate that those other industries have declined so rapidly, but it would be a shame to see an obituary for this premier industry.

We want to see the Department implement what these reports say. We want to see a can-do attitude to ensure that an industry so important to Northern Ireland is developed and grows. We do not want to have a cannot-do or a not-allowed-to-do attitude because of European Regulations; we want to have a can-do Government.

The officials in our Department are very clever men and women who have shown their ability in times past. Those people must be allowed to use that ability to get this industry out of the crisis that it is in. A lot of people are concerned that their abilities are being hampered by regulations and rules from other places rather than being used, and that is a scandal.

It would be odd not to say something about the regionalisation announcement today. It has come at last, but people are right to say that it took long enough to come. Others seemed to be out on the starting-blocks before us, and it is disappointing that Northern Ireland still has to wait another week before the effect of that announcement will kick in. I hope that when it does kick in we will get some benefit from it, for the good of the industry.

I also want to refer to an article that appeared in Saturday's 'News Letter' by Mr Alex Kane. In it he took to task not only the Minister here but the Minister at MAFF and, indeed, the Agriculture Committee for not doing enough. He said

"Politicians need to take a fairly ruthless look at the so called plight of our farmers. So far there has been no evidence that the Assembly Agricultural Committee is prepared to do this. For it seems prepared to act as a tax-payer funded lobby group for the industry pleading for new funds and increased understanding rather than face economic realities".

If Mr Kane had taken the time to read the reports he would have seen that they proposed fairly radical measures for the restructuring of the industry. The industry does

need to be restructured. Farmers say to us "We want to see the industry restructured" because they know that by having the industry restructured they will find a better way, they will become more economically successful and they will become much more successful and productive. It was wrong for those words to be used in any way to batter the Assembly when reports are being debated today which propose the very things that he says are missing from the Assembly.

We also need some clarity from the Department. On 7 September last year the Minister wrote that she had very real reservations about the value of pursuing the course of bringing in producer co-operatives which the Committee was then considering; yet on 22 February she welcomed that proposal. I am glad that the Minister has welcomed that proposal and indeed is taking some credit for it. I do not really care who gets the credit, but what I want to see is clarity on policy, and the farming community, the consumer and indeed everyone in the food production chain want to see clarity from the Government.

I shall deal very briefly with the pigs report. We hoped that the pig outgoers scheme would be helpful to pig producers. Indeed, we encouraged farmers who wanted to take that drastic step and get out of the pig industry to apply for the pig outgoers scheme. I understand that up to maybe 500 people in Northern Ireland in pig production made applications under the pig outgoers scheme, and I am alarmed to learn that fewer than 100 of them were accepted by the scheme in the first round.

2.15 pm

People are desperate to restructure their industry. However, they are playing cricket only to find that everyone else is playing rugby. It is wrong that people are riding roughshod over them. The Department must get a handle on that to ensure that Northern Ireland farmers get a fair deal. It must take the lead on restructuring so that in the future —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Paisley, your time is up.

Mr Paisley Jnr: We can say that we delivered profits to pig and beef producers.

Mr McHugh: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to speak on this important issue. I also welcome the regionalisation status that we have been granted. However, the Newry and Mourne area may find itself locked into the exclusion zone, and Departments should do all they can to help not only the tourism industry there but also other interests that could be affected.

For some time we have been asking for regionalisation in relation to BSE, and given that this has now been granted for foot-and-mouth disease, the argument could be made to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the European Commission that we are also entitled to BSE regionalisation. We have been locked

into a negative situation for a long time because of foot-and-mouth disease and BSE, and markets must be opened up.

I accept the points that were made about the article in the 'News Letter' at the weekend. The views of people outside the industry can be challenging, especially when Alex Kane says that the Committee is simply a lobby group. Part of our remit is to lobby on behalf of farmers and others but the article was wrong to say that this was all we do. The points he made are unproven and unsubstantiated.

We have already discussed the reports on the beef and pig industries, and their findings still stand. The problems of both industries are similar, as are the reasons for their non-profitability. These issues will have to be dealt with in the months and years to come. Tony Blair has said that livestock production must be approached in a different way. There must be a full overview of the industry, and whether or not this is done on an all-Ireland basis, we must ensure that we do not face this same situation in one year's time or 10 years' time. We could eradicate foot-and-mouth disease now, but under the present regulations it could return in six months' time because almost anything can be imported from the countries we deal with.

The reports make several recommendations that should be followed through. I strongly urge the Minister to put those recommendations into practice.

In the Committee's evidence sessions we tried to get to grips with the reasons for finding ourselves in this situation: sterling, the BSE crisis, the loss of markets (which continue to deteriorate), the fire at Malton's pig plant in Ballymoney, the processors, and the power that supermarkets have beyond the farm gate.

Foot-and-mouth disease has an impact beyond the agriculture industry. Shares dropped and the economic growth of the South will fall by 2% next year. In what is a multi-billion pound industry, talk is of billions being lost. However, farmers ask themselves "What billions are being lost?" They are certainly not making billions. The problem is that people outside farming have made the money. They have gained most from what is a very profitable industry. The problem is that the industry is for those outside the farm gate. That is where our problem lies. We have to get to the stage at which everybody in the industry makes a return and has a fair future. If we do not, the whole industry will fall apart and we might as well do as Alex Kane seems to say: hand it over to big landlords and do away with small farming families. From his article, that appears to be the only option.

There are many stakeholders in the industry, including the bodies that deal with it. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is one with a major role to play. Groups such as the Livestock and Meat Commission (LMC), the Northern Ireland Meat Exporters' Association (NIMEA) and others also have a role to play. From the

evidence sessions, we learned from some of those groups that problems exist to do with price-fixing by cartels. Allegations were made, as yet unsubstantiated, but many farmers believe that that is one of the major reasons for their finding themselves in such difficulties over the years, leaving aside BSE and the current foot-and-mouth disease outbreak. Difficulties in making a profit have existed for decades, and for the same reasons. A farmer is an individual who has to work on his own, having been isolated by those all-powerful bodies who have control over the budget and over how they treat farmers. Farmers told the Committee that they are all working towards producing a quality product. We cannot have a quality product unless it is paid for at the primary producer end, which has never happened to any great degree. Farmers are manipulated through grading, and money is kept from them in other ways as they strive to produce a quality product.

If we are going to change the entire agriculture industry we will have to act on the recommendations of the reports. We must not allow them simply to gather dust because they are as relevant now as they were in the past number of months.

Mr Douglas: I endorse many of the comments that have been made in the debate. Many factors are affecting our farming industry, and in the reports the Committee has sought to address the issues that are pertinent to the profitability of beef and pig producers — two of our main farm sectors that have been beset by problems over the past five years. A widely recognised point that I take from the report is that processors of red meat have never made more profit than they have done since the BSE crisis struck. They have used various excuses to cover their practices of offering low prices to producers while charging high prices to butchers and, hence, the consumers. LMC livestock figures show that the difference between what a supermarket charges for a bullock and what a farmer receives at the farm gate is £635. That is hard to believe. The consumer cost is 238% higher than the amount the primary producer is paid. Consider the timescale of production for a farmer of two years' keep for an animal against a timescale of approximately two weeks for the meat processor and supermarket. That equates to a farmer's receiving 63p per day while a processor and a supermarket gets £45.35 per day for their efforts.

In the report, the re-establishment of niche markets in Europe is recommended. That I would also highly endorse, as many of the beef industry's problems stem from a reliance on UK supermarket trade alone and the power that those giants wield. I quote from the report:

"The best of Northern Ireland's grass-fed steer beef stands comparison with any competing product in terms of farm quality, traceability, hygiene, service and eating quality."

However, there does not appear to be enough of that product at the top end of the market, and that is due to various factors. Many producers would say that the

grading standards have tightened, and they often appear to be correct in those assumptions. Nevertheless, other factors have a detrimental effect on beef quality, such as — and this is a bit rich, coming from a dairy farmer — the high percentage of dairy cows in the Province, which influences the grading quality. That is something that must be addressed.

Secondly, there is a lack of price incentives and encouragement for the beef producer to produce better quality. Perhaps the most important factor is the subsidy system, which does nothing to encourage quality but only promotes quantity. I do not blame the farmers here. They are out to make a profit and they will do anything they can to produce the meat necessary to make a profit. However, something needs to be done here; something needs to be tweaked a little to encourage quality. On that subject, I welcome the fact that the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has proposed a beef quality initiative. I look forward to its implementation at ground level.

The pig industry is having similar problems to the beef industry, with producer fragmentation and with large processors and supermarkets calling the shots. The report has recognised the need for strong producer groups in the pig sector. The United Pig Producers' Co-operative (UPP) tried to address the problem but processors actively encouraged people not to get involved. They discouraged farmers from joining and tried to strangle the venture in its infancy. The Department must address that type of action so that the producers have some say and power over their own destiny.

There is also the problem of the weakness of the euro resulting in the sucking-in of inferior products from Europe because of lower prices. We have a situation whereby our industry is regulated like no other in the world and, as usual, the producer has to pay. We had unilateral action by the UK Government to ban stalls and tethers seven years before the rest of Europe, with no compensation given to the farmers affected. A ban on meat and bonemeal was imposed, at a cost of £5.26 per pig, also with no compensation.

Countries exporting to Northern Ireland must meet the same specifications imposed on our producers or face the consequences of their product being banned from the UK until they meet our standards of health and animal welfare. Our producers only want a level playing field and a fair market for their product. Give them that and they will produce the food as efficiently as they do now, but the difference will be that they will receive proper recompense for their efforts.

We must also have a responsive Department, especially with reference to the implementation of assistance schemes such as the Pig Industry Restructuring Scheme. That scheme was introduced on 30 March 2000, but to date has not produced any revenue for pig producers or for

those who have had to leave the pig industry. Ian Paisley Jnr referred the fact that a very small number of people have been received into this scheme to date. This is highly unacceptable because this scheme was put in place to help those who went out of business. Many are down hundreds of thousands of pounds with no comeback whatsoever. Many people from my constituency phoned me last night and none of them has been received into the scheme. Instead, they have been asked to reapply. Some had submitted very small bids and find it difficult to understand why they have not been offered any finance.

In conclusion, I urge the Minister to heed the recommendations of the report and act on them. Most of them do not cost a great deal of money but require the Department to go that extra mile to lobby for the beef farmer and the pig farmer. I support the motion.

2.30 pm

Mrs Carson: I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate. I also welcome the fact that the Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development is present to reply to what is said. I welcome the two reports on restoring profit to the agriculture industry. This debate is most timely, especially considering the problem of profitability.

Our agriculture industry is going from crisis to crisis, and those involved in farming are getting deeper and deeper into debt. The farming industry has been under threat for some time. The BSE crisis, the strong pound, deep distrust of the pricing practices of processors and supermarkets, and now, of course, the dreadful foot-and-mouth emergency have all contributed to that.

If actions are not taken, the producer base in Northern Ireland will fragment and disintegrate. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development should play its part in helping to stabilise the agriculture industry by encouraging and facilitating better communication and co-operation among all levels of the supply chain. The recommendation that the Department should work with the farmers to secure an equitable price for their pigs and beef is one towards which we should work.

Northern Ireland is at the bottom of the United Kingdom price league. That inequality is unacceptable. I also welcome and support the recommendations to create producer/processor partnerships in order to look at and serve market trends. It is important that quality produce receive a fair price for everyone involved.

Improvements were mentioned in the beef producer report. The recommendations do point out the difficulty that the beef producer has had with regard to incentives for producing beef. The Department should look at, and perhaps instigate, an overall strategy to obtain better herd quality as a matter of urgency.

I have spoken about branding before, and it is also mentioned in the beef producer report. Image and brand are both very important in the competitive market.

Northern Ireland beef and pork are second to none. Consumers in the United Kingdom and Europe should be able to easily recognise that they are buying a product from Northern Ireland. A brand should be promoted and protected, with DARD taking a lead in partnership with the producers and the processors.

The problem of debt is also important. Point 13 in the executive summary of 'Retailing in Northern Ireland — A Fair Deal for the Farmer?' says

"These factors are not helped by the current climate of suspicion and allegation, with primary producers concerned that they are unequal partners in an otherwise profitable business".

We must ask for that to be addressed.

The financial assistance is needed not only to help our farmers to overcome the debt, but it must be structured to take into account a long-term strategy that will allow farmers and their families to survive and make their farms profitable and secure for future generations. Financial assistance is also needed to make sure that Northern Ireland is not disadvantaged compared with the Republic of Ireland and the rest of Europe.

In October 1998 I spoke about the problems of pig producers. Very little has changed since then, and little help has been offered.

In conclusion, I support the report's recommendations. I encourage Northern Irish consumers to make sure that the produce and the products that they buy in the markets and supermarkets are really produced here. The future of the Northern Irish agriculture industry is at stake. I support the motion.

Mr Dallat: I too support the report. It demonstrates agreement between various groups with a common interest in restoring profitability to the farming industry. Indeed, we are all grateful for the contributions made and do not dismiss any of them out of hand. We must give very careful consideration to what has been said by all the groups, not least the farming unions.

The principal causes of crisis in the farming industry are well established, so they do not need to be repeated. In addition to the BSE problem, there were the problems of currency exchange rates, cheap imports and the loss in the value of direct EU payments. Those are all well documented in the report. The current grading structures in particular have come in for criticism, and that criticism is well justified. The issue will rumble on because there is an urgent need to make fundamental changes if the farmers are to be given a fair price for their products. There is a widespread belief among farmers at the moment that they are being cheated and that belief must be addressed.

According to the report, there is a view that the farming industry is too vulnerable to the might of those who influence and control the retail market — the meat processing plants and the large supermarket chains. The

supermarkets are so powerful that farmers are frightened to offer criticism in case they lose everything. That situation is unacceptable in a modern society.

Farmers are encouraged to offer a constant supply of top-class products to the processing companies, but there are no tangible benefits to the producers for doing that. That issue cannot be dismissed as being the result of the normal effects of market forces. During the gathering of evidence there was a useful dialogue on how the farming industry might overcome some of the powers of those who control so much of its livelihood at the moment.

The concept of co-operatives emerged time and again and was mentioned earlier by the Deputy Chairperson of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee George Savage and others. That must be pursued, and I welcome the agreement of the Department to assist and encourage the movement towards co-operatives. I fully accept that it is not a direct responsibility of the Department but of the farming industry to set up the co-operatives or control them. However, it is not feasible for farmers to do that without a great deal of support, including financial support in the early years.

The Department has the expertise to influence the emergence of successful co-operatives that will not suffer from the weakness of previous models. In the past, the emergence of co-operatives broke the stranglehold of the gombeen men and that success can be repeated. In the recent Programme for Government, resources were set aside for education and training in the agriculture industry. Those resources are fundamental for equipping young people with the education and skills needed to tackle new concepts in marketing to deal with the current crisis.

Both farming organisations support the co-operative ideal and have indicated that they will support the development of such worthy principles. The Ulster Farmers' Union put forward constructive suggestions for the development of co-operatives. Those are worth examining and are detailed in the report. The Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers' Association gave evidence and also supported the concept of co-operation. It highlighted mistakes of the past but offered full co-operation, and that is very welcome.

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development emphasised in its submission that any new producer co-operative would need to be involved in processing and marketing as well as in selling primary produce. It cautioned about the massive investment needed and the risk of duplication. However, we cannot leave the industry to the monopoly of the large combines or allow opportunities for cartels that have the capacity to wipe out the industry.

We can learn from the past so that we can chart a new future that offers the hope of new prosperity based on sound financial principles. There is now a unique opportunity to move forward in partnership. For the first time there is a devolved Assembly that has the power to

call witnesses, scrutinise the work of the Department and question the Minister on all aspects of her work.

The new dawn of democracy could not have come at a better time, and the new Minister could not be more helpful in her willingness to assist with change. The farming industry, in this time of crisis, is aware that this is a time for solidarity among all interested parties. They will thank no one who exploits their situation or attempts to make political capital of them. They are watching carefully and are determined that they will not be used by politicians, some of whom have never cultivated so much as a window box.

Time has not permitted me to deal with the pig industry in particular, but that does not indicate a lack of interest. The pig industry, like the beef industry, has a future. However, it must not be left to the control of market forces or the producers will become the victims of exploitation once again. I support the report.

Mr Poots: I would like to address two points in the report. The first of those is recommendation 2, which states:

“The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development should press the United Kingdom Government to introduce a ban on imports of foreign beef that presents a threat to the local agricultural industry and a risk to consumers.”

In recent weeks and months we have seen evidence of the risk that that poses to the industry and to consumers. The crisis that we are in today is the result of cheap imports into the United Kingdom. Cheaply imported pork and chicken products from the Far East that are used in the United Kingdom can enter the animal food chain through pigswill.

There have been several other instances when food of a lesser quality was imported to the United Kingdom, put on supermarket shelves alongside United Kingdom products, and used to keep the price of food down. The cheap food policy has not proven to be good for the industry or for consumers. We are in a crisis. Animals throughout the United Kingdom are being slaughtered because of the cheap food policy. That issue must be addressed.

If food is imported, farmers in the United Kingdom should face equal and fair competition. That competition should not come from people who are not applying the same standards to food production as those rightly expected by consumers in the United Kingdom. Both the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Health — who has a role in this through the Food Standards Agency — should ensure that all food meets the high standards that are expected of Northern Ireland farmers. We have seen the meat plants and the different companies taking the opportunity, on too many occasions, to drive down the price of primary produce in Northern Ireland by introducing cheaper imports. That must stop; it is bad for the consumer, the farmer and the industry.

Recommendation 11 states that processors should

“alter their pricing policies to offer stronger incentives in favour of selling carcasses with a higher value within an overall price regime that is commercially viable to both buyer and seller.”

That issue must be addressed. For many years now Northern Ireland has had a pricing regime based on what the meat plants actually want. Butchers are asking why they must pay certain prices for R grade animals. Farmers are expected to produce U grade and E grade animals. Butchers are not receiving those grades, yet they must pay the price that is expected for that animal. The farmers are not receiving the higher price; the butchers are not paying the lower price; but the processors in the middle are making a handsome profit.

It has not gone unnoticed that since BSE came into the equation about five years ago, farmers incomes have slumped, but at the same time the meat processors' incomes have rocketed. Why has that happened? One of the key reasons is that farmers no longer have the ability to export live cattle; they can only export cattle that have been slaughtered.

There are five meat-processing companies in Northern Ireland. They own nine meat plants. They are strong companies that dominate the market. Almost all their supplies go to supermarkets throughout the United Kingdom. The problem is that the farmer has no means of pushing up his prices. The livestock markets cannot be used in the way that they were used pre-BSE because buyers from the Irish Republic are not coming to Northern Ireland to buy live cattle and thus provide some balance to the market. The balance has disappeared from the market since BSE arrived five years ago. That has left the processors in an advantageous position, to the detriment of the agricultural community.

I welcome this report and the report on the pig producers. I hope that we shall soon see profitable times for beef and pig producers in Northern Ireland once again. The work that the Committee has done has been useful, unlike the comments that were made in the ‘News Letter’ on Saturday by Mr Alex Kane.

The Assembly should take the opportunity to try to restore agriculture to its position as a dominant industry in Northern Ireland. What has helped the Irish Republic in the past few years is that it has shown a greater level of support for its agriculture industry than we have shown ours. In that case, we should learn from what has happened in the Irish Republic. Grants have been made available to farmers so that they can improve the way in which they produce their food.

2.45 pm

The Minister would do well to take account of some of the measures taken there, rather than take policy directly from Westminster on each and every occasion. We have a devolved Administration and finance of our own. We should be looking at how to spend that money,

and not necessarily at following the line taken in the rest of the United Kingdom.

I congratulate the Committee on presenting the report. I hope that it leads to better days for the agriculture industry.

Mr Kane: I support the motion and welcome the announcement on regionalisation. I hope that it will be a major step forward for agriculture and trust that the Minister will use her skills to regionalise Newry and Mourne district when everything in that area becomes foolproof. We hope that that will be sooner rather than later.

In compiling the report, the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee took evidence from all quarters of the industry. I am certain that everything possible was done to work through what are complex and multiple problems. However, it is not in the Committee's remit to call for direct intervention into market arrangements. Many producers and farmers in the Province may feel that that is the only course of action to take to stem the huge losses the industry has endured over the past five years.

I know of no measures that will promote co-operation between farmers and processors in the immediate future. It is insulting to call on producers actively to seek co-operation with processors because of the current distrust that is a result of processors' greed and opportunism. It is up to processors to rebuild trust, for it was they who undermined it in the first place and who have continually undermined it since. If processors have a reliable and wholesome Northern Ireland product to market, they should show appreciation of its value by allowing an adequate return to the producers who made that possible.

The beef quality initiative is a step towards improving Northern Ireland's herd quality. Moreover, strongly branded Northern Ireland produce would be an effective marketing tool. The Northern Ireland farm quality assurance scheme has its merits, but it will only be of value if implemented by the Livestock and Meat Commission (LMC) in a way that does not leave it open to abuse. There must be no opportunity for mixing and matching product or for "product substitution". To that end the LMC has complete responsibility and must exercise its authority over what is its scheme, otherwise the exercise is nonsensical and its objective will be completely undermined.

Although the report is extensive and considers many opinions, at best it can only touch on some of the current problems. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development must constantly consider its obligations to the farmers and should ensure that its policy does not deliver the dividends to those who least deserve them. The encouragement, promotion and development of farming in the Province must be given higher priority. Farming underpins much of what makes Northern Ireland the place that it is. The report is just one step in the furlongs towards achieving that goal. I have much pleasure in supporting the motion.

Mr Armstrong: I welcome this opportunity for Northern Ireland to export some of its produce again to the wider world market. That will restore the confidence that our farming community needs, but our farmers face many more problems. The report relays the need for the agriculture industry to open up new markets and to ensure healthy living and competition to exploit the superior quality of Northern Ireland produce. The current exchange rate greatly reduces those opportunities.

It was also pointed out that consumers have much more power than the farmers, and it is suspected that processors dictate the price. The Department cannot afford to be a mere spectator on this matter; it needs to take the lead. I do not say that the Department does not lead, but more leadership would be helpful to our farmers, who would appreciate such support. Our farmers need a good deal of support. For example, branding would allow consumers to offer more loyalty to Northern Ireland produce. We need more help on that.

We all know that farmers should look beyond their present difficulties and become more positive, but that can only happen if they are given a level playing field. More trust between the producers and the processors is necessary. That will bring profit to the farmers, and result in more profitability to our Province.

I welcome the report and support it.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers): I notice that, although the Chairperson of the Committee had a prop, I do not have one. I wonder whether we have swapped places, or is it simply an oversight?

I shall begin by placing on record the fact that I welcome the two reports from the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development that we are debating here today. I apologise to Mr Bradley, in particular, for my absence during his speech. I thank him for his understanding of the fact that I was not able to be here and for the kind remarks that he made. I also apologise to Dr Paisley for not being present for the first part of his speech. I am told that he did not show quite the same understanding as Mr Bradley, but that is hardly surprising.

The pig and beef sectors are an important part of the industry because they represent 35% of the gross output of the agriculture sector and provide significant employment on farms and in processing. Both have faced significant difficulties in recent years. The loss of our export markets for beef after March 1996 meant that the industry had to refocus on the Great Britain market. Several of our local processors have built up a substantial trade with the Great Britain retail multiples. However, the Great Britain beef market is extremely competitive, and the strength of sterling has made it attractive for many countries to send beef there. The result has been a drop in prices for our beef producers.

In the pig sector the downturn in the production cycle, the strength of sterling, and the consequences of the fire at Ballymoney combined to create the effect that for several years, pig producers were making a loss, and in many cases a substantial loss. At present, both sectors are living with the difficulties caused by the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease. I have already detailed to the Assembly the actions that have been taken to control the outbreak and to deal with the trading implications. I do not propose to repeat what I have said here before. Although there has been some increase in prices for both finished cattle and pigs as a consequence of the disruption to supplies in Britain, the situation remains so uncertain that we cannot confidently predict what it will be in the long term. I repeat that it is clearly in the best interest of all sectors that we continue to apply stringent measures to deal with the outbreak.

Much of the content of the Committee's reports, and of what has been said today, relates to the longer-term future of these sectors. I want to concentrate on those issues. First, I shall respond to Dr Paisley, Mrs Carson, Mr Armstrong and others on the issue of branding. I note the support for branding, especially of beef, but I must make it clear that I have an open mind on this. It is not a simple matter. It requires careful consideration and full commitment from all parts of the industry if it is to work. I am pleased that the LMC has commissioned a study on the scope for branding Northern Ireland red meat. That is to be completed by early summer, and I look forward to the outcome. The LMC's study is being funded from the money allocated to it for red meat marketing.

Great emphasis has rightly been put on the relaxation of the BSE beef export restrictions. The Assembly will be aware of strenuous efforts, both on my part and that of my officials, to secure a relaxation. It was extremely frustrating that, just when we were ready to lodge a formal bid with the European Commission, BSE-related food scares once again surfaced in Europe, producing a political climate that would have been extremely prejudicial to our bid. Since then we have had the results of the survey of casualty slaughtered cattle aged over 30 months. That survey indicated a much higher incidence of BSE in those animals, including the Northern Ireland herd, than was previously thought. All member states are now undertaking their own surveys in accordance with EU requirements. Once the results of those surveys are known — and it may be some months yet — we shall be in a better position to take forward the case for relaxation of restrictions on our beef exports.

I can assure the Assembly that I am fully committed to that cause and will be pressing for relaxation of the export restrictions. Some people have called for a ban on beef imports. I can only impose such a ban if there is a threat to the health status of the domestic beef herd. Although I did impose a ban on trade with GB because of foot-and-mouth disease, I cannot ban imports from

other countries unless clear evidence of a threat exists. Whether beef imports from any country represent a risk to human health is a matter for the Food Standards Agency and the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. Hitherto, the Food Standards Agency has not recommended any such ban.

I now turn to the need to improve the marketing strength of producers — a theme common to both reports. I am firmly convinced of the need for effective partnerships among all parts of the supply chain in both sectors. A partnership approach among the different interests, acting in conjunction with Government, is the only viable way forward. Although I recognise the need for producers to improve their marketing position, that should be done in conjunction with processors and retailers, not in isolation from them.

The emphasis should be on strengthening the vertical links in the supply chains, building on the existing work taking place and building on the support mechanisms of both a technical and financial nature that are available. That requires collaboration and co-operation, not confrontation. It is not for Government to impose solutions on the industry. Business dealings in the supply chain must be governed by commercial considerations and driven by market needs.

Mr Paisley Jnr said that I had reservations about producer co-operatives. My reservations are based on the experience of some producer co-operatives whose plans backfired because, at the end of the day, those who took their produce could find other sources of supply. My Department and I can help the different sectors in developing whatever solutions are appropriate to their circumstances, be they formal co-operatives or other arrangements. Indeed, we have done that in the past and will do it in future.

I firmly believe that the long-term interests of the beef industry lie in a broadly based marketing strategy, targeting those markets — be they in Great Britain or elsewhere — that are capable of ensuring that a premium price is paid for Northern Irish beef. That is why support has been provided to the industry in developing the red meat marketing strategy. The strategy was developed by all parts of the industry and the relevant Departments. An important part of that strategy is a focus on premium markets capable of providing a premium return for our beef.

However, we need to produce top quality cattle for those markets. It is well established that there has been a decline in the quality of finished cattle. I have secured £2 million per year in the Programme for Government to reverse that trend, and I welcome the fact that Members have referred to that today. Details of the proposed measures have been provided to Committee members, and I was pleased to note that they have also supported them. The measures will be introduced as soon as state-aid approval has been obtained.

3.00 pm

Much has been said about producers getting a rough deal from processors. I deplore any exploitation of one part of the food chain by another. As a public representative, I hear just as much about it as other Members. If it were proved that that was happening, I would push for strong action to be taken. The Office of Fair Trading examined the alleged existence of a beef cartel and found insufficient evidence on which to undertake a formal investigation. Although the differential in beef prices between Northern Ireland and Britain has narrowed in recent months, there are still concerns about the prices that Northern Ireland farmers receive for their cattle. I have decided to commission an independent study of the differential. The Committee recommended that I do that, and the move is supported by producers and processors. I hope that Members will recognise that, in responding positively to that proposal, I am making it clear that I am open to constructive and helpful suggestions from the Committee or from any other quarter.

I do not pretend that my Department or I have a monopoly on wisdom. In this devolved democratic institution, in which we all participate, all ideas are welcome. I shall would not be right to proceed with the investigation now, until the current difficulties with foot-and-mouth disease have eased. That said, I remain committed to ensuring that the study takes place.

I am acutely aware of the importance of making prompt direct payments to farmers to help with cash flow, especially in the current circumstances. Everything possible is being done to expedite all grant and subsidy payments. In the coming weeks, we shall make all the balance payments for this year's livestock schemes, as well as the payments under the new less-favoured area compensatory allowance scheme and the additional agrimonetary compensation. In total, those payments will be worth £55 million to local farmers.

I can assure the Assembly that representatives of the pig industry made me aware of the problems that they face from the minute that I took up my post as Minister. It is a matter of some regret, however, that I have not been able to convince the pig producers that my scope to offer them cash help is almost non-existent. I can truthfully say that I explored every suggestion put to me on the matter but found insurmountable obstacles to all of them.

Some of the issues covered in the report, such as the pig welfare disposal scheme, relate to the period before devolution, and it is not for me to explain or defend them. However, on numerous occasions, I have reminded MAFF Ministers of the plight of our pig producers and have pressed them to devise the pig industry restructuring scheme and obtain EU clearance for it. I was disappointed to read a suggestion in the Committee report that I was in some way to blame for the European Commission's tardiness in approving the scheme. I accept respon-

sibility for my actions, but I am not prepared to accept responsibility for the operations of the European Commission. I know that the pig industry restructuring scheme is seen by some as a case of too little, too late. I am afraid that it is the only show in town, and our job is to see that Northern Ireland's pig producers derive maximum benefit from it.

I have noted Mr Paisley Jnr's comments about the pig industry outgoers scheme. That scheme, as we have said from the beginning, is a UK-wide scheme. It was based on a tendering exercise, therefore the lowest tenders were accepted. The unfortunate result of that was that, on the face of it, Northern Ireland appeared to have received less than its full share. However, Northern Ireland did get its fair share on a pro-rata basis of sow numbers. I have already taken the opportunity at a recent ministerial meeting in London to make the point to Nick Brown — in view of the fact that there is now to be an extended outgoers scheme — that, although we may have got pro rata on the basis of sow numbers, we did not get pro rata in relation to our problem, which is a much bigger, deeper and difficult one than that faced by the rest of the UK's pig producers. Mr Brown was sympathetic to that view and made it clear that in the next tranche he will endeavour to see whether there are any methods compatible with the scheme that can be used to help us in that area.

I am aware of the concern of many in the industry that the marketing of Northern Ireland pigs must be improved. I am pleased to announce that after protracted consideration by EU authorities we have obtained approval to spend £400,000 to further support the pig industry's marketing effort. That money will be used primarily to promote pig meat in Northern Ireland, but will also be applied to help develop quality pig meat and improve the structures used to market pigs. Those were the priority areas for action as agreed with the pig sector. Officials will soon discuss with the industry the detailed arrangements of how to spend that money. I must say that the less direct forms of financial and non-financial assistance that my Department provides for pig producers tends to be dismissed too readily.

As I stated in my written response to the Committee's report, my Department has spent a great deal of time and effort on counselling and advising pig producers throughout the past three years. We have allocated a significant amount of money to support marketing initiatives and to working with producers to enhance co-operation and collaboration. We have done what we can to encourage the local uptake of Northern Ireland pig meat. Indeed, last year we also consulted with the Department for Social Development. That Department and my officials have worked hard to advise and facilitate pig farmers, who are not used to dealing with social security. The aim is to make it easier for them to access their entitlements in a situation in which they are losing money and in difficult

financial circumstances. However, short of acting illegally by giving cash subsidies to pig producers, there is simply nothing more that my Department or I could have done to help. It is a sad fact that it has taken the foot-and-mouth disease crisis to force the Northern Ireland pig meat price over the £1 per kilogram level for the first time.

I understand that during my absence from the Chamber Mr Bradley expressed concern about our inability here to put certain things on labels. Existing EU rules constrain what can be put on meat labels. However, there is scope for some flexibility, and I am willing to work with the industry — *[Interruption]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the people in the Gallery please stop talking.

Ms Rodgers: I am willing to work with the industry to explore how this can be used to the industry's benefit. In particular, the rules on beef labelling should allow Northern Ireland beef to be clearly identified for the consumer. However, the UK mark must also be displayed.

By the way, I welcome Mr Poots's remarks. It was refreshing to hear an unbiased and honest opinion from someone whose political views I totally respect and understand. I do not expect that those views will have changed, but nevertheless he was prepared to give credit where credit was due to the Republic. He also recognised that our devolved Administration have made and are making a difference, especially in the agriculture sector.

Finally, I shall deal with those who have said that the Department and I are not doing enough for those sectors. I am not clear as to what other action they have in mind beyond the range of activities on education, training, research, technology transfer, marketing assistance, disease control, animal welfare, traceability and the implementation of the livestock subsidy arrangements. All those are currently taking place.

However, I assure the Assembly that my Department and I shall continue with our efforts to assist in the development of the beef and pig sectors and the rest of the industry. I am committed to that and will remain so as long as I am Minister of Agriculture in Northern Ireland.

The Chairperson of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee (Rev Dr Ian Paisley): I regret that I have not got more time to deal with some of the matters that have been raised. The fishermen who made some noise entering the Gallery are seated, Mr Deputy Speaker, and they even come from your bailiwick, so do not be hard on them. They have enough hardship already without you turning on them.

There is one matter that I view very gravely. Neither my office nor the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee's office received the Minister's statement on pigs. However, in a section of the report, the Minister makes the claim that Malton Foods received "considerable Government assistance". In a recent letter to me she stated

"I cannot speak for the whole of Government, of course, but as far as Northern Ireland is concerned, I would like to record formally that neither IDB nor DARD has given any direct financial assistance to Malton at any time."

I know the whole story about Malton Foods; it is in my constituency. I was called in by the directors of Malton Foods after the fire. I also had talks with Mr Peter Small, the Department's permanent secretary. I ask the Minister why she stated "any direct financial assistance". Everybody knows — even the dogs in the street know — about the deal that was done in Cookstown and the amount of money that the owner of the Cookstown plant took when he agreed to enable Malton Foods to take it over. Malton Foods would not have been in possession of the Cookstown plant if that deal had not been done. I was involved at that time.

Nobody knows to this day how much money was given to the owner of the Cookstown plant. There should now be an inquiry to find out how much Government money was handed to the owner of that plant to make it acceptable for Malton Foods to obtain that factory. It does not matter whether the money was paid directly or indirectly. The letter referred to "considerable Government assistance", and there certainly was such assistance. I resent the Minister's coming today and referring to a letter that we did not receive with that statement in it, because that is not being utterly transparent. Everybody knows that a deal was done to get the Cookstown factory into the charge of Malton Foods.

Today we have a report, produced by the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee, that has the voices of all sides on it. It was resolved by the Committee unanimously, and it was the Committee that drew up this motion. I did not draw up the motion. I am sick, sore and tired of hearing people say, "Oh, that is Paisley's doing." My business is to chair the Committee, and I have never heard anyone — even my political opponents — say that I have given them a raw deal from the Chair. They all admit that I call them carefully. I call some of them prayerfully, but I do call them all.

Today the Minister has been talking about defending herself and her Department. This debate is not an attack on the Minister or the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. It is an attack on those responsible people who still do not realise that farmers are in a catastrophe. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development officials must remember that we are dealing with a catastrophe, but I fail to see recognition of the seriousness of the matter when I talk to them. A whole section of agriculture is going out of business. The situation is the same as that facing the fishermen. I met the Minister this morning and she knows that she told me that she could do nothing for them. It seems that nothing can be done for pig producers or farmers.

3.15 pm

I do not understand why French farmers and French pig farmers can get money into their pockets, or why farmers in the South of Ireland got money into their pockets when they got their deal. However, Northern Ireland had a welfare scheme and the Department kept trying to bluff people by saying that it would be good for the pig farmers.

Northern Ireland now has the outgoers scheme, and I noticed that the Minister did not challenge what my son, Mr Paisley Jnr, said in the House about the numbers involved in it. What good is that scheme to the agriculture industry if 500 farmers apply and not even 100 are successful? What good is it if the remaining farmers are told to reapply?

Northern Ireland's situation is different because our pig farmers faced the burning of Malton's. Pig farmers across the water did not have to face that. The pig producers' main factory was destroyed and that put them in a grave situation. Why was that not taken into account when the outgoer scheme was planned for Northern Ireland? Special consideration should have been given because of the difference between Northern Ireland pig farmers, whose main processing factory was burned down, and those in the rest of the United Kingdom. Special provision should have been made, but it was not. Therefore, pig farmers have great anxieties. They are being told that there is an outgoers scheme. However, when they apply for it, it can give them nothing. What can they do?

There must be something wrong with the system when beef and pig processors are doing exceptionally well while beef and pig producers are going out of business. There was a time when pig producing was the strongest part of intensive farming in Northern Ireland. Those farmers are now going out of business while the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development says that its hands are tied.

There are doors in Europe that we are told are closed. It is funny that when one hammers on those doors they tend to open. A statement has come from Europe a few hours ago saying that if it can help with tying up the boats it would be prepared to look at that. That is an amazing statement.

It is about time we stood at the door and hammered on it until it opens. It has opened for many other countries that have breached European law more than Northern Ireland ever has. European law is monitored and policed in the United Kingdom like no other place in the European Union. The time has come when the House must say forcibly to Europe — and the Minister must take the message to Europe — that the door must be opened. If it is not opened people are going to lose out and there will be no way back. The Agriculture and Rural Development Committee wants a way back for pig farmers and beef producers. We want a way back for

Northern Ireland agriculture, it must not die. We must get oxygen into it and keep it alive until this serious situation is over.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly accepts and endorses the findings and recommendations contained in the two reports published by the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development — 'Restoring Profit for the Beef Producer' (2/00/R) and 'Restoring Profit for the Pig Producer' (3/00/R) — and urges the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (and others involved in the beef and pig sectors) to take all necessary steps to implement the recommendations.

(Madam Deputy Speaker [Ms Morrice] in the Chair)

PORT OF BELFAST

Madam Deputy Speaker: Is the motion on the port of Belfast moved or not moved?

The Chairperson of the Regional Development Committee (Mr A Maginness): Not moved.

Motion not moved.

Mr Neeson: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for what is a very serious motion not to be moved without a reason being given to Members?

Madam Deputy Speaker: It is perfectly in order for a Member to withdraw a motion in his name.

FISHING INDUSTRY

Mr Shannon: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls upon the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to provide short-term financial assistance for the fishing industry due to the restriction coming from the cod recovery programme.

The issue is very important to my constituency of Strangford, as well as to south Down and the villages of Portavogie, Ardglass, Kilkeel and many others. The debate on the agriculture industry was very important because that industry is also in the throes of a crisis. We understand that its strength will be weakened and undermined, and we must commend the measures taken to try to restrict the spread of foot-and-mouth disease. Unfortunately, that crisis has eclipsed other problems in Northern Ireland, such as those that the fishing industry faces.

For a long time, people involved in the Northern Ireland fishing industry have been made to feel like the farmers' poor relations. It is not a matter of "them and us", but the fishing industry does feel like a second-class citizen within the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. That is not simply the fishermen's perception. The Government have continually refused to listen to the views and concerns of fishermen and of spokesmen from that sector. They have been forced to watch as the Government consistently fail to give fair and equal representation at national and European level.

Since the day and hour that the common fisheries policy was created in Brussels in 1983, we have witnessed the piece-by-piece destruction of the fishing industry, with year-on-year reductions in the amount of produce our fishermen are allowed to land. Several fishermen are in the Gallery today.

The number of adult fish that live on the seabed has fallen by 90% since the early 1970s, yet Europe refuses to acknowledge the fatal repercussions of legislation that it has enforced. Between 1999 and 2000, the value of fish landed at Ardglass fell by £1.2 million. That represents a 30% decrease. In Kilkeel the figure fell by £2.5 million, which represents a 29% decrease. In Portavogie the figure fell by £1.5 million, which represents a 20% decline. Those are massive reductions in the three major ports.

While the Northern Irish fish sector continues to be strangled by such draconian legislation, other EU nations continue to rape United Kingdom waters. Fish from those waters are essential to the maintenance and growth of our own industry. That ill-thought-out policy has convincingly failed to deliver even one positive benefit to the fishing industry. If it is not scrapped, we shall witness the total extermination of the fishing industry in Northern Ireland. It will send local communities and economies into freefall. Those of us who represent fishing areas — in my case, Portavogie — understand how legislation will affect the economy.

The latest gem to come out of Brussels — I shall not call it wisdom, because it is certainly not that — is the cod recovery plan. The second year of closures associated with the Irish Sea cod recovery plan commenced on 14 February 2001 and will last until 30 April 2001. As with last year's closures, derogation has been permitted to allow a nephrop fishery to continue. In addition, a further derogation to allow a directed haddock fishery to be prosecuted in the Irish Sea was allowed between 14 February and 22 March this year.

As a result of last year's closures, and as predicted by all those involved in the industry and their elected representatives, many trawlers that traditionally targeted cod off the County Down coast diverted their efforts to the north channel that falls within the west of Scotland waters.

The EU convened a meeting in Brussels on 13 February to discuss a cod recovery plan for the west of Scotland waters. That meeting resulted in the closure of the area fished by our trawlers in the north channel. The closure commenced last week and will continue until 30 April 2001. Next year it will run parallel with the Irish Sea closure. It is time for the Minister to wake up and smell the coffee, or in this case smell the fish.

Our white fish fleet has nowhere to go. Similar closures have been introduced in areas north of the west of Scotland waters. However, inshore waters have remained open, which allows inshore fishing by vessels similar to our fleet to continue. Closures in the Irish Sea are the only ones that extend right up to the beach. I hate to use a pun, but this is no red herring.

This is crunch time for our fishing industry, and the Government have failed abysmally to meet the demands of this very real and present danger. One option for our

white fish fleet is to turn its attention to nephrop fishing, but that sector of the industry is also feeling the pinch from Europe. Frustration, anger and dismay are out there in great quantities.

There will be a 10% cut in the total allowable catch for the Irish Sea. First and foremost, that cut will inevitably lead to restrictions on those who work with nephrops, so there is no conceivable way that the fleet can be expanded by vessels from the redundant white fish fleet. Secondly, scientists have stated that the 10% cut in the nephrops catch will result in only a 2% recovery of cod. That is a truly insignificant figure when we put it into perspective. Nephrops account for more than 50% of all fish and shellfish caught by Northern Ireland vessels.

Taking into consideration the continuing policy of restricting other sectors of fishing, that part of the industry is becoming ever more important. Therefore, it is madness to even contemplate making cuts in this fishery at this time.

3.30 pm

Meanwhile, the decommissioning scheme continues to fall flat on its face in its main objective of cushioning effects on the Irish Sea cod stock. When one witnesses the growing problems and further restrictions that are being implemented, it is clear that this school of thought is without foundation or integrity.

The next phase of the Northern Ireland decommissioning scheme has been wrapped up in EU bureaucracy since the end of last year — I have information that goes back to 1999, when the first commitment was given to it — while trawler owners are left on tenterhooks about their future, if in fact they have any future. The overwhelming irony of all this is that Brussels bureaucracy, which is currently delaying some £8 million to finance the scheme, is the same bureaucracy that has created and propagated the continuing crisis in fishing.

I understand that we shall have an announcement today about decommissioning. I am interested to hear how that will work. There has been no move to address the fact that up to 40% of this may be payable to the taxman through taxation on grant aid and the repayment of modernisation grant aid. It will be interesting to see exactly how it works. Our fishermen are still waiting to observe even the slightest indication that this scheme will save the cod fishery in the Irish Sea. Will it save it? That is a question that we ask the Minister.

Another issue that has not been satisfactorily addressed is light dues. Northern Ireland vessel owners pay £58,000 annually on light dues. That levy was initially imposed to cover the cost of navigational aids provided by lighthouses, and those are no longer used. It is especially frustrating that our fishermen have to continue to pay this levy while fishermen from the Republic of Ireland do not pay a single penny, as their Government make

the payments. That shows commitment to the industry. Where is our Department's commitment to fishing? Although the Minister has said that she will do what she can, the fishing industry is on its knees and needs serious help now: not next year, not the year after, but now, before the industry is confined to the annals of history.

As for the future of our white fish fleet, what must be done to alleviate the problems that are being experienced and to obtain commitments that something will be done? It is clear that an immediate and substantial financial package must be provided in order to secure even the short-term future of Northern Ireland's white fish fleet. For example, 13 boats are currently tied up in Kilkeel because the crews cannot be paid, and that came before the restrictions that were added last week.

For those who choose that option, decommissioning may, in a small way, address the issue. However, there must be a commitment from Government that those who wish to remain active within the sector will be catered for. The right to fish is an issue. Fishermen want to catch fish, they want to be involved in the industry and to support their families and others who are involved in it.

In the past, Westminster has opposed the introduction of a tie-up scheme that would keep vessels in port. However, the fact is that the white fish fleet faces an enforced tie-up for no other reason than it has been provided with no other options. It has nothing left to do. We must also look at boats that are not involved in white fish fishing. This will affect them as well. What we are looking for today is financial assistance that will help everyone who is involved in the fishing industry, from A to Z.

Our Government have consistently failed to provide such essential assistance while the sovereign Governments of other EU member states have provided crucial finance to support their fishing fleets. We know who they are: Belgium, the Netherlands, France, Spain and the Republic of Ireland. They are all doing something for their fishing fleets, and because they are doing something their industries will survive.

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has admitted that there are provisions in EU Regulations for the payment of compensation in such circumstances as those in which our fishing industry currently finds itself. The Minister says that it is not possible to implement such a scheme after a fishery has closed. The rest of Europe has already done something. Our Minister — here in our own devolved Assembly in Northern Ireland — has the power to do just that, and we ask her to do it. In fact, this particular aid package has been introduced following the closures associated with the North Sea cod recovery plan. That is what other countries are doing about that issue.

Can the Minister explain to me and my constituents — and those of South Down — exactly how she plans to address this problem? Why do the sovereign Governments

of other EU states deem it necessary, while our Government refuse to accept the same responsibility? Our Government cannot expect to receive a sympathetic hearing when they refuse to acknowledge the magnitude of the crisis and take the necessary action that is urgently required if the industry is to be saved.

Individuals as well as fishing organisations have made written submissions to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and to the Minister outlining what is needed.

For example, throughout the period when boats are required to remain in port, all vessels affected — that is, each fishing boat — should receive a weekly subsidy. A percentage of that financial assistance should be used to compensate the fish-selling companies, the Northern Ireland Fishery Harbour Authority and the producer organisations for the loss in income that would be inevitable should vessels be forced to tie up.

The financial assistance would allow trawler owners to maintain the repayment of bank loans, insurance and equipment hire costs, as well as provide crew members with a weekly wage. It is vitally important that the crew members also be looked after through that package, because they are the backbone of the fishing industry.

During this period the fleet will be restricted to port. Training schemes should be developed and run when the fishery is closed. The Minister and ourselves are well aware of a training scheme that the Republic of Ireland runs for their fishermen. Indeed, a substantial sum of money is spent on that training, and we ask the Minister to respond today and assure us that a similar training scheme could be introduced here. The implementation of such measures would go a long way towards providing assistance for the recovery of fish stocks and would prevent the white fish fleet diverting to working with nephrops, thus avoiding any further pressure on those quotas. That would also encourage crew members to stay with the fleet. Many are already voting with their feet and leaving the industry. We are aware of that, and we cannot let it continue.

Mr Paisley Jnr: Does the Member agree that the proposals that he outlines are not options but are absolutely necessary? If they are not implemented, we face mass unemployment along the peninsula.

Mr Shannon: That is a point that I ask the Minister to take on board. Those proposals are essential; they are not just ideas pulled out of a hat in the hope that she will consider perhaps one of the six. We ask the Minister to implement all six. If those long-term problems that the fishing industry has had to face are to be addressed, there is only one route that the Government can take. It is essential that whatever solution is found balances the need to maintain fish stocks with the continuing viability of a Northern Ireland fishing fleet — a fleet that wants to fish and that has the right to fish.

I suggest that the following action be taken to cement and bolster the Northern Ireland fishing industry. We must strive to ensure that the weight and importance of the fishing industry are elevated within the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. For too long the fishing industry has been the poor relation in this family. A fishing villages initiative programme should be developed and implemented that would give control of inshore fishing to local fishermen. We must ensure that sufficient funds are made available in order to both maintain and retain the Northern Ireland fishing fleet and its associated industries such as the processing and sale of fish produce.

Those currently involved with the fishing industry are crying out for acknowledgement and assistance in their struggle to keep their heads above water. Although attention to the foot-and-mouth disease crisis is essential, the Minister has failed to act in the same quick and decisive manner in relation to the fishing crisis. She must make a greater effort for the sake of the communities that we represent. Some of those people affected are here today. They are held together through fishing; for many of them it is not only a job, it is a way of life.

The crisis is not a recent occurrence, it is one that has been simmering for years. The fishermen need someone to fight their corner, as they are getting nowhere on their own. We ask the Minister to fight their corner; we ask her to make that commitment today. Doors are already slamming in their face everywhere they go, and that is frustrating. If one looks at the evidence, one cannot blame fishermen for asking whether, once again, the fishing industry in Northern Ireland is being considered expendable. I ask the Minister — indeed, I demand of the Minister — that she prove me wrong.

Madam Deputy Speaker: In view of the number of Members who wish to speak in this debate, I must ask participants to limit their contributions to nine minutes.

The Chairperson of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee (Rev Dr Ian Paisley): As long ago as December 1999 — well over a year ago — the fishermen's representatives met with my Committee to tell us of the difficulties they faced. We have met with them again on a number of occasions since that day. We have also had meetings with the Minister and with her officials, and we have written to the Minister to seek action to relieve the real financial catastrophe faced by those men and by the entire fishing industry.

I must remind the House that, through compulsory curtailment of their activities, fishermen are being deprived of their means of earning a living. That is what this is about. It is putting them out of the position in which they can earn a living and support their families. That is the crisis we face today — men who have the ability and the wherewithal to make a living through fishing are being pushed out. The country is telling them

that they cannot do it. They are being forced to give up the major part of their income without any compensation whatsoever.

It is surely not right that a man can be stopped from doing his legitimate work. What are we stopping them for? This country had the greatest asset of any country in Europe — the fishing grounds. What has it done? It has thrown them away. I am from Northern Ireland, but in Europe today Spaniards can get up and tell me of their right to fish my fishing grounds. Europe is dictating a policy to put the people of this part of the United Kingdom out of business altogether. It is not as if those men can find some other use for their fishing boats. One of their representatives put it to our Committee. He said:

“We cannot diversify by turning our fishing boats into golf courses.”

They cannot diversify — they are just out on the street.

The boat owners still have to pay their bills, of course. They cannot let their boats rot away in port. Their crew members need money to live on. Could any Member of the House exist on £54 a week? We are asking those fishermen to do that. Although we have been assured that a decommissioning scheme is a priority, by the time it appears it may be too late for many of them. They will already be out of business. Remember that in any decommissioning scheme the Government are going to claw back all the money that fishermen ever received in grants. Therefore, even if it were a good decommissioning scheme, fishermen would probably have nothing left at the end.

Financial aid is needed immediately. Why can we not have a scheme that would compensate the owners adequately for tying their boats up for this short period? Why can we not have that? And why can we not find ways and means to help our fishing industry when other countries can? Article 16 of EU Regulation 2792/99 makes it perfectly clear that payment of compensation is specifically permitted not only to fishermen and owners of vessels, but to the processing industry affected by stock recovery plans. That is contained in European legislation. Why can that not apply to us? When our Committee put that to the Minister on 5 March, her response was to agree that the rules do allow compensation, but that it was not practical to pursue the proposal for this year's closures. The compensation was there, yet those closures came upon us this year.

Why is there no representation to Europe now? Why are we not knocking on the door? What about Mr Fischler's recent statement? The Minister has given the Committee an undertaking to carry out an assessment of the effects of this year's closures and consult with the other Fisheries Ministers on the arrangements for next year. Next year will be too late.

3.45 pm

The Deputy Chairperson of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee, Mr Savage, and I met with

the Minister this morning and pressed the case. We said that the door was closed and that the Minister had to knock on it and take her proposals to Europe. They will say, “No, no, no”, but, eventually, if it is France, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Spain or Portugal, the door will open. It is time the door opened for those fishermen sitting in the Public Gallery who are facing disaster for their families and their employment. The Minister must do something about the situation and do it with determination. She will have the backing of every Member.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee (Mr Savage): I am pleased to see representatives from the fishing industry in the Public Gallery to hear local politicians debate this very important issue. That proves the value of a local Administration; we are talking about their future and their livelihoods.

The serious situation in the fishing industry is being forgotten in the midst of the real crisis that we are experiencing with the foot-and-mouth disease outbreak. The crisis in the fishing industry has been going on for the past 18 months, and there is real hardship and suffering in the fishing community. Boat owners have lost £50,000 in the past two years. A crew on a wage of £54 a week is hardly an economic statistic of which the Minister or anyone in the Assembly can be proud.

The way in which the fishing industry has been treated is evidence of a deeper problem — the way that the UK Government enforce European Union Regulations. Britain always enforces the rules to the maximum — to the absolute letter of the law — while other European partners continue to do exactly as they please, to their benefit and to suit their community. Our fishermen take care to conserve fish stocks, especially of young fish, yet our European partners sweep the seabed, eliminating young fish in the process and destroying the future raw material of the fishing industry. That vital raw material ends up being fed to animals, not even to humans. That is a crazy and irresponsible attitude. As a country we are going to have to address the issue of the difference between the levels of enforcement of European Regulations throughout the Community as a matter of urgency.

A new generosity of spirit needs to enter the relationship between the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the fishing industry. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) does not compensate in the event of a tie-up of fishing boats. That is bad policy and flies in the face of European Union Regulations that allow for compensation in the event of tie-up for fish stock recovery purposes. Only yesterday ‘The Times’ demanded that MAFF be closed down. The conduct of MAFF is hardly a good example for our Department in Northern Ireland. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development should be

following the European norm rather than the bad administrative example set by MAFF.

It is not enough for the Minister to say that she will look at this in the next round. The hardship caused by the tie-up of boats is being felt now. Relief is needed now. The Department treats the fishing industry in niggardly ways. It should remember that this is the second year of closures for Northern Ireland trawlermen, while it is only the first year for the North Sea fishermen. The situation is therefore more serious here. The Irish Government do not even charge their fishermen for light-houses, which they no longer use in any case. However, we do charge for lighthouses — because MAFF says that we should.

I am not getting at our Minister, as I know that she has a very difficult job to do. However I ask her to remember that our fishermen cannot, unlike their Southern counterparts, benefit from fishing in fishing boxes that are not closed. The situation is getting worse because those boxes have been further restricted since 2000. Their situation is so much more serious that the Department must consider special status for them.

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development could make representations on behalf of the fishing industry. That would be of immediate benefit. I am thinking of the boundary of the Irish Sea cod fishery, which has been restricted to 4°50' west. This should be returned to 5° west as it was in 2000 since that will cause confusion for both the fishermen and the inspectorate.

The haddock fishery derogation should have been extended until 30 April 2001, for example. The cut-off date — 22 April — was a Thursday, which did not even allow for a full week's fishing for our fishermen. Those are small matters, but in a situation like this, even small things can help. The deal that those fishermen have received so far is so niggardly — especially in the light of the further closures in 2001 — that they merit special status.

I quote from a paper that was discussed on Thursday 15 February 2001. My Chairperson was at the meeting. Our colleague's

"calls for financial aid to be made available to Northern Ireland's fishermen were given the thumbs up in Strasbourg this week when his report on Cod Fishing in the Irish Sea sailed through the Plenary unanimously."

That was on 15 February 2001.

"The Commission's savage ... cuts" —

I had nothing to do with those cuts, of course —

"have done little to improve depleting fish stocks, and it is with great reluctance that we must now accept the emergency closures of four fishing areas, including areas of the Irish Sea"

said our colleague.

He continued:

"It is very hard for fishermen, many already facing financial hardship, to take on board a closure of their area for some twelve weeks. It is even harder when there are no support mechanisms available to help the industry find a way forward."

Bear this in mind:

"The Commission says 'let the national authorities come forward with ideas and we will take them on board' but the Government seems incapable of coming forward with any sincere proposals to help fishermen in the Province.

That is why [this] report proposes that financial assistance be made available to fishermen, not only to those who choose to decommission their vessels but also to those who are forced to keep their trawlers in port during the stock replenishment period. [Our] MEPs share [the] concern" —

our three MEPs from Northern Ireland —

"and support [the] proposals, it now remains to be seen whether the Commission will act."

I come back to what I said earlier:

"let the national authorities come forward with ideas and we will take them on board."

Those proposals have got to be put forward to help our industry survive. If not, the fishing industry will face the same problems as many other parts of the agriculture industry. It is not going to be here in a couple of years' time.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that it is not normal practice to refer to people in the Gallery.

Mr McGrady: I shall certainly not refer to the welcome that one would give to the people in the Gallery, which is forbidden by you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I support the motion. However, I have one small, or perhaps large, difficulty with it. That is the intention to provide short-term financial assistance to the fishing industry. That is our immediate problem, but the real problem is much bigger than that and much more of a long-term problem. In a sense, the necessity for short-term financial assistance is a result of the common fisheries policy, which has as its core the preservation of species for recovery. There is an inbuilt injustice when the European Union, which includes ourselves, requires conservation but is not prepared to pay for it.

That is really what this is all about. This is not the first year but the second year of the particular closure for white fish fishing. Last year was the same as this year. There is double jeopardy this year because other fishing grounds, which were a temporary alternative, are now also closed. As other Members have said, from Friday 23 March until 30 April — a five-week period — boats in Kilkeel, Ardglass and Portavogie are tied up because they have nowhere to fish for their traditional catch. Unless, and this is the contradiction, they change their gearing and fish for nephrops. However, we have a problem with nephrops because this year the European Commission also reduced the total allowable catch of nephrops by 10%.

There are a series of inbuilt contradictions that are not the fault of the local Northern Ireland fishing industry, but the fault, or design, of the European Union. That is a grave injustice, given that the Northern Ireland fishermen and their organisations have constantly supported the conservation aspects of their industry.

One could argue that the Northern Ireland fishing fleet has made the greatest proportional sacrifice in the entire European Union through its contribution to conservation. Not only that, it has been proactive in proposing schemes to aid recovery plans for different species, yet those schemes have not been adopted. The Northern Ireland fishing industry has made the most major contribution, as we can easily see. The fleet has already been reduced by 30% — from around 240 boats to roughly 170 boats. That is an enormous proportional contribution, and it has not been matched by other EU member states. It is ironic that the Republic of Ireland has the ability to increase its fishing efforts while we in Northern Ireland have the disability of decreasing our fishing efforts, even though — if I may use a cliché — we are literally fishing in the same pool.

Another matter that strikes me as odd is that, away back in 1993, the European Commission made a special report on the Northern Ireland fishing industry. I remember quoting from it on one of my visits to Brussels. It said quite clearly that the Northern Ireland fishing industry and its major fishing grounds were a special case. Because of the industry's importance to the community and the onshore development that arises from it, and because it creates 50% of the employment in the fishing towns and villages, it is a special factor. It is also a special factor because, believe it or not, the Irish Sea is a special ecological biomass for the recovery of species.

The European Union said that in 1993, yet we have been unable to get a UK Government to pursue that special case, because it did not include the other ports around Great Britain. I remember, late night after late night at the House of Commons, making that plea, which always fell on deaf ears. As a result we have the problem of penetrating the apparently impenetrable blockade from Belfast to London to Brussels.

We must, in some way, create protocols by which that would happen.

4.00 pm

Members have correctly and eloquently put on record the statistics that reflect the horrific situation that the fishing industry is in. Given the time constraints it is not appropriate to repeat those, but there are three issues that must be addressed as a matter of some immediacy.

The first is the decommissioning scheme that was to have been put in place. I know that it has been held up pending agreement on the transitional Objective 1 programme. Now that that has been agreed, I hope that

we are ready to move on that as soon as the other rules and regulations — which have nothing to do with the fishing industry — have been approved.

I have some misgivings about a decommissioning scheme, even though it is absolutely essential. I am terrified that some day, if we pursue this avenue and not other avenues, the Northern Ireland fishing fleet will reach a critical point where it can no longer sustain itself or the onshore factories and products that are so dependent upon it. We shall probably not know when that time will be until it arrives, but I am very wary of pursuing decommissioning with negative, rather than positive, action.

Meanwhile, we have skippers and crewmen tied up for the next number of weeks when they could be enjoying lucrative fishing. That is not their fault. It is the result of EU Regulations. Funding apparently could not be made available, although I have yet to be convinced of that.

Unfortunately I must scrap most of what I wanted to say today. However, there was a debate in the House of Commons on 25 January in which the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food said that he would not rule anything out as regards urgent financial arrangements for the fishing industry. I took that in the positive sense, but it seems that I should have taken it in the negative sense — that he would rule nothing in. Nothing at all has happened on that issue.

Secondly, in relation to the “tie-up” proposals — and I know that that term is not liked — we are dealing with close working units of boat, crew and skipper. If those people have to stay ashore and take other jobs — albeit perhaps temporary ones — there is a danger that the skills, along with the total heritage of knowledge, will be dissipated and not brought to bear again on the industry. That can never be recovered — and certainly not in one generation. That aspect concerns me greatly.

Thirdly, we were promised that the further 10% reduction on nephrops, which was applied to assist cod recovery, would be lifted somewhat were statistics available to show that that percentage was not as high as the EU set it out to be. It was not as high — I think that the figure was around 0.2% — and therefore it was not a meaningful figure in terms of that restriction. The restriction must be removed immediately.

With 2,500 people dependent on the fishing industry, I want to see at least those three issues addressed immediately. Finally, I regret that the motion was not allowed to have total cross-community support, as was intended at the meeting in Portavogie. South Down Members were to be asked to sign the motion, but that did not happen.

Mr M Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. In supporting the motion, and asking for short-term financial assistance for the fishing industry,

the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development must strike a balance and address the long-term problems that the fishing fleet faces.

It is unfortunate that on 21 March, when meeting the fish producers, the Minister, Ms Rodgers, appeared once again to rule out any form of "tie-up" scheme. The Minister must realise that 2,500 people are employed in the sea fishing industry. The problem affects not only the fishermen, but businesses and employment — in fact the whole economy. The fishing industry will lose out if we do not support it and provide it with what it needs. Can we afford to create such a situation in another industry? My constituency of South Down is feeling the effects of foot-and-mouth disease. The fishing industry has been the backbone of areas of South Down, such as Kilkeel, Portavogie and Ardglass, for many years. There are 2,500 people employed in sea fishing, and up to 50% of that workforce comes from Ardglass, Kilkeel and Portavogie.

In 1999, £2.6 million worth of fish and shellfish was landed in the north of Ireland, and a further £70 million was added to the value of the industry by 44 local processing companies. The introduction of the Irish Sea cod recovery programme and the closure of fishing grounds have had a great impact on the fishing industry. Our fishing fleet has shrunk by 30% over the past 10 years, and there are only 170 fishing vessels more than 10 metres in length left.

Our fishing industry has never depended on tie-up schemes, compensation or subsidies. The current proposals for tie-up schemes have been forced on us by the British Government and the EU. The fishermen want to go to sea and earn a living. They do not want to see the slow death of the fishing industry or the devastation that that will bring to the fishing communities' economy. The 9.6% increase in the budget for the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development provided the sea fisheries division with an extra £125,000. However, all of that additional money has been spent on enforcing the cod recovery programme.

The delay in the decommissioning of fishing vessels is linked to the delay in transitional Objective 1 funding. We need more action and more money. Fishermen were told in November 1999 that the impact of the cod recovery plan would be offset. We are now in the second year of closure. We need legislation, and I am sure that we shall get all-party support for that.

We have been waiting for an announcement on the decommissioning of fishing vessels for 18 months. It is sad that, while other EU fishing fleets are expanding, EU rules, regulations and closures mean that decommissioning our fleet is the only option for many fishermen. We need assistance for decommissioning for those who want to leave the industry and financial assistance for those who want to stay.

Many fishermen who have traditionally fished off the County Down coast have been forced to fish in the North Channel. Those fishermen face closure because of the EU decision on the cod recovery programme that was made on 13 February. Next year, the closure in the North Channel and the Irish Sea will happen together. Where will our white fish fleet go? This is the only area with a recovery plan that includes inshore water. Fishermen here do not have the opportunity to fish away from close fishing grounds, and there is no reason why the financial problems that we faced last year will not be repeated — in fact, they will be far worse — owing to the additional closures.

We need an immediate financial package for the white fish fleet. There are 13 boats tied up in Kilkeel, and they are losing their crews because there is no money to pay them. Financial aid has been introduced by other EU member states: Holland, Belgium, France and the South of Ireland, but not here. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Ford: Many of the problems experienced by the fishermen have been aired in the Chamber today. There has been considerable unanimity. I shall not repeat all that has been said. I congratulate the six Members for Strangford on working together to bring such an essential topic to the Chamber. I apologise on behalf of Kieran McCarthy, who is elsewhere on Assembly business. I shall do my best to speak for him. As a representative of South Antrim who lives in a rural area, I know more about the other areas for which the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has responsibility than I do about the fishing fleet. During Committee meetings here and on the occasion on which we met them in the three fishing ports — with rather exciting results — fishermen's representatives have made the Agriculture Committee aware of the problems that the industry is having. It is obvious that something must be done to help them.

The necessity for conservation measures is a matter for debate. Unfortunately, it is considered only in the latter part of the year, just before the Fisheries Council meets, leaving little time to plan for what will happen in the springtime. We all know, of course, that counting fish numbers for quotas is an inexact science. The Minister has acknowledged that counting sheep numbers in recent weeks has been a bit of a problem; sheep, at least, have the decency to stay on the surface of the land, although we cannot necessarily be sure which bit of the surface they are on. Let us assume that the conservation measures required by Brussels are accurate. Eddie McGrady said correctly that we should not discuss only the short-term problems; there is a long-term issue. Notwithstanding that, what can the Minister do in the short term to deal with the immediate problem that faces fishermen?

There is no doubt that the decommissioning scheme is somewhat belated. I am not sure whether it is welcome, but it is almost certainly necessary to allow people who are reaching the end of their career to depart

from the industry with a degree of dignity. Today, we must consider what we should do, not for the people who are prepared to decommission their vessels but for those who wish to continue in the fishing industry and who have a long-term future there. That has not been addressed properly, and the decommissioning scheme is all that is on offer.

Concerns about the implementation of the cod recovery programme have been highlighted already. There is the question of the diversion to fishing for nephrops and all the problems and additional difficulties that that may create. It is noticeable that there has been wider agreement than we would normally expect on the tie-up scheme because of that difficulty. It is perhaps the first time that fishermen and conservationists have agreed that a tie-up scheme could serve the economic needs of fishermen in the short term and the need for conservation of fish stocks in the long term. That has not been given the attention that it should have been given in recent weeks.

A few weeks ago, the fishermen gave the Committee details of what their needs are, and the Anglo-North Irish Fish Producers Organisation Ltd (ANIFPO) put out a detailed plan as to how such a scheme could be implemented. So far, the only response we seem to have received from the Minister and her officials in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is that it is not really the done thing in UK policy and that up to the present it has not happened.

4.15 pm

The fishermen — and MLAs — might reasonably ask what is the point of devolution if the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development is not in a position to look to the real needs of Northern Ireland and forget what is done in England, Scotland and Wales. As Northern Ireland representatives, we expect our Ministers to respond to the needs of Northern Ireland and not to take the view that Whitehall may not approve. Indeed, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development has given us some very positive examples of that. When the issue of beef support came up a while ago she produced a scheme that suited Northern Ireland better than that which was being implemented in England, Scotland and Wales. She exercised her discretion then.

There is absolutely no doubt that she has exercised considerable discretion regarding the foot-and-mouth disease crisis. She has made a much stronger case for Northern Ireland than that which has been made in Great Britain. We must ask her what she is now going to do on behalf of the fishermen.

There have been many clichés recently. It has been said that fishermen are experiencing something similar to foot-and-mouth disease, but I do not believe that to be the case. What they are going through is something more like foot-and-mouth disease, BSE and swine vesicular disease all wrapped together. They are now experiencing

their second year of crisis. There has been some aid for the beef industry and for pig producers in the past. However, there has been absolutely nothing of short-term benefit, and almost nothing of long-term benefit, for fishermen.

That is why we must ask the Minister to give us a real answer; not just some hopes and recitations as to what is being done by the MAFF-approved decommissioning scheme.

Short-term aid is needed for fishermen because they have had to make short-term decisions. They are faced with the situation whereby the Fisheries Council decides, just before December, what is going to happen a few months later. I do not know how anyone running a business, especially one such as fishing or farming, is expected to take decisions three months before serious changes are to be implemented because a diktat appears when the Council of Ministers meets. In the face of the short-term decisions that are made affecting fishermen, they have every right to make the case for short-term aid to help them cope. That is what would happen in other aspects of agriculture.

There is a case for a tie-up scheme. Other Members have already elaborated on it and I shall not go through it again. The case is there; it is just, and it is reasonable. It is essential so that stocks can recover and fishermen who wish to continue in the industry can prepare for the future. I trust that the Minister will listen to the unanimous view that is being expressed in the Chamber.

Mr C Wilson: I support the motion. I congratulate Mr Shannon on the very thorough manner in which he has laid out the case for the Northern Ireland fishermen. I would like to thank Mr Alan McCulla, the chief executive of ANIFPO, for the information he provided and for how well he has represented the views of the fishermen.

To back up what Mr Ford has said, the motion is supported by all the elected representatives for Strangford and the other areas in which fishing takes place. Undoubtedly, the question on the lips of the fishermen from Portavogie, which is within my constituency, Ardglass and Kilkeel will be, “Is the Assembly going to be part of the solution to our problems or will it simply add another tier of bureaucracy?”. The question does bear scrutiny, because we have heard the view of elected representatives from all parties that, to a large extent, bureaucracy is hampering our fishing industry.

I refer to a letter from the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Ms Bríd Rodgers, to the chief executive of the ANIFPO. I quote from the second paragraph:

“I have explained to the Committee that it has not been policy to compensate for closures or quota reductions. To reverse this position would require detailed consultation and agreement amongst the fisheries departments in the member state. In addition,

while there is no provision in EU regulation for payment of compensation in such circumstances, the proposed compensation must be argued and approved before the recovery plan is introduced."

The question that raises for the Minister today — and Members have already mentioned this — is why, considering that she has put forward a case that Brussels and Westminster are undoubtedly promoting, we are getting concrete information that suggests that the Dutch Government and their fishermen have reached an agreement to introduce an aid package that is exactly the type of scheme we seek for fishermen in Northern Ireland. We seek a short-term scheme to deal with the current problem that is facing the fishing industry here.

Members have already said that what we are facing in Northern Ireland is the prospect of the ruination of the age-old tradition of fishing in our major ports of Portavogie, Kilkeel and Ardglass. As Dr Paisley has said, this is not simply the end of an industry. It will have a catastrophic effect on the villages and townlands in those areas, where 50% of the people are employed in the fishing industry in some shape or form. It will be particularly so on the Ards Peninsula and down the coast to Kilkeel.

Many of the men who are sitting in the Public Gallery today are facing a road down which, as Mr McGrady has said, they do not wish to go — the road to decommissioning. Years ago many of them were encouraged to take out large loans and mortgage their homes. Those are men who have no option but to go with whatever scheme is available to take them out of their present situation, in which they risk losing everything that they have in the world. They do not have the luxury of any other options. As Mr McGrady has rightly pointed out, what we are looking at today is only a short-term fix, a way of dealing with the current crisis.

I want to say to the fishermen and their representatives that we know that they are proud men who simply want the right to fish. They are not looking for handouts; they are not looking for money to tie up their boats or destroy them. What they want to do is fish. The problem for those men and their families is that the bureaucratic system in Brussels and at Westminster is preventing them from doing what is their natural right to do.

I understand that the amount of money required to introduce and implement a short-term scheme for five weeks is relatively small — some £760,000 if my figures are correct. That money must be found urgently. Where there is a will, there is a way. I hope that when this debate is over and the Minister has given her reply, the fishermen will leave this Chamber in the knowledge that the issue will not be going away.

It is not enough for parties to support the motion only to allow bureaucracy to be used once again as an excuse for failing to deliver the required money. Failure by the Assembly to find that money in the short term, cut through the red tape and deliver the money right now

will mean failure for us and ruin for the fishing industry in Northern Ireland.

Mrs I Robinson: Three of the sectors in Strangford and South Down are vital to the economy — farming, textiles and fishing — and we all know about the decline affecting those three major industries. It is evident from the press releases published before any debate in the Assembly that the plight of our fishermen will receive a fair hearing. The press, in its coverage, has also captured the local mood, but that alone will not be enough. Sympathy will not pay a single wage. We do not want to have a nine-day wonder, marked by a good deal of talk and nice words without any affirmative action to match.

Farming has received a great deal of publicity because of BSE and the scourge of foot-and-mouth disease, and farmers will receive some assistance. I impress on Members that no one begrudges them a penny of that money, especially fishermen. However, we must not fail to assist the fishing industry, which is also facing a crisis, in every way that we can. The help requested by the fishermen, because of the cod recovery plan, will be short-term help. The closed area will exist for around five weeks, from now until the end of April. At present, boats are tied up, and they will remain so until the fishermen are allowed to resume fishing.

Let us not overlook the simple fact that fishermen have not received one penny in subsidy — that in itself is a remarkable fact. This industry is worth £90 million a year; it is a vital part of our local economy, and it must be assisted to enable it to survive. Perhaps we could follow the example set in Scotland. Its Parliament gave fishermen more than sympathy — it gave them financial help. As we all know, there is money in the Northern Ireland system, and some of it will be spent in less important ways, such as on the Civic Forum, which costs taxpayers millions of pounds a year. The fishing industry is now crying out for help, and we should divert some of that money to the fishermen.

The fishermen do not want the Minister of Agriculture to say "I hear what you are saying. I sympathise. We shall lobby Europe.", and so on. They are here today, and they are asking the Assembly to tell them exactly what will be done for them. This is a call for short-term aid; the fishermen are not asking for long-term aid today, although that must be dealt with sooner rather than later. They are asking for the aid that other countries, such as Spain, Italy, Belgium and Holland, are giving to their fishing industries. These European countries have all given assistance under article 16 of the EU Regulation 2792/1999.

Under the Belgian scheme, for example, 300 boats received fixed costs as compensation for being tied up. In Holland, £7,000 was paid to each owner for eight consecutive days when their boats were tied up. No

wonder they were happy with the scheme. The Spanish authorities gave their fishermen a massive 60 million euros. Of course some countries just ignore the regulations, which were so slavishly imposed on us. France, for example, failed to set appropriate rules for use of quotas and also failed to monitor fishing and the enforcement of regulations. Even more striking, why are the fishing fleets of other countries increasing in numbers when ours is decreasing? The Republic of Ireland has recently taken possession of 16 new trawlers. How can that be? Where is the level playing field?

According to the Department's figures, there are 344 locally licensed vessels.

4.30 pm

Almost 700 people are directly employed in catching and more than 1,000 in processing. Those figures are probably an underestimate, as many interests directly depend on fishing. The number of people employed probably amounts to 2,500.

Of more significance is that half the working population in Ardglass, Kilkeel and Portavogie is directly employed in fishing. We are dealing here with real people with real needs who will not have any income at all for the next five weeks.

The fishermen have not been idle throughout all this. They have written, they have lobbied, they have done all they can to persuade, but it seems that so far they have not been successful. Therefore, they are here today to look to their own Assembly and to ask for help.

There are small steps that can be taken immediately. Let the Minister tell us, for example, that the payment of light use will be removed. The Minister has pledged to remove that. Can we be told today that she has at last been successful? If not, why has that issue not been resolved? It would at least help in a small way to alleviate hardship.

I draw Members' attention to the letter sent by Dr Paisley on behalf of the Agriculture Committee, which set out the case for the fishermen. Although that letter was specific, the response from the Department gave no indication of any real and practical help. The fishermen do not want to have repeated back to them what their problems are. They already know only too well. What they want to hear are the measures that will be introduced to help them.

We all know that fishermen take great risks to bring in their valuable harvest, which contributes much to the Northern Ireland economy. That deserves recognition and the DUP recognises the importance of the fishing industry in Northern Ireland to the lives and incomes of those who live in the fishing communities.

However, what saddens me is that, all across Europe, Parliaments fight tooth and nail to protect their own industries. Time after time the Spanish, for example, get

concession after concession. Meanwhile, all the cutbacks and hardships seem to fall on the Northern Ireland fishing industry without there being any help or compensation. Is that fair? Can the Assembly look those fishermen in the eye and say, "You are on your own"? They did not do so in Scotland. On the contrary, they gave them help. Can we afford to do less? The Minister must be more assertive in dealing with MAFF.

Are we exaggerating all this? Ask the fishermen whether all this is exaggerated, whether they have money coming in, whether they have money to pay wages, whether their boats are tied up, whether the banks have started to look for repayments. Who would dare tell them that they are not a deserving case? Ask those who have walked away from the fishing industry why they did so. They will say that they had no money coming in to pay wages and bills.

We have all the evidence before us and now is the acid test. What will the Assembly do? It will not take much money. Approximately £3,300 per vessel per week — the total will depend on the number of vessels involved — will give much needed help to those whose entire industry is facing catastrophe.

I welcome the Minister's written response that the vessel decommissioning scheme is a priority. However, when will it be finalised? Indeed, when can it start? Must those fishermen wait until they are bankrupt? Those are central questions. Why could not the decommissioning scheme have been introduced at the same time as the cod recovery programme? Besides, what is wrong with our fishing industry that the fishermen have, it seems, only the option of decommissioning, when other countries not only get help but increase their fleet? How can that be? Is that right?

With each year's closure, the problems for fishermen are compounded. I welcome the Minister's move to get more training for fishermen, but that will not produce food on the table today. I also welcome her intention to carry out an assessment of this year's closure. However, what amazes me is that we already had one year of closure. All we need to do is assess that to know what the impact has been and will be. Why can that not be done?

That again will not pay the bills that need to be paid now. What we need is a full meeting with MAFF. It seems to me that MAFF is the weakest link in all of this. It does not appear to be doing all that is necessary. After this debate is over, we need a meeting involving the Chairperson of the Agriculture Committee, Members from constituencies that are directly affected by the cod recovery programme and representatives of the fishing industry.

With the support and backing of the Assembly, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development should seek an urgent meeting with MAFF to discuss those issues and secure a positive result.

Mr Hamilton: I support the motion in the hope that it will highlight the fact that the Northern Ireland fishing industry faces as uncertain a financial future as the farming industry. I hope that the Minister and her Department will act immediately to introduce measures that will be meaningful and practical for those who earn their living from the sea. Mr Shannon and many of the Members who have spoken have given the financial facts of the current plight faced by fishermen. I do not intend to repeat those figures. Instead, I aim to concentrate the mind of the House, and especially that of the Minister, on the reality of the present situation for those who rely on fishing for a living.

For the next five weeks, the white fish fleet, which operates out of ports such as Portavogie, Ardglass and Kilkeel, will simply have nowhere to go. It has nowhere to fish, and it has nothing to do. That is the bottom line of the current crisis, which is a result of the latest restrictions announced by Brussels.

However, although the right to fish may stop, other things do not: banks still expect loans to be met; it is necessary to keep paying insurance bills; and the costs and charges for hiring equipment must still be met. As well as the right to fish, all that will stop are the wages of crews employed on the affected vessels, together with a reduction in revenues at processing plants et cetera. Unless some sort of aid is provided over the next crucial five-week period there is a distinct possibility that a substantial part of the Northern Ireland fishing fleet will go out of business. The Assembly, and especially the relevant Department, should be moving heaven and earth to prevent that.

Unfortunately, that does not seem to be what is happening. Compared to the compensation efforts made in the agriculture sector, the response of the Department to the fishing crisis has — to say the very least — been weak. We are told that the policy has not been to compensate for closure or for quota restrictions. As all Members know, policy can be changed. It can be changed, Minister, if the will exists to change it.

The Department admits that there is provision to pay compensation, but that it must be argued and approved before the recovery plan is implemented. However, the Dutch Government are introducing an aid package to assist their fishermen following the introduction of closures associated with the North Sea cod recovery plan, and they are doing that without prior argument or approval. Again, it can be done if the will exists to do it.

Fishermen want to hear the Minister tell them how she is going to help them. I hope that they will receive the type of reply I wish to hear — that the Minister and her Department value and are concerned about the future of Northern Ireland's fishing industry and that she will act to protect fishermen's futures with the same speed she has shown towards the farmers.

The figure involved is £760,000. That is not a large sum in the context of Northern Ireland's budget. However, for many fishermen and their families it represents the difference between a future and no hope. I urge the Assembly to provide that hope and support.

Mr McHugh: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I too welcome the opportunity to speak on this topic. Like David Ford, I am from a rural area, although I probably know more about agricultural matters than about fishing. There are, however, great similarities between them. I visited those areas on one occasion with a Colleague, and we were warmly received. In fact, I even noticed that some people diversified into food production for the day.

However, I am quite sure that if the Chairman of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee were to visit some of the areas I represent, he would find that diversification goes on there too. I do not hold anything like that against people or communities.

It was a good learning process, however, and it was very useful to see at first hand the difficulties, the areas concerned, how the population was made up and the coastline, of which I was unaware until that occasion.

As Members, our first responsibility is to work for the plight of communities, wherever they are — be they in Fermanagh, Portavogie or anywhere else. Their problems and day-to-day difficulties are the same. The problem is that people in coastal communities have far fewer options in respect of what they can do should their main industry fail.

I think that the Chairperson said earlier that this was a historic problem — a historic failure in terms of our negotiations when entering the EU. The natural resources, which existed for those populations and communities, were simply negotiated away in favour of other things for other parts of our industry. To a large degree we lost our fishing grounds all around the coast of Ireland to people such as the Spanish, who moved in with factory ships and for the most part cleaned the waters out.

Others have already mentioned the facts. Fishing is important to the area — 50% of the civilian workforce are involved in that industry in Ardglass, Kilkeel and Portavogie. In 1993 — I think that another Member mentioned this — a report stated that fishing in that area should be maintained as a priority, because those communities had very few options, if any, to move into any other type of industry.

The fleet in the South of Ireland was able to be increased by 36%, whereas that in the North has had to suffer a 30% reduction. That highlights the commitment of the Governments, North and South. The commitment of the Government in the South — and this was pointed out to us by the representatives of those in the fishing industry on whose behalf they negotiated — was

massively different from that of MAFF and the British Government.

I do not blame our Minister, for she had very little to do with it. What the British Government want to do and how they see policy in England as opposed to the north Down coast — or any part of Ireland for that matter — and, indeed, the importance they attach to those communities is probably beyond her scope.

That is the difficulty. The problem that one will have to surmount is to try to convince a Government that are totally biased in respect of small communities and people who are meaningless to them in terms of their overall plan. That will not be easy to do.

I mentioned MAFF in GB and British Government policies. British Government policies on agriculture and fishing — and there are similarities between the two — are unsuitable here. They are unsuitable for fishing and small fishing villages here. When the British Government go to Europe to negotiate on behalf of the fishermen, that is how they operate. In fact, we are now in a position in which BSE and the foot-and-mouth disease problem have probably overshadowed the present attempts by the fishing communities to negotiate. This is an important time for them, but they are likely to be pushed into the background. They are now expected to tie up their industry more than a month, and that means a loss of income.

4.45 pm

The representatives of the fishing communities, particularly Dick James and Alan McCulla, were very forceful in getting their message across to the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee. There is no question of that. They did a particularly good job in comparison with almost everyone else who presented issues to the Committee. They tried to get their message through to the Committee. The problem is that the Committee cannot impact beyond advising the Minister. It is for the Minister to work with Nick Brown and others in the British Government to try and make things happen in terms of action that will be of some use and some benefit in those communities. That is the problem. However, the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee will do all it can to represent the views and issues that those people brought to the Committee.

The fishing community has had problems in trying to alleviate a situation in which all they wanted was some financial assistance and short-term compensation for losses last year of approximately £6 million. They will have no income for more than a month. They have costs and bank charges to pay, and they may have to risk their lives at other times of the year to go out and fish when the weather is unsuitable. That has to be taken into account. I do not know whether MAFF or any other British Government Department takes that into account when making its policies.

Owing to the foot-and-mouth disease, the Agriculture Minister and the Department asked people to close their industries and businesses voluntarily. They did not force them to close, because if they had done so compensation would have had to be paid. I wonder whether there is anything in that for the fishermen. They are being forced to close down their businesses for a period.

I support the motion. It is timely in representing the views of the communities in the areas mentioned. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Wells: I congratulate my Friend Mr Shannon for raising this issue, ably supported by Mrs Robinson. It is a timely motion, and it is appropriate — with all the noise and clamour about foot-and-mouth disease — that we remember that another crucial aspect of Northern Ireland's rural economy is in dire straits.

One of the disadvantages of speaking late in a debate is that many of the points have been made. I apologise to Mr Shannon for being late, but on the basis that the debate was to begin at 6.00 pm I arranged a meeting in Kilkeel — of all places — for 2.30 pm. I managed to get that over with fairly quickly and came here to be in time for the latter part of the debate.

Mr Shannon: Did you drive slowly?

Mr Wells: I certainly did not.

We are talking about an industry that represents 50% of civilian employment in Kilkeel and Ardglass, both of which are in South Down. Both communities depend on three pillars for their economy: fishing; agriculture and tourism. Sadly, today's announcement, plus the sheep grazing ban on the Mourne, will mean that tourism and farming in South Down is going to go through a difficult period.

The Minister has been concentrating on the foot-and-mouth crisis — and justifiably so — but I have a sneaking suspicion that that concentration has meant that the needs of the white fish fishermen in Northern Ireland have been ignored. I hope to produce some evidence of that later in my contribution.

The fishing industry is already struggling as a result of the cod recovery plan of 2000. Many Members will remember attending a very heated meeting in the Stormont Hotel about a year ago at which this issue was discussed in some detail by the representatives of the fishing community. At least there were alternatives in 2000. The haddock fishery could be pursued and some fishing grounds were still open to the Kilkeel and Ardglass fleets.

This year, they find themselves with no alternative but to tie up their trawlers. Unfortunately the bank manager and the insurance companies do not take the same attitude. There is no moratorium on interest charges. Insurance companies still want their premiums, and harbour dues still must be paid, so, while fishermen's

debts continue to mount, they have no way of realising an income. Normally in such situations we are asked, "What is the alternative?" — that question has been ringing in Members' ears for three years — but the fishing representatives have themselves provided the Minister with a realistic alternative that would only cost around £750,000.

That may sound like a great deal of money, but compared with the vast amount of money that has been poured into agriculture in the form of subsidies, it is a drop in the ocean. It is also a drop in the ocean in comparison with the Minister's present budget for the next two financial years. If a minimum of economies were made, that money could be found within her budget. I wrote to the Minister about that subject, as did many others. I must ask whether the Minister foresaw this situation? If not, why not? I detect from the paperwork that the Department was caught unawares. There is absolutely no excuse for being caught unawares, and for two reasons: first, there was every likelihood of a second recovery plan being introduced for this year; secondly, the Minister had been warned many times by representatives of the fishing industry.

Over the past few weeks, my fax machine has been red hot with warnings from representatives that unless the Department does something, the fishermen will be in dire trouble. When Mr McCulla and Mr McGrady met the Minister last week she did not even seem to have given the proposals adequate consideration. The response was a blanket "No". That was very much in line with a letter that she sent to Mr McCulla on 12 March 2001, in which she said:

"I have explained to the Committee that it has not been policy to compensate for closures or quota reductions. To reverse this position would require detailed consultation and agreement among the Fisheries Departments in the member states."

If that is true, why did the Dutch Government immediately implement a compensation aid package for their fishermen simply because they blocked the port of Rotterdam? If the Minister is under the same constraints as other EU Ministers, why could an aid package be implemented in Holland and not in Northern Ireland? Why have the Irish Government been flexible in their interpretation of the regulations to enable generous training grants for attendance at courses et cetera? Why could the Minister not have shown the same flexibility? We are told that nothing can be done:

"In addition, while there is provision in the EU regulation for payment of compensation in such circumstances, the proposed compensation must be argued and approved before the recovery plan is introduced."

The fishermen of south Down want to know whether the Minister argued that case in Europe? If she did, why was she less successful than her Irish and Dutch counterparts? If we are to be effective as an Assembly in representing the people we cannot simply say that

nothing can be done or that consultation is required, while we watch equivalent Ministers in other countries deliver for their fishermen. That vital point must be addressed.

Proposals were made for a tie-up scheme that, at a conservative estimate, would cost just £3,300 per trawler per week. That estimate is an indication of the outgoings of trawlermen who will have no income over the next five weeks. The tie-up scheme seemed to be watertight, but it has not been introduced, and we want to know why. The implications of that decision go much further than the fishing industry in Kilkeel and Ardglass. I have no experience of Portavogie. However, Members such as Mrs Robinson and Mr Shannon have been more than capable of representing their needs. The knock-on effect on the Kilkeel community is much more dramatic than fishermen simply having to tie up their trawlers. At least 13 trawlers in that harbour are permanently tied up, and workers are being lost — the men are getting no wages, so they are seeking work elsewhere. There is also a knock-on effect on shops, post offices, banks and the other small businesses in Kilkeel, which account for much more than the £760,000 that we are talking about today.

Ms Rodgers can strike a blow for this Province, and she could do so much to save a community that is going through so many difficulties by saying, "I am going to tear up the regulations and use the power given to me by the Assembly and the Government. I am going to step out of line with my colleagues in Wales because I believe in this fishing industry in Northern Ireland. I believe in an industry that has not taken a penny of subsidies for decades. I believe in an industry that is providing enormous knock-on value and additional employment. I am going to be brave and for this five-week period help the fishermen of South Down."

We owe an enormous debt of gratitude to those men who have been out working in the most difficult conditions. Some of them have lost their lives. The very least that we can do is come up with the pittance they need to keep going through this enormously difficult period.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers): I realise that I only have 15 minutes. It is impossible to deal with all that I need to deal with in that time, but I shall do my best. I thank Members for the opportunity to address the Assembly on this very important sector of the Northern Ireland industry.

Many Members have observed, both orally and in correspondence, that the problems of foot-and-mouth disease have diverted my attention from the problems being experienced by the fishing industry. Let me assure all Members that contrary to what Mr Shannon has said, nothing could be further from the truth. The very fact that I am here for two hours today while very serious issues are evolving outside shows my commitment to the fishing industry.

The motion has called on me to provide short-term financial assistance to the fishing industry to compensate the fishermen for the restrictions on fishing imposed by the cod recovery plan. I have listened carefully to what Members have had to say, and it is obvious that they share my concern for the plight of our local fishermen.

There is no doubt that for some members of the fleet the fishing opportunity will be very limited in the latter half of the Irish Sea cod recovery programme. That has been exacerbated by the west of Scotland closures referred to by Mr McGrady. Inevitably, that is causing financial difficulties. However, there is a need to balance the requirement to conserve the stocks with the requirement to preserve the livelihoods of the fishermen. If there are no fish left in the sea, we shall not have a fishing industry. That is the balance that must be struck, and it is extremely difficult.

However, our fishermen appreciate that the closures, although painful, are agreed as one means of conserving fish stocks to help ensure a sustainable industry for the future. As Members will be aware, a number of stocks are in a powerless state. Mr Shannon referred to the right to fish. Of course fishermen have the right to fish. What I want to ensure is that they will be able to continue to have that right and that fish will be there to be fished.

I take this opportunity to thank our local industry for its co-operation in the handling of the current cod recovery plan. The vast majority of fishermen have complied with the rules and enabled the plan to proceed. Indeed, they have also contributed very effectively to the negotiations on the implementation.

I totally reject the view that I have failed the fishing industry. I have worked very hard and consulted with it on measures that I am able to pursue to help the industry in the short and long terms. I shall return to those. I absolutely agree with Mr McGrady when he says that the short-term view is important, but the long-term view is also extremely important.

In relation to short-term financial assistance, through agreement among fisheries Ministers in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland it has not been policy to compensate for the effects of recovery programmes. Given some of the comments they have made, I am almost tempted to think that some Members on the other side of the House have come around to the idea that it might be better to be part of the Republic of Ireland than to be part of the UK. It is not a cheap political point; I am simply making an observation.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: Keep that smile off your face. Sit down.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr C Wilson: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. In the past, Members have been brought into line for making comments that are of absolutely no relevance

to the subject but simply constitute a cheap political gimmick.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order.

Ms Rodgers: My time is about to run out. *[Interruption]*

5.00 pm

Mr C Wilson: On point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I ask you to consult with the Speaker after this sitting. He has ruled such comments totally out of order in the past.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Thank you for that point. It will be taken into consideration.

Ms Rodgers:

Dr Paisley's initial remarks that the provision exists for compensation to be sought were correct. However, in a letter that I wrote to him some time back I said that, because it was not submitted to the European Commission by the member state within the approval for the plan, it is not now possible to have it. I also said that I could and would undertake to carry out an assessment of the effects of this year's closures and to consult with other Fisheries Ministers on future arrangements. I remind the House that those arrangements have to be agreed among the four UK Ministers. It is a decision that has to be taken on an UK-wide basis. It is not for me alone to decide. I have to do it in conjunction with the other Ministers.

However, such compensation schemes have a limited impact. It would be impossible to introduce such a scheme for the current closure period as it would require prior EU approval on state aid, which takes considerable time to obtain.

Mr Wells: What about the Dutch?

Ms Rodgers: I shall come to that if the Member will allow me the time.

The money, even if approved, would have to be found against many other competing demands.

I want to outline the steps I have taken, as well as those being planned, to address the needs of the industry, and I assure Mr Ford that those include those wishing to remain in the industry as well as those wishing to leave.

In the cod recovery plan we secured derogation for a controlled haddock fishery for the first half of closure. That has provided a very useful fishing opportunity in addition to the continued provision for nephrops fishing. The haddock derogation produced 26 tonnes, worth approximately £30,000, in its first two weeks. My officials will be assembling the results of this fishery to present to the European Commission. I hope that the experiment will prove useful in demonstrating the industry's strong views on the potential for a clean haddock fishery.

I was very disappointed, as were the fishermen, when the Commission imposed a 10% cut on the nephrops

total allowable catch (TAC) at December's Fishery Council. I agree with Mr McGrady's comments on that issue. I have done everything in my power to have this decision reversed. I immediately held a meeting with my scientists to explore what could be done to get this under way. They have done sterling work in a very short time to produce an analysis that supports our case for retrieving TAC, and that work has been included in the UK case for restoration of the TAC. I have written to the Fisheries Minister, Elliot Morley, asking him to keep the pressure on the Commission to pursue the issue as a matter of urgency.

The results we obtained in Northern Ireland look as though they could help reverse the cut. The by-catch — as has been quite rightly stated by Mr McGrady — has been minimal, and that is a point in our favour. I recognise the importance of nephrops to our local fleet, and I am determined to see this through. Of course, it also has implications for the processing sector and the wider industry. Members should be aware that Northern Ireland was the first region to complete this work, and I want to congratulate all concerned in achieving that.

With regard to structural funds, Members will recall last week's approval by the European Commission of the Northern Ireland transitional Objective 1 plan for the next six years. Within that, £21 million is earmarked for the fishing sector, and I assure Mr Ford that this is a Northern Ireland plan for the Northern Ireland fishing industry. Mr Murphy asked why I did not go ahead with the scheme: I could not go ahead until I had received approval.

In response to industry demands, I am prioritising a vessel decommissioning scheme this year. Dr Paisley expressed reservations to me about the decommissioning scheme this morning, but I pointed out to him, and I repeat now, that this decommissioning scheme is being introduced at the behest of the industry. Its representatives told me that they wanted it, and I have no doubt that if I were standing up here now saying that I had refused it I would be getting flak from all sides — including possibly from Dr Paisley himself — for not having delivered it.

It will be of both short-term and long-term benefit to the industry. It is generally accepted that there is a mismatch between fishing capacity and fish stocks, often described as, "Too many boats chasing too few fish". That applies widely to Europe, not only Northern Ireland. Work is well under way on stock recovery programmes. A decommissioning scheme will facilitate many of those who wish to leave the industry and will, I hope, result in a more viable future. My plan is to target both the white fish and the nephrops sectors through the scheme. I hope to be able to reduce the target sectors by some 15% and to achieve what Mr McGrady referred to as the critical mass — *[Interruption]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms Rodgers: Mr McGrady made an extremely constructive and well-informed speech.

In relation to training, in the fisheries plan I have allocated £50,000 per annum over the next three years to provide basic and refresher safety training, including risk awareness and accident prevention. That training will be provided locally by our group training association and will be free of charge to the fleet. I have no doubt that Members share my desire to make safety a high priority.

Moreover, and in view of the industry's understandable concerns about limited fishing opportunities in the coming weeks, I have asked my officials to introduce proposals for additional training, related to the needs of the industry, to be delivered in the near future. I shall seek to ensure that that is properly resourced. The plan also has provision to support processing and marketing in fishery sectors as well as much-needed infrastructure improvement in the fishing ports. My Department plans to enter into discussions with the industry to review research and development in fishing gear and to examine innovations that could be incorporated into local trawls to improve the escapement of juvenile fish.

I have been working on the issue of light dues. As Members will know, I have written to the Department in Great Britain. It has not shown any inclination to waive the fees. I share the wish of the industry to secure a healthy and viable fishing industry and I am not giving up. I want to continue working with the industry and to listen to their concerns.

I assure Mrs I Robinson that although Scotland has announced a £27 million scheme, the bulk of that is going on decommissioning. Furthermore, Scotland has a larger fleet than Northern Ireland. According to my Brussels contacts in the fisheries directorate, none of the countries that has been mentioned have been given approval for a compensation tie-up scheme.

Mr Shannon mentioned fishing villages. Those villages have benefited from both the fishing villages initiative and the PESCA programme during the 1994-95 round. A wide range of projects have been funded and are being implemented to help the area's economy. Mr Shannon also referred to the modernisation grant. That will have to be repaid if the applicant is approved for decommissioning. I have no power to waive that regulation.

Cedric Wilson mentioned other countries. I am not aware of any other tie-up schemes in Europe. That is a matter for the other member states. No other region in the UK has introduced a tie-up scheme. The closed box in the Irish Sea that was mentioned by Mr Savage is actually smaller than it was last year, as a result of our negotiations.

We did well to achieve a five-week haddock derogation. Mr Wells was wrong. The fleet had a much better haddock derogation this year — five weeks with very good fishing opportunity, despite the weather. Mr Wells asked whether we saw that coming. He referred to a meeting that I had last week with Mr McGrady and a

representative of the industry. It was suggested by Dr Paisley that I have had several meetings this year with the industry. In actual fact, that was the only meeting that I have had with the industry, not because I do not want to meet with it, but because I did not receive any requests. I am very open to requests. I meet regularly with everyone who asks for a meeting, and I did have that meeting last week. Had I had other requests, I would have responded to them. *[Interruption]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms Rodgers: Excuse me — I am talking about the fishing industry. I have almost finished.

Mr Shannon: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. That is misinformation. For the past three months, Ards Borough Council has been asking for a meeting with the Minister and is still awaiting a reply.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order.

Mr Shannon: Nevertheless, it is a good point.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Members have had their say in this debate, and I ask them to give the Minister the opportunity to respond to the issues raised. I request that no further points of order be made until the Minister has finished.

Ms Rodgers: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. *[Interruption]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: I shall take one more point of order.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: I do not know what the Minister is talking about. I have the manuscript, which I read to the House. I said

“We have met with them again on a number of occasions”.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: It is. I have been misrepresented by the Minister. She has said that I said she would not meet those men. I never said those words in the House. Hansard will prove it. It is a point of order, and, Madam Deputy Speaker, you know that it is.

Ms Rodgers: If I have misrepresented the Member, I most humbly apologise. I may have misunderstood him. Nevertheless, I want to make the point that, when requested, I meet people, talk to them and listen to them very carefully.

With regard to the meeting to which Mr Wells referred, which was with a representative of the industry accompanied by Mr McGrady, issues were raised. We did know that the recovery programmes were coming up. I also knew, as did the industry, that it would not be a one-year recovery programme, that it would take a number of years. I did give careful consideration to proposals that were put to me at the meeting — to which Mr Wells referred at second hand — and I gave a practical answer. My door is always open to the industry, and I shall continue to do everything I can.

I also wish to acknowledge the contribution made by the industry to the wider economy, and in particular to the cod recovery plan. Members will be interested to know that the European Commission has recently published its Green Paper on the future of the common fisheries policy. Over the next week I shall be launching a consultation exercise on that paper to ensure that the needs of the Northern Ireland fishing industry are factored into the debate at June's Fisheries Council meeting. I fully intend to be present at that and to play a full part.

Mr Shannon: I am bitterly disappointed at the Minister's response. Not once did she give any hope to the fishing industry in relation to the tie-up scheme of the three major ports or to the representatives of that industry who are sitting in the Gallery.

I made a point of order but was ruled out of order. It was a good point, however, and I shall make it again. Through the offices of Down District Council we have been asking for a meeting with the Minister for three months, and we are still waiting. When the Minister goes back to her office, perhaps she will ask one of her civil servants to scurry around the office to see whether that reminder from Down District Council can be found. It has been lying there for almost three months. Perhaps then we can have a meeting on behalf of the fishing industry which we, the council and MLAs represent.

Mr Wells: Does the Member accept that Mr McCulla from ANIFPO also has made several requests for meetings with the Minister? A meeting was set up and then cancelled at very short notice. If the Minister checks with her diary secretary, she will find lots of ANIFPO letters on her desk saying, “Please meet us as soon as possible on this issue”.

Mr Shannon: Madam Deputy Speaker, the — *[Interruption]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms Rodgers: The meeting requested by Mr McCulla was cancelled by Mr McCulla, not by the Minister.

Mr Shannon: I say categorically that that is not so. I was in touch with Mr McCulla concerning this matter, and I know that he was prepared to put himself out at any time, to cancel any meeting, in order to meet the Minister, so that is certainly not my understanding of what took place. I understand that Mr McCulla may be present in the Gallery. I know that he cannot — and will not — speak, but that is certainly my interpretation of my discussion with him.

5.15 pm

Madam Deputy Speaker: The Member is aware that no reference should be made to people in the Gallery.

Mr Shannon: People in the Gallery may be invisible to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, but they are not invisible to me.

The right to fish is a core issue, and the Minister has not addressed it. Each and every one of the parties took time to deliberate on this issue, which is of great importance to the fishing industry.

I want to summarise some of the points made. In his introduction, Dr Paisley mentioned saving the fishermen from disaster and the fact that they need to earn a living but that there is was no room for them to diversify. Mr Savage, the Deputy Chairperson of the Agriculture Committee, also mentioned the need for a generosity of spirit between agriculture and fishing, and he underlined the immediacy of that need. We come back to that point all the time.

The next time we have a debate on fishing we shall just let Mr McGrady speak, as he says everything for the rest of us. Mr McGrady said that decommissioning would be an integral part of the package but not the whole package. One point he stressed was the short-term need — financial assistance should be made available now.

Over the years I have sat with Mr McGrady in the Ards, Newry and Mourne and Down Councils looking at the fishing industry. Mr McGrady was at the most recent meeting to discuss those important issues. We are looking at a long-term strategy, but the issue today is to do with the cod recovery plan and how we are going to assist the boats with the tie-up scheme.

I thank all Members for their comments. Mr Ford pointed out that assistance for agriculture is already there, but that that same assistance has not been available for the fishing industry. We must look at the source of that assistance. All in the Chamber implore the Minister to acknowledge the needs of the fishing industry.

My Colleague Mrs Robinson referred to the lack of food on the table. Is that not the very essence of this proposal for short-term financial assistance? We represent the people involved in the fishing industry, and they need something now to get them over the five-week period. Their bills continue to arrive and their debts still remain to be paid. The mortgages for the boat and the household bills do not simply stop. The Minister still does not have the compassion to understand the dire needs of the fishing industry.

Mr Hamilton hoped to move heaven and earth to try to help. That is what we want. We want enthusiasm, dedication and a positive approach from the Minister. She can do it, and she has the power to move on this problem. I implore her to look at those fishing matters and to do her best to address the question.

Allow me to return to decommissioning, which was requested by the fishing industry away back in the summer of 1999. Almost two years later we are finally looking at a possible decommissioning scheme. That was the only light to come out of the Minister's address.

Decommissioning is only part of the package. Today we want a tie-up scheme.

Madam Deputy Speaker, is it possible for the Minister to stop talking to her Colleague and listen? Let us listen to the issues — we are not here putting in time. We implore the Minister on behalf of the fishermen of the three villages of Portavogie, Ardglass and Kilkeel to do something for them.

I am concerned that the Minister has chosen to make some cheap political points today. We are not here as political parties; we are here on behalf of the people we represent to try to fight for the fishing industry.

I am trying to be respectful of the Minister's position, but I must remind her that, as Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for Northern Ireland, she has a responsibility to the fishing industry. We have not had one glimmer of hope for the tie-up scheme.

We need to conserve the fishing stocks, but the fishing industry also wants some help to try to overcome this problem. It is interesting that the World Wildlife Fund — a major conservation body — also agrees with the fishing industry. It has a joint plan. It wants to see the fishing industry going forward. Fishing needs to be conserved, and the World Wildlife Fund believes that financial assistance is vital for that to happen.

The Minister said that she would need to have meetings with her Colleagues in Scotland and Wales. Perhaps she could indicate how many meetings she has had on the issue with the other Assemblies and what progress has been made? It would be interesting to see whether any meetings have taken place on a tie-up scheme. Let us in Northern Ireland for once not be subservient to the other parts of the United Kingdom. Let the Assembly lead the way. Let the Minister lead the way on behalf of the fishing industry over the tie-up scheme.

Mr Wells: Does the Member agree that the Minister could follow the example of her Dutch counterpart, who, within 24 hours of a protest in Rotterdam harbour, was able to find 14 million euros to help compensate her fishing fleet? Can the hon Lady not follow suit and do exactly the same? She would be applauded by the House if she did.

Ms Rodgers: Madam Deputy Speaker —

Mr Shannon: I am quite happy to give way.

Ms Rodgers: Do I have permission to answer that?

Madam Deputy Speaker: The Member has given way to the Minister, but I remind the Member that the clock is ticking and that we have only 10 minutes left.

Ms Rodgers: I have some resource problems. The Member is talking about the Minister of a member state who has access to the Treasury of that member state. I am the Minister of a region and am not in the same position. I cannot obtain resources at the drop of a hat. I

have to compete in the block for all of the resources, and there are many competing demands in Northern Ireland.

Mr Shannon: The Minister has indicated in correspondence with the fishing organisations that she has the wherewithal to make some assistance available. I ask her to deliver on the commitment that she has given to the fishing organisations and elected representatives. She can help the industry, but she must make the effort. The tie-up scheme is what we need, and we need it now. Short-term help for the whole industry is needed at the moment. We are all aware that plenty of money is available when it comes to other organisations such as North/South

bodies. Let her make money available. I implore the Minister to take the gracious step and help the fishing industry. It is quite clear to the elected representatives that no constructive response has been forthcoming from the Minister today.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls upon the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to provide short-term financial assistance for the fishing industry due to the restriction coming from the cod recovery programme.

Adjourned at 5.24 pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Monday 2 April 2001

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

CLERK TO THE ASSEMBLY

Mr Speaker: Members will have noted that the new Clerk to the Northern Ireland Assembly has taken up his post today. I am sure that the whole House will join me in wishing Mr Arthur Moir every success in his new position.

FOOT-AND-MOUTH DISEASE

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development that she wishes to make a statement on the current position on foot-and-mouth disease and the implications for Northern Ireland.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers): As always, I am grateful for the opportunity to update the Assembly on the situation with the foot-and-mouth disease in Northern Ireland since I last did so on 26 March. As Members will doubtless know and be thankful for, the situation has remained static, and we have had just one confirmed outbreak.

However, my major concern now relates to the Republic, where there has been a very recent outbreak and where the risk of further cases must be correspondingly high. Members will be aware of the suspect case which was reported in County Louth last Thursday. I am glad to say that the preliminary test results for that case were negative.

I am also concerned about the position in Great Britain, where the number of cases continues to rise daily. Both of these situations present the very real risk that we will import the virus again. Although I and my Executive Colleagues will do what we can to counter that threat, I make no apology for stressing again the need for farmers to adopt a fortress mentality as a last line of defence.

With regard to other aspects of the present situation, the major development over the past week was the EU decision to regionalise the foot-and-mouth disease controls on Northern Ireland. That decision represents a very considerable achievement for us and allows most of Northern Ireland to resume something like normal trade in the relevant products with effect from next week.

Although this is an excellent result, it does bring problems with it. As the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee is aware, tomorrow the Newry and Mourne District Council area will become subject to several controls aimed at ensuring that products from there do not get into the rest of Northern Ireland. This is because the European Commission required that we identify a discrete administrative area within which the site of the outbreak was located and where the necessary controls could apply. The smallest such area round south Armagh is this district council area.

I recognise that this will cause problems for farmers and processers in the area, but my officials are working to minimise the impact of these controls as far as possible. Disease permitting, our next move will be to have the controls on the Newry and Mourne District Council area lifted so that the whole of Northern Ireland is removed from the relevant export controls. We will be making that bid once 30 days have elapsed and cleansing and disinfection have been undertaken at the scene of the Meigh outbreak — that is as soon as possible after next

Thursday, 5 April. However, that will not be an easy case to win.

In the meantime it is essential that we be able to demonstrate to the Commission that the district has been sealed off in so far as the movement of susceptible animals and their product is concerned. My officials are assessing precisely what needs to be done to achieve that. Where further help is needed from other Departments, I will address that through the interdepartmental group which I chair and which is working very effectively. We will also liaise with the RUC to agree what contribution is necessary from it.

The second major development during the past week was my joint announcement with Joe Walsh of our intention to carry out a precautionary cull of sheep in the area around and between the locations of the two outbreaks, North and South of the border. Our rationale was the creation of a firebreak round both outbreaks to prevent the spread of any further infection in that area. Unfortunately, that idea quickly ran into difficulty due to concerns among the local community over several aspects of our proposals. Initially those concerns revolved around the disposal of the sheep carcasses, but, recognising the urgency, I was able to agree to have the carcasses rendered instead of buried. Subsequently, it became clear that some people had concerns over the financial impact of the cull. That was not helped by the circulation of misleading rumours that the authorities in the Republic were offering higher rates of compensation than normal for sheep to be culled within their jurisdiction. I had those reports investigated with the authorities in the Republic, and they were incorrect.

Last Thursday I was able to reassure the people concerned that they would receive compensation in the normal way, and at the normal rates. The value of the animals will, as always, be assessed by valuers from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, and in the event of any dispute, independent valuers will be brought in to arbitrate.

There have been reports in the press since last Thursday of an amnesty for some of the farmers involved. I will take this opportunity to set the record straight. No amnesty was granted; nor, indeed, would I have considered granting one. This was potentially a very difficult situation, and I would like at this point to pay tribute to the contribution by John Gilliland of the Ulster Farmers' Union (UFU) and Nigel McLaughlin of the Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers' Association (NIAPA). The fact that the farming unions were seen to be being so supportive of the Department's attitude was crucial to a resolution of the problem.

At least one MLA has expressed concerns about the fact that we are taking the carcasses out of the area for disposal. However, I am satisfied with the Chief Veterinary Officer's advice that, with the appropriate disease pre-

cautions, of the options available to me this disposal route represents the one with the lowest risk. Members will note that an independent vet has since confirmed that view.

There were several other significant events this week. The Executive were able to agree and announce a relaxation of the restrictions on movements by the general public. That has gone down well, and I hope that it will now provide the springboard for a recovery for tourism. Coupled to that, I announced last Friday some easement in the controls on the movement of animals under licence to take account of general welfare issues that have been raised with the Department. Those come into effect today.

Finally, I shall announce soon the establishment of a group to examine the changes that might be needed to protect us better from animal disease in the future. I need to stress, however, that such a group will have to work within the parameters set by the European Union to protect the free market. Nevertheless, there are various practices that have clearly contributed to the outbreak of the disease and its subsequent spread, and those must be reconsidered.

Although we should not be satisfied with a situation in which we have had a case of foot-and-mouth disease, we can take comfort from the fact that, as each day passes, we can be surer that the outbreak has been controlled. I call on everyone in the community to continue to observe the controls that are still in place, particularly those aimed at preventing further importation of the virus from elsewhere. In particular, I appeal to the people of Newry and Mourne to bear with us, to co-operate with my staff and to observe the controls that will come into effect over the next few days. I will do all that I can to get the controls lifted as soon as possible, but, in the meantime, it is vital that they be complied with — to the letter.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development (Rev Dr Ian Paisley): I am glad that the Minister made it clear in her statement that the decision on the cull of sheep came from her and Joe Walsh and not from the EC. There seemed to be some idea that the EC had initiated it and said "If you do not do this, you can have what you want."

The Minister stated that she wanted to put the record straight about the negotiations. Conveniently, however, she did not deal with the fact that the question of amnesty was discussed at that meeting. That was entirely out of order, because neither the Minister nor her officials have authority in that matter. There was a long and heated discussion at that meeting about the granting of amnesty.

Why did the Minister not do for the people of north Belfast what she did for the people of south Armagh? Why were the people in Belfast not informed about what was going to happen? Why were they not told about all the supposed safeguards? We were told that the animals were coming in sealed lorries; in many cases, that

sealing was done with tarpaulin. Many of the tarpaulins did not fit properly, and the lorries were not fully sealed. That was confirmed by the independent vet. Is the Minister aware that there is no effluent plant at that place? All the fluid there flows into the Belfast sewerage system. Do the people of north Belfast not have the right to an explanation, if their health is being put at risk or if there is a risk that the disease might spread? Those are important questions that the Minister must answer clearly.

Mr Ford: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I cannot take a point of order during questions to the Minister. I will gladly hear it at the end.

Ms Rodgers: The decision on the cull was not taken by Joe Walsh; it was taken jointly by Joe Walsh and me in the interest of the island of Ireland and of the two areas in which there was infection. Joe Walsh had to organise the cull on his side of the border, and I had to organise the cull on my side. It was done following dialogue, as with everything that we have done on this matter. We have acknowledged that the disease does not recognise the border between Louth and south Armagh — unfortunately.

10.45 am

The EU Commission made it clear to us, and showed the wisdom of our decision that whether the virus was clearly present in that area would be a crucial issue in regionalisation. The fact that we were carrying out a cull would, therefore, be an essential part of that decision. It was a case of great minds thinking alike and coming to the right decision.

I am surprised that Dr Paisley seems to have the idea that he was privy to all the discussions that took place at the meeting with the farmers in south Armagh on Thursday. The long and heated discussion on amnesty is news to me. The important thing about that meeting was the outcome. To my mind, the outcome has been for the benefit of the agriculture industry and the people of Northern Ireland as a whole. The outcome was also important for what we are trying to achieve — to keep foot-and-mouth disease out of Northern Ireland.

I am the Minister of Agriculture, and I am not aware of any sheep in north Belfast. There are no issues of human health with this. Rendering is happening every day in that area — it is not something that started last Thursday or Friday. The same sewerage system has been there for a while; there is nothing different. However, anything of that nature is a matter for the Department of the Environment, not for the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

In relation to my not alerting the people of north Belfast, my view is that if public representatives had been concerned about what was happening, they should have made their concerns known; that would have been very useful. They could have contacted the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, me or my

private office, which is open daily, to find out if there really was a human health or a health problem.

Those representatives could then have told the true story, which is that there is no risk to human health; neither is there a problem in spreading the disease. I based everything I did on the advice I received from the Chief Veterinary Officer, who is the expert in these matters.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development (Mr Savage): Does the Minister agree that the fact that relaxation measures could be announced this morning is due entirely to the rigorousness with which restrictions have been applied in Northern Ireland? Does she agree that it is at exactly this time, when our guard is slightly relaxed, that there is the real danger?

This virus is of a particularly virulent strain. Japan is an island, and the disease has been kept out of there since 1908, but this virus has still managed to get in. Will the Minister please reinforce the message of continuing vigilance? Does the Minister agree that the Prime Minister was very wise in postponing the elections?

I think that the Minister might have been referring to me while she was speaking. May I remind her that I have been involved in farming all my life. I have sat on the Agriculture Committee over the past few weeks listening to veterinary officials saying that this virus is carried in the noses of human beings for at least five to seven days. If it is carried in human beings' noses, it must surely be able to be carried in animals' noses.

Ms Rodgers: I assure Mr Savage that at no stage in my remarks was I referring to him. I also reassure him that whereas the virus is carried in the noses of living people, it is not carried in the noses of dead animals.

I totally agree with the Member about relaxation and confirm his view that because of the measures that we have taken, we have, so far, been successful in our efforts. That is due in particular to the co-operation that we have received from the community — and the farming community especially. I agree with the Member when he says that because things seem to be going reasonably well, it would be dangerous to relax our guard. The danger is really at the farm gate and at the ports of entry, particularly from Great Britain, where, unfortunately, the disease is still raging.

The farm gate is the real point of defence against the disease, and I urge farmers to maintain the fortress farming approach. I also urge people coming into Northern Ireland from Great Britain and the Republic to take all the necessary precautions.

I do not want to comment on the postponement of the elections — that matter is outside my ken.

Mr McGrady: I congratulate the Minister and her departmental officials on enabling Northern Ireland to be regarded as a designated area — excluding,

unfortunately, the Newry and Mourne area, which is part of my constituency. This is no mean achievement in the context of recent events in the rest of United Kingdom, and the House should congratulate the Minister and her Department on a tremendous achievement.

The people, the farmers and the industries of Newry and Mourne are suffering the pain for the rest of Northern Ireland. It is important that we recognise that. Some of the residents and businesses are 20 to 25 miles away from the main focus of the disease. Will the Minister ensure that relaxation is introduced as soon as possible? I realise that we cannot be complacent, but can she give further details of the relaxations that she hopes to introduce today, and what they will mean?

Ms Rodgers: I appreciate the Member's remarks about Newry and Mourne, because it is very hard on the people there who have been affected by the problem for some time. It is especially hard on the people who are not in the Meigh area but who are bound by the restrictions on the Newry and Mourne District Council area. They are not able to get their products out of the area because they are in the smallest discrete administrative area that we could identify for the EU. I sympathise with those people.

I assure Mr McGrady that as soon as we reach the thirtieth day after the Meigh outbreak I will vigorously pursue regionalisation for the whole of Northern Ireland, including Newry and Mourne. I understand that, following the further outbreak in County Louth and the announcement that antibodies have been found in a sheep in the Cooley Mountains, that will not be an easy task. However, I still intend to pursue the matter vigorously with the support of the UK Government and Joe Walsh.

On the question of the relaxation of measures, I was very pleased to be able to announce the relaxation on the movement of animals which comes into place today. There were difficulties for farmers in relation to welfare and animal husbandry issues, such as not being able to move sheep for lambing or to move cattle out to grass. Those activities will now be possible. The details will be publicised, and they are now available in the local veterinary offices. The restrictions had previously been relaxed to allow movement up to 5km and this will be now extended to 10km, which will help many farmers. The details will be available for those who need them.

Mr C Murphy: A Cheann Comhairle, the Minister said that the case for the removal of the restrictions around Newry and Mourne could be a difficult one for her to win. Will she assure us that if the relaxations are not granted at the end of the 30 days, they will be removed in a matter of days or weeks, and not months, as some people in the locality have suggested? Will she acknowledge the contribution made by the farmers in the south Armagh area in sacrificing their healthy animals to secure the future of the agriculture industry in the rest of the island? Will she continue to press the case

for consequential compensation payments? She has had wide-ranging discussions with farmers in that area and the farmers' unions, and I am sure that there is a huge range of issues that will affect people in the farming community and throughout the island.

Ms Rodgers: As I have already stated in response to Mr McGrady, I will be moving immediately, and with the same vigour that I pursued the relaxation for the rest of Northern Ireland, to ensure that the Newry and Mourne area will be made exempt as soon as possible. I acknowledge the contribution of the farmers in south Armagh. I would like to take this opportunity, because of some of the denigration that has gone on, to assure the House that the vast majority of farmers in south Armagh are ordinary decent farmers, as are the farmers in the rest of Northern Ireland who have faced the same problems over the last number of years. They have been anxious to co-operate with me in the past week and are now doing so. I want to place that on record.

Mr Conor Murphy referred to the consequences for the farming community; I realise that there will be consequences. They are, of course, getting full market value for their animals. Also there will be consequences for sectors other than farming. There will be consequences for tourism; there will be consequences, I understand, even for photographers who cannot go to events owing to cancellations. The consequences are endless. I have said in the House that, although I sympathise with the plight in which people find themselves, it would be virtually impossible to pay for the infinite amount of consequential payments out of the Northern Ireland block. I made that point at the Cabinet meeting that I attended some weeks ago with the Prime Minister. Consequential payments will be a matter for the Treasury, and if the British Government were to take the view that consequential payments are to be made, I would expect Northern Ireland farmers to get their share.

Mr Ford: Does the Minister accept, notwithstanding the personal opinions expressed by Dr Paisley, that many of us — both in the Assembly and in the Agriculture Committee — are grateful to her for the efforts that she and her officials put into solving the difficulties regarding the cull in south Armagh last week? We also wish to add our support to what she said in praising Mr Gilliland and Mr McLaughlin for their efforts. We recognise the genuine sacrifice that people with healthy sheep are making in the same way as farmers in Cumbria, for example, are doing.

What action is the Minister taking from this week to deal with the problem of liquid milk production in the Newry and Mourne area? Can she indicate when she expects to present the case for the abolition of all restrictions in the Newry and Mourne area to the Standing Veterinary Committee in Brussels?

Ms Rodgers: I thank Mr Ford for his comments. I completely accept that the Agriculture Committee, in

particular, and, indeed, the whole Assembly are appreciative. Indeed, the Agriculture Committee left me in no doubt about that when I met with it last Friday. It is not just the Assembly and the Agriculture Committee that are appreciative, and the huge volume of letters that I am receiving from both the Unionist and Nationalist communities shows that people across Northern Ireland are appreciative of our efforts. I really appreciate that because it is good to know that we have the support of the whole community in this difficult time.

I cannot go into details about the liquid milk situation. I know that it is a problem; I know precisely what the Member is referring to. My officials are in discussion with people in that area. We are operating under EU Regulations, and my officials are trying to establish how problems can be dealt with in many sectors, such as the processing industry, as well as in the liquid milk sector. Those discussions are ongoing, so I cannot give a definitive answer on how that issue will be resolved — but it is being dealt with. I may be able to give the Member further information if he contacts my private office.

I have discussed the issue of the Standing Veterinary Committee with my Chief Veterinary Officer — who will be at the next Standing Committee meeting — and with my head of policy; we will be preparing a case. I will also be talking to Joe Walsh — I hope — next Friday, and clearly the South will be preparing a case because it will be looking for relaxation in due course. All of that is being put together, and I hope to mount as effective a case as we did in managing to achieve regionalisation thus far.

11.00 am

Mr B Hutchinson: Before putting my question, I want to respond to something the Minister said about MLAs. As an MLA for North Belfast, I heard about the movement of sheep to north Belfast through the media, not through the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. Perhaps the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development could have informed the six MLAs for the area before making the decision public. We might then have been able to influence the decision. That may not be the Minister's problem; perhaps it highlights the problem that some MLAs find out about what Departments are doing after the event, rather than before it.

With regard to the processing plant in north Belfast, did the Minister take any advice from the Department of the Environment about the environmental implications? I understand, having spoken to Belfast City Council's environmental officers, that there was a problem with the wall in what is known as the "chemical scrubbing plant", where these animals would have been — for the want of a better term — power-boiled. The emissions from that site were quite high over recent weeks. Did the Minister ask the Department of the Environment whether this wall had been fixed and whether it stopped the public

nuisance? On Friday, when I checked the wind direction with the weather station at Belfast International Airport, I was told that there was a south-easterly wind. That means that any stench coming from those sheep would have gone directly over the houses in north Belfast.

Ms Rodgers: Billy Hutchinson raised a point concerning the Department of the Environment. Drumcrue — I am sorry: that was a slip of the tongue. I nearly said Drumcree. *[Laughter]* Drumcrue is working full-time as a rendering plant. There are no extra environmental impacts in relation to the plant's handling sheep, nor am I aware of any additional stench coming from sheep. It is the same process that continually takes place in north Belfast — in this case it just happens to involve foot-and-mouth-disease sheep.

I am sorry that Mr Hutchinson feels that perhaps I should have warned him in advance, but this is ongoing every day of the week and every week of the year. Perhaps, with hindsight, it would have been better if I had contacted the North Belfast MLAs to reassure them. However, as this is happening daily, it never occurred to me that such action was necessary.

Mr Berry: I certainly agree with the Minister that there are many decent farmers in south Armagh. I also remind her — though I am sure that she is aware of this — that some farmers have had their bluff called by the Department in the past few days. Can the Minister confirm that there are so-called farmers in south Armagh who have been claiming subsidies for sheep that have not been physically on the farmyards across the area? They have been called "paper sheep". Can the Minister confirm this, and will she and her Department take action in cases where it is found that there are discrepancies between sheep presented for the cull and the numbers that have been claimed for in recent days?

Ms Rodgers: I am pleased to note that Mr Berry agrees with me about the farmers in south Armagh, the vast majority of whom are decent — like farmers in the rest of Northern Ireland — and have been going through a very difficult period in recent years.

With regard to his question about "paper sheep", that matter will become evident only when we come to deal with subsidies. I assure the Member that the payment of subsidies will be dealt with this year in exactly the same way as it has been every other year. Incidentally, where "paper sheep" — "paper whatever" — fraud has been found in the past, it has not been confined to south Armagh. There are rogues everywhere — in every profession, in every walk of life, and in every part of Northern Ireland — unfortunately. Fortunately, however, they are a small minority.

Mr Speaker: I am sure that the Minister was not referring to any hon Members.

Mr Hussey: I refer to the last section of the Minister's statement, where she expresses particular concern —

and rightly so — about the further importation of this virus. Perhaps I am returning to a question that I placed before the Minister on 12 March. She states that she has concerns about the position in Great Britain. However, she says that her

“major concern now relates to the Republic, where there has been a very recent outbreak and where the risk of further cases must be correspondingly high”.

I applaud the Minister for her change in guidelines and for encouraging the tourist industry to return to normality. I know, and the Minister will know, that in the north-west in particular, many tourists will be coming from the Republic of Ireland. Why do we still not have reciprocal arrangements on the land frontiers?

Ms Rodgers: I appreciate Mr Hussey's concerns. However, I do not know what he means by “reciprocal”. I presume he means the same arrangements as in the Republic. We do not have the same situation in Northern Ireland as we have in the Republic, particularly with respect to the security forces, as Mr Hussey will understand.

With regard to ensuring that no animals or products are brought across the border, the policing on the Southern side of the border is not the same as on this side. I reassure Mr Hussey by saying that since we set up the most recent controls, there have been 163 interceptions of the movement of animals by the RUC. Sixty of those interceptions are now being investigated and processed. The fact that you do not see policing does not mean that it is not happening. *[Interruption]*

I think I heard someone saying “I do not believe it.” Clearly, someone does not believe what the RUC is telling me. That is not my problem.

We have put as many officials as possible on border roads, and the RUC is patrolling the area to try to prevent any further infection coming into the Province. However, if farmers in Northern Ireland do not take personal responsibility for their own farms, nothing in this world will keep the virus out. Neither I nor my Department can check every individual in every vehicle that comes into Northern Ireland, nor would I suggest that such policing can be carried out on the other side of the border.

Farmers must not allow people through the farm gate unnecessarily. People who have been on other farms or who have been in contact with other animals must follow the disinfectant procedures. I hope that farmers are doing that. If these procedures are followed we will not have another case.

Mr Fee: I thank the Minister once again for her personal attention in this matter. I cannot recall any Minister in any jurisdiction in these islands who has repeatedly come back to be questioned from the start of a crisis until the end. Her performance has been first-class. I have no doubt that the people of Newry and

Mourne and south Armagh will bear with her and give her absolute support so that this problem can be solved.

When will she publish the type of restrictions that we will be asked to abide by in Newry and Mourne? Can she make the information as widely available as possible, and, if appropriate, can it be put in the various community facilities run by Newry and Mourne District Council?

Ms Rodgers: I appreciate that Mr Fee is anxious to co-operate with the restrictions in Newry and Mourne. I hope tomorrow morning to have a meeting with the MLAs from the entire Newry and Mourne area — South Down and Newry and Armagh — so that we can have discussions and I can explain the position to the Members. My veterinary officer will also be present to respond to any questions. I think that is the best way of dealing with the situation.

Mr McHugh: A Cheann Comhairle, Mr Berry's comments were interesting. Would he prefer that the Minister had the farmers of south Armagh culled, rather than the sheep? The one positive thing about “paper sheep” is that they are easily managed, and they do not contract foot-and-mouth disease. Given that we are likely to have regionalisation in place this week, will the Minister consider the crisis situation building up on farms with regard to day-to-day management?

Mr Speaker: I am having trouble hearing what the Member is asking.

Mr McHugh: Will the Minister consider the crisis situation building up on farms in relation to farm management and the inability to move livestock? The farm management problem is becoming extremely serious. Will the Minister consider the possibility of farm-to-farm sales, as marts are no longer open and do not appear likely to be opening in the medium term? Something will have to be done to alleviate the management crisis taking place on farms at present, and the Minister seems to be reluctant to tackle it.

Ms Rodgers: I hope that Mr McHugh is not condoning “paper sheep”.

With regard to the farm management issue, I am not sure whether he is referring to commercial movements, which I presume he may well be, or welfare movements. I have today been able to further relax the restrictions on movement to deal with good health, husbandry and welfare. That will be welcomed by the farming community, as it is a response to the regular discussions that I continue to have with the unions and the industry.

The farm-to-farm movement referred to by Mr McHugh is under review. I regret that Mr McHugh seems to be somewhat critical that I am not responding properly to those concerns, as that is the most dangerous way of spreading the disease. I will do absolutely nothing — repeat: nothing — to take us back to a situation where we might run the risk of bringing foot-and-mouth disease

into Northern Ireland. That will be my position at all times. My Chief Veterinary Officer advises me that the adjustments that we are making are meeting the welfare needs that have been put to us by the farming community. Other needs have also been put to us, but the view of my veterinary officials is that that would be a very dangerous move to make now, and I do not intend to move until I feel that it is no longer a risk.

Mr Poots: Does the Minister accept that her Department has misled the people of Northern Ireland? The Department claimed that these animals were being moved in sealed trailers. In fact they were moved in articulated tipping lorries with tarpaulins pulled over the top. Those are not sealed units. Those vehicles were driving along the A1, through farms. How were farmers along the A1 supposed to “fortress farm” when the Department was moving sheep from an infected area through their farms?

There is no trade effluent plant within the Duncrue complex. Can the Minister give us guarantees that sewage sludge from Belfast will not be spread over agricultural land? Is she aware that lorries using the Duncrue plant were drawing specified risk material from Ballymena, Dungannon and Newtownards meat plants, and returning to those plants, having been in contact with lorries from the infected area? That was a ludicrous idea. The sheep should have been buried and disposed of in the infected area. The Minister told the Agriculture Committee that cost was one of the factors — it was cheaper to render the sheep than to bury them. Can she confirm that?

11.15 am

Ms Rodgers: I thank Mr Poots for his remarks and questions.

With regard to its being cheaper, that is what I said in response to a question at the Agriculture Committee. I was asked why I was doing this when it would clearly cost more, and I replied simply by saying that actually it is cheaper. I did not for one minute say that we were doing it because it is cheaper. That is slightly twisting what I said.

My officials have assured me that the vehicles carrying sheep carcasses were fluid-proof and safe. I say to Mr Poots that I am somewhat surprised at the number of pseudo- vets in Northern Ireland. I take my advice from the experts, the professional vets, who know what they are about and who are extremely anxious to ensure that this disease does not take hold. They have done an excellent job so far and have worked far beyond the call of duty, particularly in the south Armagh area. I am aware that several vets there, at the early stages of this disease, did not even get home to their beds, so hard were they working. They are the people who know what they are about. When they tell me that it is safe to do something, I take their word for it.

The sheep were in sealed vehicles. They did not move through the farms; they moved along the roads. They did not go through the fields.

Mr Poots: There were farms along the side of the roads.

Ms Rodgers: I will explain to Mr Poots, for he does not seem to quite understand. Fortress farming is at the farm gate. As my vets tell me, the real danger arises when somebody goes onto a farm and is in contact with farm animals. Lorries moving along the road, with carcasses sealed inside, are not going near farm animals or farm land. They are going along the road.

With regard to the specified risk material, I have to admit that I am not quite sure what Mr Poots is talking about. I will have a written reply for him in due course.

Mr Taylor: Foot-and-mouth disease affects all of us in Northern Ireland. It is a major problem, and in no way should any party try to make it a party political issue. I commend the Minister yet again for the way in which she is handling this matter, which is appreciated right across all businesses in Northern Ireland, including the farming industry.

I want to ask the Minister about the antibodies found in sheep in Cooley, County Louth. Does this imply that they had already suffered from foot-and-mouth disease and that the Southern Irish authorities had failed to detect it? I would like to know more about what is behind the emergence of antibodies in sheep in County Louth.

I ask the Minister, although it is not primarily her responsibility, whether, if the good news continues in Northern Ireland and we make progress after Thursday, all Departments, including the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, will be in a position to launch a major publicity campaign to promote Northern Ireland’s agricultural products and its tourist industry?

Ms Rodgers: I thank Mr Taylor for his remarks, with which I absolutely agree. I thank him for making the point that this is not a time to be making party political points or trying to take cheap party political advantage. It is far too serious a situation.

The answer to his first question is yes. This clearly indicates the importance of finalising the cull in that area to ensure that where there is any chance of the infection being present, or having been present, in sheep — and that is the most difficult to discover — the animals are culled as a precaution.

The Executive are considering a publicity campaign. There will be wider issues than those that relate to the agriculture industry. On matters related to agriculture, I have asked the vision group, which was set up to examine the future of agriculture in Northern Ireland and to work out a long-term strategy, to appoint a subcommittee which would look at the implications of what has happened and make an addendum to its report.

As the Member has stated, it is important that we learn lessons from this and look at what we need to do from now on.

Mr Bradley: I compliment the Minister and her team on their tireless efforts to deal with the foot-and-mouth-disease outbreak. The Minister must be the busiest lady in Ireland — she is certainly the busiest politician in the country.

The House will share my hope that we have contained the disease that broke out around Meigh in Armagh and Proleek in Louth. Given the cross-border dimension to the problem, can the Minister say when she will next meet her Southern counterpart at formal North/South Ministerial Council level?

Ms Rodgers: A formal meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council has been arranged for next Friday; it will take place in Dublin. The only issue on the agenda will be foot-and-mouth disease. All related issues will be discussed and decisions will, we hope, be made about how we should proceed.

Mr P Doherty: To what extent has the lorry driver from Banbridge, who brought the sheep to Meigh, co-operated with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development? Is it true, as reported in the media at the weekend, that his lorry stopped at other farms and marts at the time of the Meigh delivery?

Ms Rodgers: I have already put it on record that one of our biggest problems was that we did not have full co-operation from the person — indeed, the persons — concerned. The Member will be aware that the matter is now under investigation and that the driver is being questioned. In the circumstances, it would be entirely inappropriate for me to comment any further.

Mr Paisley Jnr: Members will note the Minister's comments on the proposed anti-disease group. Can she tell us a little about the group? We need to know the who, what, where and when. We hope that the group will be considerably more successful than the anti-disease measures taken heretofore.

Can the Minister tell us what approaches were made to her by people seeking an amnesty, either for themselves or for others? We know what her response was, but we should know who sought the amnesty. There are no cases pending before the courts, no arrests have been made and no prosecutions are ongoing. Can the Minister assure the House that people will be prosecuted to ensure that this sort of thing does not happen to our agriculture industry again?

Ms Rodgers: I was talking about the vision group, and my response to the Member is exactly the same as that which I gave to Mr Taylor. I have asked the vision group to set up a subgroup. I do not know what the Member means by saying that the group must be better than it was in the past. There never was a group working

on foot-and-mouth disease; there was a group considering the future of the agriculture industry and working out a strategy for the future. The report of that group was due on 6 March, but that has been put on hold because of the foot-and-mouth-disease problem. I have asked the group to set up a subgroup to consider the implications of what has happened in the past five weeks and make recommendations. I considered that wise.

The Member may be aware that the only approach that was made to me on the matter of amnesty was made via an ad-hoc committee that was set up in south Armagh. I was able to address some of their concerns, but I made it clear that I would not be prepared to address others. I said that I would not make promises that I could not or would not keep.

Prosecutions will be a matter for the RUC. Investigations are proceeding and I cannot respond on behalf of the RUC as to whether or not prosecutions will take place. However, I assure the Member that the Department will co-operate fully with the RUC, which may lead to people being brought to task for their wrongdoings.

Mr Kennedy: I welcome the Minister's statement. She has outlined this morning that she will move to lift the controls on the Newry and Mourne area as quickly as possible. Nevertheless, she has alarmingly said

"However, that will not be an easy case to win."

Can she expand on that? Farmers and people throughout Newry and Mourne will want to see the restrictions lifted as quickly as possible.

I also welcome the Minister's statement on the issue of the amnesty. However, can she spell out the compensation procedure, which involves an appeal? Who conducts that appeal? Is it genuinely independent? Will it not come under any external pressure to give benefit to those who had been seeking amnesty on other issues?

Ms Rodgers: As regards Mr Kennedy's remarks about Newry and Mourne, I appreciate his concerns as he is an MLA from that area.

When I said that it would not be easy, I was referring to various factors. First, the disease has spread within some European countries already. Secondly, there has been a new case in County Louth subsequent to the one we had in the Meigh area. Finally, there was the discovery of sheep with antibodies. Those issues will make the Commission and the Standing Veterinary Committee nervous when we go to seek a lifting of the ban. Knowing how difficult it was to get regionalisation at this stage, I am not underestimating the difficulties ahead. We may have to wait until the 30-day period following the Proleek outbreak is over. All those things have been conveyed to me as possibilities. I assure Mr Kennedy that I will do everything possible, along with my officials, to ensure that the restriction is lifted on Newry and Mourne as soon as is humanly possible.

With regard to the compensation procedure in the south Armagh area, I will reiterate what I have said publicly. The compensation will be at full market value as assessed by departmental valuers. If farmers are unhappy with that, they have access to one of three named independent valuers. That is the position. It is the same as the position in relation to the original slaughters in the Meigh area and indeed to slaughtering in the UK and the Republic.

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's statement. I asked her a question some weeks ago about the spreading of animal blood on agricultural land. To date, I have not received an answer. Is the practice to be outlawed? If not, can she explain why a farmer in Rosslea told me the other day that the price of a kill has gone up by almost £5 in order to pay for the additional cost of landfill for blood and animal waste?

Ms Rodgers: As regards the first part of Ms Gildernew's question, it is not a risk. It seems to me that landfill might be a commercial issue. If prices rise, it is a commercial issue, and one that I cannot deal with.

11.30 am

Mrs I Robinson: Will the Minister tell the House if her discussions with south Armagh farmers were designed to organise the logistics of the extended cull or to avoid a showdown with IRA/Sinn Féin in the run-up to the elections?

Ms Rodgers: I thank Mrs Robinson for the question, although I do not entirely understand it. I assure the Member that everything I have done since the beginning of this crisis has been with one view in mind — to keep foot-and-mouth disease out of Northern Ireland. I have not had any other consideration at any time. I am pleased that the outcome in south Armagh was that I could proceed with the necessary cull — bearing in mind what Mr Taylor said about the presence of antibodies and my reply to him. My answer to Mrs Robinson's question is that at all times my only consideration was to keep foot-and-mouth disease out of Northern Ireland. So far, with the co-operation of the whole community, including farmers, we together have been successful. I hope to continue along those lines.

Mr Armstrong: I welcome the Minister's relaxation of the movement of livestock under licence. This is due to the vigilant actions of farmers who have maintained fortress farms and Department of Agriculture and Rural Development staff who have manned the border. Everyone draws comfort from each passing day that is free from new cases of foot-and-mouth disease. There can be no relaxation on Northern Ireland's borders with the Republic of Ireland or the rest of the United Kingdom.

Will the Minister tell the House how many sheep were disposed of during the previous week in the cull at the

border? Is she sure that there are no sheep left in that area, lest there be another case of foot-and-mouth disease?

Ms Rodgers: I thank the Member for his question and his obvious concern. With regard to movement under licence, Mr Armstrong was one of the people breaking down my door during the previous week to ensure that that movement was permitted. I am pleased that I have been able to respond to him and others who made those same concerns known to me. I also appreciate his remarks that there can be no relaxation and that we must keep up our guard.

With regard to the final figures, I must say that those numbers are not yet available, because the cull has not been completed. As soon as I have them, I will make them available to Mr Armstrong in writing. I am pleased to say that as far as I know the cull will be completed today in time for regionalisation tomorrow.

Mr Speaker: As there are no further requests for questions, that brings an end to questions to the Minister on her statement. We now move to the motion on the Pig Industry Restructuring (Capital Grant) Scheme.

Mr McGrady: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. You and the Assembly have agreed to the convention that in subject matter debates or questions the Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson of the relevant Committees will have speaking preferences with regard to questions and/or comments. This is done on the understanding that the Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson is speaking on behalf of the Committee. Will you rule to that effect, and will you predetermine in that ruling whether the said Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson is speaking in a personal, party or Committee capacity? If in a capacity other than the last, will you ensure that he or she does not receive precedence?

Mr Speaker: In respect of Committee Chairmen's and Deputy Chairmen's speaking opportunities, there is an element of precedence where there is a relevant Committee and the Chairman or Deputy Chairman indicates that he wishes to speak in that capacity. I sometimes have to balance that with the wishes of party Whips, because occasionally they too have a view on the order of contributors from their parties. In general terms, however, the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman will speak first.

If a Chairman or Deputy Chairman chooses to speak in a personal capacity, he or she does not take precedence. In that respect the Member is quite right.

However, it is recognised that there are occasions when a Chairman or Deputy Chairman may speak on behalf of his Committee but also properly make other remarks. In those circumstances he should indicate which remarks are being made in a personal capacity, for he cannot be called a second time.

PIG INDUSTRY RESTRUCTURING (CAPITAL GRANT) SCHEME

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers): I beg to move

That the Pig Industry Restructuring (Capital Grant) Scheme (Northern Ireland) 2001 (Statutory Rule 2001 No 90) be approved.

Members will need no reminding of the difficulties which the pig industry here has had to endure over the past few years, to say nothing of the current added effects of the foot-and-mouth-disease outbreak. I hope that Members will also need no reminding of the efforts that I have been making to try to secure the introduction of an aid package for pig producers at the earliest possible date. Members will also be aware that the Pig Industry Restructuring Scheme has two elements. The Regulations referred to in the motion relate to the second element for on-goers — that is those people wishing to remain in the industry.

The control provisions needed for on-goers required subordinate legislation, made under two separate pieces of primary legislation. These have different powers and, although the controls are identical, it meant that we had to make two statutory rules — one by negative resolution in the usual way and the other by confirmatory resolution on the part of the Assembly. Both rules are similar in providing for controls on the payment of grant-aid over a two-year period in respect of interest rebates on loans for expenditure incurred in restructuring a pig production business.

Such expenditure can relate to either capital or non-capital, but the primary power to regulate for such payments on capital expenditure requires the rule to be confirmed by the Assembly. It will cease to have effect unless approved by a resolution of the Assembly within 40 days of 30 March, the date on which it came into operation. This rule and the equivalent one for non-capital expenditure provide the necessary legal basis for my Department to approve applications under the on-goers' part of the Pig Industry Restructuring Scheme. This is very important as, although no payment can be made for one year after an application is approved, we must have evidence that interest has been paid to the lending institution, and we wish to be able to make those payments as soon as that anniversary is reached. The confirmation of this rule by the Assembly will ensure that this hurdle does not exist, and I hope that Members can therefore agree to confirm the rule today.

I emphasise that these rules are important, but, essentially, controlled provisions will allow the Pig Industry Restructuring Scheme to benefit pig producers here. Accordingly, I decided that it was not necessary to prepare regulatory impact, human rights or equality impact assessments or to undertake any public consultation. I

invite the Assembly to confirm its approval of the rule identified in the motion.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development (Rev Dr Ian Paisley): I am speaking as Chairperson of the Agriculture Committee, and there will be no gagging of the Chairperson just because minorities in the Committee cannot have their way. Mr McGrady had better get his act together and get the two members from his party in absolute agreement before he comes attacking me in the House.

The great thing about the system here is that nobody can remove the Chairperson of a Committee. The agreement that the Member entered into to keep Nationalists and Republicans in place covers me too. If Members want to remove me they will have great bother doing so. It is ridiculous that petty statements are made because minorities cannot have their way. My Committee, by a majority vote, gives me the right to speak. However, on this matter there is unanimity, so I am speaking for the whole Committee. Of course, sometimes members are not there when decisions are made or they do not even express themselves when decisions are taken.

When the proposal for the Pig Industry Restructuring (Capital Grant) Scheme was brought to the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee on 2 March members questioned a department official on the details. As a result, the Committee was content for the Department to proceed with making the rule that is now before the House.

In reconstructing their pig production business, many farmers — and this is a concern of the Agriculture Committee — face huge capital expenditure costs which can only be met by taking out loans. The restructuring scheme provides for the payment of grants towards the cost of such loans. The scheme is welcome and it provides a lifeline in these difficult times as long as those farmers who seek it are accepted into the scheme.

Figures have been bandied about concerning how many applications were made to the scheme and how many were accepted. The Agriculture and Rural Development Committee has got no confirmation as yet from the Minister on those figures. The Committee is not content with that. It has asked officials from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to attend its meeting on 6 April so that members — and this was a resolution of the whole Committee — can question them to see if this is going to be effectual. Many people want to get into the scheme but some have already been told that they are not accepted. It is important that they are given another chance. It is also important that the ratio of applications to successes, 500:80, is changed and that the pig farmers who are in difficulty can benefit from the scheme.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development (Mr Savage): I welcome the scheme that the Minister has introduced. It is an indication of a vote of confidence from the Department

of Agriculture and Rural Development to the agriculture industry, and especially to the farmers.

Will the Minister give details of the take-up of the scheme that enables pig farmers to leave the industry and will she tell the House if that take-up has been lower than expected? Many telephone calls to me suggest that that was the case, so will the Minister tell the House how much money is left in the kitty and how much money is available for the restructuring of the scheme?

The scheme is UK-wide, and other areas are involved, but surely there was a designated amount of money for Northern Ireland. How much of that money has been used, and what contingency plans are in place for making the remainder available to more pig farmers?

With two experienced politicians — one on each side of me — I have to be careful how I proceed, but I welcome the loans scheme for pig farmers. In these days when the agriculture industry has come through crisis after crisis it is an opportunity for the pig industry to restructure, for the out-goers scheme to be successful, and for those who want to stay in the industry to do so. I congratulate the Minister and I will support her 100% in any way possible.

The agriculture industry must modernise and unless it goes forward as a modern agriculture industry, Northern Ireland cannot compete with its counterparts across the water. People must realise that we are part and parcel of Europe. It is hoped that the Minister will see fit to broaden the outlook of the loan scheme to cover other areas. Time will tell as to the major difficulties that will be faced by the agriculture industry due to foot-and-mouth disease.

I hope that, in time, the Minister will broaden her outlook and take those things on board.

11.45 am

Mr Bradley: I too support the motion. Cattle-related matters have dominated the agriculture agenda, so it is good to know that back at the ranch people were working in the interests of the pig industry, because it is very much part of our history. I will not give into the temptation of rehashing much of what was said about farming debt and about restoring profit to the pig industry. I support the capital grant scheme. As the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee has said, it is long overdue. The on-goers will welcome it, and I thank the Minister for moving this motion this morning.

Mr McHugh: A Cheann Comhairle, the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee agrees that this scheme is overdue. It is also a welcome opportunity for people who previously missed out on the wider scheme. There are many difficulties with funding, and there is the possibility that it may not do what it was intended to do and help farmers. Those involved in the fishing industry have also found that the scheme is so complicated that it is difficult to say whether it will benefit those who are most in need of it in the long term. This is due to a lack

of information and to delays on the part of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in delivering and implementing the schemes.

These are the main problems that farmers face. In this instance, they have to decide if they want to, and need to, get out of the industry. They have not always had the information to allow them to do that. They have to decide if they want to leave the industry permanently, although a son may want to get into the industry in the next few years. These are all very difficult decisions. A farm has to be taken out of the business of pig production completely even if there is a possibility that it may become profitable in the future.

Farmers must decide whether to go for the scheme or to try to have a future as a pig farmer. Whether we have a future as an area that produces pig meat, or we just give in and allow imports, has an impact on the overall economy. Our debt reports have shown that most of the difficulties that farmers faced were beyond and outside the farm gate. That includes the BSE crisis and now foot-and-mouth disease, which may be the deciding factor for many farmers on whether they remain in the industry.

We have covered most of the arguments regarding the 'Restoring Profit for the Beef Producer' report. There are similar arguments in the pig industry, which was very strong in all counties 20 years ago. Most of that industry, certainly from the area that I come from, is no longer there. You could count on one hand the number of people who are involved in pig production in Fermanagh, and a number of years ago every second farm was involved in it. The pig industry now faces the foot-and-mouth disease, and pig farmers must decide whether they have a future.

We are also losing other aspects of farm production such as beef. This is due to the impact of the power of people outside the farm gate — the supermarkets and the processors — and how they deal with farmers. The reports that we published have several recommendations for putting this right. Some of the recommendations point to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's taking a proactive role in helping farmers who remain in the pig industry to have a future. Malton Foods and others have stood firmly against any moves towards strengthening the hand of the individual. That difficulty may be overcome if farmers can remove the fear of trying to stand against large corporate organisations that work for profit, try to stifle all opposition and create a total monopoly over the profit of an industry.

At present, those outside the farm gate have the power. When farmers are making an income of approximately £22 each and everyone else is talking about the massive economic impact in relation to farming, it shows who is making the money and the profit and who is being excluded entirely from this. It is up to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, in particular, to do

its best and to work with the farm groups that want to move to a position of strengthening their base.

I support the motion because it allows progress and allows farmers to go for money at this point. Previously, they were afraid to move because they lacked the information to make a decision.

Mr Kane: The benefits of the Pig Industry Restructuring Scheme and the length of delay can all be measured best and most accurately by the number of producers who have been forced from the industry. I accept that the blame for such delays in the introduction of support lies with the United Kingdom Minister and with Mr Fischler in Brussels. Delay in supporting, during crisis, any of our farming sectors is increasingly becoming the norm. However, for those producers suffering the collapse or manipulation of their markets, this is of little comfort.

The pig industry has, without support from subsidies, endured the rigour of what has often been a very uncertain market for its product. I pay tribute to those who have remained in production against impossible odds. That said, a strategically targeted £400,000 grant at this stage might have a positive impact on those who have managed to remain in production. Further developments involving Government funding for producer co-operatives would have attracted much support, both within the industry and from many members of the Agriculture Committee. In order to bring the price of Northern Irish pork into line with the United Kingdom mainland, a level of financial commitment from Government, however costly in the interim, could prove one of the only alternatives.

Regarding price differentials, I share the view of the producers that explorations of the impact of swine fever and the more extensive downsizing of the pig herd on the mainland are the factors that explain the higher prices for pigs across the water. The Ballymoney fire has had an enormous impact on the prices paid to producers, but so has the procurement of pigs in the Republic. Tie in those factors with the disadvantage of Northern Ireland's greater input costs and the fact that a level playing field of animal welfare Regulations does not exist, and the stage is set for the extinction of the pig industry. United Kingdom pig producers have been forced to accept the stall-and-tether ban in advance of other EU states, which has imposed costs on the industry that it cannot afford in the current circumstances.

This welcome, but late, injection of cash for restructuring the pig industry, involving the development of marketing structures and improving quality, is welcomed by the industry. However, it must be seen in the context of the current difficulties, and I urge the Minister not to rule out the provision of cash to fund a new co-operative initiative in the future.

Mr Poots: The pig industry has faced many difficulties in the past few years, and many farmers find themselves with debts that outstrip their assets. To this end, the on-goers

scheme must be welcomed as a step in the right direction. There are other steps that many of us would like to have seen included. Nonetheless, we welcome the steps that have been taken in the interim.

I have a number of questions arising from this issue. Mr Savage said that there may not have been a full uptake of the on-goers scheme. If that is true, is it possible for money from that scheme to be put towards the out-goers scheme where it appears that there has been a higher take up? I understand that many farmers have applied to the out-goers scheme and have been rejected. I want to question the role of the Department in that.

Farmers had to pay £350 plus VAT to get their animals valued. It has also been claimed that those who applied to the out-goers' scheme were told at meetings held by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development that they should do it on a 10-year basis. Yet the vast majority of those who listened to the Department's advice have had their schemes rejected. What opportunity is there for those people to reapply? Is there any advice that can be given before they go down that road to ensure that they will get finance from the out-goers scheme?

Mr Shannon: Does the Member agree that we do not have the details of how those people who have not been accepted for this scheme can be included in a second phase? Does he agree that it is a problem that farmers who applied for this scheme were told by the Department that they should apply for the full amount of money and, when they did, they were then refused? That is one of the concerns that pig farmers have about this issue.

Mr Poots: I agree.

I know that the Minister is busy with the foot-and-mouth-disease crisis. Believe it or not, we are sympathetic to the Minister. The fact that we ask awkward questions does not mean that we are trying to get at her. However, our constituents are concerned about the issues we are raising on their behalf. There are 500 farmers out there, and 420 of them are not very happy. It would be useful if the Minister could make a statement to the House at some stage on the out-goers scheme. It would be appropriate if the Minister could set out what has happened so far and the way forward as the Department sees it and allow the House the opportunity to ask questions about it.

Ms Rodgers: I would like to thank all Members for their contributions. I understand the concerns that many of them have about this scheme, which was long in gestation.

With regard to Dr Paisley's comments, the applications accepted were based on a UK-wide tendering process. That meant we had to accept the cheapest bids. There could not be any question of regional shares for Northern Ireland, or anywhere else, but I can confirm that the out-goers' bids so far show that Northern Ireland has

received approximately the proportion that we should have, based on sow numbers. That may well not be proportionate to our problem, but it is proportionate to our sow numbers.

Taking Mr Savage's points next, I have already said that we will get our share based on applications to date. There will be a second chance for others in the mark II out-goers scheme. The Member asked me to broaden my mind regarding the loans scheme. I think that my mind has always been pretty broad, but in relation to loans scheme, there is the little matter of the EU state aids regulations.

12.00

With regard to comments made by Mr Savage and Mr McGrady, the next issue is the need for a grant scheme for Northern Ireland pig farmers. I have said many times that I cannot hand money out without EU state aids approval. Although I would like to do that, it would be illegal. As Members will know from my remarks earlier today, I am not prepared to act illegally for the pig farmers or for any other farmers. I thank Mr Bradley for his comments and his support for this scheme.

Mr McHugh raised a number of issues. I accept that the Pig Industry Restructuring Scheme is complicated. That was necessary in order to satisfy the EU that we are not simply handing out money to farmers who might go and increase their pig production, which would be adding to our problems. My officials have tried to help farmers to comply with the scheme and are happy to continue to do so. Mr McHugh's point about co-operatives is noted, but it was merely an observation rather than a question. It has been made in the past by many people, including Mr McHugh.

I fully agree with Mr Kane's comments regarding the delay in approving the restructuring scheme. The delay was both inexcusable and frustrating, both for me as Minister and also for the people who are waiting for it. However, neither Nick Brown nor myself were in the driving seat on this. I have pressed Mr Brown on numerous occasions to exert pressure on the European Commission to speed it up. The other points made by Mr Kane about the cost of stalls and tethers are points that have been made in the past. I have dealt with them before.

I am grateful for Mr Poots's welcome for the restructuring scheme. It is not possible or, indeed, necessary to reallocate cash from the on-goers scheme to out-goers. The budget that we have is the maximum available. Many of the bids were low, thus allowing us to achieve the reductions at a lower price. Mr Shannon asked whether unsuccessful bidders in the out-goers scheme could reapply. The answer is that they can.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Pig Industry Restructuring (Capital Grant) Scheme (Northern Ireland) 2001 (Statutory Rule 2001 No 90) be approved.

COMPANIES (1986 ORDER) (AUDIT EXEMPTION) (AMENDMENT) REGULATIONS

**The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment
(Sir Reg Empey):** I beg to move

That the draft Companies (1986 Order) (Audit Exemption) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 be approved.

We are here today to debate the Regulations that propose to change the existing law on the audit of company accounts. They are made under the powers in article 265 of the Companies (Northern Ireland) Order 1986. The purpose of this proposal is threefold. First, to raise the threshold for audit exemption from its current level of £350,000 to £1 million. We are concerned that the Regulations placed on businesses not be overly burdensome, particularly to our smaller businesses. Hence, the Regulations we are debating today will reduce those burdens.

In the light of consultation by the Department of Trade and Industry in London, we are persuaded that the balance of argument favours moving the turnover threshold for audit to £1 million a year figure as a first step. We are aware that the independent company law review is specifically addressing whether some other, less burdensome form of assurance could replace the full audit for companies with an annual turnover of between £1 million and £4.8 million. That is the maximum turnover figure permitted under European rules. The review will make its final recommendation on this "lighter touch" independent assurance later this year. We have not as yet taken a view on this.

Secondly, the Regulations simplify the law relating to dormant companies — that is, companies which are still on the register but which have had no significant accounting transactions during the period. They dispense with the requirement that dormant companies must pass a special resolution to gain exemption from audit, but they do allow one if 10% or more shareholders so require. The Regulations allow certain payments required of all companies to be made to the Companies Registry while status remains dormant.

Thirdly, the Regulations require that a dormant company acting as an agent for a third party must disclose its agency status in its annual accounts.

There is little doubt that these proposals will be warmly welcomed by the business community as a means of getting rid of burdens and removing unnecessary irritations. I want to emphasise also that the changes reflect a careful assessment of the relative costs and benefits.

It may help if I give some explanation of how we reached our conclusions. Regarding the audit exemption and the background to it, I turn first to the increase in the threshold. The Companies (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 introduced a requirement that all companies should

not only file their accounts with Companies Registry, but that those accounts should be accompanied by a report signed by a registered independent auditor.

On three occasions in the 1980s the Department of Trade and Industry in London consulted on whether the audit requirement should be kept for all companies. On each occasion it was decided to retain the status quo.

The first cautious step was taken in 1995, with the exemption of very small private companies from the audit, while those with turnovers of between £90,000 and £350,000 were given the option of filing a similar report in place of the full audit report. This regime was considered unsatisfactory and was abolished in 1997. The current position is, therefore, that only companies with a turnover of above £350,000 are subject to a full statutory audit.

The typical cost of an audit for a business with a turnover of around £1 million is between £1,000 and £1,500. With regard to the effects of amending the audit Regulations, we estimate that the increase in the threshold to £1 million will enable approximately 3,000 more Northern Ireland companies to take advantage of exemption from audit, leading to annual savings of £3 million to £4.5 million. Research suggests, however, that only half of the companies eligible to take advantage of exemption might be expected to do so. In that case, annual savings would be between £1.5 million and £2.25 million. The important point is that those companies will have a choice to make in the light of their own particular circumstances.

The proposals change neither the existing minority shareholders' safeguard that 10% of shareholders can require an audit, nor the treatment of groups of companies, where a parent or a subsidiary company may take advantage of the exemption only if the total turnover of the group does not exceed the threshold for individual company exemptions. The Regulations also preserve the existing separate regime for charities.

If approved by Assembly Members, the new threshold will apply for financial periods ending two months or more after the Regulations come into operation.

Regarding dormant companies, article 260 of the 1986 Companies Order draws a distinction between those companies which are actively trading and those which are not. We estimated that some 2,000 companies have dormant status — often incorporated to protect a company or brand name, or whose only purpose is to own an asset, such as the freehold of a building. Many dormant companies are in groups and would not otherwise be eligible for audit exemption. In March 1999 the Department of Trade and Industry published a consultative document on the legislative framework for dormant companies, which set out proposals to reduce the costs involved in running a dormant company. A large majority of respondents agreed with the proposals for simplification of the law.

On the proposals concerning agent companies, most respondents agreed that where a dormant company acted as an agent for another company, some action was needed to make it clear to a third party.

It is certainly legal to act in this way, but it can be confusing or misleading to a third party. Just over half agreed with the proposal that companies acting as agents should be required to declare their agency status in an annual report.

I hope that it is clear from what I have said that the consultation by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment on these proposals has led to a package of measures which are practical and appropriate, which relieve unnecessary burdens on smaller companies and which have the broad support of the business community. I can confirm that in my view the amendments to the 1986 Order proposed in these Regulations are compatible with the European Convention on Human Rights.

In our modern economy, small companies are increasingly the vehicles of sustained economic growth and job creation. It is therefore vital that we reduce unnecessary burdens on them. The Regulations are a significant step in that direction. They help to make an appropriate and equitable regulatory framework for business.

I commend the Regulations to the Assembly.

Dr McDonnell: I welcome the Minister's statement. The pertinent phrase was in the last sentence or two — "reduce unnecessary burdens". The proposals that he has outlined make sense, and a serious or legal audit should only be required where it is absolutely necessary. In my view, a full audit is certainly not essential for small businesses with a turnover of less than £1 million. Such a company will still have to do its accounts, but the problem has been the legalities and obligations imposed on it. The Minister mentioned a figure of between £1,000 and £1,500 as a possible audit figure. However, in my experience, the cost can be between £3,000 and £4,000 by the time all the documents are completed and all the Regulations that go along with the audit are complied with. The protection still exists through the suggestion that 10% of a minority shareholding can seek an audit if it is required or if there is any suggestion of underhand dealing.

The Regulations will remove a threat, burden and responsibility from small companies and allow them to get on with doing what they do best. It is up to them to meet the bookkeeping requirements. Companies will still have a choice. The Regulations proposed by the Minister are very commendable, and I hope that in the future we can look at methods of further reducing the burden on small businesses.

As the Minister has rightly suggested, even in the large US economy, growth is taking place in the small business sector, for example, where 10-person companies

are expanding to become 20-person companies. The growth is not taking place at multinational level because those companies have grown almost as much as they can. This is a good start, but I urge the Minister not to leave this where he has left it today. Rather he should look at other technical means of reducing the burdens of bureaucracy and bookkeeping and the other stresses on small businesses, which are the lifeblood of our economy.

Mr Wells: I broadly welcome the proposals made by the Minister. If he manages during his tenure of office to cut through much of the red tape that burdens small companies in Northern Ireland, he will have done something which will make a contribution to the economic development of the Province and provide new jobs.

I well remember starting out in life as an accountant. I realised that I found it as interesting as being an undertaker and that it was not for me. After three or four months in — I will not name the company —

Mr Paisley Jnr: He got sacked.

Mr Wells: I certainly was not sacked. I discovered that I was not a number cruncher, so I gave up.

12.15 pm

During that time — 25 years ago — I carried out audits at very small companies. Although Sir Reg Empey has said that the average cost of an audit for a small company is between £1,000 and £1,500, that is not a true picture. I recall the amount of work and staff time that companies had to devote to having the paperwork ready for our arrival. Therefore the real cost, including that of staff time, is much higher than £1,500.

I welcome the fact that the limit for a compulsory audit has been raised from £350,000 to £1 million. This could free 3,000 companies from the burden of an audit. The Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee brought departmental officials to one of its meetings and questioned them closely about this, and we were satisfied that this was a good move. I am also content because I do not feel that an audit system for a small company works. The number of cases of skulduggery unveiled through an audit is very small. I asked the officials to tell me when a company was last prosecuted as a result of the findings of an auditor, and nobody could remember. Therefore, the audit of small companies seems to be a totally unnecessary piece of red tape which is burdening those companies and achieving nothing. I also welcome the removal of the need for a special exemption motion for dormant companies.

Representatives of small businesses, in a recent presentation to the Assembly, said that the two factors that drag down the expansion of small companies in Northern Ireland are red tape and bank charges. If the Minister can make a dent in those two problems, he will achieve real growth in this economy because, as the hon Member for South Belfast, Dr McDonnell said, the real

potential for increased employment in the Province is through small companies.

According to a fascinating statistic in the United States, the country's top 100 companies have had a net gain of nil in employment there. The huge surge in economic growth in the United States has been almost entirely in the field of small companies with fewer than 500 staff. In that country, one of the main reasons for that has been the cutting of red tape and the ending of unnecessary bureaucracy. If this is a step in the right direction, it is very much to be welcomed.

Sir Reg Empey: I have listened carefully to hon Members' comments, and I thank them. This is a deregulatory measure. I appreciate that much of what the Government ask the private sector to do constitutes a direct charge on those companies because time is money. However, it is essential that we find out certain pieces of information in order to provide a service, though we have been searching the entire system for ways to reduce the burden. I take the point that Dr McDonnell and Mr Wells made about the costs involved. The figures quoted here are, I suppose, the sort of invoice figure that you might expect, but, as Members have said, they do not take into account management time and preparation et cetera.

I would not want the impression to be given that we are trying to relieve companies of the requirement to produce accounts, because companies need to know what is happening for their own benefit. In many cases lenders require certain information, and it may very well be that lenders will require audits. If that is the case, it is a matter for an individual company, but some small companies do not require this audit and there has been no significant evidence of large-scale fraud. The proposal is, therefore, appropriate.

Members may ask why we do not go further. We may go further, but we will wait for the outcome of the review. Mr Wells also referred to bank charges. I attended a recent seminar in the Long Gallery at which these matters were highlighted. I am very conscious of them and, at the moment, we are considering approaching the banks. One gentleman who was at that seminar earns a living by saving his clients from losing money through bank charges. This would not be possible if overcharging did not take place. How else could he make a living out of saving companies' money?

Something is not quite right, and that will have to be followed up vigorously. As Mr Wells said, any charge on a company is money directly off the bottom line; it is money that is not available to reinvest or available for research or any form of development. Therefore we are obliged to try to find ways of simplifying matters and assisting these companies. This would be far better than having to go through a complicated grant procedure that involves significant costs to the public and even further

regulation. If we can make things more cost- effective, everybody will benefit. I hope these Regulations will make a good start.

If I have not responded to all relevant questions, I will pick them up later. I appreciate the support voiced by the Committee and other hon Members for these measures which I hope will make some small contribution to the added efficiency of many of our small businesses.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the draft Companies (1986 Order) (Audit Exemption) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 be approved.

ASSEMBLY COMMISSIONER FOR STANDARDS

The Chairperson of the Committee on Standards and Privileges (Mr McClelland): I beg to move

That this Assembly approves the findings and conclusions contained in the first report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges — ‘Inquiry into the Possible Appointment of an Assembly Commissioner for Standards’ (01/00/R) — and calls for all appropriate arrangements to be put in place by the Assembly Commission, the Speaker’s Office and other relevant Assembly Committees to ensure implementation of the recommendations.

As Chairperson of the Committee on Standards and Privileges, I am pleased to bring before the Assembly the Committee’s first report, which contains the findings and conclusions stemming from its inquiry into the possible appointment of an Assembly commissioner for standards. I am particularly pleased that the report enjoys the unanimous support of the Committee, and I am grateful to the members of the Committee for their assistance, hard work and contribution. I also thank the various witnesses, most of whom were from legislatures throughout the British Isles, who attended the Committee to provide oral evidence.

Following its establishment on 15 December 1999, the Committee received several complaints from Assembly Members about the conduct of other Members. The Committee carried out initial investigations of these complaints, but it soon became apparent that the investigation process had certain limitations and disadvantages. It was unclear what constituted a complaints investigation, and there was no provision for detailed investigations. The Committee was not empowered to decide what further action the Assembly should take when a complaint was upheld. Despite its powers to investigate, the fact that the Committee had no clear sanctions or penalties to recommend to the Assembly in that event tended to limit its operation and effectiveness.

It was against this background that in June 2000 the Committee resolved to undertake an inquiry into the possible appointment of an Assembly commissioner for standards who would be responsible for investigating complaints against Members of the Assembly. In the course of this inquiry the Committee considered and reported on the role and responsibilities of an Assembly commissioner for standards; his or her relationship with the Committee; the arrangements for reporting the findings of the Committee to the Assembly; the powers of, and sanctions that could be recommended by, the Committee; and the impact of the Committee’s findings on the Standing Orders of the Assembly.

In conducting the inquiry, the Committee heard evidence from a wide range of individuals from Parliaments, Assemblies and other organisations with experience and expertise in parliamentary standards and privileges and the parliamentary investigation of complaints.

The Committee took evidence from, among others, representatives of the House of Commons Select Committee on Standards and Privileges, the Committee on Standards in Public Life, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, the Welsh Assembly's Independent Adviser on Standards of Conduct, the Scottish Parliament's Standards Committee and the Dáil Éireann's Select Committee on Members' Interests. The Committee also examined several systems for dealing with complaints against parliamentarians in a wide range of Parliaments, Assemblies, and legislatures in different countries. I shall outline the Committee's key findings and conclusions in each of the areas that I mentioned. Some of my Committee Colleagues will speak in greater detail about the issues arising from the inquiry.

The fundamental issue considered by the Committee was whether it would be appropriate, in principle and in practice, to recommend to the Assembly that a commissioner for standards should be appointed to investigate complaints against Members. The Committee was mindful of the problems and difficulties that it had encountered while investigating the small number of complaints against Members that were referred to it. The evidence given by several witnesses reinforced those concerns.

Most witnesses were strongly in favour of having some kind of system to investigate complaints against Members that was independent of the Committee on Standards and Privileges. One reason put forward was that it was important for the credibility of the Committee on Standards and Privileges and of the Northern Ireland Assembly to ensure that complaints against Members were investigated — and seen to be investigated — in a fair, unbiased and non-party-political way. It was also felt that the establishment of an independent investigative process would increase public confidence in the commitment of the Committee and the Assembly to ensuring the maintenance of high levels of probity on the part of Members in conducting their affairs as public representatives, inside and outside the Assembly.

The Committee concluded that it should recommend to the Assembly that a commissioner for standards be appointed to investigate complaints against Members. If the Assembly endorses the Committee's recommendation that there should be a commissioner for standards, we shall approach the Assembly Commission to discuss the process of recruiting a commissioner and decide on the terms and conditions of employment associated with such an appointment. I urge the Commission to work closely with the Committee to make an appointment as soon as possible.

Having determined the need for a commissioner for standards, the Committee felt that the primary role of the commissioner should be to investigate complaints against Members. It is anticipated that the type of complaints that would be referred to the commissioner for standards would routinely include matters relating to alleged breach of privilege; specific complaints about

Members in relation to the registration or declaration of interests; and matters relating to the conduct of Assembly Members, including specific complaints in relation to alleged breaches of the Assembly's code of conduct. To ensure the effectiveness of the commissioner, the Committee agreed that, if necessary, it would use its powers under Standing Orders to send for persons, papers and records.

The Committee, in considering the role and responsibility of a commissioner for standards, focused directly on the importance of having an independent means of investigating complaints against Members. That is crucial if Members are to be sure that complaints against them will be investigated in an impartial and non-party-political way. The Committee also considered that the appointment of a commissioner to investigate complaints would promote the credibility and integrity of the investigative process, the Committee on Standards and Privileges and the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The Committee decided that the limited role proposed for the Assembly commissioner for standards should be subject to review in the light of experience. However, the Committee did not rule out an extension of the commissioner's role and responsibilities to include making recommendations about sanctions and penalties, advising and guiding Members on the registration and declaration of interests, and compiling, maintaining and making accessible the Register of Members' Interests.

12.30 pm

The Committee spent a considerable time examining the relationship between the commissioner and the Committee on Standards and Privileges. The Committee wished to strike a balance between the independence of the commissioner and the authority of the Committee and, ultimately, the Assembly.

Key witnesses all stressed the importance of the commissioner's being, and being seen to be, independent from the Committee and the Assembly when investigating complaints. That independence was seen to be crucial to enable the commissioner to investigate complaints in an unbiased and fair manner. That is also important to promote public confidence in the investigative process.

In taking evidence, the Committee also noted that several individuals who investigate complaints in other Parliaments and Assemblies had resigned directorships and memberships of political parties, or other affiliations, if that was considered to prejudice their perceived impartiality. The Committee intends to discuss that matter in detail with the Assembly Commission, if the Assembly agrees that a commissioner for standards should be appointed.

The Committee agreed that the commissioner would report his or her findings on all complaints to the Committee on Standards and Privileges. The commissioner's

report would also be submitted to the Assembly under cover of a report from the Committee.

As part of its inquiry, the Committee also considered the extent of the powers of the Committee and the sanctions or penalties that it can recommend to the Assembly. The Committee was concerned that, although it had some power to investigate Members, there was a lack of clarity on what, if any, sanctions or penalties the Committee could recommend that the Assembly impose on a Member if a complaint were upheld by the Committee.

The Committee was clear that in serious cases it is essential that it should be able to recommend the imposition of some kind of sanction or penalty. If that is not the case, the process of investigating and reporting on complaints will be of limited value and the concept and practice of the Assembly's regulating its affairs will seem to be ineffective.

The issue of penalties and sanctions against Members is referred to in section 43(4) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, and there is provision in the Act for those powers to be included in the Assembly's Standing Orders. Unfortunately that has not yet been done. The Committee is therefore strongly of the view that Standing Orders and, indeed, the guide to the rules relating to the conduct of Members should be amended to empower the Committee to recommend the imposition of a limited range of sanctions or penalties in cases where a serious complaint is upheld against a Member.

If Standing Orders were amended to incorporate the provisions of the Act, the Committee would be in a position, when required, to recommend to the Assembly that a Member be excluded from proceedings and/or that his or her rights and privileges be withdrawn for that period of exclusion. A recommendation of that nature from the Committee would be made if a Member failed to register an interest, financial or otherwise, failed to declare an interest before taking part in proceedings relating to such an interest or breached the rules of advocacy.

In proposing these changes to the Assembly's Standing Orders, the Committee acknowledges the need to discuss the issues raised with the Committee on Procedures. I encourage members of that Committee to support our desire to put in place arrangements that will ensure implementation of my Committee's recommendations.

The Committee believes that the recommendations in this report will go a long way towards demonstrating to our electorate the commitment of the Committee on Standards and Privileges and the Assembly itself to the highest level of probity on the part of Members in conducting their business inside and outside the Assembly. I sincerely hope that the report will receive widespread support in the Assembly.

Finally, I thank the Clerk to the Committee, who is ill at this time, the replacement Clerk and the staff for their

hard work and valuable support in helping the Committee to present the report. I invite Members to support the motion.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee on Standards and Privileges (Mr Beggs): The Committee agreed unanimously that there is a need to appoint an Assembly commissioner for standards. The Committee also made recommendations on the role of the commissioner and the way that role would interact with the Committee to maintain standards and public confidence in the Assembly.

I express my appreciation to the witnesses who appeared before the Committee, and I would like to particularly thank the Clerk of the Committee, Mr John Torney, and his staff for their work throughout the evidence-gathering period. I valued their guidance and assistance, and I hope that John will make a full and speedy recovery.

At the outset, the Committee on Standards and Privileges received a stream of mostly minor unsubstantiated complaints against Members. Most of those were dealt with speedily. It became apparent that there would be practical difficulties if the Committee had to gather evidence for a more serious case. There is a need for clarification and certainty about how detailed investigations should be carried out and what sanctions the Committee could recommend.

It is essential that we progress and improve our system of regulation. I will be concentrating on the relationship between the commissioner and the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

It is important to strike a balance between the independence of the commissioner, when investigating and reporting to the Committee, and the authority of the Committee, and indeed, the Northern Ireland Assembly, in making the final judgement and determining the appropriate penalty.

Those who investigate complaints must be unbiased and fair and must also be perceived to be so. The Committee believes that it would not be possible for a Member to carry out the role of commissioner because of the political or other relevant affiliations that might bring their impartiality into question.

We propose that, in order to maintain public confidence in the process, all complaints be passed to the Clerk of the Committee on Standards and Privileges in writing. The Clerk would log the complaints, pass them to the commissioner for consideration and then advise the Committee, which would have no role in sifting complaints.

In a case where the commissioner determines, on the basis of a preliminary investigation, that the complaint is of a trivial nature, he will advise the Committee that no further action is required. That will minimise the

possible abuse of the system by political opponents and maintain maximum public confidence.

Members agreed that the Committee on Standards and Privileges should not question decisions by the commissioner in trivial cases.

When the commissioner determines that a detailed investigation is required, we would request that the Clerk and the Committee be advised of the likely timescale and the progress that is being made. Several witnesses recommended that, in order to protect the Member under scrutiny, the Committee, and the commissioner, would submit no intermediate reports because such information could lead to ill-informed press speculation about the final outcome.

The commissioner will submit the completed report to the Committee and, having given the commissioner independence in making the report, we recommend that the authority to make a judgement remains with the Committee and the Northern Ireland Assembly. As in other places, the Committee should be empowered to request additional information from the commissioner and to question additional witnesses should it decide that that is necessary. The Committee will then assume responsibility for publishing the commissioner's report, as well as its covering report.

Lessons may be learned in the future and the Committee has, therefore, included in its report the need to review practices. I recommend the Committee's report as the best practice that we are aware of, considering our limited experience to date. I urge Members to support the motion, and the relevant Committees and the Assembly Commission to progress this matter as quickly as possible.

Mr Wells: This is the Committee's first report and if it is implemented it will serve to underscore the need for Assembly Members to ensure the highest level of probity in conducting their affairs inside and outside the Chamber. There have been remarkably few complaints made to the Committee since it was set up.

I visited the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament over the past couple of months. The people there were amazed when they heard how few complaints had been levelled against Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

In the Scottish Parliament complaints are running at about one a week, and in the Welsh Assembly the relevant Committee is kept very busy dealing with complaints. However, there have only been five or six minor complaints in the entire lifespan of the Northern Ireland Assembly and none have occurred in the past 18 months. When preparing for this speech I tried to think why this was. I can only think that it is because of the calming influence of the DUP in the Assembly — it ensures that everyone is extremely well behaved. There is absolutely no doubt that had the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly

had the benefit of the sanctifying influence of Dr Paisley and William McCrea, they too would be very well behaved.

The report has the unanimous support of the Committee on Standards and Privileges. We are grateful to all the witnesses — including those from the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly — for their evidence. I thank the Committee staff for their assistance in the inquiry. We should place on record our debt of gratitude to John Torney, who, unfortunately, has been ill recently. I understand that he is recovering well. The document is a testimony to his efforts. My Colleague Mr Beggs explained the relationship between the commissioner and the Committee. My comments will concentrate briefly on the proposed arrangements for reporting the findings of the Committee to the Assembly following investigations by the commissioner for standards.

Following the commissioner's investigation into a complaint, the findings and recommendations will be presented to the Committee through the Clerk of Standards. The Committee will report that either the outcome of the case is trivial in nature and requires only preliminary investigation — indeed, that has been the situation with all the complaints that have been made to date — or that the results are such that the complaint requires a detailed investigation. In the case of trivial complaints the Committee will report the commissioner's findings to the Assembly. That will be accompanied by a statement confirming that the Committee accepts the commissioner's recommendation and that no further action is required.

In the case of complaints that require detailed investigation, the commissioner's report will be submitted to the Assembly under cover of a report from the Committee on Standards and Privileges. The Committee's covering report will detail its consideration of the commissioner's findings and conclusions, its decision on whether the Committee has upheld the complaint and a recommendation to the Assembly on the appropriate sanction or penalty.

It is essential that the highest standards of probity be maintained in the Assembly. They must also be seen to be maintained. Therefore an independent commissioner is vital. There are those who have argued that, because of the level of complaints, perhaps we do not need a commissioner. The presence of a commissioner should ensure that there will be few complaints. That person must be someone of the highest possible standing — someone who is totally independent and impartial. The appointment will underscore people's confidence in the Assembly. I believe that we will continue to have a situation where there will be little cause for complaint.

I urge Members to support the motion in the name of Mr McClelland. It has the unanimous support of members of the Committee. It has been a smoothly run and amicable Committee, and we agreed on almost every point of the report. I highly recommend it to the

House, and I hope that it will have the unanimous support of everyone here today.

Mr McNamee: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom cuidiú leis an rún agus mo thacaíocht a thabhairt don tuairisc ó Choiste Caighdeán agus Pribhléidí an Tionóil. I too endorse the report and support the motion from the Committee on Standards and Privileges. Members have outlined the broad role of the Committee. It deals with matters of privilege for Assembly Members, the work of the Clerk of Standards and the arrangements for compiling and maintaining the Register of Members' Interests. The Committee's role also involves the consideration of complaints relating to the registration and declaration of Members' interests, the conduct or misconduct of Members, and breaches of the code of conduct for Members.

When the Committee on Standards and Privileges considered the small number of complaints referred to it, it became clear that there was no clear outline, guideline or procedure on how the Committee should proceed to investigate a complaint. The investigative powers of the Committee were not clearly defined.

12.45 pm

I will focus on the range of sanctions which may be applied to a Member if a complaint is made against him. Neither the Standing Orders of the Assembly nor the Guide to the Rules Relating to the Conduct of Members empowers the Committee to recommend a sanction if a complaint is made against a Member. Standing Orders enable the Committee to investigate complaints which have been referred to it and to summon Members to respond to the complaint.

Section 43 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 allows for Standing Orders to include sanctions against Members, but our Standing Orders do not, at present, make provision for such action. The Act allows for Standing Orders to make provision for the exclusion of Members from proceedings and the withdrawal of their rights and privileges during exclusion.

In considering this issue together with the role of the Assembly commissioner, how he would work with the Committee and how the Committee would report to the Assembly, we heard very useful evidence from other sources. These included representatives from the National Assembly for Wales and the Scottish Parliament. Their evidence was particularly useful because, fairly recently, these institutions have also had to deal with the issue of standards and privileges and the investigation of complaints.

We also had witnesses from Dáil Éireann, the Select Committee on Members' Interests and the House of Commons. We heard particularly useful evidence from Elizabeth Filkin, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards in the House of Commons.

Having considered the range of evidence, the Committee concluded that, in its report to the Assembly, it should recommend that the Standing Orders be amended — in particular, Standing Order 57 — to enable the Committee, when a complaint has been investigated by the commissioner and the commissioner has reported, to recommend to the Assembly that sanctions be imposed. The Committee also recommended that these sanctions should be particularly applicable in cases where there has been an allegation that a Member has failed to register certain interests, or to declare such interests while taking part in proceedings, and where a Member is alleged to have breached the rule of advocacy or the Code of Conduct for Members. It would also be necessary to amend the Guide to the Rules Relating to the Conduct of Members to accommodate the Committee's recommendations to the Assembly in cases where sanctions may be imposed. Therefore, I recommend that the Assembly support the motion and accept the report.

I thank, in particular, the Committee staff and those who provided us with very useful evidence. Most witnesses came to visit us in Parliament Buildings, thus making it much more convenient. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr McCarthy: As a member of the Committee on Standards and Privileges, I am pleased to support the motion. As has been said, the aim is to ensure the highest levels of integrity in the conduct of affairs both inside and outside the Assembly. It is unfortunately the case that in recent years there have been several instances of behaviour by members of other bodies, namely the House of Commons and Dáil Éireann, which have come to the attention of the general public for all the wrong reasons. This Assembly is a new authority, and now is the time to say that wrongdoing is totally unacceptable.

The highest standards are expected of public representatives, and rightly so. We must put in place a system whereby wrongdoing by Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly will not be tolerated, and neither will unwarranted allegations of wrongdoing. It is regrettable that we have to consider a system of sanctions and penalties, while at the same time hoping that they will never have to be implemented.

I accept that in the event of our agreeing to the appointment of a commissioner, it is necessary to give some teeth to a revised Code of Conduct. Putting all these arrangements in place will need much further work, not least by way of consultation with other interested parties. It is important that the Assembly Commission and other Assembly Committees, such as the Committee on Procedures, are actively involved in this consultation process. I urge those interested parties to work with our Committee to secure the full implementation of our recommendation.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the staff of the Committee for their very dedicated work in helping

members to draw up this report. I thank our Chairman, Deputy Chairman and the members of the Committee for working harmoniously together. I also thank the range of witnesses who contributed to our work. In conclusion, I thank the Clerk of the Committee, Mr John Torney, who has been taken unwell recently. I join with others to wish John a speedy recovery. I recommend that Members support the motion.

Mr McClelland: I am very pleased with the response to the report, and I thank everyone who contributed to the debate. The Committee decided that in presenting the report to the Assembly, it would attempt to cover the key sections of the report among members in some depth, and so demonstrate the cross-party support for the recommendations. In particular, I thank my Committee Colleagues for their contribution and support during the debate.

My Deputy Chairman, Mr Roy Beggs, gave us a very helpful explanation of how a commissioner for standards would work alongside the Committee on Standards and Privileges. He quite rightly stressed the crucial need for the commissioner to be able to investigate complaints in an unbiased and fair way, and so to ensure public confidence in the Committee's investigative process.

Mr Wells commented on the small number of complaints. I hope that he is not signalling in any way that that will change in the near future. He spoke on, among other things, the arrangements for reporting the findings of the Committee following an investigation by the commissioner. In doing so, he helpfully re-emphasised the role of the Assembly in the self-regulation of Members.

I want to say a brief word about the opportunity or facility to appeal against a decision reached by the Assembly. The Committee considered this issue at the time of the inquiry and agreed that, at present, the best system for the Assembly is to be self-regulatory and operate self-discipline, as the Members are best able to weigh up and evaluate the gravity of the offence. The Committee believes that it is the responsibility of Members to maintain the good name and integrity of the Assembly.

Mr McNamee covered on behalf of the Committee, and quite rightly stressed, the important issue of the powers or sanctions that can be recommended by the Committee to the Assembly in the event of a complaint against a Member being upheld. It is important to the operational effectiveness of the commissioner and the Committee that provision is made for appropriate sanctions and penalties to be made by the Assembly. This point was again taken up by Mr McCarthy, who helpfully highlighted the impact of the Committee's findings on Standing Orders and the Guide to the Rules Relating to the Conduct of Members. This shows the importance of the Committee on Standards and Privileges needing to work with other Assembly Committees. I repeat the words of my Colleagues and urge the Committee on

Procedures to assist us in the implementation of our recommendations.

Finally, I want again to thank everyone who contributed to the debate and commend the motion to the Assembly.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly approves the findings and conclusions contained in the first report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges — 'Inquiry into the Possible Appointment of an Assembly Commissioner for Standards' (01/00/R) — and calls for all appropriate arrangements to be put in place by the Assembly Commission, the Speaker's Office and other relevant Assembly Committees to ensure implementation of the recommendations.

The sitting was suspended at 12.56 pm.

On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —

Oral Answers to Questions

2.30 pm

Mr Speaker: Question, 11 standing in the name of Mr Hilditch, has been withdrawn.

OFFICE OF FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Foot-and-Mouth Disease

1. **Mr McHugh** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister whether they have asked the North/South Ministerial Council to consider the introduction of legislation to control the importation of animals from Great Britain during the current outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease. (AQO 1255/00)

The First Minister (Mr Trimble): No. The North/South Ministerial Council has no locus in relation to legislation. However, one of the first protective measures introduced by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when the disease was confirmed in Great Britain was to ban the import into Northern Ireland of all live susceptible animals from Great Britain.

That was implemented on 21 February 2001 and banned the import of cattle, pigs, sheep and goats. It was extended on 28 February to include horses. The ban on all these animals will stay in place while the disease risk from such imports remains high.

In addition to this internal United Kingdom ban, the European Union imposed a ban on the export of all live susceptible animals and their products to the whole of the United Kingdom. None of these animals or products can, therefore, legally enter the Republic of Ireland directly.

A meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council's agriculture sector is planned for 6 April to consider the issues of mutual concern arising from the foot-and-mouth-disease outbreak in order to supplement the obvious ongoing co-operation. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is satisfied that it has adequate and sufficient powers to control the importation of animals from Great Britain during the outbreak of the disease.

Mr McHugh: At the outset of the foot-and-mouth-disease crisis, while the Agriculture Minister was able to do something, she told us that she was powerless to stop the movement of livestock at that point, or even earlier when we first knew of the outbreak in Britain. Considering this is an all-Ireland situation, I feel that the North/South

Ministerial Council should have a role in both examining this trend to address it for the future and stopping the movement of livestock from Britain to this island.

The First Minister: The simple reason for that is that a ban was imposed as soon as the disease was detected. However, let us also be realistic about this. We are dealing with the British Isles and a common travel area. Within that area — absent of a health risk — there is no limitation on travel. Let us also remember that this problem arose in Armagh and in Louth solely because of the illegal animal trade and smuggling that characterises that area.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development (Mr Savage): Do the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister agree that there is an urgent need to raise animal health standards in the Republic of Ireland to ensure that its standards of animal health and welfare are at least equal to those of the industry in Northern Ireland? Will they further agree that much greater efforts must now be placed on the control and eradication of the smuggling of livestock between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and vice versa?

The First Minister: I agree entirely. One thing we may find coming out of this unhappy episode is that there will now be a much greater realisation, particularly in the Republic of Ireland, of the need to deal with the illegal trade and to raise the measures as regards controls and safeguards to the same standards as those that exist here.

Mr B Hutchinson: The North/South Ministerial Council has no legislative powers in either jurisdiction. Can the First Minister tell the House if there have been discussions about the prevention of the illegal movement of animals around the country? What measures, both North and South, will be taken to prevent it?

The First Minister: Over the course of the previous couple of weeks the Member will have seen that there has been close, practical co-operation between the Departments of Agriculture here and in the Republic of Ireland. The issue will come up for discussion at the North/South Ministerial Council meeting on 6 April. One encouraging matter has been the response in the Republic of Ireland to this, particularly the suggestions I have seen from the Irish Government on how to tighten up on the illegal trade and increase the level of safeguards there. That is promising. It would be convenient if we could co-ordinate the measures that are taken in regard to the illegal trade through a mechanism such as that.

Discussions with United States Administration

2. **Mr McGrady** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister what follow-up plans are

to be set in place following the recent discussions with the new Administration of the United States of America.
(AQO 1252/00)

The Deputy First Minister (Mr Mallon): During our recent visit we had an opportunity to meet with President Bush, Secretary of State Colin Powell and Members of Congress. We provided a briefing on progress made on the Programme for Government and the outstanding political issues still to be resolved. Follow-up action will be undertaken at official level via the Northern Ireland Bureau with a view to ensuring that co-operative linkages between Northern Ireland Departments and their USA counterparts are developed in ways that promote a practical understanding of our overall objectives.

Mr McGrady: Does the Deputy First Minister agree with me that it is important that these discussions move on from political matters to those of inward investment and how to assist Northern Ireland's economy? Is it the intention of the First and Deputy First Ministers, perhaps through the Northern Ireland Bureau in Washington, to make further detailed arrangements for liaison on the subject of inward investment, which was the norm in previous presidencies?

The Deputy First Minister: The Member will be aware that the First Minister and I engaged in what we regarded as an onerous but successful roadshow in the United States some time ago. As part of the briefing that we gave on the implementation of the Programme for Government to the United States Administration we emphasised the continuing importance of American investment as a critical factor in securing progress towards a peaceful, inclusive and prosperous society. The importance of establishing strong working linkages with the United States Department of Commerce was registered. It was fully accepted by those senior members of the Administration to whom we spoke.

During informal — and I stress the word “informal” — discussions in the United States I was made aware of possible plans for an American investment conference in the autumn organised by non-governmental groups. I will probably have more information about that later this week. I will keep the Member and the House informed.

Mr Paisley Jnr: Will the Deputy First Minister confirm to the House the total cost of this visit to the United States of America to the taxpayer? Will he list the officials who accompanied the First Minister and himself and confirm that on this occasion the Deputy First Minister and the First Minister did not fall out over policing? Is that a sign that the First Minister has now caved in to the Deputy First Minister's position on policing?

The Deputy First Minister: I thank the Member for the rather predictable question. The cost of the official visit has not yet been tabulated or formulated, but no doubt, the hon Member will put down a written question when it is. The information will then be provided.

With regard to the second part of the Member's question, three officials accompanied the First Minister, three officials accompanied the Deputy First Minister and we were both accompanied by a senior official from our Department.

The matter of policing was discussed; it was discussed during a detailed meeting with Secretary of State Colin Powell. As the Member rightly surmised, there was no falling-out over this issue. In relation to the part of the question that he did not ask, I was delighted to see his party leader and his Colleague Peter Robinson present in the same room as us all with the President of the United States and, I assume, pursuing the same objectives.

Mr Davis: Can the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister confirm that, during discussion with the new American Administration, they stressed the need to proscribe the dissident Republican terrorist organisations and to take effective action to inhibit terrorist fundraising in the United States of America?

The Deputy First Minister: I can confirm that the First Minister raised this issue in the meeting with Secretary of State Colin Powell. There was a very positive response, and I can further confirm that there was no fallout over that issue.

Senior Citizens

3. **Mr Dallat** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to ensure that senior citizens are afforded equality under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement and to give an assurance that the appalling attacks on them will be addressed as a major issue for the Assembly.
(AQO 1240/00)

The First Minister: Attacks on vulnerable senior citizens are cowardly. They must be deplored by all. The Executive and Assembly will wish to give every possible support to the RUC and the courts in making those responsible for such attacks answerable to the law for their crimes. Arising from the Belfast Agreement, a statutory equality duty was introduced under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 which requires public authorities, in carrying out their functions, to have regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity. Under this new equality duty one of the categories to be considered is persons of different age, which, of course, includes senior citizens.

Mr Dallat: I welcome the assurances given by the First Minister, which will come as a source of comfort to all those senior citizens who have been attacked throughout Northern Ireland. Can the First Minister go further and assure the House that there is an inter-agency approach to protecting the rights of senior citizens? Finally, can he assure the House that greater recognition will be given to the role of the voluntary bodies, such as St Vincent de Paul, Help the Aged and the Salvation

Army, which play a vital role in ensuring that senior citizens really have equality?

The First Minister: I thank the Member for his question, and I note that there have been some very unpleasant incidents in his constituency which are, no doubt, very much upon his mind. On the question of an inter-agency approach among voluntary agencies, we recognise the essential work carried out by the voluntary and community sector in several areas, particularly in work with, and for, the elderly. The Executive financially support a number of organisations which assist the elderly, including Help the Aged and St Vincent de Paul.

Mr J Wilson: Does the First Minister agree that the disgraceful assaults on senior citizens are symptomatic of disregard for elderly people in general? Will he assure me that he will start to redress the problem by giving a commitment to provision for elderly people in the single equality Bill?

The First Minister: The single equality Bill will draw together measures with regard to anti-discrimination and the equality duty under section 75. I am not sure that anything that we would do under that heading will deal directly with the issue of assaults on the elderly. That is essentially a police issue. Of course, if there are ways in which we can deal with that latter point, we will.

Mr Shannon: I note the First Minister's comments. Does he agree that our senior citizens have made an excellent contribution to society? How will his office address equality in relation to ageism and the fact that at 60 or 65 years of age senior citizens still have a very valuable contribution to make to society?

The First Minister: We will be going out to consultation on the single equality Bill quite soon. The Member will see that there are a number of issues raised in that which we can deal with. The substantive point he makes is one with which I would agree. Although people may retire at the age of 60 or 65, many of them are still capable of making a very significant contribution to society, and we want to encourage that.

2.45 pm

Agriculture Industry: Support from Executive EU Office

4. **Mr Bradley** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to outline the level of service and support that the Northern Ireland agriculture industry can expect from the office of the Northern Ireland Executive in Brussels. (AQO 1195/00)

The Deputy First Minister: The Brussels office will provide support for the Executive as a whole, but providing support and other services to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development as she helps the Northern Ireland agriculture industry through a difficult time will be a high priority in the coming months. The head of the office has now taken up post in Brussels.

Mr Bradley: Does the Deputy First Minister accept that, because of the special significance of the common agricultural policy for farming and rural development, it is essential that we have agricultural expertise in the Northern Ireland office in Brussels?

The Deputy First Minister: Staff in the Brussels office will work for all Departments in accordance with priorities that will be agreed by the Departments. The special significance of EU agricultural policy means that agriculture will have a high priority in the Brussels office. It is a matter for the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to set out policy in that area and to determine the nature of its negotiations.

The staff of the Brussels office, working closely with officials from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, will develop contacts with agriculture experts in UKRep and in the Commission and pursue relevant lines of enquiry. Should the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development decide that it needs a dedicated agriculture expert in the Brussels office, we would discuss how that need would be met.

Mr Poots: Can the Deputy First Minister say how much it has cost to set up the Brussels office? How has the project exceeded its budget by so much?

The Deputy First Minister: The project has overrun because of internal regulations there and the need to refurbish the office. I understand that the office will be finally and fully open by the end of April. The notional cost was £450,000, which will, of course, be increased by the cost of fitting out the office in such a way that it can offer a proper service to the Executive and to Members of the Assembly who might require assistance while in Brussels, and promote Northern Ireland interests in the European Union.

Mr Ford: The Deputy First Minister referred to liaison between the Northern Ireland Executive office in Brussels and agriculture experts in UKRep. How will the Northern Ireland view be put directly to the Commission, without being mediated through UKRep, when Great Britain's interests are not the same as ours?

The Deputy First Minister: Our message will be conveyed directly by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in Great Britain. We need to know about what is coming on-stream and about how we might bring benefits to Northern Ireland agriculture. That will be the benefit of having both the office and the expertise of UKRep.

Single Equality Bill

5. **Mrs Courtney** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to make a statement on plans for consultation on a single equality Bill. (AQO 1251/00)

The First Minister: The Programme for Government contains a commitment to initiate consultation on a single equality Bill. The preliminary consultation will be on the scope and content of the Bill and will be open and wide-ranging. Our office is planning to hold seminars to discuss what should be included in the Bill, in addition to inviting written comment. Consideration will be given to holding additional meetings for interested groups.

Mrs Courtney: Will there be consultation on the draft Bill itself?

The First Minister: Yes. Our timetable for the Bill includes two consultations. The first consultation on the scope and content of the Bill will begin soon and will be open and wide-ranging. A second consultation, focusing on the draft Bill itself, will be held in 2002. After we settle the scope and range of matters, a draft Bill will be published and people will be able to consult on the detail, as well as on the general issues. An equality impact assessment will be carried out on the draft Bill and will be incorporated, along with a regulatory impact assessment, in that consultation.

Mr McNamee: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. We were led to expect the consultation to begin in early spring. Can the Minister be more specific in identifying a date when the consultation will take place, and also give the reasons for the delay in beginning consultations?

The First Minister: There are several complex issues to be considered in this matter. It is our intention to go out to consultation as soon as possible. We had hoped that that would begin in April, but the Member will notice that I have been careful not to give a commitment on that matter. There are other factors floating around — I think “floating around” is the appropriate term — that may cause problems.

Dr Birnie: Will the First Minister confirm that in deciding upon the scope of this equality Bill in Northern Ireland, consideration will be given to the wider UK context of equality provision, especially in the light of recent relevant court cases?

The First Minister: Some of the matters that we will have to consider actually come from outside the UK, such as the Equal Treatment Directive and the Race Directive. In dealing with those, as with any other fundamental matter of human rights, one has to ensure that there is no geographical discrimination within the state, and the state is the United Kingdom. The point was graphically raised several years ago in a case brought by a person who was employed in this Building, a Mr Dudgeon, in which the European Courts held that there has to be equality of treatment within the state.

Unemployment Differentials (TSN Action Plans)

6. **Ms Hanna** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister what account is taken of unem-

ployment differentials in the development and implementation of New TSN action plans. (AQO 1247/00)

The Deputy First Minister: The Programme for Government explicitly recognises the importance of tackling community differentials in unemployment. That is consistent with the Good Friday Agreement, which commits us to the goal of progressively eliminating the differential in unemployment rates between the two communities. New TSN is the key Executive policy for addressing social deprivation. It aims to tackle social need and social exclusion by targeting efforts and available resources within existing departmental programmes towards people, groups and areas in greatest social need.

New TSN aims to contribute to the reduction of inequalities among different sections of society by consistently addressing the problems and people who are objectively shown to be in greatest social need. New TSN should, over time, contribute to the erosion of those inequalities. However, it may be necessary to agree objective measures of inequality as a matter of urgency, before any measurement is used in fulfilment of the Good Friday Agreement. For example, we will develop a new up-to-date assessment of the geographical distribution of deprivation.

In addition, as our New TSN publication, ‘Making It Work’, makes clear, the Equality Commission has been empowered to advise on the community differential in unemployment. It has also been empowered to advise Government on setting benchmark measures for the future reduction of the unemployment differential, involving bringing together representatives of employers, employees, the political parties and other interests. The devolved Administration is committed to working co-operatively with the Equality Commission in all of those tasks.

Ms Hanna: How will progress on New TSN be monitored?

The Deputy First Minister: Departments are implementing the actions and objections in their action plans as published in ‘Making It Work’, and the Executive Committee will be keeping a very close watch on progress on the New TSN action plans across all Departments. Ministers will provide up-to-date progress reports. Every Department will thoroughly review its action plan each year and update it to take account of progress, building in new targets to follow those that have been completed.

Each year the Executive will publish a New TSN annual report so that people will be able to see for themselves what has been achieved during each year. There will be an evaluation of New TSN that will report in 2002 and that will include the involvement of external experts. The outcome of the evaluation will feed into future thinking about New TSN.

Mrs Nelis: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Deputy First Minister for his detailed and

reassuring response. If such differential is addressed, can the Deputy First Minister assure the House that it will take into account and be directed at the areas of traditional high unemployment which have a worse differential than any other area in the Six Counties — the north-west and the Foyle constituency?

The Deputy First Minister: New TSN is not only targeted at people, areas or groups in society that transcend urban boundaries and electoral ward boundaries. We must ensure that a pen picture is created for each area. If that were done on an electoral ward basis, that pen picture would be especially useful for all of us.

In areas that do not suffer from social deprivation there are pockets and parts that are in need, and they must be dealt with. The Executive await the report that has been commissioned from Mike Noble. It is hoped that when those benchmarks are applied we will get proper pen pictures for the whole of the North of Ireland and all the areas that require TSN will be identified — including those pockets in areas that do not have this problem.

I understand what the Member is saying about Derry — and it also applies to Belfast — and about the areas where urban regeneration is taking place. This is useful not as a means to end the problem but as a start to getting to grips with it.

Mr Hussey: I have listened very carefully to the Deputy First Minister's replies. Can he confirm to the House that much work remains to be done to ascertain a truly accurate understanding of the labour market in Northern Ireland? Further to that, will he tell the House the true reason for the limited unemployment differentials that still exist?

The Deputy First Minister: A great amount of work has still to be done, and the Executive have to devise the best ways in which to tackle that problem. We all recognise that there is no one path to it, but that there are various aspects of the problem given the people, areas and groups in society to which it applies. Most important of all — as with any problem — we must recognise that there is a problem and that it has to be dealt with. This is not to be a matter of debate for the Assembly or elsewhere, but it is a problem that has to be dealt with if we are ever going to build the type of stable society that we wish for.

Commissioner for Children

7. **Mr Armstrong** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister whether consultation was undertaken with the Government and other devolved Administrations when formulating policy on the appointment of a commissioner for children. (AQO 1200/00)

The First Minister: A comprehensive consultation process on the issues of a children's commissioner and a

strategy for children is currently under way. As part of that process officials are liaising with the Government at Westminster and the other devolved Administrations to gather information on best practice in those jurisdictions and elsewhere.

Mr Armstrong: Is the First Minister aware that Scotland and Wales have also moved to appoint a children's commissioner. Given the opportunity that presents itself for the exchange of knowledge and information, will he assure the House that close working relationships will be established with children's commissioners in other parts of the United Kingdom?

3.00 pm

The First Minister: As part of the consultation process on the proposal for a children's commissioner for Northern Ireland, we are already in discussion with the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales about arrangements there. The commissioner will be independent of Government, so it will be a matter for him or her to develop working relationships with commissioners in other jurisdictions. I would be amazed if they did not wish to do that as a matter of priority.

Mr Ervine: Does the First Minister share the belief that there should be a requirement for the commissioner to be proactive and have the capacity to direct the security services to deal with circumstances where there is a belief that children are not being properly dealt with?

Mr Speaker: I am sure that the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister will respond to that question. The time is up.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr Speaker: Question 13, standing in the name of Mr Hilditch, has been withdrawn.

Belfast-Bangor Railway

1. **Mr McFarland** asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline when the Bangor rail line will be relaid. (AQO 1229/00)

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Campbell): Translink has advised me that the site works for the relaying of the Belfast-Bangor railway line are due to commence on 6 August 2001, with full completion of the project due by 22 December 2001. The work will entail the relaying of some 23 miles of track, representing investment of the order of almost £15 million. It is another step towards the achievement of the consolidation option for the rail network outlined in the railways task force interim report and for which the Assembly agreed funding in December 2000.

(Mr Deputy Speaker [Sir John Gorman] in the Chair)

Mr McFarland: I thank the Minister for his most welcome answer. He will know that the Bangor line is the flagship of new rail commuter arrangements for the Belfast metropolitan area with new rails, new trains, a new station and new park-and-ride facilities. Why is there such a row between the Bangor Chamber of Commerce and Translink over the use of the Abbey Street car park as a park-and-ride facility — a row that may blight the opening of the new station on Thursday?

Mr Campbell: I understand that there are some difficulties, but I am unaware of the precise detail of any problems that have arisen with Bangor Chamber of Commerce. However, I am told that the work will start as scheduled. I will undertake, as a result of what Mr McFarland has said, to investigate whether any delay will arise as a result of the problems he has just outlined.

Dr McDonnell: Does the Department for Regional Development intend to do something about a light rail system in and around Belfast to relieve congestion and the various defects in the public transport system? In the absence of a light rail system, is there a possibility of upgrading the existing system, or doing whatever it takes to provide a more adequate public transport system in the city?

Mr Campbell: The issue of light rail and other shifts of modal transportation are being discussed as part of the regional transportation strategy, which, as the Member will know, we hope to introduce to the Assembly in the next three or four months.

Issues such as the light rail system, or any advanced transportation system that presently does not exist in the Belfast metropolitan area, will be considered as part of the strategy. However, I am sure that the Member would not expect me to pre-empt the outcome of the transportation strategy.

I had a very useful meeting last Friday — the first with many of those involved — about the development of the strategy. The issues raised by the Member will form one of many strands that will be examined as a result of the developing transportation strategy throughout Northern Ireland.

Mrs E Bell: Following Mr McFarland's question regarding the Bangor line, I welcome the Minister's statement on the commencement of the work. Can he assure me that, as well as talking to the Chamber of Commerce, passengers and residents of the area will be advised about the commencement and what is happening throughout the relaying of the line?

Mr Campbell: I give that undertaking. Translink anticipates that the work can be concentrated into a short period of time through the use of a special relay train. The work will be carried out during a 20-week period.

During that period, single-line operation will be required from Monday to Friday and the line will be closed each Saturday and Sunday. Translink will be issuing a revised timetable during the period of single-line operation. I will undertake to ensure that local residents are consulted in advance of any of these changes.

Unadopted Roads and Services (Prospect Area, Carrickfergus)

2. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister for Regional Development to advise if the Roads Service will be appointing consultants and subcontractors to upgrade the unadopted roads and services in the Prospect area of Carrickfergus and to detail when the improvements will take place.
(AQO 1234/00)

Mr Campbell: As I mentioned in answer to the Member's question on 5 March, my Department's Roads Service issued a formal notice giving the developer of the Prospect area of Carrickfergus 28 days to commence the work necessary to bring the roads up to adoption standard. That period expired on 15 March and as the developer did not respond, the Roads Service moved quickly to appoint a contractor to undertake the necessary remedial work. Our contractor has been on site for about one week and the work should be completed by the end of April. The cost will be recovered from the developer's bond.

Mr Beggs: I welcome the Minister's answer. I was not aware of that when I placed the question two weeks ago. Does the Minister agree that the Roads Service, which is under his departmental control, has been slow in the past to bring developers to account to ensure that roads and services are brought up to the required standard? Can he assure me that the Roads Service will press the needs of residents rather than be perceived to be reluctant to draw down developer's bonds and thus upgrade the roads and services that local residents require?

Mr Campbell: I understand the frustrations, particularly when there is an inordinately long period of time for the developer to respond. The statutory position is that the responsibility for constructing roads and sewers in new developments lies with developers. The Private Streets (Northern Ireland) Order 1980 gives my Department the right to take action when developers fail to fulfil this obligation. Roads Service practice is to make every effort possible to persuade developers to meet their responsibilities voluntarily. However, as a last resort my Department is certainly prepared to use its statutory powers, as has been demonstrated in the case of the Prospect development.

Mr Gibson: Is the Minister still confident that the various programmes to upgrade the Maiden City to Aghnacloy section of the trans-European route are on schedule? Is funding guaranteed so that the Strabane bypass, and others, can be assured over the next three years?

Mr Campbell: I thank my hon Friend for his question and for the way in which he was able to weave that matter into the question.

I wish I were in a position to guarantee funding for these schemes. However, I understand that the Minister of Finance and Personnel may throw light on some of these schemes very shortly. I assure the Member that I am doing everything in my power to ensure that the finance required by my Department to carry out priority road schemes in the major works preparation pool is received so that we can build all of the roads, including those he has referred to.

Mr R Hutchinson: I am almost tempted to ask about the A8 to Larne, but I will not do so.

Can the Minister assure the House that all will be done to ensure that road and housing developments will be adopted as quickly as possible? This is a problem not just in Carrickfergus but in several new developments throughout Northern Ireland.

Mr Campbell: I assure the Member that despite the delays that unfortunately have become a feature in some areas of Northern Ireland, my Department's Roads Service is doing all it can to ensure that developers fulfil their obligations. Where developers do not do so, the Department will take action against them similar to that outlined previously with regard to Carrickfergus. If other developers default, we will take the same necessary action.

Road Improvements (Comber Area): Vesting of Land

3. **Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister for Regional Development to list the areas where land has been vested for road improvements in the Comber area in the past two years. (AQO 1224/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service has vested no land for road improvements in the Comber area in the past two years. However, it is in the process of vesting land for stage 2 of the Comber bypass scheme as well as realigning 500m of the A22 Killinchy road at Flowdam.

Mrs I Robinson: Can the Minister assure me that the Comber bypass will go ahead regardless of the outcome of the planning application, which included the Comber bypass?

Mr Campbell: The Comber bypass, as in so many of these instances, is one of a number of schemes where I require the necessary resources to ensure that not only do they begin but that they are completed.

The hon Member referred to a recent planning application — the result of which was announced last Friday — which referred to a residential neighbourhood development and included the bypass and a new junction to accommodate the traffic generated by the

proposal. Planning Services' notice of opinion to refuse that housing development covered only that particular version of the bypass. However, my Department already holds a valid planning approval for the original version, so the Comber bypass scheme is not affected by the recent planning announcement.

Mr Taylor: The decision taken by the Department of the Environment to reject the planning application in respect of the Riverside development in Comber was regrettable and deplorable. The project would have built a bypass without cost to the public purse. Will the Minister ensure that, irrespective of that deplorable decision, the Comber bypass will proceed in accordance with the previous schedule? Will he fight to secure the funds that are now necessary, owing to the rejection of the planning application?

3.15 pm

Mr Campbell: It is good to see the Member back in the House again. I shall take all necessary steps to ensure that I have the resources to construct each of the schemes in the major works preparation pool. I pay no less attention to the Comber bypass than I do to other road schemes. I know that if I were to mention all of those schemes, Members would add more to the list.

I shall make whatever bids and representations are necessary to ensure that the Comber bypass proceeds.

Mr McCarthy: The Minister mentioned the A22 Killinchy road at Flowdam. In view of the fact that money was taken from a project to provide a much needed footpath in Kircubbin some years ago and that the Flowdam project shows no signs of coming to fruition, will the money be returned to the budget and used to provide a much needed footpath in Kircubbin?

Mr Campbell: I cannot comment immediately on the issue of funding for a footpath that was, as the Member said, withdrawn some years ago. However, I undertake to investigate that matter.

The procedures for vesting the land required for the minor works scheme to realign 500m of the A22 Killinchy road at Flowdam have begun. An area of 1.68 hectares will be vested.

Housing (Brownfield Sites)

4. **Mr S Wilson** asked the Minister for Regional Development, in relation to the draft regional strategic framework for Northern Ireland, 'Shaping Our Future', to outline the basis on which recommendations were made to build a percentage of new homes on brownfield sites. (AQO 1254/00)

Mr Campbell: The draft regional strategic framework, which was the subject of a public examination in 1999, set targets for the share of residential development to be located in existing urban areas to reduce greenfield

extensions. The targets up to 2010 were 55% for the Belfast metropolitan area and 40% for Londonderry and each regional town. The targets were set in comparison with a 60% target for England by 2008 and in the knowledge that 55% brownfield development was being achieved in some cities in England. The local targets also recognised the fact that Northern Ireland is less urbanised than many other regions of the United Kingdom.

The panel that reported on the public examination recommended a minimum brownfield target of 40% for Northern Ireland but said that more challenging targets should be set for individual settlements using the area plan process, which would, in turn, be informed by urban capacity studies. In recent discussions on the final draft of the regional development strategy, the Regional Development Committee expressed serious concern that the minimum regional target for brownfield housing development is too low. I am convinced that there is a compelling case for setting a more challenging and ambitious target, which will support the continuing efforts to regenerate our towns and cities. I reassure the House that, in setting the most appropriate target for brownfield development in the regional development strategy, I will take seriously the concerns expressed by the Regional Development Committee and other Members.

Mr S Wilson: I welcome the Minister's statement, but does he not agree that the 40% target as it now stands is ridiculously low? Given that no urban capacity has as yet been completed, does he not agree that to have publicly set such a target is wrong and dangerous, insofar as it will lead to more and more pressure on greenfield sites? Does he agree — and perhaps he will look at the figure again — that there will be a substantial increase in the proportion of building to be carried out on brownfield sites and that it will be the equivalent of that set for the rest of the United Kingdom?

Mr Campbell: Several Members have expressed this view, and I share it. In relation to the establishment of a figure, part of the difficulty is that — whether it be 40%, 50%, 60% or more — it almost inevitably becomes the base line against which developers and the wider community expect all development to be set. I am reluctant to be drawn into a hard-and-fast figure from which there will be no deviation. To repeat what I said about examining the figure, I want to see a more ambitious target being set. I will not be drawn into a precise figure, but I know the Regional Development Committee is in the process of expressing a view. I am acquainted with that view, and I will take it, and the views expressed by my hon Friend and others, into account when that time comes with the regional development strategy.

Mr O'Neill: Does the Minister agree that the setting of such development targets in Northern Ireland is more difficult than it would be in England? In particular, does he agree that the difference between the urban area of

Belfast and the rural area is significant and that the requirement for them to be treated separately is greater?

I understand and welcome his comments about the urban development capacity and the limits which should be imposed on it in the Belfast city area, but I am most concerned about the figure being too restrictive. We do not have the brownfield capacity in rural areas in Northern Ireland.

Mr Campbell: If the tenor of the Member's question is the distinctiveness between the Belfast metropolitan area and the rest of largely rural Northern Ireland, then I readily concur. We must establish a figure which is ambitious but also realistic. We are in the process of determining that figure. We will decide what is appropriate when the Regional Development Committee has had an opportunity to examine the matter and has passed its views to me. It will have to be appropriate both for rural Northern Ireland and for the urban centre that is the Greater Belfast area.

Mr Irvine: Does the Minister agree that we are entitled to be disquieted when he now rejects a figure which was offered to strategic planning by his Department? Does he accept the reality that the higher he sets the figure for brownfield build, the more he creates an ethos? Does he also accept that, in turn, it will be in the minds of the developers that they have to adjust to the circumstances of the new ethos which the Minister himself created?

Mr Campbell: Perhaps the Member did not hear the reference in the response. I will repeat it so that it will be absolutely clear. I am convinced that there is a compelling case for setting a more challenging and ambitious target which will support the continuing efforts to regenerate and breathe new life into our cities and towns. I have not come to a conclusion as to what the figure should be. I am not indicating a predetermined outcome, rather I am indicating what I am looking at. I am awaiting the definitive response of the Regional Development Committee, and I will then come to a conclusion which will be brought before the Assembly within a matter of a few months.

Toome Bypass

5. **Mr McLaughlin** asked the Minister for Regional Development to give an update on the proposed Toome bypass project following his recent announcement that the sale of Belfast harbour will not proceed.

(AQO 1211/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service is continuing to make good progress on the Toome bypass scheme. In particular, both the environmental assessment and planning stages of the scheme have been completed. One objection has been received to the notice of intention to make a vesting order, which was advertised in February 2001. The Roads Service is seeking to

resolve this objection with the relevant landowner. A geotechnical contractor has completed approximately 70% of the ground investigations on the site. We have appointed Ove Arup & Partners, who are consultants of international standing, as project managers for the scheme. Contractors have been invited to apply for inclusion in a restricted list of contractors who will be asked to tender for the design and construct contract.

My decision not to proceed with the sale of the port of Belfast will not directly impact on this scheme. With regard to funding, the indicative allocations made available to my Department are not sufficient to fund all of the schemes in the major works preparation pool. I have, however, made very strong bids to the Executive programme funds for the Toome bypass and other schemes. I am hopeful that I shall be successful with these bids.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for the comprehensive detail in his reply. However, I was hoping that he would indicate what impact the decision about the Belfast harbour estate has had on the prioritisation of projects. We have already heard reference in earlier questions to other very worthy and relevant projects. We would like reassurance that the Toome bypass project will continue to receive top priority.

Mr Campbell: The issue of the possible sale of the Port of Belfast has been in the public domain for a number of years. I understand that in the year 1999-2000, public expenditure in Northern Ireland was planned on the basis of a £70 million receipt from the sale of the port. As it did not sell, the impact was borne in that year by reducing expenditure across Northern Ireland programmes generally. Expenditure plans for future years, which have been approved by the Assembly, include most of the funding for the Chancellor's initiative schemes, including the Toome bypass, and do not depend on any such receipt.

Mr Kane: If the Minister is successful in obtaining funding for several schemes in the major works preparation pool, when will he be in a position to make announcements about other schemes in the pool?

Mr Campbell: I thank the Member for his question, which is almost predicated upon positive news. I hope for positive news.

I cannot predict events, but, if I am successful, I hope to develop schemes that have been debated at Question Time, during Adjournment debates and in correspondence with Members and MPs. Sometimes MPs do not correspond with me to make requests, but raise issues through the media — more of that later. If there is a response, I hope to move very quickly on several schemes.

3.30 pm

Rev Robert Coulter: Has the Minister considered the possibility of a private finance initiative, namely a toll system, for the Toome bypass? Since there is an

alternative route for those who do not wish to pay a toll, does he agree that this is an ideal opportunity to test such proposals?

Mr Campbell: I agree that in the foreseeable future there will be opportunities for the private sector to play a role in major infrastructural investments in Northern Ireland. The Member will be aware that in the past three weeks I paid a visit to the eastern seaboard of the United States where I investigated that very possibility. I hope that it will not be necessary to choose this option for the Toome bypass and that I will be in a position to announce that we are proceeding with this scheme. We could then examine the possibility of private sector finance for other much needed schemes in Northern Ireland.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 3, standing in the name of Mr Arthur Doherty, has been transferred to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, and a written response will be given. Question 8, in the name of Mr Close, has been transferred to the Minister of Finance and Personnel, and he will receive a written answer. Question 18, in the name of Mr Byrne, will also be responded to in writing; it has been transferred to the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

Irish Hare

4. **Mr Poots** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail his proposals to provide greater protection for the Irish hare. (AQO 1210/00)

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Foster): I n October 2000 I launched a species action plan for the Irish hare. The action plan will be implemented by a partnership, which will include the Ulster Wildlife Trust, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and my Department's Environment and Heritage Service. The plan deals with the decline, over the past three decades, in the number of hares in Northern Ireland. The action points in the plan includes the completion of a repeat survey of hares. The Environment and Heritage Service will commission this work once the current restrictions caused by the foot-and-mouth-disease outbreak have been lifted. When I have assessed the repeat survey and the impact of the other three measures in the species action plan, I will consider what further steps, if any, need to be taken.

Mr Poots: Does the Minister agree that it is unacceptable to the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland that the catching of hares, an endangered species, still takes place? Hares are taken to contained sites, chased by greyhounds that happen to have muzzles on them, and are not necessarily returned to the places from where they were caught in the first instance. Given

that the Department is granting licences for this practice, the hare population is continuing to decrease.

Mr Foster: My Department has powers under the Game Laws (Amendment) Act 1951 to issue permits to capture hares from the wild for hare coursing. Recent legal advice has confirmed that the Department might be acting unlawfully if it were to adopt a blanket policy of not granting these permits. The repeat survey and assessment of other protection measures will create an opportunity to re-examine this matter.

In the meantime, I recognise that issuing permits to take hares for coursing is often perceived to be inconsistent with the action plan. Therefore, although this other work is under way, I will ask officials to re-examine the evidence to determine the impact of netting hares on that animal's conservation status.

Tree Preservation Orders

5. **Mr Wells** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (a) the number of requests made to the Planning Service in the past five years to apply tree preservation orders to protect trees under threat and (b) the number of tree preservation orders made in that period.

(AQO 1198/00)

Mr Foster: My Department does not maintain central records of such requests. The Planning Service's headquarters is responsible for processing tree preservation orders to protect trees under threat. However, these originate mainly as a result of a recommendation from divisional planning offices, and I am advised by officials that the majority of these requests are made without any prompting from the public. Over the past five years the Planning Service's headquarters has received 98 recommendations for orders to be made. A total of 68 orders were made during this period.

Mr Wells: Does the Minister accept that urgent action must be taken to protect trees, particularly in urban areas? The public is fed up with the devastation caused by property developers who move in, cut down trees and then lodge their planning applications. Unless something is done soon, many of the best examples of urban forestry and single trees throughout this Province will be destroyed. It is time that the Minister's Department took action.

Mr Foster: This question is important and has been asked on many occasions. As I previously reported to the Assembly, I am aware of weaknesses in the legislation, and I am considering a range of proposals for strengthening it. These proposals were originally contained in the consultation paper issued by my Department on changes to planning legislation in general. They included increases in fines and the automatic replacement of protected trees which had been removed or destroyed without consent. As a result of representations made to

me on this subject I have also asked officials to consider whether further changes are needed. I hope to introduce this legislation by way of a planning amendment Bill in the next session of the Assembly.

Mr A Doherty: The percentage figures quoted for tree and woodland cover in Northern Ireland are appallingly low. Does the Minister agree that this unsatisfactory situation will not be reversed solely by more stringent conservation or preservation measures?

On the contrary, a more proactive approach must be adopted. Will the Minister assure us that his Department and other relevant Departments will jointly promote a vigorous campaign of woodland development? This campaign must include reasonable and adequate compensation or incentives to farmers and other landowners.

Mr Foster: I can assure Mr Doherty that we are very much aware of the lack of tree cover in Northern Ireland. We are thinking in terms of preservation, as that is very important. The possible cost to the Department in compensation paid in respect of a tree preservation order is also a material consideration which my Department will take into account before making an order. It is important that a balance is struck between the interests of tree protection and the interests of taxpayers. My officials will be reviewing the compensation provisions in the forthcoming planning amendment Bill.

Mr Armstrong: Can the Minister advise of the specialist circumstances in which a tree preservation order is issued? Is the Minister satisfied that the current enforcement powers are adequate? If not, will he consider improvements to those powers to ensure that our trees enjoy the best possible protection, especially in urban areas such as Newtownabbey?

Mr Foster: We are concerned about the lack of tree cover and the preservation of trees. My Department has a statutory duty in relation to trees. Where it is considered expedient to do so, the Planning Service may place a tree preservation order on trees because of their amenity value.

Articles 64 and 65 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 give the Department discretionary powers to make tree preservation orders for a number of purposes including that of the protection of woodland areas.

A tree preservation order simply prohibits the cutting down, topping or lopping of any protected trees without the Department's consent. My Department may not decide to apply a tree preservation order if the health and condition of the trees do not merit their protection; if they are not considered to make a significant contribution to the amenity of an area; or if the trees considered to be under threat can be adequately protected by conditions attached to a planning approval.

Mr McHugh: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. In relation to urban areas, is there an impact,

perhaps for other Departments, for buildings close to trees, preserved trees in particular instances, and parks where there is concreting close to trees? Is there another way around orders to remove trees from the immediate area?

Mr Foster: Again cognisance is taken of where trees are situated. The objective of a tree preservation order is to retain and protect the character of an area in which woodlands, individual trees and groups of trees contribute to the visual amenity. They are also used to retain and protect the existing structure and diversity of woodlands, particularly where they offer protection to wildlife habitats, and to inform new development proposals that may have an impact on areas protected by an order.

Pollution (Larne Lough)

6. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of the Environment if he has expressed his concern to the Department for Regional Development regarding the pollution that is being caused in Larne Lough as a result of continuing developments in the Islandmagee, Ballycarry and Whitehead areas, where the existing sewage treatment works is overloaded. (AQO 1233/00)

Mr Foster: Officials from the Environment and Heritage Service of my Department have been in discussions with the Water Service of the Department for Regional Development about the sewerage infrastructure serving the Islandmagee area. In particular, concerns have been expressed about discharges from the Ballystrudder waste water treatment works. I understand that the Water Service has hired consultants to report on the future provision of sewage treatment for the Islandmagee area.

Pending completion of that report, the Water Service plans to deal with the primary sewage at Ballystrudder by pumping it to the Ballycarry works for secondary treatment. Effluent from the Whitehead area is discharged into the Irish Sea rather than into Larne Lough. The treatment works at Ballycarry performs well and is not considered to be overloaded. The Environment and Heritage Service will seek to ensure through the planning consultation process, and through the regulation of discharges from the Water Service's waste water treatment works, that future development does not proceed in the absence of an appropriate infrastructure. The Water Service is consulted about the water and sewerage aspects of relevant planning applications.

Mr Beggs: The Minister will be aware that Larne Lough is an area of special scientific interest and that Swan Island in particular is a special protection area. Does he accept, given those designations, that every effort should be made to ensure that the facilities to deal with sewage are adequate to prevent pollution? Will he make a statement on the current water quality in Larne Lough, a tidal lough with a restricted movement of waters in and out.

Mr Foster: We are very concerned about the quality of waters wherever they may be. However, as far as Larne Lough is concerned, the Environment and Heritage Service is currently classifying waters under the Northern Ireland estuarine and coastal waters classification scheme.

That work is not complete, so a definitive assessment of the water quality in Larne Lough cannot be given at this time. However, last year's data from the estuarine and coastal waters monitoring programme demonstrates that Larne Lough meets at least the mandatory bacteriological standards of the EU's Bathing Water Directive. That provides an indication of the water quality, although I emphasise that Larne Lough is not a designated bathing water site.

Road Accidents

7. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of the Environment to state how his recent promotional campaign to reduce death on the roads is being assessed and what plans he has to reinforce the message that speeding is the no.1 cause of accidents, particularly among young people. (AQO 1238/00)

Mr Foster: My Department's road safety promotion campaigns seek to encourage positive road user attitudes and behaviour. The campaigns' effectiveness is measured by monitoring the extent to which targeted road users are aware of the publicity and the impact that that has on their attitudes.

3.45 pm

This has been a sad weekend, with five deaths on our roads. A fortnight ago there were five deaths and, despite the fact that we preach and advertise consistently, this regrettable occurrence still happens. I extend the sympathy of everyone in the House to all those who have been bereaved in such tragic circumstances. It is very sad to get word that a loved one has been killed in a road accident; the "valley of tears" is a very lonesome place.

Independent research is carried out before and after each publicity campaign is launched and during its lifetime to ensure that it remains effective in changing attitudes. Excessive speed remains the principal cause of death and serious injuries, particularly among young people. My Department, the RUC and the Department for Regional Development will continue to address the problem of speeding through a combination of education, enforcement and engineering.

My Department will continue to aim the anti-speeding message at young, inexperienced drivers in particular through its ongoing publicity campaign "Slow down, boys", a new road safety web site and new initiatives made possible by the increased number of road safety education officers. The RUC will also go to schools throughout Northern Ireland with a recently piloted, anti-speeding roadshow aimed at sixth formers.

Mr Dallat: The entire House concurs with the sentiments expressed by the Minister. We offer our sympathy to those families who have been bereaved. We are grateful to the Minister for the special interest that he has taken in this subject, and we wonder how much worse it might have been had he not orchestrated this high-profile campaign. However, can the Minister tell us that all measures humanly possible are being taken to understand and to end the appalling tragedies on our roads?

Mr Foster: We are keen to do what we can, where we can, whenever we can to ensure an end to road deaths, injuries and collisions. I assure Members that we are working on this very difficult problem. A road safety consultation document is now being circulated to focus public attention afresh on road safety. This significant theme cuts across several Departments.

Attitudes may have changed a little bit. Excessive speed is the cause of many collisions and is therefore a big issue for my Department. We are getting our message through, though perhaps not quickly enough. Research carried out after the launch in 1999 of the anti-speeding campaign "Thump" showed that nearly half of all drivers and more than 40% of 17- to 24-year-olds surveyed indicated that they had changed their driving behaviour as a result of the commercial. Fifty per cent of 17- to 24-year-old male drivers said that speeding is never a risk worth taking. That was an increase of five percentage points from the pre-campaign survey. Thirty-two per cent of 17- to 24-year-old male drivers claimed that they personally could not exceed the speed limit at all on country roads while driving safely. That was an increase of nine percentage points from the pre-campaign survey. This shows that progress is being made. However, there is still much to do.

Mr Shannon: How does the Minister envisage enforcement of the campaign to reduce deaths on the roads in terms of manpower, financial resources and man-hours, which will be reduced according to the recommendations of the Patten Report? In the Ards borough last year there were 60,000 man-hours available for policing, yet this year there will only be 32,000. How can the Minister expect the delivery of a campaign when the number of man-hours is being cut so dramatically?

Mr Foster: I accept that the RUC is under strength at this time. I have always maintained that even though there are cameras around — and perhaps there are not enough of them yet — the best deterrent is the hands-on approach. I am sure this applies to all of us when our driving is not as good as it should be and we see a police car around. The hands-on approach makes us come to terms with driving and encourages us to drive decently, respectfully and responsibly. I accept Mr Shannon's point, and I intend to speak to the Chief Constable on this matter.

Mrs Nelis: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasChann Comhairle. I concur with the Minister's expression of

sympathy to all those who have been bereaved due to road accidents this weekend. I pay tribute to the Minister's efforts to address this ongoing and terrible problem.

The promotional campaign and advertisements on this matter can certainly be described as shock tactics. Has the Minister examined the issue of signage such as that currently used in the Republic of Ireland as a consciousness-raising deterrent to speeding? It seems that that does have some measure of success in the road accident statistics in the South of Ireland.

Mr Foster: We will certainly take steps to examine anything that we deem necessary to improve the roads situation. We will take any offers that will help us in that regard. As far as the Republic of Ireland is concerned, the road death rate there is very high. I have spoken to Mr Noel Dempsey, and he is not at all satisfied with it either. However, we will take steps to do anything, on either side of the two jurisdictions, to help each other on this matter.

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Fraud

9. **Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the steps being taken by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency to combat fraud.

(AQO 1193/00)

Mr Foster: The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Northern Ireland (DVLNI) has a comprehensive range of anti-fraud measures in place in specific areas of the agency's business. Measures include identity checking for driving licences, a number of security features on the new photo card driving licences, ownership and compliance checks for transport operator licences, identity checks for taxi, PSV, and transport operator licences, insurance and MOT compliance checks for vehicle registration and licensing. Roadside checks and wheel clamping to deter vehicle excise duty evasion are in place.

There are links with Interpol and others to ensure that imported vehicles have not been stolen or written off. There are also close links with the RUC, other police forces, Her Majesty's Customs and Excise and other Government Departments and agencies to prevent vehicle-related fraud.

Mr Paisley Jnr: I am sure that the Minister is alarmed by the extent of driver and vehicle licensing fraud in Northern Ireland. I understand that it is around 10% for ordinary car vehicles, amounting to around £11 million lost to the economy a year. Can the Minister confirm the areas of the Province where such fraud exists and at what levels? Can he tell us where it is most prominent?

Furthermore, has the Minister met with the RUC about the level of fraud? If he has not, will he give us an undertaking that he would be prepared to meet with them to discuss additional measures that they could take by way of a task team to tackle this disgraceful level of fraud in our country?

Mr Foster: As I said earlier, we will take steps where we can to assist us in what we can do to ensure that everything is clean and above board. At this time I have no details as to where the greatest level of fraud is taking place, but if I can find out, I will certainly give him a written answer.

The most recent survey of vehicle excise duty evasion shows a 10% evasion rate in Northern Ireland, compared to 3% in Great Britain. Evasion in Northern Ireland represents a loss of some £12 million to the UK Exchequer.

The DVLNI works closely with the RUC — the primary detection authority. The agency also has responsibility for payment of penalties, fines and for prosecuting cases in court. In the current year, 1 April to 28 February, 12,000 penalties have been paid, and there were 1,849 prosecutions. The revenue collected as a result is nearly £1.6 million.

Since the introduction of wheel clamping in 1998, 2,000 vehicles have been clamped, 300 have been scrapped and 11 have been auctioned. DVLNI has plans to introduce statutory off-the-road notification and automatic number-plate-reading cameras to combat vehicle excise duty evasion.

We are examining the problem. It is not escaping our eye, and cognisance is being taken of it all.

Mr Kennedy: Has the Department of the Environment given consideration to means of combating the growing problem of importation fraud, which involves new cars being imported into Northern Ireland?

Mr Foster: A certificate of conformity must be produced for all new cars imported into Northern Ireland. The certificate proves that the vehicle meets European and British safety standards. The only exception to that is personally imported cars. To qualify for personal import status, the importer must produce evidence that he has been in a foreign country and has driven the vehicle abroad and that the vehicle is intended for his personal use.

A percentage of imported vehicles are checked via the Interpol link to ensure that they are not stolen. The agency also checks vehicle details on an electronic link with vehicle databases in Great Britain and the Netherlands. The European car and drivers information system highlights vehicles that are involved in fraud. It will be developed further in the future to include other European countries.

Road Safety Officers

10. **Mr Ford** asked the Minister of the Environment to make a statement on the appointment of road safety officers. (AQO 1218/00)

Mr Foster: In July 2000 I announced plans to increase the number of road safety education officers from 11 to 21. The number of officers had been reduced from 16 in 1991. Over 330 applications were received for these

posts, and consequently the selection process has been protracted. Interviews are taking place, and I expect the successful candidates to be appointed by the end of the month.

The appointment of additional staff is important and will allow for the enhancement of a range of road safety activities next year. This will include a 25% increase in the number of visits to schools, with substantially increased support for teachers and participation in courses for drink drivers, which are being extended across Northern Ireland. New initiatives will be introduced, including a driver improvement course, practical child pedestrian safety training at the roadside and a new scheme for monitoring the fitting of child safety belts.

Mr Ford: I join the Minister and others in expressing my sympathy for those who have suffered as a result of road accidents this weekend. I thank the Minister for the comprehensive reply, although it is worrying that we still do not have the additional road safety officers we were promised last July.

There seems to be a particular difficulty with car crashes involving young drivers at weekends, and speed is the major part of the problem. Considering that, is there not a need for a more imaginative campaign about that and some of the other issues that he has highlighted, directed at young drivers?

Mr Foster: We will take all measures that are reasonable, legal and rational to prevent so many collisions, accidents, injuries and deaths on the roads.

There were 330 applications for the road safety education officer positions, and they do take a long time to process. The selection process has been protracted because of the high standard of the applications and the fact that so many of the candidates met the selection criteria. Procedures for recruitment and promotion are established centrally and, in the interests of equality of opportunity, must be faithfully adhered to.

We will take all action that we can to ensure that there are fewer deaths on the road, fewer collisions and fewer injuries.

Planning Applications (Strangford)

11. **Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the backlog in planning applications that impact upon the parliamentary constituency of Strangford. (AQO 1225/00)

Mr Foster: My Department does not hold information about planning applications on a constituency basis. However, I can provide the Member with figures for the district council areas of Ards, Down and Castlereagh, which are wholly or partly in the Strangford constituency. At the end of February, the number of planning applications that were more than two and a half months old were 327

in Ards, 204 in Down, and 106 in Castlereagh. That is a total figure of 637.

Mrs I Robinson: Will the Minister concede that the backlog is having a detrimental impact? What steps is he taking to resolve the unacceptable delay in processing these major applications? Does he accept that all such delays only serve to inflate house prices in the Strangford constituency?

4.00 pm

Mr Foster: We are endeavouring to reduce the backlog as much as possible. In the districts mentioned in my answer the total figure of 637 represents an increase of 114, or 22%, on the figure of 523 at the end of March 2000.

The backlog in the Castlereagh district had fallen by 17.5% by the end of February. Unfortunately the backlogs in the Ards and Down districts had gone up by 55% and 11% respectively. Both districts are in the Downpatrick division of the Planning Service; that district has been particularly affected by staff shortages. I visited the Downpatrick office recently. It is under strength and needs some help because it is overworked. Staff shortages are being addressed, and I expect to see an improvement as the year progresses.

On the positive side, we have reduced the backlog by 9%. That has been achieved against an increase of 5% in the total number of applications received. I am optimistic that we will meet the target of eliminating the backlog by the end of 2002.

Mr McCarthy: I wish to speak about ordinary applications. Does the Minister agree that it is totally disgraceful and unacceptable that a local council approves an application in December 2000 and yet four months later that application has not been processed and passed as approved to the applicant?

Mr Foster: I accept what the Member has said, and I thank him for the point that he made. It is not acceptable, but it is not the case that people are doing nothing. If the Member can give me specific cases I will gladly look into them.

(Madam Deputy Speaker [Ms Morrice] in the Chair)

EXECUTIVE PROGRAMME FUNDS: FIRST ALLOCATIONS

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of Finance and Personnel that he wishes to make a statement on first allocations from the Executive programme funds.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan): I will make a statement on behalf of the Executive on the first set of allocations from the Executive programme funds. I will also touch on the outcome of the final routine public expenditure monitoring round for the financial year that has just ended.

The Assembly will recall that a key innovation in our first Programme for Government and Budget was the creation of Executive programme funds. Our aim was to assist the development of new policies and programmes and new improved services as well as directing spending to new strategic infrastructure projects. By marshalling our resources in that way we are determined to support our agreed priorities and we can break away from the patterns of spending that applied under the period of direct rule and see — more and more — the difference that devolution involving local politicians working together can make.

We are all aware that the problems that our constituents face can only be addressed by close co-operation between Departments and by us finding local solutions to local problems. These funds are a key instrument in promoting co-operation between Departments and making them address multi-dimensional issues in a cross-cutting way. That is how we will ensure that our focus is on those whom we are trying to help and what we are trying to achieve and not on those responsible for delivery or management.

We established five Executive programme funds to achieve that change: the social inclusion and community regeneration fund, the new directions fund, the infrastructure and capital renewal fund, the service modernisation fund and the children's fund. In total we have made resources amounting to £372 million available for these funds over the next three years.

This includes the amounts originally announced in October, which we have since supplemented when possible, most recently by adding £10 million from the February monitoring round, which I will come to later.

The Executive regard these funds as a major means to support and promote the priorities of this Administration. At the same time the Executive recognise that the creation of the funds signals a new way of working together that

will take time to mature. We decided therefore to have two rounds of allocations on the funds this year. This will allow time for experience to be gained in operating the funds without committing all the resources available immediately. It will also make time for potentially very valuable proposals to be properly developed and considered at a later stage.

However, in the case of the infrastructure and capital renewal fund, it is necessary to commit resources in good time to permit investment to proceed. This means that, by and large, only a single and early allocation is feasible each year. This is reflected in my announcement today.

The purposes for the funds were set out fully in the Programme for Government and Budget documents in the autumn. The criteria we adopted to guide the processes of bidding and selection have recently been issued to the Assembly Committees. Bids were sought in January on the basis of clear guidelines to Departments describing the principles underlying the funds and including both the general criteria applicable to bids for any fund and the more specific points covering each fund separately. In total, Departments lodged 139 bids across the five funds totalling £581 million over three years, more than the total resources available in the funds, and well in excess of the amounts we intended to allocate in the first round.

All bids have been scrutinised carefully and measured against the criteria for the funds by the Department of Finance and Personnel, the Economic Policy Unit and the Equality Unit working closely with all the Departments. Among other things, an assessment was made of the consistency of the proposals with the principles of New TSN and the statutory equality duty under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Executive have been able to draw on this analysis in considering all the bids.

For the first tranche of allocations from the Executive programme funds in the 2001-02 financial year, the Executive consider that 62 proposals should be supported across the five funds. In total, this support would amount to £146 million over the next three years. In addition, the proposals announced last week by the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment will be funded from the new directions fund. A full list of the allocations has been circulated to Members, along with a copy of my statement.

Before going into the details of the allocation to each fund, I would like to give Members an overview of what we are aiming to achieve in the first tranche in strengthening the implementation of the priorities in the Programme for Government.

The priorities which we adopted in the Programme for Government were: "Growing as a community", "Working for a healthier people", "Investing in education and schools", "Securing a competitive economy" and "Development North/South, east/west and international

relations". When the Assembly commented on the draft programme, Members gave a strong emphasis on the needs of young people, a theme that is found in our first three priorities. It was in the light of such views that we placed greater emphasis on children in the revised programme which the Assembly endorsed last month and committed ourselves to a new children's strategy.

This focus on the needs of young people is central to my announcements today, with over one third of the projects focused on the young. This is clearly the case in the specific bids on the children's fund, but there are many other bids, under three other funds, that will make a major difference to the future of young people. A key aim is to protect the vulnerable and ensure that education is open to all, including those who might otherwise fall out of education.

The second main area on which we are making a major focus is improved health and improved health services. That is central to our overall priority of working for a healthier people. A quarter of our Executive programme fund projects are in this area. We will invest in healthier communities. A key part of our public health strategy is seeking to focus much more on the prevention of ill health. We will also start to develop hospital accommodation and use new technology and projects to improve the quality of service.

The third focus in our allocations is on promoting growth as a community, a further Programme for Government priority. We will start new pilots to see how housing estates can work together to tackle health, education and training needs, and build better community infrastructure working with district councils. We are also making a further allocation to fund the Executive's new victims strategy.

The fourth area on which the Executive have placed special emphasis is securing a competitive economy. For this purpose, major investment is needed from the Executive. We have started to invest further in transport infrastructure through the major roads schemes, ensuring that some of the major routes in Northern Ireland are developed effectively. That is on top of the extra investment in railways announced in the Budget as a pre-allocation from the infrastructure fund.

We are also determined to find a new sustainable future for our rural economy and new opportunities for tourism, an area where it is essential that we invest for a new future. We have backed new innovative schemes to help rural areas and assist tourist fishing. We will develop our creative industries through new seed funding, seeking to encourage new skills and new employment in this growing sector.

Finally, the Programme for Government emphasises the importance of investing in modern services to update the quality of our services, laying the foundations for e-government. The Executive programme funds allocations

will provide the basis for more accessible, modern services. They include actions to modernise aspects of the Health Service. We are also investing in the core hardware and software, so that the Executive can provide new e-government services. There is also action to develop our libraries as key electronic centres for the public, while also producing a new electronic job market.

We are also determined to explore, creatively and imaginatively, the scope for new sources of funds to contribute to the necessary investment, especially in infrastructure. We know that there are no panaceas or magic bullets. Misconceptions and misunderstandings concerning private finance initiatives (PFIs) and public-private partnerships (PPPs) need to be resolved. Difficulties and deficiencies need to be overcome. Seemingly attractive options that would only amount to accessing new forms of borrowing are not in themselves the answer, carrying as they do some of the limitations and complications that we must resolve.

The Executive welcome the progress made by Departments, especially the Department of Education, in pursuing new approaches. We have set aside £2 million a year to ensure that the best options are explored and examined to achieve results that have the clear potential to repay that investment in the form of acceleration of PFI and PPP projects.

In short, through these funds and through these 62 projects we have started to make major progress together across Departments on addressing the needs of the young, on improving health, on assisting communities and victims, on securing a better economic future and on modernising our services. We have proved that we can work in a co-ordinated way across Departments to create real change.

4.15 pm

I want now to deal briefly with the first tranche of allocations that we propose to make from each of the funds. I will not go into detail on every project but instead concentrate on how these allocations will support the priorities that we have collectively agreed upon as an Executive.

I will begin with the children's fund, which the Executive have established with the objective of providing support for children in need and young people at risk. Our children are the future, and we are determined to ensure that they have every opportunity to reach their full potential regardless of their circumstances. This fund has offered Departments a further means to demonstrate their support for children and young people, both through their own actions and through working with non-governmental organisations, including the voluntary and community sectors.

The Executive have decided that 12 projects should be supported in the first tranche of allocations from this

fund, amounting to £10.5 million over the next three years. Our efforts through this fund have been focused on the most vulnerable and those children and young people in greatest need. We aim to make a significant impact on protecting children by developing specialist residential units, providing residential childcare places and supporting families. We have also recognised the needs of children with disabilities and paid particular attention to helping children who otherwise might fall out of education through a school-age mothers programme, a juvenile justice liaison service, new counselling services for pupils and referral units to support primary education. We will also make a start on the task of redeveloping the Youth Service.

I think that the Assembly will agree that these announcements mean that the children's fund is off to a good start, but I would emphasise that this is only the start. An interdepartmental working group has been established to work with the voluntary and community sectors to develop potential projects that can be supported by allocations from this fund in the future. I look forward to seeing the ideas that it will bring forward.

I now turn to allocations from the infrastructure and capital renewal fund. The objective that the Executive have set for this fund is to support the development and renewal of strategic assets owned by the public sector or that are used to provide services of utility to the public. It is the largest of the funds in terms of resources and therefore offers the opportunity to make a significant impact on the Executive's strategic priorities.

In the first tranche of allocations from this fund one of the Executive's concerns has been to move forward projects that will significantly strengthen the strategic roads network. These vital assets have been neglected, and we are determined to restore them step by step. The projects now supported are on key parts of some strategic routes: the A8 Belfast to Larne route; the Toome bypass, on the main A6 Derry to Belfast route; the A1 at Loughbrickland on the Belfast to Dublin road; and the A4 between Dungannon and Enniskillen. Taken together, they are a major contribution to the process. We have retained significant flexibility in this fund, so that in due course we may be able to consider other projects that will strengthen our strategic transport, energy and telecommunications networks when such projects are at a relevant stage of development.

The fund also has a role in supporting major assets that the community depends upon for vital services. The Executive have therefore authorised support for four additional schools capital projects, comprising two primary schools, a special school and one grammar school — each of these being of top priority within the schools planning lists. We have said that the Executive will support our children and their education, and this is proof of that commitment.

The infrastructure fund will also support very important developments in the Health Service. There is an allocation to provide 13 new homes for residential childcare, with 28 new places and 58 replacement places. Money is being provided to begin the redevelopment of the Ulster Hospital, which is a vital facility for many people. We are also providing a new medium secure unit to cater for the needs of some of the most tragically stricken members of our community. In total, these and other projects being supported from the fund will account for £79 million over the next three years.

The establishment of the new directions fund signalled the Executive's determination to promote new and innovative ways of developing and delivering public services. The allocations I am announcing from that fund today are preliminary and leave substantially larger amounts for future tranches. This will allow Departments to work together to produce further and, I hope, more distinctive bids on this fund in the future.

In beginning to set a new direction, the allocations from this fund include a seed fund for the creative industries, which will support projects designed to harness creativity and to achieve positive social, cultural, educational and economic outcomes. There are also four projects designed to improve the way the Health Service operates through improving IT and other forms of communication, to ensure that the Health Service can make use of more modern ways of working. This will reduce inefficiency and have benefits for patients that will make a difference.

New directions in education include particular initiatives to promote the social inclusion of children from groups whose first language is not English and for travellers' children. There is also provision for expanding the number of special places available for secondary age pupils.

The proposals include some important developments in agriculture, including assistance with the development of organic farming, action to minimise pollution from farms, and action to minimise the contribution made by agriculture to the phosphorisation of soils, which is affecting our fresh waters. These follow on from the support for the beef quality scheme, which was announced in the draft Budget statement on 17 October 2000, as a pre-allocation from this fund. There is also provision in support of the road safety strategy.

The Executive are determined to ensure that new directions are taken. At the strategic and detailed levels we want to encourage new ways of doing things within the full range of the public services for which we are responsible. The ideas announced this afternoon will contribute to that objective.

I will now turn to the service modernisation fund. We have sought to find means of promoting efficiency and innovation in the delivery of services by the public sector. Our focus has been on ways to make a difference

to the way services are managed and delivered for the ultimate benefit of the public.

The actions proposed include several projects to improve the IT networks in Government. These are badly needed if important functions are to be carried out more efficiently and carefully, thus providing a foundation for work to improve support from Departments for Ministers and for the Assembly, to ensure the most effective and efficient delivery of services to the public.

Modernising the provision of libraries will include new electronic information services. This will represent an important enhancement of the range of services available and has potential for links with the school library system and with the public library system in the South. There is also a proposal to enhance the jobcentre online web site, which will improve online access to job vacancy information and enable clients of the jobcentres to apply for jobs online. This is an important development in electronic government. It will make a significant contribution to the objectives of the Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment and the Department for Social Development.

Finally, I turn to the fund for social inclusion and community regeneration. As I explained on 12 February, this fund now includes an allocation of £2 million designed to provide a safety net on the issue of gap funding. The main point is that Departments can proceed to deal with the problems of the delay in the structural funds by anticipating that there will be draw-down money from the new round of programmes. This involves a judgement and should Department support something which ultimately does not receive support from the European programmes, this £2 million will provide a safety net from the Executive's own resources to cover the same purpose.

More widely, the social inclusion/community regeneration fund exists to support actions against poverty and to develop effective community measures in both urban and rural settings, as well as community relations and cultural diversity.

The Executive made an advance allocation from this fund when we provided for a pilot programme of housing schemes — announced in October — designed to meet the needs of travellers. The Executive have decided to support a range of activities under this heading. These include the additional match funding required to fully deliver the LEADER+ programme, which is currently being negotiated with the European Commission.

There are also important developments in the reading recovery programme, which is a fundamental foundation for social inclusion through the education system. The proposals also support action to improve youth services and leaving and aftercare services in conjunction with the Department of Education and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

Other important bids under this fund include actions targeted at the health of travellers, who are among the most excluded groups in our society. They badly need the kind of community-based health system and action on health promotion that is envisaged under the fund. The allocations also include a grant programme for local community-based projects that allow local people to design and manage their own actions in relation to public health, in partnership with voluntary agencies. That is targeted at the most disadvantaged and unhealthy 10% of electoral wards.

The programme also contains a contribution for a new initiative to improve adult literacy and numeracy. Finally, there is support for technical assistance to district councils to help draw up community support plans. That is particularly valuable because, under the proposal, every £1 invested by the Department for Social Development will draw in £4 from district councils for the same objectives.

As we proceed, it is our intention that the social inclusion fund should be increasingly well targeted and impact strategically upon excluded groups. There is much more work to be done on this, and I am sure that Members will wish to feed in views in this debate and in the subsequent consideration of the issues in Assembly Committees, particularly the Committee for Finance and Personnel. There are future funding rounds available that must be developed in order to make this and other funds as effective as possible.

As I said earlier, we were able to augment the provision made in the Budget for the Executive programme funds due to the outcome of the February monitoring round. I have explained in the past that the monitoring rounds are routine readjustments of expenditure plans to take account of the latest available information on spending patterns across public expenditure programmes. The February round is routinely the least significant. One of the main reasons for that is that it always takes place after the allocations in the spring Supplementary Estimates have been finalised. There is usually no scope to reallocate resources between Departments, because that would normally involve a change to the amounts in votes.

At this stage of the financial year there is limited scope to increase spending before the end of the financial year. Thus, the pattern is that some savings normally emerge. That proved to be the case in the recent February monitoring round. Departments declared savings amounting to £24.8 million. Total bids amounted to only £3.2 million. However, a proportion of the savings identified by Departments arose through issues of timing — commitments had been made that could not be fulfilled in the financial year.

In those cases the Executive agreed that subject to Assembly approval of the forthcoming Estimates, some £8.8 million should be carried forward for particular

purposes. That included £950,000 for Department of Agriculture and Rural Development programmes, £7 million for some aspects of Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment expenditure and £900,000 for parts of Department of Finance and Personnel expenditure.

4.30 pm

In addition, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is considering the possibility of a fishing vessel decommissioning scheme, and some provision has been held in reserve which could be used for that purpose in the 2001-02 financial year. Having covered the few bids that have been lodged by Departments and these amounts for carry-over, the amount remaining was £10 million. The Executive decided that this should be carried forward from 2000-01 into the 2001-02 year and added to the Executive programme funds.

In circumstances where the Executive are conscious of the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease and its adverse implications on so many fronts, it is prudent not to allocate all the money available from the monitoring round now. The Executive, assisted by the inter-departmental working group chaired by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, will be considering further regional responses to the critical difficulties. Notwithstanding the need to keep these matters under review, I hope that there will be a welcome for the Executive programme funds and monitoring round allocations announced for farming and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development programmes today. Details of the February monitoring reallocations are set out in the tables attached to the copies of the statement, which have been made available to Members.

The Executive have set out to make a difference through the allocation of the Executive programme funds, as I have outlined today. They are beginning to work in new and distinctive ways, and their existence provides a totally new way of drawing together the spending plans of many functions into a more coherent strategic approach.

The Executive began to make this difference in meetings held over recent weeks in preparation for these Executive programme funds allocations today. They have developed a strategy and made themselves more effective. They have also been able to address needs and opportunities in a range of services, including some major investments in capital infrastructure, while keeping a way open for others, which could be equally, if not more, important. The process of working together is increasingly important, given the range of departmental functions, which, in turn, represent a range of opportunities to make a difference for members of the public.

It is important that we maximise the benefits from these funds so as to make the most of the resources that we have, although we do not have enough to do all that we want to. The application of the Barnett formula means that the Treasury does not provide sufficient to

match the full range of initiatives that the Government have decided to make affordable elsewhere. The Executive have responded to this problem creatively and imaginatively through these funds. They are determined to use them to make an impact on the way we do business and, most importantly, to make a difference through benefits to the public.

I will be discussing the proposals that I have announced today with the Finance and Personnel Committee. In particular, there will need to be consultation with that Committee on the approach to including these allocations in the Main Estimates. Some changes to detail for technical and other reasons may be required as the process of completing the Main Estimates proceeds over the next number of weeks prior to the deliberations on the next Budget Bill which will take place in late spring or early summer.

On behalf of the Executive, I commend these proposals to the Assembly.

Madam Deputy Speaker: We have one hour for questions to the Minister. I ask that question and answers be concise so that as many Members as possible may participate. I remind the House that the normal procedure is that points of order are taken at the end of the debate.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Mr Molloy): A LeasCheann Comhairle, go raibh maith agat. First, I welcome the Minister's statement today on these rounds and, although the Committee did not have the opportunity — and that is our main concern — of scrutinising and going through the departmental bids in the proper way, it does generally welcome the idea behind the fund itself and the allocations.

The Finance and Personnel Committee has severe concerns about the first round of allocations and the way that they have been managed. Those concerns are at two levels that will be dealt with through questions.

The Committee was unhappy that decisions regarding the allocations under this expenditure were taken with undue haste and insufficiently detailed consideration. Committee members felt that the principle of the funds — that they should be directed towards cross-departmental projects — had been set aside. Members felt that they did not get new and innovative programmes in the lines of departmental bids.

Is the Minister satisfied that the principles set out in the management of the funds have been followed? Is it not true that the Executive Committee's desire to gain early and positive publicity from the scheme — for which no justification has been forthcoming — has overridden the case for properly considered and equitable distribution of the money. The Finance and Personnel Committee certainly had great concerns about that last week.

A stated objective of the Programme for Government was the inclusion of projects that would assist the

development of activity across departmental management lines. Can the Minister say how many of the successful bids fall into that category? I believe that the cross-departmental aim has been lost and the successful bids are for a continuation of the same issues.

The evidence given — *[Interruption]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Please ask your question.

Mr Molloy: Madam Deputy Speaker, I understand your concern about the time, but the Finance and Personnel Committee has not been given enough time to deal with this issue, and there are a number of serious issues that must be dealt with. There was not enough time in the Committee sessions to ask the questions, so we need to ask them in the Assembly.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I appreciate that the Member has asked a number of questions. If he has one more, will he please put it.

Mr Molloy: I express my concern that the Committee did not have the time to deal with this issue and as such it is making a farce out of discussing it now. Can the Minister assure the House that the September round of Executive programme funds will be examined in a different way?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel for his points and I appreciate the concerns of the Committee as expressed by him. Given that this was the first round of Executive programme funds, matters were not dealt with perfectly. The situation is such that information is only made available to the Finance and Personnel Committee if similar information is being made available to other Committees. A more straightforward approach needs to be adopted in the future to ensure that information about bids goes to the Committee for Finance and Personnel automatically and does not depend on what is circulated to other Committees.

The first allocations from the Executive programme funds are not just a case of more of the same. I am not pretending that this first tranche of allocations achieves the degree of cross-cutting activity, interdepartmental bid development, and programme planning that the Executive want to see. This is the first tranche, and I would remind Members that we are dealing in the circumstances of Budget underfunding.

The number of demands and bids far exceeds our Budget allocations. Therefore it is not surprising that many of those, that have been of particular concern to Departments and Committees and which did not make it in the Budget, have found their way through to the Executive programme funds.

We would have been open to even more criticism if we had not embraced some of those key projects which have slipped departmental budget priorities and allocations to date but which have been able to qualify using the criteria and thinking for these funds. It is hoped that

Members welcome that. The Executive need to develop their approaches in the future and that includes working with the Finance and Personnel Committee.

However, the Executive's future management of the programme funds will depend on their developing the relevant substructure. In my further dealings with the Finance and Personnel Committee, I will have to take account of the type of subcommittees or substructures that are created.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development (Mr Cobain): I agree with the Chairperson of the Finance and Personnel Committee's concerns about this process. The Committee for Social Development was not consulted on these bids. We had the bids for information purposes, but we had no input into them. There are no cross-cutting issues involved. I thought that these were new, innovative schemes with a cross-cutting element, but there is no cross-cutting element in the infrastructural fund for new schools and new roads, and that is a deviation from the original criteria. I am raising that issue because the Department for Social Development, out of a total allocation of £146 million, received slightly more than 1%. Given that there are people living on the periphery and in poverty, that is a disgrace.

The Social Development Committee envisaged the inclusion of schemes such as the installation of Economy 7 heating or replacement bathrooms and kitchens in houses. However, all those proposals were rejected on the grounds that they did not meet the criteria, although three schemes, which are of no particular interest to anyone living in poverty, have been accepted. The Committee has been totally ignored by the Department of Finance and Personnel and the Executive, but there is insufficient time to discuss these important issues.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Will the Member please ask his question.

Mr Cobain: I want the Minister to address such issues as fuel poverty and the need for a replacement of bathrooms and kitchens in houses, matters which the Social Development Committee has continually raised. Northern Ireland has the worst housing in western Europe. We talk about targeting social need, but the Minister absolutely excludes those who are living in poverty.

Mr Durkan: I take some of the points that the Member has made, and they need to be responded to. However, the Member cannot have it both ways. He cannot say "This is not new — it is just more of the same" and then say that he wanted more of the same. The measures that the Member has mentioned were covered, and allocations were made as part of the revised Budget to address fuel poverty and the replacement of kitchens and bathrooms, et cetera. Those measures fall to be funded from the allocations that we have already made to the Department for Social Development's budget. If we had made further allocations we would be entirely open to the

criticism that we have just had: that there is nothing different between these allocations and those that were made in the Budget. We want the funds to work and develop on this cross-cutting basis to reflect regional priorities and the inputs and responsibilities of a range of Departments.

In this first tranche of funds, Departments have not yet been able to develop work to that degree or in that manner. The Executive do not yet have the full substructure to do that. It would not have been right for us to delay important allocations of much needed public funding before we had developed an absolutely perfect infrastructure, given that this is money from the new financial year.

With regard to consultation with the Social Development Committee, I am not responsible for what information the Committee did, or did not, receive. It was the responsibility of the Department for Social Development to make known its bids. Perhaps that Department, in its reading of the criteria, did not bid as widely as some other Departments. However, the allocations that have been made to the Department for Social Development will benefit people in need. The Department will use that money well to work with people who are trying to make a difference on the ground.

Mr Byrne: I welcome the Minister's statement. We are now beginning to see some tangible evidence of the Executive programme funds. I welcome particularly the funds for schools, roads and children's issues.

4.45 pm

Can the Minister explain the rationale behind the grants programme for local communities to pursue local action in public health and promote stronger community development, particularly in large urban social housing developments? I particularly welcome the new school for Dromore. However, I am deeply disappointed that phase 3 of the Omagh throughpass is not in this current allocation.

Mr Durkan: The grants-based initiative to which the Member referred was put forward by the ministerial group on public health to deal with the impression that there is absolutely no cross-cutting inspiration to any of these bids. That initiative will target the most disadvantaged and unhealthy electoral wards — the 10%. It will allow people to design and manage their own actions in partnership with statutory and voluntary agencies and make a difference for people who need that difference. The initiative should stimulate community-based actions and should break into those cycles of deprivation and ill health.

I welcome the Member's support for the spending that we have announced today for roads. I note his disappointment that the spending does not include the further work he has identified on the A5. There is a huge underinvestment with regard to our roads infrastructure.

That is something we have been trying to make good with the Budget allocations and through this particular fund. We need to continue to work on that in the future. It is not the case that we had a bid in for every project being identified in the Chamber today.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Mr Carrick): The Minister's statement reads:

"A key aim is to protect the vulnerable and ensure that educational access is open to all".

I am disappointed, in the light of that, that funding for the upgrading of facilities for students with learning difficulties is not included. Since current funding allocations seem unlikely to meet the timetable for compliance with disability legislative requirements, can the Minister state, in the absence of an unsuccessful bid, how access arrangements for disabled students can be made a matter of priority funding to bring about equality of opportunity as soon as possible?

Mr Durkan: The Executive recognise the importance of the needs of students with disabilities, including those with learning difficulties. In relation to the issues of access that he has identified, that was not something that qualified in the allocations that we were making in this particular tranche. It is an issue of serious need that the Executive have identified, and our hope is that we will be able to address that issue in allocations that will be undertaken in future monitoring rounds.

Mr Close: The concept of Executive programme funds is one which I welcome. It offers many opportunities for the people of Northern Ireland, but the handling of this tranche has been nothing short of disastrous. How can the Minister convince the House that best value will be obtained through the allocation of these funds when, for example, the Finance and Personnel Committee was treated with what I can only refer to as contempt? It was given no opportunity to perform its statutory function of scrutiny. Furthermore, not for the first time, we were presented with a series of honeyed words by way of trying to cover up the fact that adequate time was not given for us to perform our statutory function.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Will the Member please put his question.

Mr Close: I have already asked the question: how can we be convinced of good value for money? The Committee that is fundamentally charged with the role of scrutiny of the Department of Finance and Personnel, and thus the other Committees, was not properly consulted and had no opportunity whatsoever to express its views. How, then, can the Minister state that

"all bids have been scrutinised carefully"?

As we have said before, there must be no whitewash in the Assembly.

Mr Durkan: I have just been treated to another sermon from "the man from unction". There is no whitewash in the Assembly so far as the Executive are concerned — they have responsibilities as well. I accept and recognise the responsibilities and role of the Finance and Personnel Committee and the other Committees. The Executive also have a role: to come forward with allocations across a range of programmes and to commend them to the Assembly.

The allocations that I proposed today will receive all sorts of comment from various Committee representatives, including those from the Finance and Personnel Committee. I have made it clear that we need to improve how this works in future. I have made no pretence about the fact that I am an agent of the Executive so far as many — *[Interruption]*

If only Mr Close would actually listen.

The Executive have to consider the issues brought before them. I regret that the information which I thought was being made available to all Committees — and which the Executive agreed could be made available to them — was not, for some reason. That is a communication error, a serious omission that we need to overcome. It is not a whitewash.

I would be glad to hear if there are any particular allocations which this Member, or anyone else, actually disputes and wants us to set aside. I come to the House on many occasions to discuss process and procedure, and I am constantly criticised about it. The statements made here and the details of the proposed allocations are available to all the Committees to pursue and query with us if they want to. Most of Mr Close's criticism is about process — there is very little about substance.

Mr B Hutchinson: I do not know how to follow that one.

There was a lot of flowery language in the Minister's opening remarks — particularly in relation to young people — and several references to investment in education and schools, with a key line about people who might "fall out of education". However, the budget for youth services — in Belfast in particular; I do not know about the other boards — has been cut this year. Its £2.7 million budget has been reduced by £400,000, but in the Minister's statement on infrastructure we were told that this service would receive money. On the one hand the Executive are saying that they should cut youth services because the money is not needed; yet on the other hand, they are going to provide money for special youth projects. This does not seem to me to add up.

When the Minister read out the Executive's plans for infrastructure, he did not once mention youth services. He mentioned social services in the context of providing much needed homes for people who require placements — but he did not mention youth services. How did the

Executive arrive at the decision to fund an element of youth services for which his Department had already cut the funding?

Mr Durkan: The Executive did not direct, or seek, cuts in the youth services in Belfast. The decision on those budgets was not made by the Executive. I just want to make that clear. The Executive do not direct every single pound of spend. Departments, and secondary budget holders working under Departments, make various decisions. The most important thing is that the Executive have been able to use the Executive programme fund to invest in redeveloping the Youth Service.

Investment in the Youth Service is not only in the infrastructure fund, which I referred to in my statement. The statement, long as it is, could not cover every bid. However, every bid is included in the table, so there has been no attempt to exclude anything. It is odd that I seem to be criticised for not actually talking up an allocation that was made. It contradicts some of the other criticism that we have received.

Ms Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, Madam Deputy Speaker. Unlike other Members, I welcome the Minister's announcement concerning children and young people. It is a positive first step, and I will not criticise any money going to services for children and young people. Is the money ring-fenced? If not, will the Minister ensure that it is ring-fenced to target these matters? Will the Minister inform us as to the criteria the community and voluntary sectors will need to meet to access these funds? Furthermore, can we have a list of those who are on the interdepartmental working group?

Mr Durkan: The funding will be used for the particular purposes for which it is allocated. Funding will be given for a particular purpose, although it can be used for a particular whim or legitimate pressure that arises. To that extent the money is clearly distinctive as regards ring-fencing. Some allocations, particularly some of the smaller ones, are clearly in respect of pilot schemes and initiatives. Therefore it is important that those schemes are tracked to ensure that the money is best used and to learn lessons for the future.

The interdepartmental working group is mostly connected with the children's fund. When we introduced that fund we recognised that Executive programme funds should be available and should be subject to bids from the Departments working together. We wanted to ensure that part of the children's fund was open to direct bidding from the community and voluntary sectors.

Several Departments are involved in the interdepartmental working group — the Department of Finance and Personnel, the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the Department for Social Development and the Department of Education.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Dr Birnie): I welcome the statement in the round although I also agree with the points that have already been well made. There are few genuinely interdepartmental plans in the statement. We are pleased that some moneys have been granted for basic adult literacy and numeracy education, given that the amount included under that heading — £2.4 million over three years — comes to less than 30% of the approximately £9 million initially bid for.

Incidentally, my Committee did get an adequate period to consult on the bid and I welcome that.

Given the proportion of the bid that has been granted, what is the Minister's assessment of the adequacy of the bid at this time? A quarter of the population of Northern Ireland will not be able to read the first few sentences of the statement — let alone its entirety — and probably will not be able to make much sense of the figures at the back as they cannot count. It is a social and economic scandal that needs to be dealt with. The statement is good as a starting point, but it does not go far enough.

5.00 pm

Mr Durkan: I am glad that the Committee for Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment was satisfied that it had had access to information in reasonable time. I acknowledge that that is not the case for all Committees.

The allocation is just a start; it is not, by any stretch of the Executive's imagination, the end of our interest in — or commitment to — adult basic education and the promotion of literacy and numeracy skills. The Programme for Government referred specifically to work in that area, and that is reflected in the allocation. We also want to see it getting the priority that it deserves in the Department's budget, and that will be relevant to future Budget bids as well as to further allocation rounds.

Had we confined ourselves to meeting a certain number of bids in total, we would have been able to offer assistance in fewer areas. The Executive felt that it was important to make a commitment to starting and getting on with a number of key programme areas. We have tried to do that, and that decision was distinct from the normal Budget round. Had we acted on the normal Budget basis, we would have considered whether entire projects could have been finished at that stage or not. We believe that starting some programmes — perhaps without full funding at this stage — will put them in a stronger position for priority consideration in future Budget rounds. Previously, many of the key areas that Members consider to be the big needs have been unable to break through in the normal Budget round. I suppose that it is a bit like throwing a six to get onto the board. We have tried to do that in a number of areas with the Executive programme funds.

Mrs Courtney: I welcome the announcement and congratulate the Minister and his team on their work. I know that many people will welcome the investment in schools, health and roads. I am grateful for the inclusion of the Toome bypass, having become daily more conscious of the need for it.

The Minister said that he had not fully allocated the infrastructure funds. Presumably, the next tranche of funding will allow the gas pipeline to the north-west to become a reality, so that we can be sure of a level playing field for economic development.

Mr Durkan: Obviously, the Member regularly has to sit in traffic jams in Toome, as do the Minister for Regional Development and myself. That is all pure coincidence — *[Interruption]* — and we just feel sorry for everybody else that we see there. It is important to our infrastructure, and I hope that it will make a difference to the road between the two cities.

We want to see a significant development of telecoms. The House has shown its interest in and commitment to significant extension of gas pipelines. In both those areas, proposals must come from the private sector. Sir Reg Empey, as Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, is taking a close interest and is working hard on those matters. There are, at present, no proposals that would justify the allocation of funds, so we have retained the flexibility to consider any more proposals that emerge. Any subsequent decisions will be subject to all the normal appraisals.

Mr S Wilson: Given the question mark over the behaviour of the Minister of Education — especially in relation to the allocation of capital funding in the past two years — I welcome the Minister's assurance that all bids have been carefully scrutinised.

However, looking at the small print in the infrastructure fund — wherein the Minister says that some of the projects financed will require further financing in the fourth year — I am dismayed that there is an imbalance yet again in capital spending between schools that cater mostly for the Roman Catholic population and those that cater mostly for the Protestant population, in a ratio of 10:1. The Minister said in his statement that that is a result of

“each of these being of top priority within the schools planning lists.”

Can he assure the House, first, that he has seen those planning lists; secondly, that the projects listed here are top of those planning lists; and thirdly, that he has assured himself that these funds are not being used once again by the Minister of Education as a party political election fund, as his previous allocations were?

Mr Durkan: The Executive are satisfied that in making these allocations in respect of the schools capital programme, we are supporting the improvement in schools capital by taking action to reduce the number of mobile

classrooms and so on — all the things that the Education Committee would like to see us do, and that the Executive wants to do. We are doing that on a basis of priority need. That is a fact. We did not manufacture how particular schools have come to fall in a particular sequence of priority need. It is there and it is real.

In many ways, what the argument raises is not just that there are other needs in other schools — clearly there are — but that there is a need for much more money in this whole area. That is one of the reasons why we are trying to seek more money in relation to the Barnett formula. I saw the schools that would have been next on the list and, even if we had some significant extra money in this tranche and were able to allocate it to schools, the presentational or perception issue that the Member seems to be identifying would still have existed.

The Executive had to take decisions on the basis of need. We set down very clearly that targeting social need, meeting need and disadvantage, and equality considerations would be key considerations in the use of the Executive programme funds. We clearly could not discriminate against need just because people raised obvious presentational concerns.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, Madam Deputy Speaker. I do not want to rehearse any of the arguments made earlier by Francie Molloy, the Chairperson of the Finance and Personnel Committee. As a member of that Committee, I share Mr Molloy's views.

I welcome the fact that 62 projects will be supported by these funds. I thank the Minister for his words. Some of these projects would have been ongoing issues, and the purpose of the funds is to be more strategic and long-term. I welcome the Minister's commitment to try to influence the Executive to work on that strategic basis in the long term. I understand why the funds have been allocated in such a way.

The Minister states that the Barnett formula disadvantages this area. I would like a commitment — I know that the Minister has already done this in the past, but I want a further commitment — that this continuing problem of underfunding will continue to be challenged by the Executive.

I welcome the fact that money is being allocated to public-private partnership initiatives in order to ensure that all avenues of funding can be properly explored.

Mr Durkan: I appreciate the frustration that the Member has registered as a member of the Finance and Personnel Committee. We need to ensure that we make best use of these funds, and we need to develop our whole approach to them. I hope that we will have positive encouragement from Members — frustrations notwithstanding — and the co-operation and good counsel of Committees as we set about doing that in the future.

We need to make sure that we make the best use of all funds, not just the Executive programme funds, but also the main Department funds. We also need to make sure that we maximise the resources available to us, and that will include trying to make improvements on the Barnett formula, a task which is not going to be easy or straightforward. We have a very clear view of the difficulty with the Barnett formula. Unfortunately, there are others who do not have the same clear view of the problem and are approaching it from a different starting point. Therefore, we need to build a case there.

We also need to make sure that, where we can marshal additional resources and find better means of managing some of the pressures of private finance initiatives and public-private partnerships, we do so. Some Departments have been examining and developing different ways of doing that, and such activity is to be encouraged. There are no easy answers, and the Treasury's rules and interpretations need to be considered, because certain actions can count as borrowing. We need to address these issues, and that is one reason for making an allocation from the Executive programme funds to allow the Executive and all the relevant Departments to have a concentrated means of making progress on these matters.

Mr Hussey: I thank the Minister for his statement, and, like others, I welcome the overall concept of the fund. However, I want to look briefly at substance and at some of the processes involved. Does the Minister agree that there could be a perceived lack of location-specific projects for the west and north-west of Northern Ireland? He referred to the A4 project, which, he said, extends from Dungannon to Enniskillen. It is listed in the funding section as extending from Dungannon to Ballygawley. Is there perhaps an attempt to avoid highlighting the fact that the west and north-west have been left out? Perhaps we should wait and see how the various general funding is applied to those areas left out of the location-specific funding.

On the subject of process, and in response to the Chairperson of the Social Development Committee, the Minister said that its problems were not his responsibility. Surely he must accept responsibility for the fact that the Finance and Personnel Committee was not notified in January that this process had been initiated. We were not given time — we were not notified that the process had come into being at the end of January in the Departments.

I realise that I have to finish, so I will end with this point. Officials gave the Finance and Personnel Committee evidence to the effect that there was not sufficient time to prepare schemes properly for inclusion in the bids for allocation. This meant — and this goes back to where I started —

Madam Deputy Speaker: Will the Member come to the point of his question, please.

Mr Hussey: — that capital projects were not included in the bids.

Mr Durkan: First, I do not accept that the west or the north-west areas are not benefiting from these allocations. The region as a whole will benefit. Some proposals are locality-specific, others have more strategic, regional significance. For example, while expenditure on the Toome bypass is locality-specific to Toome and its immediate surroundings, the project has significance for a much wider area.

On the issue of residential childcare places, we will be looking across the whole region. There are also some provisions which, although they result in investment in a particular location, such as the medium-secure unit, are designed to provide much needed services across the community. As someone who served on the Western Health and Social Services council, I, along with others, had been pressing for the provision of a medium-secure unit here and for residential childcare places. In my view these announcements do not bypass those who have needs in the west and the north-west in particular.

5.15 pm

We said, both in the House and elsewhere, that we hoped to make allocations from the Executive programme funds before we got to the Main Estimates. We always said that we would make allocations at this stage. That was never a secret — it was communicated to people.

The Committee for Finance and Personnel was notified some time ago of the Department of Finance and Personnel's own particular bids for Executive programme funds. My regret and concern is that those making the other bids did not make similar notification, as I believe they should have. That is why I make the point that I made earlier. We want to make sure that there is just one system of "green for go", rather than try to interpret a whole series of different lights from different Committees. We will try to improve that in the future.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr O'Neill): I welcome the Minister's statement and congratulate him. He demonstrates, more and more, that he stands at the centre of this Administration. He proves that the Good Friday Agreement and its institutions are working for all our people.

As Committee Chairman, I must welcome the good news for the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure — both the plan to buy out the commercial salmon netting licences, which I am very keen on from the Committee's point of view, and the other moneys. I particularly welcome the creativity seed funding element, which covers four Departments. It is a very good example of a cross-cutting activity, despite what some people have already tried to demonstrate.

Has it something to do with the way a Department presents its budget claim for these particular funds?

Have some of the Departments done that inadequately? Can the Minister expand on how the cross-cutting process works in this round of allocation? What are the plans for the future? Does he agree that this is further evidence of the need for collective decision-making involving all parties to the Executive?

Mr Durkan: I am particularly glad that, as Chairperson of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee, the Member welcomes the fact that we have been able to fund a measure that that Committee has advocated. He has raised the issue of buying out the salmon licences several times in the Chamber, both in relation to the Budget and to various monitoring round allocations.

The welcome for the creativity seed fund is not just important for the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. It can also have a positive impact on employment and regeneration. We know that uplifts in cultural activity can be central to regeneration across the region.

I hesitate to comment on comparative analysis about how Departments have approached those particular funds or bids. I stress that any bids that have not been awarded Executive programme fund allocation at this stage are not, in themselves, bad or unworthy bids. They are not matters that do not need support or attention. It is just that, given the availability of resources, we could not cover everything. We had to decide on the best projects to match the particular criteria. We also had to examine the overall spread for the different funds. I hope that, notwithstanding the disappointments, we have achieved that.

It is a learning experience for all of us — the Executive and the Departments. In the future, we want to see Departments making even stronger and more clearly defined bids of their own, but we also want to see Departments working with one another to develop strong bids that have a clear, strategic impact across Government and on the entire region.

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Campbell): I welcome the outcome of some of the bids that I, as Minister for Regional Development, made for flood prevention and road schemes, including the Toome bypass, under the infrastructure fund. Does the Minister agree that when I was dealing with oral questions today I did not reveal the outcome of the bid or what he was going to say, despite the fact that I was in possession of an advance copy of his statement and that one of the questions was about the Toome bypass?

Mr Durkan: I am glad that the Minister welcomes the decision made by the Executive Committee, and I am sure that he and his officials will use the moneys that have been allocated to the Department for Regional Development for roads and flood prevention. He informs me that he used discretion earlier. I appreciate that — I am not entirely surprised.

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's statement, but I am extremely disappointed with the figures for the Department for Social Development — it has fared very badly in this round. I am aware that the Housing Executive put in bids that were not met. We could have been more creative in addressing the needs of those suffering from fuel poverty.

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

I welcome the £0.2 million that will be given to the peripheral housing estates in Derry. However, there are inner city estates in Derry, such as the Bogside, Brandywell, Creggan and the Diamond, that are also experiencing deprivation and disadvantage. It is well documented that poor housing impacts on health, education, mental health and social exclusion, yet the entire Department only received £1.46 million over three years.

I agree with other Members that there has been a lack of consultation with the scrutinising Committees. There is no point in rehashing the points that have been made very well by my Colleagues. The funding that has been allocated to Social Development raises the question of whether the Department would have done better had the Minister for Social Development been in the Executive. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Durkan: Many Members have mentioned matters that they feel should have been funded or supported, but which were not the subject of bids. It is difficult enough, when we do not have sufficient resources, to satisfy everybody by meeting bids that have been made, but it is very hard to satisfy people by meeting bids that have not been made. I recognise some of the problems that have been discussed, such as fuel poverty, but no bid was made for that area. However, some of the issues were covered previously by the Budget and so there should not necessarily have been a bid for fuel poverty.

The funds have been concentrated on the peripheral estates in Derry because those estates did not benefit from other moneys that have been managed by the Department for Social Development in programmes such as the urban initiative and the Londonderry regeneration initiative. That is why that particular bid was met.

Significant funds have been allocated to support work — not only by the Department for Social Development but also by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Rural Community Network — in respect of various estates across the region where there is a lack of community-based organisations. The funding is to try to fill some of the gaps. The Department for Social Development is working with other Departments and is trying to make a difference. It has made bids for projects that are outside of, or beyond, some of the activity that is being undertaken.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education

(Mr Kennedy): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak. I give a broad welcome to the additional funding allocated to the education projects that are indicated in the Minister's statement. The Education Committee was pleased to consider and comment on the bids submitted by the Department of Education, but I want to highlight the lack of time that was provided to undertake effective consideration.

The Committee was pleased to see that several of the early intervention bids had been successful in attracting some, if not all, of the requested funding, including funds for children with learning difficulties and to increase reading recovery work. Although I am pleased that capital building projects have attracted funding, I must express my personal concern regarding the apparent imbalance in the capital funding allocated to the controlled sector in recent years. I believe that that imbalance is reflected in the announcement. There is an obvious and urgent need for capital funding in all of the school sectors.

Consideration must be given to the allocation of capital funding on a fair and equitable basis in each sector. Can the Minister explain how the schools named in the statement were selected? I have a list of contenders originally provided by the Department of Education that confirms that the contenders that the Minister named today were in a list dated January 2001 under projects that were insufficiently planned. They have qualified for funding today before some of those schools that were ready and on the starting block for the original announcement but missed out. Will the Minister give due consideration to that? I am sorry that the Minister of Education is not here, but I think that this is a very serious issue, and I am not entirely satisfied that the controlled sector has been adequately or fairly treated.

Mr Durkan: The Executive agreed the allocations on the basis of work that had been done not just by the Department of Education but by the Department of Finance and Personnel, the Economic Policy Unit and the Equality Unit to ensure that the recommendations that were announced were entirely consistent with New TSN and equality considerations. Given the limited allocations that could be made from the fund for schools infrastructure, the schools that received allocations are those that were high contenders. There were other high contenders that could have received allocations if there had been more money, but, as I said earlier, with that sort of shortlist, some of the presentational concerns that have been raised would not necessarily have been assuaged.

We must allocate on the basis of need. We will get into difficulty if we decide to allocate on how things look, or on how things appear, rather than on the basis of objective need. I often get the question from this side of the House that not enough allocations are going to particular areas, and why is money going to some areas that reinforces previous spending patterns and not enough

going to other areas? We cannot manage these things by appearances and impressions. If we are in the business of Government we must manage by objective need and by objective criteria, and that has been done.

We could not discriminate against need because of the obvious presentational concern that has arisen, which we were able to anticipate. However, we would have been breaching serious principles if we had tried to come to a different allocation purely on the basis of the impressions that some people might have.

5.30 pm

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment (Ms Hanna):

I acknowledge the limitation on the funds available and the time constraints for development of departmental projects. I am aware of the relationship between the environment and health and, indeed, between the environment and tourism and encouraging new investment. Can the Minister assure me that environmental and sustainable development projects will be given greater priority in future allocations?

Mr Durkan: The Department of the Environment has one allocation, like the Department of Finance and Personnel, and that one allocation is for road safety. The Executive are very supportive of the consultation exercise that the Minister of the Environment, Mr Foster, has undertaken as the latest in a series of initiatives. The seriousness of the problem was again brought home to us at the weekend.

As regards wider environmental issues and sustainability, some of the allocations that have been made in respect of agriculture have a strong environmental dimension — for example, farm waste management and measures to reduce phosphorisation of water. Both are very significant in environmental terms and were issues that were pursued by the Minister of the Environment at the environmental sectoral meetings of the North/South Ministerial Council.

Mr Shannon: A sum of £1.4 million has been set aside for early intervention for children with learning disabilities. Was that the full amount of money requested by that Department? Is the Minister prepared to make available a copy of all submitted requests for financial assistance from each Department, along with a copy of requests that were successful?

Did the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development request assistance for the tie-up scheme, that the House unanimously supported last Tuesday? Of the £2.75 million that has been set aside and could be used for a possible fishing decommissioning scheme, how much will actually be granted for decommissioning?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Shannon, if you expect an answer you will have to be brief.

Minister, please be brief.

Mr Durkan: There is no secret about the bids that were submitted. Many Committees have received details of the bids as submitted by their Departments. We will try to resolve the issues that have been mentioned today concerning differential timing and level of information to Committees.

It must be remembered that the bids are the property of the Departments making the bids. They are not the property of the Department of Finance and Personnel. That is something that must be clarified so that in future we do not have these glitches. Most Committees have available to them the information about all the bids that were submitted, and we are making no secret of the fact that there have been many unsuccessful bids.

The further moneys that are being referred to as being held over for February monitoring fall for future allocation by the Executive and will depend on the proposals that the Executive have and the prevailing pressures at that time.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The time is up.

Mr Kennedy: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I appreciate that I and other Members had the opportunity to question the Minister of Finance and Personnel on this important announcement, but I would like to express some alarm that an announcement of this nature should be made so late in the afternoon business of the Assembly and allocated just one hour. That is unsatisfactory.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That was not a valid point of order. As I told the Member's Colleague, the Member for West Tyrone (Mr Hussey), last week, the allocation of time for any item of business is at the discretion of the Business Committee, not the Speaker. If the Member wishes to raise the matter with his party Whip, he is free to do so.

Private Notice Question

ROAD SAFETY

Ms Morrice asked the Minister for Regional Development, in the light of the high number of deaths on the roads over recent weeks, to detail the measures that the Roads Service is taking to address the urgent need to improve road safety.

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Campbell): I am sure that the whole House will join with me in expressing sympathy to the families and friends of those killed in road accidents at the weekend. My Department is fully committed to the fight to improve road safety in Northern Ireland.

There are three vital aspects to reducing the number of road traffic casualties, and they are commonly referred to as the three Es: education, enforcement and engineering. For education, the road safety branch of the Department of the Environment seeks, through its high-profile road safety publicity campaigns, to change the attitude and behaviour of road users by informing them of the main causes of road traffic death and injury. Then there is enforcement: the RUC will enforce the law in relation to traffic offences. The third is engineering, which includes the provision of traffic-calming and accident remedial measures by my Department's Roads Service.

During 2001 the Roads Service expects to spend £3 million on road safety engineering measures, allowing traffic-calming schemes and accident remedial measures to be implemented. In recognition of the need to improve road safety for vulnerable road users in urban streets, the Roads Service has allocated steadily increasing resources to traffic-calming measures since the programme began in 1990. In the current financial year, £1.4 million was allocated. As I said some weeks ago, I hope to make a further significant announcement on traffic calming before the Easter recess.

Several of the Roads Service's other activities also contribute to improving road safety, including major works, traffic management, structural maintenance, street lighting, private streets and development control. The Roads Service has been assisting the Department of the Environment's road safety branch to prepare a road safety strategy consultation document. I understand that the Department of the Environment will shortly seek a wide range of views on a new road safety target and road safety strategy for Northern Ireland up to 2010.

Official RUC statistics show that the vast majority of accidents are caused by human error and behaviour. The road environment is a contributing factor in very few accidents. Although my Department will continue to make the public road network safer, it is important that each of us —as drivers, riders, pedestrians, cyclists, and

so on — accepts responsibility for our road safety and that of others.

Ms Morrice: I thank the Minister for his response, and I appreciate the fact that the Minister of the Environment is also in the Chamber for this question. This is the first time that we have put a private notice question to a Minister, and it is appropriate that it should be on such a serious subject. I join the Ministers in expressing sympathy to the families of those killed in recent weeks.

Several questions on road safety have been put to Ministers today. However, the issue must be considered in much more detail than is allowed by a simple question and answer or by the 20 minutes that we have been allocated.

I must admit that I am extremely disappointed that I am not hearing a much greater desire to do something — to do it now and do it fast. Does the Minister agree that there seems to be total confusion over who takes responsibility or the lead role over the three Es that he is talking about, split between the police, the Department of the Environment and the Department for Regional Development?

Secondly, the Public Accounts Committee certainly had a good go at how badly the strategy on this issue was being followed, in relation to a reduction in the number of deaths and serious injuries on the roads. It was hoped that by 2000 this would have reduced to something in the region of 1,500. In fact, there were nearly 2,000 dead or seriously injured in 2000 — the figure was 1,950. In other words, the target was not met, and lives have been lost as a result of inaction by these Departments. Is that what it is? People are being killed — five more after this weekend and three two weekends ago — because of inaction on the part of all these organisations, buck-passing, or somebody else's responsibility or fault. Will the Minister support a call for a high-level cross-departmental road safety task force to be set up immediately to cut across the red tape and all these barriers that are impeding us from finding a way to reduce the number of deaths on our roads? Set this up immediately; support this high-level task force on road safety, and get something done to cut the number of deaths on our roads.

Mr Campbell: I thank the Member for her response and her question. She has indicated that she is disappointed by the lack of response, but I should say that we — the Assembly collectively — are in somewhat of a difficulty, because road safety, per se — *[Interruption]*

Ms Morrice: That is buck-passing.

Mr Campbell: Road safety is an issue for the Department of the Environment. *[Interruption]*

Ms Morrice: It is an issue for everyone.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

Mr Campbell: That is the reality. As Minister for Regional Development, I have itemised traffic-calming measures — not as a result of issues that Ms Morrice or anybody else raised. I raised them in my Department, and I will be making an announcement, because I am concerned. I happen to know one of the families that were bereaved at the weekend in Coleraine. It is not a case of a lack of will on my part. I will do whatever I can within the remit of my Department.

The hon Member makes mention of targets not being met. That is a matter for the road safety division in the Department of the Environment. I will gladly meet — *[Interruption]*

Ms Morrice: Road safety is in the Minister's remit.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Campbell: I will gladly meet the Minister of the Environment, who is equally concerned about the issue. I will meet him to see if there is any merit in the establishment of a road safety task force, or if there are existing arrangements that can be fine-tuned, with which we can seek to establish a greater degree of response. If the targets are not being met, we can try to see that they are. On those three fronts, we have to continue to educate the public, because all of us should pay greater attention while using the roads, whether as motorists or pedestrians. We need to try to ensure that the enforcement option — for which the RUC is responsible — is vigorously pursued. The engineering option is specifically within my remit.

5.45 pm

As I have said, I am committed to the establishment of and additional expenditure on traffic-calming measures. I hope soon to be in a position to make an announcement about these schemes. I assure the Member and the House that I will meet the Minister of the Environment to come up with measures which are not already being taken and to see if this issue can be addressed more quickly than before.

Mr B Hutchinson: Every year there are over 800 casualties as a result of traffic turning right. What can the Minister do to remove the serious danger of traffic turning right on dual carriageways?

Mr Campbell: I will have to examine right turns and other aspects of main junctions and arterial routes where there are higher instances of casualties than expected. The Roads Service is continually carrying out such work and is always looking for ways to make improvements. I have, in response to questions in the House, outlined measures that it has taken to eliminate accidents that occur specifically at right turns.

I will undertake to see what measures have been put in place, for example, in the past 12 months, and I will respond to the Member. I will also seek further safety

measures at right turns where problems have emerged from time to time.

Mr Dallat: Like all Members, I am distressed by the number of road accidents. Is the Minister satisfied that investigations after fatal accidents are sufficiently thorough to uncover all the influencing factors? Would he support a more thorough investigation so that, after all these years, we might learn the reasons for fatal accidents? We know that the primary causes of accidents include speeding and drink-driving. However, it is now widely accepted that much more information should be gleaned after fatal accidents to establish all the factors.

Mr Campbell: One of the difficulties with fatal accidents involving vehicles is that it may be weeks, as opposed to days, before all the facts emerge, and it is a very sensitive situation. When there has been a fatal accident, family members must be considered, as must the drivers of vehicles. However, I accept the thrust of the Member's point. We ought to be able to establish the causes of these accidents and consider these factors when implementing changes. I will gladly examine the matter.

I look forward to meeting the Minister of the Environment to see if we can undertake to implement any new measures or to implement existing proposals more quickly. The Roads Service will remain committed to implementing engineering measures, including changes in structure, design, right turns, et cetera, which would help to reduce the awful carnage on the roads.

Mr Hussey: My point follows on from the Minister's response to the last question. I am aware of the three Es approach. With regard to the engineering aspect, how

can road safety considerations be given greater priority when schemes are selected for completion using the funding process that the Minister must follow? Is he willing to upgrade road safety as a priority when the Department has to make choices about schemes?

Mr Campbell: The short answer to that is a simple yes. Roads Service engineers invariably face a problem, which I am sure the hon Member will be aware of given his background in local government. Roads Service engineers examine the road safety implications and the road safety history of a particular stretch of road when there is lobbying for change because of the possibility of accidents. However, many residents and public representatives feel that the Roads Service is almost saying that there must be some sort of accident to guarantee remedial works. That is a difficult situation to resolve. If there are stretches of road where there is the serious possibility of accidents and fatalities, they should be prioritised — and they are.

Occasionally accidents happen that have no obvious safety implications for that stretch of road. If speed or drink-driving is the cause of a fatality, it is difficult to see what could have been done or what can be done in the future to eliminate the problem. I take the Member's point. I will ensure that where possible — and we are examining possible improvements — road safety will be the top criterion. If there is a road safety implication when alterations and remedial work are being contemplated, that implication will always receive high priority.

Adjourned at 5.53 pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 3 April 2001

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

DEPARTMENT FOR LEARNING AND EMPLOYMENT BILL

Second Stage

The Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Dr Farren): I beg to move

That the Second Stage of the Department for Learning and Employment Bill [NIA 12/00] be agreed.

Members will be aware that I have been considering changing the current title of this Department for some time. Its undue length has caused continual problems. I have become the Minister of Further Education, the Minister of Further and Higher Education, the Minister of Higher and Further Education, the Minister of Training, the Minister of Training and Employment and the Minister of Employment. I might enjoy being perceived as carrying all those different Ministries on my back, but, Members may agree that, regardless of the length of the Department's title, its acronym is an unfortunate one. Therefore, after much thought, I have come to the view that the title ought to be the Department for Learning and Employment.

Several other options were considered, but we concluded that the option chosen neatly encapsulates the key themes of the Department, namely, lifelong learning and preparing people for employment. I assure Members that changing the Department's title will have no significant cost implications for the Department or its customers. As no new regulations are proposed by the Bill, there will be no adverse impact on business; neither will the Bill have any impact on equal opportunities.

The Chairperson of the Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment Committee (Dr Birnie): The Committee was grateful to the Minister for consultation about this Bill at the pre-draft stage. In broad terms we welcome it, because, as the Minister has just said, the acronym often associated with the Department — DHFETE — has been unfortunate, given efforts to encourage people to enter into higher and further education and lifelong learning as a whole. By

changing the Department's name, we will remove at least one thing to which the diary column in the business supplement of the 'Belfast Telegraph' repeatedly refers.

There is a need for a new and shorter title, but it must cover the broad areas of the Department's remit. We note that the Minister said that there would be no regulatory impact from the change and that the cost implications would be insignificant. At the next stage of the Bill's passage, the Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment Committee hopes to discover whether there are any cost implications. I say that partly because of the Comptroller and Auditor General's 1999-2000 report, which detailed the Training and Employment Agency's failure to follow proper purchasing procedures when it was developing a new corporate identity and promoting and re-imaging the New Deal and the jobcentres. The Public Accounts Committee will be pursuing the matter, and our Committee will watch its deliberations with interest.

The Committee welcomes the proposal.

Dr Farren: The costs associated with the name change will be quite low. Given the strong possibility that the proposal will meet with Members' approval, the Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment has kept its stationery supplies to a minimum — just enough to cope with current business. The costs for stationery and signage, additional to ongoing costs, are not likely to be more than £10,000 to £15,000. Further details will be available at later stages of the Bill's passage. I thank the Chairperson of the Committee for his support.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Second Stage of the Department for Learning and Employment Bill [NIA 12/00] be agreed.

VICTIMS: PEACE II PROGRAMME

The Junior Minister (Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister) (Mr Haughey): I beg to move

That this Assembly welcomes the inclusion of a specific measure for victims in the European Peace II programme.

I welcome this chance to draw attention to the real opportunities that the Peace II funding provides for victims. It is significant that a specific measure has been developed to which only individual victims and victims' groups will have access.

The funding package amounts to approximately £6.67 million, and it will provide significant additional resources to this important and often marginalised section of society. Peace II funding will allow important work to be taken forward in a range of areas but will concentrate on reskilling, retraining and re-employment, so that those who have often been excluded from education and employment opportunities will benefit most.

The Peace II funding should also be seen in the context of the overall funding package available for victims. The Victims Unit in the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister allocated £420,000 in the past financial year to several projects and initiatives.

In the next few days my Colleague Minister Nesbitt and myself will meet our Northern Ireland Office counterpart, Mr Adam Ingram MP, to discuss the allocation of £9 million of funding recently announced by his Department. It is vital that we work with him on this issue and that funding is targeted in a meaningful way at the most important areas.

The £6.67 million provided for victims in the Peace II package is an important part of the total package of targeted funding and gives a clear indication of the Executive's desire to tackle the issues in a proactive manner. I look forward to a positive discussion and debate on these matters, and I know that everyone present will welcome this very important step in addressing the needs of victims.

Mr Dallat: I welcome the announcement as a positive step towards recognising the needs of people hurt so badly by the troubles. The European Union has a vital role to play in this process not just in the short term but for many years to come. The needs of victims and their families cannot be resolved in the short term. It is a long and painful process that will continue many years after the majority of Assembly Members have gone. That has been the experience in other parts of the world where conflict caused suffering and hardship to many people, but the conflict cannot, and will not, continue.

The peace that we now enjoy has been inspired in many ways by the European experience dating back not just to the second world war but for many years beyond

that. We all have some experience of the suffering endured over the years by people from all sections of the community. In a graveyard near my home there is an inscription on a tombstone which reads "An innocent victim of the troubles". People in the future will, without doubt, read that inscription and understand to a point. However, they can never really understand the suffering or the needs of the people who were affected. They will not know that family life for everyone in that house was turned upside down. Their lives, their careers and their plans for the future were shattered. Even today, they are struggling to rebuild what was destroyed a few years ago. Assistance to retrain and reskill is critical for this family and for many other families affected during the 30 years of the troubles.

Mr Haughey's announcement today about funding is a recognition which will assist the needs of the victims in a very positive way. That was a promise made, and I am more than pleased that it has now been honoured. It is the first milestone on a long and torturous road for people. That road will have many corners and many hazards. I hope that in the future the European Peace II programme will continue to support those victims as they put their lives together again and face the future. The victims cannot be left behind. We have a duty as politicians to help them on their way. There is, as I have said, a notion that victims can be given a quick fix, a cheque in the post. Such notions are not only mistaken but also insulting to those who matter most — the victims.

Today there is a recognition that the process includes resources to retrain, reskill and rebuild lives. Let us hope that we can build on our experience to ensure that this support is used wisely and in consultation with those who need it, and those for whom it was intended. Above all, let us be aware that it is only a beginning. No one should be surprised if, in the distant future, politicians are still coping with the hurt caused during the troubles. The hurt has been great for all our people, and the healing process has to be inclusive. To address the problem in a selective or divisive way would only delay the whole process of reconciliation.

10.45 am

Today's announcement is a very positive step. It is a recognition that people's lives were turned upside down by the troubles and that there is now a caring Assembly which, with the support of European funding, is prepared to help those people to rebuild their lives and to assist them on the journey onwards. This is a historic day for the Assembly and an important day for the European Union as a whole. I particularly welcome the announcement.

Mr Berry: I have an interest — like many in the Chamber — in this subject because not only had I a relative murdered by terrorists but I saw at first hand the difficulty that real victims have in getting financial help following their loss. In February, the Assembly was told

by the First Minister, Mr Trimble, that, under the Peace II programme, victims of violence and ex-prisoners will be regarded as target groups for assistance. The EU programme will also include a specific measure for victims, with funding of approximately £6.6 million. Our MEPs also need to be praised for the work and effort that they have put in to secure this money.

There is a very serious anomaly. Far too often victims and ex-prisoners are included together. There are far more ex-prisoners' groups — which exist to milk this system — than there are victims' groups. When we hear that millions of pounds will be available for this section as a whole, it does not necessarily mean that the victims will get the lion's share of the money. Several months ago a question was put by Mr Dodds to the Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Durkan, about £6 million being allocated to ex-prisoners' groups. Some £4.5 million of that came from the EU peace money and £1.5 million came from the Government.

There is a genuine need to ensure that the real victims receive money. That is evident when we see the ability of numerous groups to apply for, or claim, money on spurious grounds. For example, huge sums of money have been paid out by the Ministry of Defence for alleged injury, for the death of animals, or for the loss of, or damage to, silage in the border areas due to helicopter activity. Money has been squandered throughout the whole system. The money must now be very much focused on the innocent victims. The vast numbers of fraudulent claims serve to confirm that there is an indisputable danger of giving taxpayers' money to fraudsters. We see that also in the huge sums that were paid to the Ex-Prisoners Interpretive Centre (EPIC) — an organisation funded to deal with ex-prisoners.

These points all raise crucial questions. How many of those groups that have sprung up over the last decade, claiming to deal with all kinds of people related to the troubles, are legitimate? I refer Members to one group in the Maze Prison which received money for a fly-fishing course. It is not rocket science to realise that all too often there are scams of one sort or another being carried out. Undoubtedly, Republicans will moan that we are claiming there to be, and creating, a hierarchy of suffering. One thing is clear: the grief of those whose relatives were brutally murdered by terrorists is not the same as that of those who cry over terrorists who were killed. If the latter have any grief, it ought to be only for those whom their terrorist friends killed.

I wrote numerous letters on the subject to the Minister then responsible for victims' issues, Mr Adam Ingram. I have also put many questions to the two junior Ministers, who are present today. One of the things that stand out from raising the issue with Mr Ingram is the uncertainty of funding for the victims year after year. By contrast, there is no shortage of money for those who created the

victims in the first place. That too is a source of anguish among victims' support groups.

Another issue must be addressed, and I trust that the junior Ministers will take it on board today. It is that of the widows of UDR and RIR personnel, who have been overlooked in all of this. It is imperative that they be included as well. We welcome the additional money that was provided for the RUC widows. People whose loved ones were murdered because they were members of the UDR or RIR were very concerned at being treated differently. There should be equal recognition for all those in the security forces. We trust that UDR and RIR widows will be highlighted under this programme.

The notion that you can treat the victims and perpetrators of violence equally concerns me. That philosophy underlies much of the money that is being distributed under the peace and reconciliation fund. It is a clear signal of moral bankruptcy. It is my contention that there is no equivalence between them.

I am also concerned that because we have Sinn Féin/IRA sitting in government their influence will extend to ensuring that their own political clique gets more recognition than the real victims. Even though they jump up and down proclaiming how much they care about victims, the reality is that, under their ideology, even terrorists are victims. This aims to overthrow all right thinking. It is the old idea of calling evil good.

There is a very real concern that money earmarked for victims should go to the real victims. It should not go to people whom political correctness deems appropriate.

I trust that we will get assurances from the First Minister, the Deputy First Minister and the junior Ministers that innocent victims will be catered for and that they will receive the funding they need and deserve. We are all aware of the suffering and anguish that has been caused over the past 30 years or more by the loss of loved ones who have been tragically and evilly taken away. I also trust we can be assured that innocent victims will not be provided for under the same banner as ex-prisoners' groups.

It is a matter of great concern. We have raised it in the past and will continue to raise it. I trust that the junior Ministers will take up with the relevant Ministers the points that I have raised today, for it is not only a matter of funding for the victims. Many times we have heard that it is not just a matter of money: it is also a matter of justice.

There have been many murders in the area I represent — South Armagh — and other border areas. When I raised the issue of an inquiry with the Security Minister, Mr Adam Ingram, he replied to me on 13 March 2001 saying that an inquiry would be counterproductive and would jeopardise the investigations. As I said earlier, this is not just about funding; it is also about justice. Mr

Ingram went on to say that the perpetrators of all unsolved murders in Northern Ireland should be brought to justice. I find it very sad that the perpetrators are being funded by the Government and by the Assembly. All these points need to be taken on board. Not only does funding need to be provided but justice needs to be seen to be done in this country.

Mrs E Bell: It will come as no surprise to anyone in the Assembly that I welcome the motion. I have worked with victims for the last 20 or 30 years and I know that this will be an encouragement to them.

Soon after the ceasefires were announced in 1994 I talked to several women from all parts of the community who had lost relatives through violent deaths. They hoped that the acknowledgement of their loss and the trauma of their experiences, and those of the many like them, would now be made in an open and appropriate manner.

Some years on, after the Good Friday Agreement and the referendum, I spoke to the same people again and they made exactly the same point. However, they made it in a much more cynical way. I have worked with groups, organisations and individuals who have been concerned by the apparent inaction and total disinterest in their plight and the plight of all those who were affected by the troubles.

I am sure that people have heard the word “acknowledgement” many times. These women have been concerned about that, as opposed to the high profile they have seen given regularly to prisoners, for whatever justifiable reasons.

The Victims Liaison Unit has done a very good job in encouraging and bringing together organisations and groups that work with victims and for victims. The Bloomfield Report highlighted the problems faced by victims. Many publications about the troubles and their victims recount horrific stories. All victims display admirable tolerance. However, there are always comments on the lack of acknowledgement and often the lack of interest from politicians and the public for victims. While compiling his report, Sir Kenneth Bloomfield spoke of the great sympathy he felt for the victims whose stories he was told and of his admiration for how those people had reacted and coped with the horrific events in their lives.

The Victims Liaison Unit was set up to implement the recommendations made in the Bloomfield Report ‘We Will Remember Them’. The unit has done a great deal of good in bringing victims groups and individuals together, assessing needs and developing the Government’s policy towards victims and survivors. It also set up Touchstone, the umbrella group for victims’ organisations. The unit runs seminars and conferences with the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust to highlight and discuss situations in these most sensitive areas. It also funds projects, including the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund, which provide bursaries to dependants. This work must be

carried on, as I am sure it will be by the Victims Unit with assistance from the Victims Liaison Unit

The recently established Victims Unit, which is in the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, is working with the Victims Liaison Unit to improve the situation of those most recently affected by the troubles in a practical way. I believe that Mr McGrady said that the Victims Unit is committed to improving services to victims by 2002.

Peace II moneys will undoubtedly play a significant part in meeting this challenge, and it is fitting that the European Union continues to play a direct supporting role in this area of regeneration.

It is essential that the standards of provision be assessed and that financial assistance be allocated where it is most needed. I hope that the Victims Unit and the Victims Liaison Unit will do that. The £420,000 announced by the junior Ministers last week was welcome, and the promise of another £9 million will go some way towards addressing the needs of victims and their organisations with basic measures such as counselling, befriending, retraining and community unemployment projects.

There has been talk of a hierarchy of victims. In fact, there has been talk this morning of “innocent” victims, and I am still trying to figure out exactly what that means. Regardless of the definitions given by others we should not allow the needs and hopes of those who have already been disadvantaged by acts of terror and sectarianism to be curtailed by manipulation. The Bloomfield Report said that victims are those people — men, women and children — directly affected by the troubles. It is not for us to determine degrees of victims or to monopolise victims. We should never let victims become pawns in a political game — as many of them fear they are.

The Assembly should pledge itself to ensuring that all victims are treated with trust and care and are given practical, relevant help to achieve their aims and to take advantage of every opportunity. Victims should have easy access to information on finance, counselling, medical help and other support as necessary. It may well be that a victims’ minister will have to be appointed, but at the moment we need to look to the junior Ministers, who have been tasked with this responsibility. I know they are committed to victims, and the Committee of the Centre will work with them.

Peace II money and other measures will contribute to an open acknowledgement of the price victims have paid. It will provide the Government and other involved bodies with the finance to allow the furtherance of such projects that will help victims enjoy full citizenship in the new Northern Ireland that we all hope for and are working towards. We must address the legacy of the conflict. We must do it for all victims and we must do it together.

Mr Boyd: I welcome the fact that financial assistance will be given to the innocent victims of terrorism, but there are several points that need to be clarified regarding the claim that there are specific measures for victims in the European Peace II programme. There is no specific definition of “victim” in the programme. The term is used to mean many things to many people. Mrs Bell made light of the term “innocent victim”. However, it is essential that a distinction be made between innocent victims of terrorism and those who were clearly involved in terrorist acts, who, regrettably are also described by many as victims.

11.00 am

It is morally wrong and an insult to the many innocent victims when they are referred to by some in authority in the same manner as those who committed the very heinous acts against them and their families. The needs of innocent victims should be addressed, and not simply in monetary terms as some Members appear to believe.

The First Minister, in an article in the ‘Belfast Telegraph’ at the weekend, claimed that they had been attempting to address the needs of the bereaved and injured. That is an insult to the many innocent victims.

The First Minister and other pro-Agreement Members have caused untold hurt to the innocent victims of terrorism by endorsing the release of prisoners who are guilty of the most heinous of crimes and supporting an amnesty for those convicted of terrorist acts. The First Minister has also supported their elevation into the very heart of the Government.

For the First Minister and others to refer in their recent publication to a one-stop shop for victims is insensitive and indeed an insult. The attitude that innocent victims can be bought off with a monetary payment is adding insult to injury. The First Minister’s claim that he is championing a public inquiry into IRA/Garda collusion rings hollow, considering his support for the early release of terrorist prisoners and an amnesty for convicted terrorists. In the words of Mrs Sylvia Callaghan, whose son was murdered in the Ballykelly bombing,

“Any deal that benefits terrorists by putting them in positions of authority in our land is an insult to the memory of my son, murdered by the people the authorities are now falling over themselves to placate.”

The most important step that the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister could take to ease the pain of the innocent victims is to endorse the exclusion of Sinn Féin/IRA from government. It would also be a positive gesture to the victims if the First Minister were to donate his Nobel Peace Prize money to the innocent victims rather than retain it for himself. I call on him today in this Chamber to do so without further delay.

The innocent victims in the Unionist community have little confidence in the administration of EU funding by the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust (NIVT). Payments

to terrorist prisoners between 1995 and 1999 under the European Union Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation amounted to more than £6 million. Under the Peace II programme, £6.7 million has been given out for victims, and £6 million was also given for prisoners under Peace I. How much will be given to prisoners under the Peace II programme?

The grants in the Peace I programme were used to provide education and training, resource centres, minibuses for prison visits — including training of drivers to gain their HGV licences — guitar and yoga lessons. This was all for prisoners in the Maze prison; a computer was also provided for female prisoners in Maghaberry prison. This is disgraceful; the funding would have been better spent on the innocent victims of terrorist violence who have suffered throughout the last 30 years.

To compound the hurt even further, NIVT — in my view, a completely discredited body — which administers this European funding, recently authorised the paltry sum of £2,000 for the families acting for innocent relatives. This is one of the largest victims groups in Northern Ireland, made up of several hundred RUC, UDR and RIR widows.

It is disgraceful that terrorist prisoners are receiving such large amounts, yet innocent victims receive very little or, in some cases, nothing at all. NIVT is a discredited body in the Unionist community, and, as a priority, I am calling for an independent report to be compiled into its administration and allocation of grants under the Peace I programme. No further funding should be given to prisoners, ex-prisoners or their families; the resources that are available under the Peace II programme should instead be channelled towards the real victims of terror and their victim groups, together with the many innocent victims who are not members of any victim groups and have had to endure agony, often in silence, with little or no support.

In closing, I want to highlight the poor attendance in the Chamber today. There are fewer than 30 Members out of 108 to discuss the important and essential issue of victims.

Mr Watson: In supporting this motion, I welcome the announcement that has been made. I also put on record our thanks to our MEPs, our Government and those responsible for making this funding available under Peace II. It is rather ironic that some of our victims’ groups got very little money under Peace I. I listened with interest to Mr Boyd when he hinted — and it does beg the question — that those administering the funds then were working to their own political agenda. Certainly, the victims did not get their fair share of funding. Mr Boyd referred to Families Acting for Innocent Relatives (FAIR), and I understand that that group, together with Victims of Injustice Campaigning for Equality (VOICE) and Homes United by Ruthless Terror (HURT), travelled to Brussels in April 2000,

where they lobbied successfully to ensure that there would be a line in the budget earmarked for victims of terrorist violence. Those — indeed, all — victims' groups need to be treated as a priority.

To ensure that this is not lost in the debate, I want to say that the peace dividend needs to get down to the victims as quickly as possible. This has not yet happened. Core posts are needed in the sector, and they are essential if the excellent support work for victims is to continue and develop. We know that the work of the victims' groups is expanding at an exceptional rate, and support is needed quickly.

Mr Boyd touched on discrimination. In the past, those groups which include members of the security forces have found that they have been discriminated against. We need guarantees that that will not happen. This needs to be made abundantly clear in relation to any funding from Peace II. Guarantees are also needed that groups with a proven track record of excellent work will be given all the resources they need to do the work that no one else is doing. They must be able to demonstrate good management practice, good value for money and good care for their members and staff. They must be treated as priority groups in the sector in future.

I agree with Mr Berry about the measures that need to be taken for the UDR and RIR widows. I hope that the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister will address that matter. I hope that an anomaly will also be addressed. Past members of the RUC who left the force perhaps a few weeks before they were murdered are not included in arrangements for the RUC. I urge that the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister address that matter.

Mr Ervine: This can be nothing other than a difficult subject to deal with. If not every group of victims is named, I suppose some are being left out and others elevated. When the blood runs in the street, as the brain is splattered against the wall, the blood does not know the victim's religion or political affiliation, or even his age. Our society, however, does not have one hierarchy of victims about which we hear, but a series of such hierarchies. Each group, each faction, elevates its victims or perceived victims above the victims or perceived victims of others.

I do not know whether this is any consolation at all to the widows, the widowers, the children or the parents. People who never knew the husbands, wives, sons or daughters have a bitterness and a hatred for them, and in death — even in death — a sense of detestation continues as if those people had been known intimately. It brings to mind the sense of communal pain felt in society, that sense felt by the diaspora. That communal pain is more evident when it is realised that those furthest away from the war are very often those who want the war to be fought most of all.

Recently I had a conversation with some victims. I asked them what I might do. Their reply was "Do not do anything for me publicly. If you have anything to do for me, it will be with the statutory agencies, which can affect my life in practical ways. If you espouse my cause publicly, I will not be sure whether you are doing it because of the value you place on me or because of the value you place on being heard by an electorate that might feel that you are fighting a good battle for them."

The nature of a divided society is that you cannot fight a good battle for someone without also fighting a good battle against someone. In a way we are all victims. The children, who came into this society with absolute innocence, were imbued with a traditional attitude from wherever they came, and that probably ensured that, in their separate ways, they found their paths to the jails and to the graveyards.

Something happened to us. Rather than play the game of supremacy that both sides play — especially with victims — would we not be better asking "What happened to us?" We stood the victims and their relatives side by side to make a line that forms the milestones to show us how far we had to come and how awful we had become before we began to make changes in this society. They also became the bulwarks against our capacity to revert back to what we once were.

Nothing is perfect. For those of us who have the luxury, there is an opportunity for life to be wonderful. Unfortunately, there are those on all sides whose lives will never be wonderful again. The sense of loss, with no intimate touches, no sharing of thoughts, no arguments, no smiles: that is a human experience. Whether you are Protestant or Catholic, Nationalist or Unionist, Loyalist or Republican, there can be no denying that we are all human beings who need to start pulling a curtain down on the past.

We will not forget where we have been, or what we have done, but perhaps as we move away from the brutality and the awfulness of the past, we will find a way to expurgate our guilt and our grief. We might be able to confront what happened to us: why we did the things we did; why we had the simplicity we had; why we lived with the ghosts, the myths and the shibboleths that allowed us to take life. Never mind venerating victims — it allowed us to take life.

Our choices are clear. Either we offer people succour and comfort in their time of need, or we are a failed society. Leave any one of them out and we wound ourselves. There are victims' groups, and I am certain that they take great comfort from their fellowship, but there are individuals — ordinary people — suffering behind closed doors. Rather than simply going on a rant of my personal opinions, let me try and do something practical. It is vital that those with authority are proactive in helping victims. It will be easy to identify

the victims' groups but much harder to identify the individual sufferers, those who do not want that fellowship, those who do not want to be used as pawns in a political game, those who prefer to live isolated lives.

What are we doing that is proactive for those individuals? Are we rapping on the doors to offer them society's help or are we waiting until they come to the door with a begging bowl? When we talk about the Peace II initiatives, I would like to know what we are going to do. I advocate that the two junior Ministers take back to their respective leaders the importance of being proactive and say that any single, unrecognised victim diminishes this society.

11.15 am

Ms Morrice: We welcome the motion. However, I am a little confused, if not somewhat bemused, as to the reason for its being before us. If it is about creating greater awareness of what is on offer for those who have suffered throughout the many years of troubles, it is certainly extremely valuable. As Mr Ervine said, we need to be extremely proactive about letting people know what is available and what can be done to help victims. It is vital that we ensure that there is greater awareness of this subject.

However, if the purpose of this motion is to enable us to take credit, it is of no value. Taking credit or praising oneself for doing something which people in authority should have been doing for many, many years is not something that I welcome. However, I will give it the benefit of the doubt and assume that the reason we are discussing this today is that victims, victims' groups, people who have suffered and people who, as Mr Ervine said, suffer "behind closed doors" and do not know how to come forward will now know that this help is available to them and that they must come forward. We would definitely like to be much more specific about exactly what is available. We do need to go out to let victims know what is available to them.

I want to dwell for a moment on a history lesson. As head of the European Commission office in 1994, I was involved in setting up the first peace programme. In the negotiations with Brussels on Peace I, the needs of victims were very much on the table and were being discussed by civil servants and fonctionnaires in Brussels and here. Pushed by Europe, there was support for victims and victims' groups under Peace I, though, without any doubt, there was not nearly enough. Our hope must be that in Peace II much more is made available in this specific measure for victims.

I also remind Members that when the first draft of the Peace II programme was issued well over a year ago, several Assembly Members were at the presentation in the Long Gallery. I think that it was Adam Ingram and his staff who made the presentation. It should be on

record somewhere that when the first draft of Peace II was issued, there was not even a mention of victims in it.

I remember several of us raising our hands to arrest the proceedings and query what the peace and reconciliation programme was all about. There seemed to be an incredible steer towards those projects that focused on the economic needs of Northern Ireland. I also stated that it would be difficult to stamp a dove of peace on Peace II, because there was not nearly enough work being done on reconciliation and getting communities together. I am very glad to see that there has been a turnaround and that as a result of consultation and pressure the original draft has become a source of measures which we can welcome in today's motion.

However, I want us to go further than that. I would also like to welcome specific measures for integrated education, for greater cross-border co-operation and for more cross-community work. Peace II needs to achieve these goals also and we should bring these issues to the Floor of the House.

There is no doubt that we welcome the specific measures for victims included in the European Peace II programme. We thank the European Union for providing us with the finance to enable us to do this. Once the European moneys run out, let us hope that the Government will undertake to continue support measures for the victims of the troubles by mainstreaming this funding. Let us not simply clap ourselves on the back in congratulations for our good works. We are not doing enough. Much more needs to be done on a long-term basis.

Mr A Maginness: As I listen to this debate I have a sense of déjà vu. The old arguments much beloved of the DUP about "innocent" and "real" victims are being remoulded and recycled. I had hoped that the DUP might strike a more positive note today.

Mr Poots: Does the Member consider Slobadan Milosevic to be a victim?

Mr A Maginness: I am not sure that that is relevant to the debate.

Allow me to develop my argument a little. I respect Mr Berry because he has a genuine interest in the concerns and needs of victims. However, I am disappointed by the rather begrudging, carping attitude that he brought to the debate today. Instead of welcoming this motion with enthusiasm, he criticised it and then indulged in the old argument about innocent victims, real victims and prisoners et cetera. Ex-prisoners help to re-establish themselves as citizens. I am not afraid to assert that publicly, because it is important that we assist these people.

That is a separate argument, and ex-prisoners have separate needs. A humane and caring society is one that says to ex-prisoners "You have offended. You paid a price. We will now help you to rehabilitate yourselves." This applies to people who were convicted of offences

arising out of the troubles — scheduled offences — as much as to those who were convicted of “ordinary” crimes.

The prisoners’ argument is completely separate from the victims’ argument. Let us consider the centrality of victims. The Good Friday Agreement, which the DUP opposes and seeks to overturn, addresses the needs and suffering of victims. A section devoted to victims of violence says

“The participants believe that it is essential to acknowledge and address the suffering of the victims of violence as a necessary element of reconciliation.”

That is an important statement.

Today, the Executive are addressing the needs of victims of the troubles. That is an important step which everyone in the House should welcome enthusiastically. Peace II gives us an opportunity to target specifically the needs of victims. David Ervine spoke very eloquently about the needs of victims and pointed out that it is not only victims’ groups that we need to help but also individual victims, especially those who are hidden away and who feel so isolated and so marginalised that they may have given up hope. The Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister will target victims individually and through organisations. The important strategy on which the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister is working, on which all Members will be consulted, will establish a comprehensive programme for addressing the needs of victims.

Let me return to the Good Friday Agreement, which says that it is essential not only to “address” but also to “acknowledge” the suffering of victims.

Mr Berry: Will the Member acknowledge that when he and his party, and many others, agreed to the Good Friday Agreement — if one can call it that — many victims were sorely annoyed and distressed when they saw that the perpetrators of violence were going to be released early on to the streets and the victims shunned? Basically, those victims were told “We care more for the prisoners than we care for the victims.”

Mr A Maginness: Yes, some people were mightily distressed by the early release of prisoners, and some were not.

Mr B Hutchinson: Does the Member agree that on 15 December 1994, when exploratory talks opened in this Building, 364 Loyalist and Republican life-sentence prisoners were already on the streets, long before the Good Friday Agreement was even talked about?

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Member for the intervention. In the normal course of events prisoners are released from prison when they have served their time. As Mr Hutchinson pointed out, many Loyalist and Republican prisoners had already been released. The number of reoffenders among that group, and, indeed, among the groups released after the Good Friday

Agreement, is minimal, and it is important to take that into consideration.

People say “Hordes of prisoners have been released. This is terrible.” Is it so terrible? Prisoners have contributed to and secured the peace in our society. They may have done terrible things in the past, but they have paid for those things. The contribution of prisoners should not be underestimated — though it should not be overestimated either.

11.30 am

The Good Friday Agreement talks about victims — it makes them a central part of the agreement. We — especially members of the DUP, who are so opposed to the Good Friday Agreement — should say that it has produced a focus on victims. If we were truthful, that is what we would say. The Good Friday Agreement has acted as a stimulus for focusing on the needs of victims, and it is very important for Members to acknowledge that.

The Good Friday Agreement talks about the acknowledgement of victims. Today we are talking about addressing the needs of victims. The strategy has to address not only the needs of victims but also has to acknowledge victims in some way. I do not know how we will do that. Many ways have been suggested, but there is no overall scheme in which acknowledgement can fully take place. The strategy that the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister produces should contain a major element acknowledging the role of victims and their suffering. It should acknowledge their pain both individually and collectively. That is an important element and should be included.

The SDLP takes acknowledgement seriously, and we have produced our own ideas about it. One of these ideas, which would be helpful in acknowledging the suffering and pain of victims collectively and individually, is the establishment of a video archive. This would be publicly funded, and victims of the troubles could go to it and relate their stories on video or audio. The tapes will be stored as an historic record, which the public will have access to. Similar schemes have been set up in other places such as Israel and Washington.

Mr Paisley Jnr: I thank the Member for giving way and for putting an interesting idea to the House. Is he proposing, in his definition of victims, that people who have been injured by terrorist activity should have to share a place in that scheme with people who were terrorists and were perhaps injured by members of the security forces who were defending law and order? Does he understand that some victims might feel reluctant to be seen as part of that definition?

Mr A Maginness: I understand your position and the deeply held views of people who are upset about the equation that you have just suggested.

Mr Speaker: The debate is to be conducted through the Chair, not by addressing Members directly.

Mr A Maginness: I apologise, Mr Speaker.

The definition of victim that Mr Paisley Jnr suggested is far too restrictive. Eileen Bell is a leading expert on victims because she did so much work over the years in that area before the issue of victims became “fashionable”. She has suggested that the definition of victim should not be restrictive — it should be much wider.

The SDLP believes that as well. If people believe that they have been victimised by the troubles, that should be sufficient to define them as victims. It should be self-defining, because when people are excluded all sorts of problems are created. However, I do understand the sensitivities that people have about the definition of victims and the sharing, as it were, of victimhood with people whom they do not agree with politically or who they believe to have been the cause of violence or hurt in society.

It is essential that the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister co-operate fully with the Northern Ireland Office and with Minister Ingram in particular. It is vital to have co-operation between the Executive and the Northern Ireland Office. Mr Ingram has been very helpful and enthusiastic in addressing victims’ issues. A co-operative approach is central to addressing the gamut of victims’ needs. I am sure that that will come about, and I urge that it does.

Mrs I Robinson: There is a difference between those who carried out terrorist atrocities and those who suffered at the hands of those same terrorists. To say that the prisoners have paid their price to society is to add insult to injury.

Some terrorists served only months of life sentences because of the deal agreed under the Belfast Agreement. Many ex-prisoners are involved in drugs, protection rackets and other antisocial activities. They have created a mafia-type society that is causing severe hardship across the Province. I ask Mr Maginness to bear that in mind.

Throughout the so-called peace process, one group of people has come to symbolise all that is wrong with current political developments — the victims of the troubles; and by “victims” I mean those who have suffered as a result of terrorist violence. They are the real victims as opposed to those who are busily trying to claim a place in that honourable group.

The evident disparity between the way in which ex-prisoners and victims are treated is obscene. The catalogue of financial handouts to ex-prisoner groups is not only offensive but smacks of a pay-off. Almost £7 million have been given to ex-prisoners to date. That is, of course, only a minimum figure — a vast sum has been given to them through other mechanisms. Whatever

figure is taken, it should be compared to what the real victims have received, which, in my opinion, is a bare fraction of what has been given to ex-prisoners.

Why have real victims been so overlooked? Is it because they are an in-your-face reminder of the barbarity and brutality of the deeds of wicked people, some of whom now pose as peacemakers?

Can the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister explain why we now have a cunning redefinition of who the real victims are? It has long been a tactic of Republicans to portray their lives as ones of unrelieved blackness and “victimhood”. That has worked well for them until now, so why would they want to cease such a profitable occupation, especially when there is money in it for them? That is why it is essential to recognise the difference between those who support terrorism and those who have borne the brunt of it.

It has been mainly the Protestant community that has suffered so much, often without murmuring or complaining. Republicans, however, although they have been at the forefront of the cause of the suffering, have gone around the world whingeing and begging as though they were the victims. Our community, in contrast, has picked itself up and plodded on, and we have lost out as a result. We find that the lion’s share goes to the terrorists and thugs at every turn.

We are now witnessing the unacceptable merging of real victims with those who caused the trouble in the first place. The real victims, once again, are being treated on a par with those who caused the pain and hurt. To make matters worse, legitimate victims’ groups are unable to employ the number of staff required to provide the full range of services for those who need them. They are unable to meet in the sort of premises that terrorists now enjoy outside prison. I find that obscene.

To add insult to injury, victims with young children have had to endure the humiliation of being unable to provide for their growing families, as they watch the perpetrators of their anguish being lauded and hailed at every turn. Some of those people now have the audacity to sit in the Chamber with an arsenal of weapons at their disposal.

One of the major problems that I have encountered is the prejudice shown by the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust (NIVT) towards organisations on the Protestant side, on the grounds that they are too political. It does not have that attitude towards ex-prisoner groups. The director of the NIVT said

“politically motivated ex-prisoners of war are at the forefront and actively continuing their struggle with their clear commitments to community development.”

In March last year the NIVT froze funding for Families Acting for Innocent Relatives (FAIR). Again, in September, it reduced the funding, which meant that FAIR was no

longer able to retain all of the staff that it had employed to help victims. In comparison — *[Interruption]*

Mr B Hutchinson: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I refer you to Standing Order 17(7) because I am concerned that several Members have mentioned organisations that have acted as intermediary funding bodies. However, they have not mentioned others who fund prisoners' organisations and rehabilitation. Under Standing Order 17(7), you could rule to prevent that. NIVT has done excellent work to tackle poverty and that has gone unrecognised in the Chamber.

Mr Speaker: Standing Order 17(7) gives the Speaker an opportunity to draw attention to persistent irrelevance or tedious repetition.

I am generous to many Members with regard to the length and repetitiveness of their speeches. However, it may be a relief to the House that not all Members are mentioning all organisations — otherwise we would never get through the debate.

Mrs I Robinson: I do not have time to go down the list of relevant funding bodies, but I take the point that my Colleague made.

In comparison to the funding for FAIR, Relatives for Justice, which is far more political than FAIR, received £99,000. That is not a sign of even-handedness or of a commitment to helping victims, especially Protestant victims.

Ms Morrice: Will the Member give way?

Mrs I Robinson: No. I am just finishing.

I hope that the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister will reassure the House that the real victims of terrorism will receive money separately from ex-prisoners' groups and remove the current disparity in funding.

11.45am

Mrs Nelis: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I will briefly mention some of the comments made by Members about ex-prisoners. I must state clearly that ex-prisoners are making, and have made, a valuable contribution to the healing and confidence building that is characteristic in a society that is emerging from conflict. I also want to draw attention to the DUP, those innocent victims, politicians who, from what we hear in the Chamber, never did anything wrong. Graveyards are full of the victims of Ulster resistance, the killing machine that the DUP played a big part in.

No money can compensate those who lost a family member in the conflict of the past 30 years. It is an unmeasurable grief that time does not heal. Time merely adjusts the quality of life for the living so that they perform the functions of everyday living in the knowledge that part of their lives has closed down — a burden that never goes away. No one should expect relatives who

are carrying such a cross of grief also to carry the additional pressure of financial hardship created by the loss or injury of a family member. Monetary aid that can ease that pressure should be sought out and delivered. That delivery must acknowledge equality of treatment; it should acknowledge transparency; and it should be based on the principle of "to each according to his needs".

The welcome addition of EU money should not become the subject of a squabbling match between a plethora of administrative groups. Indeed the situation involving the Victims Liaison Unit, the Victims Unit, the trauma advisory services and the various intermediate funding bodies — not to mention the Secretary of State — is only causing confusion to the victims who are looking on and wondering what it has to do with them. I am not demeaning the role of the groups that I have mentioned in trying to address the needs of victims, but the administrative quagmire is causing total confusion. What proportion of the EU funding will be soaked up by the bureaucratic bodies on administration? Why do we need all these people dipping their fingers into the till of money that should be used solely to address the needs of those who have suffered as a result of the conflict? I need an assurance — and so do all the relatives' groups and individuals — that an administrative levy will not be imposed on the distribution of the money.

In addition to the legitimate concerns of relatives of victims and survivors of the conflict who have the right to be adequately compensated, they collectively have the right to truth, justice, acknowledgement and recognition. The Bloomfield Report is used as the definitive means by which the Northern Ireland Office measures victimhood. Commentators and numerous politicians have constantly articulated the hurt of those affected by the conflict, but that expression, is rarely extended to the forgotten victims and survivors of state and state-sponsored violence. Such victims — well over 400 men, women and children — were accorded one paragraph in the lengthy Bloomfield Report. Is it any wonder that there is in effect — and some Members have mentioned this today — what amounts to a pecking order of victims? We saw it recently when the Secretary of State announced £11 million for the relatives of RUC victims. I am not saying they do not deserve that, but compare it with the £200,000 that was announced for all of the other victims' groups and individuals.

That disparity between allocations reinforces the perception that the state operates a league table of victims, not only in funding, but also in truth, justice and recognition.

Marginalising the forgotten victims of state violence is a tactic in the propaganda war. It is used successfully by politicians to demonise and exclude those who do not come within the definition "security forces". They label the relatives of some of those killed as innocent and, by implication, others as guilty. The suggestion is that some were right and some were wrong. That makes nonsense

of the historic compromise that is the Good Friday Agreement and is an attempt to criminalise everyone. There are double standards on the part of the British Government, and anyone following the issue of victims in the media could be forgiven for thinking that there were only two parties to the conflict. Many parties were directly and indirectly involved in the conflict, and we are all responsible for victims.

We have a duty to care for all who have suffered and for those who live with grief, injury, pain and traumatic stress. We have the opportunity, with this small tranche of money, to decide that it will be given to all surviving victims and their families, irrespective of political or religious differences. The present administrative arrangements are divisive and bureaucratic and will only postpone the opportunity for healing, which is the main purpose of the money. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Beggs: I welcome the additional money. It is coming to Northern Ireland as a result of the efforts of the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, of our three MEPs and, to some extent, of Members of the Assembly who went to Brussels to lobby for it in 1998. I also welcome the inclusion of a specific measure for victims in the Peace II programme. Most of the funding should go towards the innocent victims of terrorism and paramilitarism.

In determining how to treat victims, we should consider how their needs were addressed in the past. Most innocent victims are not highly organised or politicised. I urge Ministers to be proactive in assisting with the establishment of a support structure for victims in all areas. I am thinking of organisations such as Wave, which is respected by all communities. As a starting point, the Minister should analyse each council area to see how much funding there has been for victims. I fear that some stark figures will come to light from such a study.

My experience of how victims were dealt with by Peace I is, in the main, limited to my own constituency. There are victims in all constituencies in Northern Ireland. In my constituency, there have been many innocent victims of violence. Many members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, the Ulster Defence Regiment, the Royal Irish Regiment, the Army, the Prison Service and their families have also been victims of terrorism. In addition to what has happened in the past, there are at least 80 organised gangs, many with paramilitary connections, whose activities continue to create victims. That fact has been highlighted by a recent report. People are being intimidated and business people blackmailed by those gangs. Those people too are victims, and their problems must be addressed.

Many of these gangs hide under a cloak of either Republicanism or Loyalism.

How many victims were assisted by Peace I funding in my own area? I recently received a report from

Proteus, one of the Peace I bodies. The report advised that Proteus had assisted 1,331 victims of violence and 977 ex-prisoners. How much of that money was spent in Carrickfergus? Carrickfergus does not appear in the table of funding. No money was spent in Carrickfergus. A very low proportion was spent in Larne. The money is not being evenly distributed. Some areas need assistance in drawing down the funding to help victims of violence.

The Educational Guidance Service for Adults received £4.3 million in European Peace I funding, if my memory serves me correctly. In the entire constituency of East Antrim £26,000 was spent. These groups were putting money into victims' groups and ex-prisoners' groups, and a very low proportion was being spent in East Antrim.

I also urge that specific funding be set aside for the ongoing victims of intimidation. I am aware of several very genuine victims who are experiencing difficulties in re-establishing their lives. In the last year they have been forced out of their homes, yet the system does not appear to be able to assist them. I ask the Minister to be proactive for those who continue to suffer from intimidation by paramilitary groups.

How are we going to assist those who are being brutalised or shot by these self-appointed paramilitary godfathers? Some in this House continue to withhold their support from the police and continue to hold back from urging their community to join the police. Whether they like it or not, they have a degree of responsibility for victims of ongoing terrorist violence when they withhold their support from the police and withhold support for joining the police from their community.

Everyone must get behind the police. They must get behind the criminal justice system exclusively. The longer games are played, the more victims there will be. Others will use the withholding of support for the police to justify their breaches of human rights and the brutalisation of bodies. This Assembly and this society must decide whether they are going to move forward by respecting the rule of law and by relying solely on the criminal justice system.

Mr Shannon: I welcome the fact that money has been allocated to victims. I wish to speak specifically on where that money should go. The notion that the victims of terrorism in Northern Ireland should receive the financial support of government, both at Westminster and in Brussels, is honourable. However, events of the past few years have shown us that this too has been lost amongst the political expediency and the social confusion that is the Belfast Agreement.

The gulf between Government efforts to promote and support the spokesmen of terror and their acknowledgement of and support for the victims of terror is truly reprehensible. IRA/Sinn Féin, which has the blood of thirty years of slaughter on its hands, is elevated to

Government, and has millions of pounds of taxpayers' money thrown at it. On the other hand, we have the families and individuals who must live the rest of their lives with the physical and emotional scars received at the hands of these thugs. The victims are having to organise and raise money for their own cause on their own.

12.00

The Government of this country have rejected and insulted the victims of terror and the memory of those who died to protect freedom and liberty in the scramble to meet the demands of IRA/Sinn Féin. Along with many others, I must applaud the bravery and courage of all those real victims and groups, such as the Long March, in refusing to lie down to the intimidation of IRA/Sinn Féin and the treachery of Westminster.

Our respect and admiration must be directed towards the victims who choose to stand on a public platform and share their experiences of how their lives have been destroyed at the hands of IRA/Sinn Féin. It is not easy to remain emotionally detached from the issue when you see people on television such as Michelle Williamson, who lost her parents in the Shankill bombing. When you hear her telling her story in person, and when you listen to the experiences of others whose lives have been wrecked by the troubles, the emotions and feelings stimulated can hardly be described or contained.

This is the reality of the past 30 years, and it exposes the play-acting and pantomime farce that is the Belfast Agreement through which murderers are given the power to dictate how we run our lives. They are able to do this as a direct result of taking innocent lives, yet they continue to plot the ethnic cleansing of all things Protestant and Unionist from our Province. There is no bigger insult to all the innocent victims. This is the present day reality. Innocent victims of fascist Republican terrorism are castigated, disregarded and ignored, simply because of their innocence and incapability of planting bombs in London — because they have no wish to do that. Therefore it is disgraceful to note the amounts of public money being allocated to those who, ironically, were responsible for our troubled history, while the real victims are ignored and pilloried.

One such group comprises the wives and widows of those who were injured or murdered defending democracy in this country while wearing the uniform of the Ulster Defence Regiment and the Royal Irish Regiment. One hundred and ninety-nine members made the ultimate sacrifice, while many hundreds more were injured or maimed. Families and former members require support and recognition and the Assembly has debated the issue before and has supported a motion. They, of all people, have had to endure untold hardship and pressure. It is deplorable that thus far they have gone unnoticed.

Money has been made available for RUC widows. I welcome that, although it is long overdue. However, a

precedent has now been set, and it is essential that UDR widows and families get satisfaction on this matter as soon as is practicable. Many of us can recall members of the UDR and the RIR who are no longer here to look after their families. We can recall the young children and families left at home and the derisory amount of money offered to them as a result of their breadwinner being murdered by the IRA.

Mr Roche: Does the Member agree that it was Mr Martin McGuinness, as head of the northern command of the IRA, who was responsible for initiating as a major strategy the shooting of off-duty policemen and UDR men?

Mr Shannon: I thank the Member for his intervention. That has been well illustrated in many books and papers.

I also want to focus on those people who are not the members of victims' groups. A young man from east Belfast came to my advice centre a few months ago. He had witnessed the murder of his father and brother, and for the last 20 years has been unable to forget that nightmare. He has lived it every minute, every hour, every week, every year for 20 years. He has been unable to hold down a job and is unfortunately unable to have an ordinary stable relationship, although he is married with a very young family. He is one of the people who are outside the victims' groups. Where do those such as this young man feature in this system? How will he be accommodated and where will financial assistance be made available to him to help him get over the trauma and distress that he has had over the last 20 years? Where will the help be for him and his wee family?

For over 30 years the gunmen of IRA/Sinn Féin have been employed in a campaign of terror throughout this country, leaving many thousands of families without husbands, wives, sons and daughters and leaving countless children orphans. The lives of these people have been irreversibly altered and they continue to suffer. However, over the past three decades they have been ignored, isolated and forgotten.

It is stomach-churning to listen to the arrogance of the Republican movement making public representations such as at the launch of the Human Rights Commission. One individual from that organisation asked what was going to be done to accommodate the poor unfortunate Republican prisoners who have been released on to the streets through the Belfast Agreement. That was his idea. Another individual wanted to know how the Irish language was going to be accommodated, while a third spoke about the deaths of rioters who had been shot by plastic bullets.

Let us put this into perspective. The voice of the true victims, the peace loving and the law-abiding citizens of Northern Ireland has again been relegated behind that of the terrorists and the gunmen. This is no surprise unfortunately, as those in the pro-democracy camp warned

that this would happen before and ever since the signing of the agreement.

The landscape for the real victims of terror cannot be allowed to remain as it is. The policy, attitudes and financial assistance that will be available through Peace II must change, and the real victims must get their say. This new tranche of funding must be available to the victims of terrorism and put the focus on the families who today are living and continually reliving their experiences. They need our help.

Mr C Wilson: Although my party welcomes any proposal to recognise the loss to the families of the innocent victims of terrorism, it is important that we put this matter into perspective. The problem was brought home to me very starkly when a lady representing one of the victims' groups spoke at the front of Castle Buildings.

On that occasion that group came up to point out to the British Government — Mr Tony Blair and the Secretary of State — that while they were inside negotiating with terrorists on the difficulties with the Belfast Agreement, the victims had been largely forgotten. Members of that group brought that home in a very graphic way with large posters and large display boards showing the thousands of innocent victims throughout Northern Ireland who had suffered as a result of the vicious and violent terrorist campaign over the last 30 years.

However, this lady had something to say about victims that the House would do well to remember. She said that for many years people such as herself, her friends and her neighbours, along the border counties in particular, had been suffering quietly and had borne their grief with pride and dignity. They were proud of the fact that sons, daughters and, in her case, husband had been prepared to sacrifice their lives — and their families had suffered as a result — because they were standing for democracy, law and order and justice.

This lady showed clearly that her husband had not been being discriminatory when he put his uniform on to go out and defend the community, because he protected the entire community — Catholics and Protestants, Nationalists and Unionists. We must never forget these people. The lady accurately reflected the view of many victims, particularly those whose families had suffered as a result of their commitment to providing law and order to this community.

She then witnessed the corruption of the democratic process and the fact that the RUC was to be dishonoured and disarmed at a time when the terrorists were being elevated. People who had been on the run, who were on wanted lists and who had been sought and pursued, as was right, by the security forces were then seen walking into negotiations to bring into being the Belfast Agreement. They were being fêted across the world in Washington and further afield, meeting world leaders and being treated as statesmen.

That spectacle activated those people to moving from bearing their pain with pride and dignity to a position in which they felt that, if nothing else, at least their families might get some recompense for the pain and suffering that they had borne.

I was keen to hear some of the remarks made today, because they reinforce the point that I am about to make. The formal signing and sealing of the Belfast Agreement led to the pollution of the democratic process and the destruction of the RUC. The people of Northern Ireland must continue to remember that fact.

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Mr C Wilson: I am sorry, but I will not give way.

In the months ahead, the Belfast Agreement will place the representatives and frontmen of terror in the governing body of the new Police Service of Northern Ireland. They will be on the boards, managing and controlling the new service in their respective areas. Imagine the affront that will be caused to many, particularly those in the border counties. They will know that those who control the Police Service in their areas are the very people, organisations and those linked to organisations that put their loved ones in an early grave — those who were responsible for over 10,000 maimings, mutilations and murders throughout the Province.

Under this scheme we could witness the spectacle — if the Secretary of State's interpretation of the entry criteria for the new Police Service is correct — of people in border counties seeing those who, they know, murdered their loved ones wearing the uniform of the new Police Service. How would you feel if your father, mother, brother or sister was murdered by someone who was never brought to book for it? Do not dismiss this as notional or fanciful. The reality is that many people have never been brought to justice in Northern Ireland, particularly in County Armagh. There were several killings in that murder triangle over a short period, and only a small proportion of the perpetrators were brought to justice.

I move on — *[Interruption]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I caution the Member that he has moved well away from the issue of victims and money for victims, which is the subject of the motion, and on to related but separate matters.

Mr C Wilson: Insult has been added to injury in today's debate by the fact that those who front and are "inextricably linked to terrorist organisations" — an expression used by the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State — as represented here by Sinn Féin and the PUP, have the effrontery to get up — *[Interruption]*

Mr Ervine: Will the Member give way?

Mr C Wilson: No.

They have the effrontery to talk about what they can do for the victims. Despite their high-sounding words

and their homilies to Members about the need to reach out and look forward, they are people who prepared to go into a pub and plant a bomb, with no better or greater excuse than the presence there of innocent Catholics or Protestants. In some way they consider those people to be the enemy.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member and his Colleague need to be careful about the direct accusations against other Members that they make in the Chamber. They may be covered legally in some circumstances against action, but they are not necessarily covered by parliamentary procedure in making direct accusations against Members when there have been no convictions on the basis of the actions that they describe. I simply caution the Member and refer to the comment made by a Colleague of his.

Mr Roche: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Poots: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I will take the point of order from Mr Roche and then the one from Mr Poots.

Mr Roche: I thank you for your advice, Mr Speaker, but I would not like to think that procedure could be used in any way to silence debate in the Assembly. If you want me to, I will give you numerous references from respected and recognised authorities on the IRA to back up any statement that I ever make about the IRA.

Mr Speaker: Order. My response to the Member is that order in this place is the same as in other places.

12.15 pm

When accusations are made about a Member, particularly when they are made without notice and in the absence of the Member, conventions of parliamentary procedure and courtesy are being breached. That matter is clear. The Member ought to read some of the parliamentary procedural documents that he is so fond of referring to. The issue that he raises about other evidence is not relevant.

Mr Poots: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Outside this Chamber, an organisation cannot be defamed, but individuals in the organisation can. Mr Wilson mentioned organisations — not Members in the Chamber.

Mr Speaker: The Member should read Hansard tomorrow. In fact, Mr Wilson went much further than mentioning only organisations. He referred to Members in the Chamber, and he referred to Members who had spoken. It was clear what was being referred to. That is why I cautioned the Member. I am not asking him to withdraw his comments at this point, but I have cautioned him.

Mr Molloy: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I think it would be worthwhile to read Hansard tomorrow because the previous Member did mention a member of

my party by name, and we will be looking at that. Will you make a ruling on that?

Mr Speaker: I have already advised the House that I will be studying the matter. The fact that I have raised the matter myself shows that I am doing my best to pay attention both to procedures and to what Members say.

Mr Ervine: On a point of order, Mr Speaker — or perhaps a point of clarification. Having been alluded to, I believe, by the Member, do I have a right of reply?

Mr Speaker: Yes.

Mr C Wilson: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I will not be losing any sleep over any determination about what I have said today. I stand by every word.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member may not lose sleep, but he may for a while lose the right to be in his seat. Please continue.

Mr C Wilson: That could also be borne.

People may think that my comments are harsh about the organisations that I have mentioned, but one has only got to put this matter into perspective. The organisations that I mentioned — Sinn Féin/IRA, and the terrorists represented in the Chamber by the PUP — are, at this moment sitting on huge piles of illegal weaponry. They refuse to hand those weapons in — weapons that are still being used almost daily for acts of terrorism and criminality and which we are told that they may need in the future. That is the sole purpose for those people having them. One should not believe that the leopards in those organisations have changed their spots or have had a great change of heart. That is the point on which I wish to end my comments. The reality is that the greatest—[*Interruption*]

Mr Ervine: Will the Member give way?

Mr C Wilson: No.

The real and greatest reward, tribute or memorial for the innocent victims and the families of those who have suffered throughout Northern Ireland would be to see democracy, law and order restored. It would be to see terrorism and its representatives removed from their positions as they pollute the democratic process by their very presence in this Chamber and in what is called the peace process. While these people pay tribute to the desire for peace and the need to move things forward, it is always at a price. In the case of Sinn Féin/IRA, it is further concessions.

Their reason for keeping the process moving was that those who were guilty of some of the most heinous crimes — such as those who were responsible for the murder of two policemen, as my Colleague said — would be given a clean slate. They have now been granted an amnesty. There is now a desire and a push by Sinn Féin for a wider amnesty for all those who have been involved in criminality and terror in the past 30 years.

Just outside this Chamber there is an epitaph to Mr Edgar Graham, who fell as a result of the terrorist campaign. The stone that marks his savage murder by the IRA reads

“Keep alive the light of justice”.

That is a charge to the House today. It is exactly the opposite of what is happening in the process in Northern Ireland. I apologise to the people — particularly to the victims — who had to listen to terrorists talking about how they should deal with the victims of terror. It is an absolute affront and a disgrace.

It is the duty of those Members who believe in democracy, justice and law and order to rid ourselves of that process and put in its place something that will ensure that there are no victims in the future.

Mr Gibson: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this issue. On 29 January I had a unique opportunity. I joined in Brussels with councillors from all over Europe to form the Confederation of European Councillors. The first act of the confederation was carried out on Sunday 28 January — a cold but sunny winter’s day. The councillors joined together in the largest cemetery in Flanders field and assembled around the grave of the youngest soldier to be killed in the first world war. He was a lad of 14 years of age from County Wexford.

I was further honoured when I was asked to lead the act of remembrance. However, the greatest victims of shame and hypocrisy were those who had come from that same county and that same part of Ireland. They publicly wept because, for the first time, they recognised the shame and the hypocrisy of not having respected and honoured their own.

There have also been sad occasions in my constituency on which to report. We have had 97 people murdered. An equal or greater number from outside the constituency were also murdered in West Tyrone. I have also seen the victims of shame. The coffin of a decent, respected Roman Catholic RUC man was being carried down the streets of Omagh, but the Roman Catholic population shunned and boycotted that funeral of one of their own respected families. Therefore there is — perhaps for the first time — a recognition that there is a growing awareness in the Catholic community, and it did not happen on the day of the Omagh bomb when 29 people were killed.

What was different on that day was that the Roman Catholic population of Omagh felt the pain, sorrow and anguish that had been felt in the 97 Protestant households of West Tyrone for 28 years. A colleague, Cllr Joe Byrne, was the first person to come to my home. I was glad to see him, and I could recognise the genuine feeling.

In my constituency office I still attend to families who were given pitiful sums. Thirty years ago a family from Castlederg received £700 compensation. Those families have had to struggle to survive financially to bring up their families and to manage small businesses,

farms or their work. I am grateful that the two junior Ministers came to the Committee of the Centre. They have given us their help and support and, so far, they have shown a willingness to listen.

I am rather tired and angered today when I hear the begrudging hypocrisy, particularly from Alban Maginness. There is still a very serious problem. During a Committee evidence session I pointed out that some of the victims expected very little compensation, and one of the witnesses, in a rather condescending way, said that she had been delighted to receive a letter of thanks from the victims’ group which I initiated in west Tyrone for a day’s excursion that they had enjoyed to Belfast and the Crawfordsburn countryside. I chose not to point out that for three months one of those families had attended loved ones in the Royal Victoria Hospital, from where they also had two of their family cars stolen. They were not just victims in one way.

I also want to mention another raft of victims in the remote, rural area of west Tyrone where the Protestant community is sparse. The small Orange halls and church halls that were used as community halls for social activity cannot now be used because of terrorist threats. Those halls are now run down so that social fabric is also a victim.

At present, I am dealing with several specialised cases, and I am supporting a Manchester law firm that is dealing with people from my area who are termed as suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. Those people received the best medical treatment that was available 20 to 25 years ago. However, while they tried to carry on and run their businesses, stress and trauma continued to debilitate them. They have had to give up their jobs, and they have had financial and domestic crises.

12.30 pm

These people are in desperation and need the best we can provide. West Tyrone Voice, a victims’ organisation, is going out of its way to take a small group of selected people to an island in Greece. It wants to bring some psychiatric counsellors with them to support these people for 10 to 12 days to help them to recover. Over a long period these people have had to endure deep-seated psychiatric traumas — and that was not first from managing financial affairs or a family — which have become embedded.

Dr Hazlett Lynch, whom I got to head that organisation because of his personal qualities and counselling abilities, is regarded as someone who gives more than adequate guidance and help to those 250 families. The fax that he sent me says it all:

“Please make sure this message does not get lost in the debate. What we need are the following:

The peace dividend to get down to the victims”.

That is a heartfelt plea; the people feel there is a victims' industry but that the genuine victims are not in receipt of the help that they need. This has not happened as yet.

"Core posts in the sector — this is absolutely essential if the excellent support work for victims is to continue and develop; these posts are for suitable victims to work with victims; work at present is growing exponentially; the need for our groups has long been established.

Guarantees that there will be no discrimination against our sector by funding bodies".

Unfortunately, this has been a genuinely held feeling in West Tyrone Voice.

"Guarantees that the groups with a proven track record of excellent work on the ground are given the resources they need to do work that no one else is doing; that groups that can demonstrate good management practice, good value for money, good care for members and staff, etc, are treated as priority groups in this sector."

I appeal directly to the junior Minister to take those groups of victims who feel an honest and genuine need seriously.

Mr Speaker: It was not clear that the Member was coming to the end of his speech, and I was going to give him the opportunity to continue when the debate resumes at two o'clock. However, that will not be necessary.

The sitting was suspended at 12.33 pm.

On resuming (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr McClelland] in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Mr Poots: The House is fairly empty, but I am sure that it will fill up during my speech, not because of what I will say but because people will be returning from lunch.

I am glad that Mr Nesbitt has been here throughout the debate. I have criticised him on previous occasions, so it is only right that I should note his presence today. However, I must apologise, as I have to leave later this afternoon. I would like to stay for the whole debate but I have several appointments to keep.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Poots, you are not usually so gently spoken. I am having trouble hearing you.

Mr Poots: Do not worry, Mr Deputy Speaker; at certain points my voice will rise to the occasion.

There are three sources of funding for victims' groups. It is important to bring those sources together in a common, identifiable body where victims can access funding. That has been a problem in the past. Different groups have administered different funds, but victims' groups — and victims who do not belong to groups — have had trouble identifying where to go for support. Some have gone to the Victims Liaison Unit and some to the Victims Unit, but they have been sent from pillar to post on many occasions. It is important to address that issue properly.

I am also concerned that Peace II funding is being seen as an alternative to the money coming from the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, instead of complementing it. I know that applications have been made for funding during the past year that have not been met — certainly not in full. On most occasions they have received less than half of what was originally applied for. I am worried that we are looking at Peace II as an alternative to Executive funding, as opposed to a means of complementing it.

I welcome the motion, but I do not think that the Assembly or the Executive should be patting itself on the back and saying that we have done a great job for the victims. We have only touched the edges. What we are doing will help, and it is good to be doing something, but we cannot say that we have done a great job and that victims should feel obliged to us.

Is the money truly additional, or will it pay for things that should have been provided by other Departments anyway? I noticed that wheelchairs were included in the list of funding arrangements announced recently. That is a good thing, but the truth is that the Health Service should have provided them. I also noticed that money is going to the Ulster Hospital for a survey on facial reconstruction. Again, should that money not have been provided through the Health Service? I want to raise this issue, as it may apply when the funding is distributed later. I want to ensure that it is truly additional and will not be spent on things that should have been provided by whichever Department it may fall into.

Who funds the victims and distributes the funding? The Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust has already been mentioned. In my experience, district partnerships also fall into this category with their handling of victims' groups. The Lisburn district partnership had to be brought to a virtual standstill to get it to support funding for victims' groups.

The money for prisoners groups could go through on the nod, but if one wanted money for victims, there was a serious row.

The same thing happened when Castlereagh district partnership did not give funding to the victims of the La Mon massacre. That was one of the main incidents of the troubles in that area, yet that district partnership, which is supposed to be representative of the community, was not prepared to give money to a project relating to the La Mon massacre — a project which had the support of the local council and the community in general. I have to say that NIVT has been more willing and appears to have been less thorough when giving funding to prisoners' groups as opposed to victims' groups. What sort of society gives more favourable treatment to murderers than to those who had their loved ones murdered?

Alban Maginness said that the Belfast Agreement addressed the needs of victims, but in my opinion, the

Belfast Agreement has exacerbated their needs. Justice was stood on its head, because those who carried out murder, those who planted bombs and those who created destruction in the Province were released from jail without having served time commensurate with the crimes that they committed. As a result, many whose loved ones had been murdered during the troubles here — people who had sat with their heads down and got on with life — said “Hold on a minute. These people are getting early release from jail for crimes that they have perpetrated, and the Government are funding them to help them to get their lives back together. As the people who lost our loved ones and as the people who were injured during the troubles, we are not getting the same treatment.” That is why, after the Belfast Agreement was signed, a raft of victims’ groups appeared throughout the Province. They saw that funding was available to help people to re-establish themselves. However the funding was not going to those who had suffered during the troubles; it was going to those who had been carrying out the murders, the bombings and the shootings.

In his speech, Alban Maginness did not accept that there is any difference in victims. It is a pity that he is not here; I would have welcomed an intervention from him. There is a very clear difference. Nobody in his right mind would argue that Saddam Hussein was just as much a victim as the Marsh Shiites or the Kurds. Nobody in his right mind would argue that Slobodan Milosevic — and I note that Mr Maginness did not answer the question when I raised it during his speech — was of the same standing as the Kosovar Albanians who had to tramp across mountains after having been put out of their homes. Nobody in his right mind would say that Adolf Hitler falls into the same category as the Jews who were taken to the gas chambers. Nobody in his right mind should be saying that the South Armagh IRA should be equated with the people who lost their lives in the Kingsmill massacre, or that Lenny Murphy should be equated with the innocent Roman Catholics in North Belfast who were murdered by the Shankill butchers. There is a difference between terrorists who got themselves injured or killed as a result of their activities and innocent civilians who lost their lives — people who were shot in the back, who were simply going about their business.

I remember hearing on the news one night that a 19-year-old girl had been shot in Fermanagh. Gillian Johnston was her name. Some time later it was heard on the news that that family got something like £850 as compensation for the loss of that young lassie’s life. It would not have mattered whether it was £850 or £850,000 as it would not have brought her back. The joy that the family had from that young girl could never be reinstated. When people see those who have carried out murder being released from jail, being taken by the hand, given money and preferential treatment in housing, and then look at what the victims got, they say “Hold on

— something is wrong with this society.” There is something wrong with a society that does not treat its victims fairly.

Mr Paisley Jnr: During his speech, Mr Alban Maginness mentioned his proposal for a victims’ archive, and I am sure the Member agrees that that is an interesting proposal. I would like him, if possible, to say whether he agrees that a victims’ archive can be of use only if it is for victims. If those who created victims are included in the archive, it will be a damning insult to the victims themselves.

The point was well made that those who suffered in the Holocaust would not want to share their victimhood with the Nazis. I am sure that the Member would agree that victims in the Northern Ireland archive should not have to share their victimhood with those who made them victims.

Perhaps Mr Maginness would also address the issue of prisoners’ being out of jail. I think he missed the point in his speech — perhaps deliberately — that prisoners get out of jail anyway. Does he agree that people were not complaining about prisoners’ getting out of jail, but about the fact that their punishment was deliberately curtailed by the Belfast Agreement? They were therefore not being punished at all for the crimes of which they were convicted.

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for his intervention, and I fully agree with him. The man who carried out the Shankill bombing murdered 10 people — nine of them innocent — and I think he served six years and three months. The period was not commensurate with the crime committed, but he was released as a result of the Belfast Agreement.

Can you imagine having an archive that included the people who lost their lives in Loughgall? They were all armed and were out with murder in their hearts and minds. On the other hand, in Lurgan, two young lassies were shot at the shop in Kilwilkie together with the fellow who was walking across the street. Could Lenny Murphy be in the archive, with some of the people he murdered? I do not think that would be acceptable.

Mr A Maginness: The purpose of the video archive is for people to give their stories and to represent the pain and grief that they or their relatives have suffered as a result of the troubles. The people who died at Loughgall had families, and children were orphaned. Are those children and widows not victims of the troubles? Those who died were engaged in terrorist activities, but the result was that their families and children suffered. They are victims, and I suggest that they deserve a place in the archive.

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for his intervention. I point out to him that during the Holocaust an archive was drawn up, and it would have been wholly inappropriate

to put Adolf Hitler's grandchildren into it — had he had any.

You cannot put the perpetrators of the crimes into the same category as the innocent who died during the troubles. That principle also applies to their families. That issue has to be clearly dealt with. Those who lost their lives during the troubles as a result of terrorism are not in the same category as those who went out to do an honest day's work and lost their lives as a result of the illegal activities of others.

2.15 pm

People have said that the prisoners' issue and the victims' issue are separate matters. In reality, the same bodies distribute the money to the prisoners and the victims. In essence, therefore, they are not separate issues. They are not separate issues when people see that more money, in the years after the Belfast Agreement was signed, has gone to prisoners' groups than to victims' groups. Those issues must be addressed.

We are never going to sort out the problem of the victims of the troubles. Money will never sort it out, because money cannot bring back a loved one. However, there are certain instances where money can help. I can think of young people who had to leave school at 16 or 17 to take a job because the father of the house had his life taken away. The mother had three or four other children to rear, so that young person needed to get a job to bring a few extra pounds into the house. They may now want to go into further education because they were denied that opportunity as a young person. That is the sort of issue that should be addressed.

Tremendous opportunities could be created for the victims of the troubles. I thank God that I am not one of the victims. A Republican organisation sought to make me a victim; it attempted to murder my father, but it did not succeed. I would like society — had I been a young person without a father — to have treated me in an honourable and respectful way. I would not want society to have placed me in the same category as someone whose father had gone out with an AK47 rifle. I want society to treat victims as people with genuine needs and concerns. The Assembly and the Executive of Northern Ireland have much to do and learn about this issue, and they need to treat people with the care, respect and dignity that they deserve.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Many Members have said since lunch that they wish to speak in the debate. Should each of them attempt to speak for 15 minutes, there would be no possibility of everyone taking part.

Mr Armstrong: The word "victims" covers many aspects of the past tragic 30 years. It includes innocent people who were caught up in an incident through no fault or design of their own — people getting on with everyday life and minding their own business. It also includes a

father, mother or other close relative, now in the twilight of their life, who suffered mental scarring from the loss of, or injury to, a dear one — a son, daughter, husband, wife or other relative. Some victims are civilians, or ex-members of the security services, who suffered permanent injury and/or mental scarring that no amount of compensation can repair.

The term also covers people who, because of their service, had their civilian career prospects damaged. Some were made redundant because employers did not want to take the risk of their business being attacked by terrorists. The farms of some victims had to be wound up or leased out because the father or son was incapacitated or worse. These definitions cover the victims of 30 years of shooting, bombing and other barbarities that the terrorists inflicted upon the community. These are the victims who should take priority in any measures to be formulated by the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. The word "victim" also covers many other aspects of our tragic past.

We could describe victims of circumstance as those who were injured during terrorist activity, who were held in protective custody, or who absented themselves — that is, went on the run — from their place of residence. Many of those in protective custody availed of educational opportunities provided by the Government, and their next of kin were able to avail of many financial benefits.

Victims of conscience are those who choose to hold to their beliefs and ideals contrary to the laws of the land. Again, many facilities were on offer to them, but they chose to pursue their agenda of civil disobedience.

These concepts of victimhood cannot belong to the category I first described. As a direct result of the activities of victims of circumstance and conscience, the innocents I spoke of are now victims.

Mr G Kelly: Go raibh maith agat. People often want to rewrite the causes of conflict. It is certain that in the conflict of the past 30 years or more, there were victims on all sides. In a way, that is a very simple message. People are trying to work out some sort of hierarchy of victims and survivors. We are not just talking about people who are dead. Generally speaking, we are talking about people who have survived and who need help. At times we are talking about a generational issue, something which will not just spread to friends and relatives but to children and grandchildren.

The first principle is that all sides were involved in this and everybody is affected by it. We need to take a very basic view of what a victim or a survivor is. A victim is a victim is a victim. It does not really matter to the person whether his suffering is as a result of an action of the IRA, the RUC, the British Army, or Loyalists. The loss of a father or mother is devastating no matter who carried out the killing.

Contributors have mentioned Loughgall. Let me remind Members that not everyone involved in that was armed and that people were summarily executed. They were given the coup de grâce as they lay defenceless on the ground. Let us not get on our high horse about how people died. We could debate this for five or six hours, 10 days or four months. The fact is that if people are suffering and need help, then they should be given help, no matter what part of the community they come from.

I represent north Belfast, an area which has borne the brunt of the casualties over the past 30 years. People there, whether they are Nationalist, Republican, Unionist, Catholic or Protestant, deserve the same respect that Mr Poots is talking about. Respect should not be given in some hierarchical or sectarian way. In the end, we should avoid this categorisation that everybody seems to go for and deal with victims and survivors as they are — people who are suffering and need help. Go raibh mile maith agat.

Mr Kennedy: I welcome the measure outlined by the junior Ministers. As an elected representative for Newry and Armagh, I have tried to give assistance to individuals and groups directly affected by the slaughter campaign organised and executed by the IRA, and Republicans generally, in my constituency. Having listened to their victims' views, I know that money in itself will never ever compensate for the loss they have endured and the great suffering they have had to undergo. Our treatment of innocent victims should be a top priority for the Executive and the Assembly.

I am interested in the remarks of Mr Gerry Kelly, the Member for North Belfast, who has himself received many thousands of pounds in compensation for his perhaps questionable activities. He has certainly fared significantly better than many — *[Interruption]*

Mr G Kelly: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Since he is making accusations, will the Member say what those questionable activities are?

Mr Deputy Speaker: That is not really a point of order.

Mr Kennedy: Mr Kelly has received amounts greater than any award made to any of my constituents who have lost husbands, wives, children and loved ones.

Mr Paisley Jnr: Does the Member agree that many victims will take it as a great insult that anyone should come to this House who, in the past, ensured not only that there were victims, but that the place where the victims were to get justice was destroyed by bomb attacks? For such a person to come and lecture people on victimhood sticks very thick in their throats.

Mr Kennedy: I take the Member's point.

Many innocent victims throughout Northern Ireland are only now beginning to unlock the grief that has been in their hearts and stored up in their homes and families over many years. We should remember that, in the light

of the ongoing political and peace processes, recent years have been particularly painful. People have shown remarkable courage in bearing their pain and in the quiet and extremely dignified way in which they have gone about rebuilding their lives, without any assistance from Government. They have had to rely on members of their family, neighbours, friends and local communities such as churches to help them to readjust their lives after their great loss.

It has already been said today that there is a clear distinction between the innocent victims of terrorism and those who, in any way, went out and planned or premeditated murder, or who died as a result of their own illegal deeds. That is a very clear distinction in the minds of most decent people.

We should consider ring-fencing the Peace II money for the real victims of terrorism. We should establish a victims' commission, in line with the views expressed by Sir Kenneth Bloomfield in his report. I will be interested to hear in the winding-up speeches whether or not that can and will be taken on board by the Ministers. That could unlock much needed finance to victims' groups that are being established or are up and running. Those groups are facing real staffing difficulties and difficulties in ensuring that they have the counsellors to give advice, support and help to the people who need it.

A clear programme of trained project officers should be set in place to help victims' groups and individuals to apply for funding and help. It should cover everyone: those who lost loved ones, those who were caught up in explosions or events, and those whose lives have been considerably changed because of the trauma involved.

Mr Roche: Does the Member agree that if such a commission were set up, it would be very important that those involved in its work shared an understanding of victims, contrary to that displayed by Mr Maginness, whose comments were an offence to the sensibilities of decent people in Northern Ireland?

2.30 pm

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his intervention, and I accept his point. The recent announcement of increased compensation payments for RUC widows is a welcome step, which is long overdue. A proper compensation scheme also needs to be introduced for other security force members — those of the UDR, the RIR and the regular Army — so that those who wore a uniform on behalf of the people of Northern Ireland will be properly recognised for the service they have given and the sacrifices they have made.

There is a clear disparity between the funds provided for groups representing ex-paramilitary prisoners and the funding for groups that represent innocent victims. Recently, I was alarmed to read a public statement by a

senior director of the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust, who at the launch of a report, 'The Cost of Imprisonment', said

"politically motivated ex-POWs are at the forefront and actively continuing their struggle with their clear commitments to community development".

A statement of that nature needs to be clarified, and those in a public position who distribute grants —

Ms Morrice: It is ironic that we should talk about people in public positions who disperse grants, given that this morning the Public Accounts Committee held a press conference on the distribution of European grants and their mishandling by Departments. The Irish Sport Horse Genetic Testing Unit Limited in Fermanagh received about £3 million. Why are such points on the handling of European money not brought to the Floor of this House?

The Deputy Chairperson: We are straying from the subject of the debate.

Mr Kennedy: Given Ms Morrice's background and her undoubted connection with the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust, I will not make any comparison with the case that she raised. The Public Accounts Committee is effectively dealing with the matter she raised, as it deals with other issues.

We are debating victims and European funding. The public servant's public remarks are, in my view, wholly inappropriate in that they highlight, in some way, a supposed contribution to society by "prisoners of war". In reality, most decent people are of the opinion that had it not been for the actions of those selfsame POWs, much misery and suffering could have been avoided.

We hear many requests for public inquiries into various cases. However, many of the victims who regularly talk to me highlight the fact that neither their loved one nor his sacrifice is ever mentioned. We appear to be in danger of remembering set-piece murders or set-piece, large-scale slaughters. Meanwhile, those innumerable people who lost loved ones and family members are being quickly forgotten. That is a huge mistake. An argument could be made for setting up a truth commission to enable us to hear of the deeds that were done in the name of Irish Nationalism and Republicanism and the glorious tales of murders by bloodthirsty killers that were carried out in the name of Ireland.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Kennedy, may I ask you not to stray too far from the subject of the motion.

Mr Kennedy: The Assembly could do worse than to allocate Peace II money to a truth commission or to murder inquiries, especially into murders in my constituency.

Mr Paisley Jnr: Given that other countries can bring vicious criminals before war crimes tribunals, does the Member agree that money should be set aside to examine the activities of the leaders of terrorist organisations in

Northern Ireland to see whether charges could be brought against them?

Mr Deputy Speaker: We are straying from the motion.

Mr Kennedy: If inquiries were established into some atrocities, they would seriously damage the reputation of people who present themselves on the world's stage as peace players.

We welcome the announcement on European funding. We want the money to be spent wisely and properly. The First Minister and the Deputy First Minister must give an assurance that safeguards will be put in place to ensure that the money is spent in the interests of truly innocent victims. This opportunity must not be wasted. We can never compensate fully, but at least we can give recognition to the sacrifices that have been made in Northern Ireland over the past 30 years.

Mr Roche: Mr Deputy Speaker, can you tell the House of your thinking when you came "near" to ruling that Members were straying from the motion when it was suggested that money should be set aside to bring people before an international tribunal? Why is that irrelevant to a consideration of how to address adequately the needs of the real victims of violence in Northern Ireland?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Roche, I am prepared to take up the time of the House responding to a ruling that I have actually made, but I will not waste time responding to a ruling that I might have made. There is a clear distinction, and I would like you to think about it.

Mr Savage: I support the motion. Violence has always been an unpleasant part of Irish politics, and violence has victims. For too long, Northern Ireland has had victims. We must work with all our might to sustain the political institutions that have brought peace to our Province so that Northern Ireland has no more victims of violence.

Peace will be the best memorial to the victims — the only memorial worth having. In my view it is impossible to compensate the victims of violence with mere money; that would undervalue their suffering. Monetary compensation is one small way in which we as a society can say to the victims that we understand what they have gone through and what they have suffered. It is one of the few ways in which we can register our feelings for the victims of violence, their dependants and their loved ones. We should offer such compensation humbly, recognising that it is inadequate and, at best, a poor way in which we can attempt to identify with their suffering. The cost of life has always been too great. No amount of money will ever be enough. Therefore I urge generosity in any compensation for victims of violence — nothing less will suffice.

I have listened to many speeches today and, unfortunately, at the end of a debate, there is much repetition. I urge Members to look seriously at the motion. We do

not wish for victims of violence. We want to be able to put that behind us, but at the same time we want to let them know that we appreciate what they and their families have gone through.

Many people in this country have thrived because of the conflict — they have that on their consciences. What brings it home is when the door closes at night and you see the empty chair.

I was not intending to speak today, but I felt I had to say something. I served in the Ulster Defence Regiment for 13 years, and never did I see its members step out of line. I had many good friends in the force. One incident that really had an impact on me was when, one morning, my brother left to go to work and a bullet stopped the wireless in his car at 7.50 am. That was one of the longest days of my life. However, he was lucky as he survived the attack; many people were not as fortunate as he was.

About four years ago, my son was beaten up in Banbridge, which is in my constituency. It was not because of anything that he was doing — perhaps it was because I was involved in politics and it was a way of getting at me. I do not want to bring emotion into the debate; rather, I thought that I could play my part — and that is why I stood for the Assembly — to try to eliminate such incidents. I know what we as a family went through and what my brother's family went through. People only understand when they are close to it. I hope that any compensation for victims is spent wisely and that those victims will never be forgotten.

Dr Adamson: This has generally been a good debate in which most points have been covered. It would be remiss of us not to mention prominent individuals who have given their time, effort and money to support victims and to match Government funding. I am thinking of Peter Lavery, the lottery millionaire, who has not only matched Government funding but has given a large part of his personal fortune towards the support of victims, particularly the children of the troubles. I know that everyone in the House would like to thank him for that.

It would also be remiss of us not to mention the Lavery family and others such as the prominent journalist Jim McDowell and the community activist in east Belfast Mr Sammy Douglas. I know that these individuals have provided a great deal of time and effort as well as moneys to help to support the victims of the troubles.

2.45 pm

Mr Hussey: I regret that, owing to business in my constituency, I meet victims — not on this issue but on the difficulties that they face in other circumstances. I believe that one of the junior Ministers is well aware of the difficulties that victims face.

It was the murder of a very close friend of mine that brought me into politics. The area that I live in has suffered throughout the troubles. As a teacher, I have

vivid memories of following the coffins of parents of the schoolchildren that I was teaching and the coffins of those that I had taught. These people had entered society, taken up a regular job in order to give something back to society and had also taken the time to serve their community through part-time membership of the security forces. As time went on I realised that there had to be another way. Like my Colleague Mr Savage I decided that coming to the Assembly and adopting that approach was a way forward. However, I also believed — and still believe — that it would be totally incongruous and outrageous for a body such as this Assembly to forget what those people have suffered.

Recently, groups representing the victims of paramilitary terrorism have begun to organise themselves. These groups have to be recognised, and I appeal to the junior Ministers to tell us how they intend to allow those groups to get onto the same footing as other long-established groups. The new groups feel that it is taking a long time to gain the same recognition and funding as the groups who represent other types of victims. It is time for the peace dividend to filter down to the victims of paramilitary terrorism.

These groups are still in their fledgling stages; they need their core workers. Their work is growing exponentially. The Ministers must be increasingly aware of this, for these groups are beginning to exhort them to give proper recognition to the people that they represent. They are establishing a growing reputation in their field, and this must be recognised. I hope that when the Ministers reply they will tell us how such groups are being recognised. I await their replies with interest, and I trust that the Assembly will never forget those who have suffered in such dastardly ways in the troubles that our community has gone through.

The Junior Minister (Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister) (Mr Nesbitt): This is, as many people have said, a very sensitive issue. I have witnessed at very close quarters the immediate and sudden death of someone during the troubles. However, that pales into insignificance in other respects. I have not been a victim during the troubles, nor has a close relative of mine been a victim. Therefore I speak with a genuine sense of inadequacy.

I cannot for one moment comprehend the feelings of those who have lost a father, mother, or dare I say even more so, a son or daughter. You expect the next generation to outlive you; not to die before you. That must be very harrowing. I thank all the Members who contributed to the debate in a very serious way, by and large.

Mr Kennedy said that we can never compensate victims, but we can, at least, recognise what they are going through. Money is no compensation. In recognising that, we also acknowledge the significant monetary contribution that is now available to help victims in some small way.

For the first time there will be a specific amount of money available solely for victims. In that respect, Peace II differs from Peace I. Victims will not be in competition with others, such as community groups that wish to utilise European money. The specific money for victims is to be welcomed.

Although the use of the money is yet to be fully determined, it will provide a source of practical assistance to victims. It will certainly be used in training and in re-employment. Above all, it will be used in giving practical assistance to victims.

We thank the European Union and the MEPs who contributed towards gaining this funding. We thank them for the serious contribution, made through Peace II, to the provision of funding. In the same breath, I must mention the Executive and this Administration. We are taking this matter seriously and are endeavouring to develop a strategy for victims and to identify their needs.

We will be undertaking widespread consultation. I ask each Member, especially those who feel that their communities have not been fully represented, to facilitate that consultation and encourage people to respond to it. People should make known to us what they want put in place when this money is spent. That is a genuine request from Mr Haughey and myself.

Mr Boyd and Mrs Iris Robinson mentioned the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust. There will be an intermediate funding body appointed to handle grant application, processing and the award aspects of Peace II. It is anticipated that that body will be appointed within two to three months through open competition.

I hasten to add that the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister will be very closely involved in determining the mechanisms and in monitoring all stages of how the money is used, once the new intermediate funding body has been appointed.

People might think that I am offloading accountability onto someone else. However, this Administration — the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister in particular — has had no input into the previous elements of funding and the core funding scheme. We will now have responsibility for the new intermediate funding body and for our funding for it. Peace II accounts for about £7 million, of which £1.6 million will come from the Executive. That should answer Mr Poots's question about complementarity. Therefore funding from the Executive and Europe will be combined.

Responsibility for the management of victims' funding will fall to the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, and clear criteria will be agreed with the Department of Finance and Personnel. I am conscious of the point that Mrs Nelis made about bureaucracy; I shall not allow bureaucracy to be the tail

that wags the dog. We must ensure that the money is fed down to those in need — the victims.

Mr Beggs asked about the geographical distribution of funding. Our purpose will be to meet the needs of all victims, regardless of where they are, and to give equal opportunities to all. Members who feel that their area has not been well represented should help us to ensure that those areas contribute to the development of the strategy. Mr Beggs also spoke about ongoing acts of violence. We will recognise the needs of victims of such acts; they must be included.

Mr Berry raised the sensitive issue of the treatment of widows of members of the RUC. They will receive practical help under Peace II. All victims and their families will be eligible, and that includes, without doubt, the security forces. Mr Watson raised the sensitive issue of compensation. I do not wish to disown the matter, but I must state clearly that compensation is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Office. Nevertheless, Mr Haughey and I will press the issue of compensation at the regular meetings that we have with Mr Ingram and the NIO.

Mr Berry asked about the certainty of funding for the future. That is important. It is not enough to have money now; we must have certainty about the availability of funding in the future. I welcome the announcement that there will be £500,000 per year for the next three years from the Executive's social inclusion fund.

Mr Ervine and Mr Alban Maginness raised the issue of practical assistance to individuals. That has been a recurring theme, and, at the outset, I said that it was individuals who needed the assistance. This matter is connected to the issue of bureaucracy and the mechanisms that the intermediate funding body will operate under, with the agreement of the Department of Finance and Personnel. In order for us to give practical assistance, individuals must tell me what is needed. We will conduct research to meet as many victims as possible to get their views about what they need. We will undertake that research shortly; Members' help would be appreciated in that as well.

3.00 pm

The subject of individual victims leads me to the needs of victims — something that was raised by Mr Beggs and Mr Shannon. We are consulting on that, but there are certain general comments that I can make at this stage.

One theme that came through this afternoon and this morning was that ex-prisoners' associations are well organised and can utilise funding, whereas other groups are not. How can we give that assistance? I hope that we will be able to develop a strategy to help those who do not have the apparatus to make a claim or to apply for funding.

Core staff was mentioned; that is important as well. The core staff must be maintained. One sensitive element that came through — I keep using the word “sensitive”, but all of what we are talking about is sensitive — was mentioned by Mr Shannon, Mrs Iris Robinson and Mr Berry, to name but three, and that is ex-prisoners’ groups and their involvement. Let me make it clear — the Peace II programme contains a measure specifically for victims; it is called Victims and Survivors of Violence. Ex-prisoners’ groups are not eligible for that. They may — to be up front about it — be eligible for support under other measures in the programme, but not under the victims aspect of the measure. I understand — *[Interruption]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister has said that he will not give way.

Mr Nesbitt: I understand the strength of feeling in communities, no matter what side a person is on. Although I understand, as I said at the outset, I do not speak as one who has been directly affected by violence. My understanding is that of someone who has been able to stand back from events, so to speak. Those who have been affected articulate the hurt, and it is for us as Assembly Members to reflect that hurt, suffering and the needs of victims. However, our task — and it may not be accepted by all — is to give effect to the Belfast Agreement and to address the needs of all victims fairly, honestly and openly as described in that agreement. That is what I am charged with, and that is what this Administration is charged with.

There are many parties here, and if we are to move beyond conflict and truly reconcile — my party Colleague George Savage reflected on this accurately and pointedly a few minutes ago — we must take on board the needs of all.

One difficulty that I have in politics is meeting victims. A DUP Member said earlier that the victims of violence feel full of hurt and alienated, and Alban Maginness referred to another argument. I also hear the two arguments. Some people ask me how I can be in the Administration. Others say exactly what Mr Savage said: “You must continue in the Administration so that others do not suffer what we have suffered.” It is for the latter reason that I stand here today, and that is why I mentioned what Mr Savage said in his concluding comments.

Alban Maginness mentioned a memorial or an archive. We are aware of that suggestion, and it is in keeping with the recommendations of the Bloomfield Report. It could be a demonstrable way of showing something on a permanent basis, but we must give it careful consideration.

We need to take on board the views of victims and their representatives when deciding what we should do. We must be conscious that the priority is to give practical help to support victims. Perhaps the money should not be spent on some form of archive. It is something that needs to be, and will be, thought through carefully.

Two types of commission were mentioned. That needs careful consideration. What role should a commissioner play in general? More specifically, what roles would a commissioner for victims or a truth commissioner play? Should the money be used for that? We have not reached a firm conclusion. We are debating the issue, and we will be consulting the Northern Ireland Office.

The truth commission is an equally delicate matter. There could be advantages and disadvantages to such a commission. There have been references to the many difficulties experienced by the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. My Colleague Mr Haughey has been speaking to its vice-chairman, Alex Boraine, and we are taking on board his experiences. It is something that we are considering. We are treading very sensitively and, I hope, very sensibly.

The experiences of the victims will remain with them for many years to come. I hope that we will not have to witness new victims being created in the same way that they have been in the past. That is why I am here. That is why this Assembly and this Administration are here. That is why we — Mr Haughey and myself in the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, and others in this Assembly — are endeavouring to do our best for victims.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly welcomes the inclusion of a specific measure for victims in the European Peace II programme.

(Madam Deputy Speaker [Ms Morrice] in the Chair)

MINIMUM WAGE

Mr B Hutchinson: I beg to move

That this Assembly considers the current minimum wage threshold to be too low and supports a minimum wage level of (at least) £5 per hour and calls for the youth exemption contained in the current legislation to be abolished so that the £5 per hour rate applies to all.

I want to point out a number of things about the legislation, even though it is a reserved matter. The legislation has been ineffective in tackling the problem of low pay and exploitation. Low pay is not an issue about people not doing the work; it is about exploitation.

There are three reasons why the legislation has not tackled the problem properly. First, the minimum wage has been set too low. It does not even keep pace with inflation. For many, it becomes the maximum, not the minimum wage, and we need to take that into consideration.

Secondly, there is no adequate enforcement. The unit that deals with enforcement is hidden away. There are very mild penalties. The unit is understaffed, and employers know that if they are caught the worst that will happen to them is that they will be made to pay the minimum wage.

These factors illustrate the fact there are few incentives to deal with the problem.

The third problem with the legislation is the inclusion of exemptions, the most obvious of which is age. We all know that for a long time a number of "high street" companies have been paying their staff a low wage. Some Members have sponsored Third-World issues. However, when considered in the round, it seems that some of the cases in Northern Ireland are just as bad. For example, certain companies pay 17-year-old staff members £1.70 an hour. That is a total disgrace, and we need to deal with it. Those Members who have supported such worthy causes elsewhere need to recognise that we need justice for people in the United Kingdom.

The Anti-Poverty Network's statistics show that low pay affects 300,000 people in Northern Ireland. That is a damning statistic that we all need to take into account. The NSPCC claims that one in four families and one child in three live in poverty. These are also damning statistics for such a society as ours, and we need to look at this in the context of low pay.

Northern Ireland wage levels are 20% lower than those of our counterparts on the mainland, yet the cost of living has increased at a quicker rate. My Colleagues on the Unionist side of the House continually, and rightly, refer to the need for parity with the rest of the United Kingdom. We need to look at the levels of wages

needed to keep abreast of inflation and to ensure that people do not end up living in poverty.

Among the other factors that put Northern Ireland at a disadvantage, in comparison with the rest of the United Kingdom or even with the rest of Europe, is the 140% increase in our fuel prices. These are matters that we have to deal with on a daily basis. Electricity prices here are 21% higher than in Scotland, 27% higher than in England and Wales and a massive 53% higher than those of our neighbours in the Republic of Ireland. Those statistics highlight how important it is for employees here to earn a decent wage which enables them to keep their heads above water.

Our domestic electricity prices are the most expensive in Europe. The cost per unit in Northern Ireland is 9.43p. Electricity is cheapest in Finland, where it is 4.47p per unit. These factors need to be considered when we, or employers, are deciding how much people should be paid. Statistics showing electricity prices and the earnings of those at the lower end of the pay scale are damning. In the financial year that ended in April 2000, Viridian made £70 million in profits, but it also announced that prices would rise again. Six weeks ago we had a heated debate on electricity prices.

Mr Cobain: A heated debate?

Mr B Hutchinson: Yes, it was a heated debate. Funny comments are not very appropriate to this debate, especially when they come from the Chairman of the Social Development Committee, who knows about the problem of fuel poverty.

We should be linking all of those with low pay. Take the lack of investment in the transport infrastructure and the effect that has on such people. Most people here need cars to journey to and from work because of that. One example, which cripples most people, is the cost of car insurance in Northern Ireland compared with that in the rest of the United Kingdom. That is just another element.

3.15 pm

We listen to and comment on Budgets and Programmes for Government. On Committees we talk about sustainable development in communities, job creation and urban and rural regeneration. Even if we achieve all of that, will it work when the Anti-Poverty Network is telling us that 300,000 people in Northern Ireland are affected by low pay? Surely we must do something about that and ensure that the Assembly deals with poverty here? We say that we want sustainable development, and yet 300,000 people are affected by low pay. We cannot even guarantee that people in work will receive a wage from their firms that will keep their families on a weekly basis, yet we are asking communities to produce sustainable development.

The Green and Orange Tories in the House will argue that if we increase the minimum wage to £5 we will lose jobs rather than create them. That brings me to the amendment from Dr Birnie and Mr Beggs. They are asking us to look at the impact on national and local employment and to consider possible alternative threshold levels. Why not look at the European threshold level, which is set at £7? Regarding the amendment, I am not asking for a change in legislation today — it is a reserved matter — but I am asking people to do a number of things. We need to look at what the Assembly can do today and tomorrow without having to change legislation. The legislation can be changed as we go along.

As I have already said, we have to take action to lessen the burden on the 300,000 people in Northern Ireland who are affected by low pay. The Assembly could do something, if it wanted to. Bringing the motion to the Floor has already started the process. That has allowed a discussion to take place, and when I am finished speaking I hope that a serious debate will ensue. I call on everybody in the Assembly, and those outside, to lobby our Westminster MPs to try to get the minimum wage changed to £5.

I also call on the Assembly to establish a policy whereby all departmental employees, direct or indirect, are paid at least £5 per hour. A precedent has already been set here with the Assembly Commission's deciding to set the minimum wage at £5. Departments could follow suit. We should take the lead and talk about what we can do. In summing up, my Colleague, Dara O'Hagan, will provide a breakdown of the figures of people being paid under £5 per hour in each Department. Let us establish a policy whereby the Industrial Development Board (IDB) does not award Government grants to companies that will not pay £5 per hour. We could restructure Government-sponsored training programmes to ensure that they top up state benefits to a level of at least £5 per hour.

Many lessons have been learnt about community development and economic regeneration. One is that without an integrated approach, they will not work.

The other is that Government aid is being poured into different areas, but the issue is not being viewed in a holistic way. Now is the time to do that. We must look at how much money is being injected into Government programmes and at how much money the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety is contributing. All these issues must be examined to see if resources can be better utilised. There is an opportunity to look at the New Deal and other schemes — which do not work in any case — to see how they can be restructured.

If the Assembly cannot implement my suggestions on the 300,000 people who are on low pay, it is telling society that it is not prepared to deal with such matters. This is one way of dealing with some aspects of poverty. I ask all Members to support the motion.

Dr Birnie: I beg to move the following amendment: Delete all after "low" and add

"and calls for an adequate research assessment of the national and local employment impact of possible alternative threshold levels."

The proposer of the motion referred to me and the co-sponsor of the amendment as "Orange Tories". I can only speak for myself: he is half-correct, but perhaps not the half that many people might expect.

Mr Ervine: When the Member reads Hansard tomorrow he will see that neither Member was named as an Orange or Green Tory.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Dr Birnie: I do not deny that the proposers of the Sinn Féin/PUP motion have some worthy objectives, to the extent that Mr Hutchinson referred to the problem of non-enforcement — that is, the illegal non-payment of the current minimum wage. I doubt if anyone in the House would disagree with that. I hope that we all support enforcement of the law as it stands.

In this amendment we are not attacking the minimum wage in principle. We accept that it is in the law. However, the motion raises the crucial question of what the correct minimum wage should be.

There are many reasons to doubt the wisdom of pushing for an increase in the minimum hourly rate from its current level — which in October will rise to £4.10 - £5 without also giving adequate consideration to all the consequences of such a change. This could have an impact especially on the poor, for whom the proposers have a high regard. Furthermore, policy elsewhere in the United Kingdom would have to be considered because this is a non-transferred matter.

In an ideal world everyone's wages could be raised at the stroke of a legislator's pen. But — and therein lies the rub — you cannot legislate your way to prosperity. This can be achieved in the long run only by having a more competitive economy.

The proposers have not yet indicated that they have considered seriously the possible negative impact on employment that would result from raising the minimum wage by the extent they propose, and hence the implications for unemployment. Neither have they indicated that they accept that there are sound reasons for the so-called youth exemption, whereby there is a lower minimum wage rate for workers between the ages of 18 and 21. Workers in that age bracket generally have a lower level of productivity and are often still in training. They do not produce as much as fully trained adult workers. It does not seem unreasonable, therefore, that companies should economise on their costs until these younger workers reach full or average productivity and are fully trained.

Remarkably, the proposers have ignored the stance of the Low Pay Commission, which was the body established by the Blair Government in 1997/1998 to decide precisely what is being debated today — the level of the minimum wage. The commission recently recommended that the UK minimum wage should be increased to £4.10 this October and to £4.20 thereafter. Indeed, my party, through its Westminster spokesmen, has already welcomed that.

Interestingly, the Low Pay Commission includes representatives from the Transport and General Workers Union, the Confederation of British Industry and a number of labour market economists. Therefore it would appear to be reasonable to follow the figures that they have arrived at rather than the figure of £5.

Northern Ireland starts from a position of a lower average level of wages and productivity than the rest of the UK — something that the proposer did not mention. This implies that any ill-considered increase in the minimum wage here could have even more job-destroying effects on competitiveness. Members are too well aware of the tenuous position of firms in sectors such as textiles, clothing, farming and tourism. We should not lay the final straw upon such firms and possibly break their backs.

International evidence, as provided by the Organisation for Economic Development and Co-operation in 1998, implies that as a country's minimum wage rises as a percentage of the market wage rate then the rate of unemployment in that country also rises relative to other countries. For a long time, France has had a relatively high minimum wage for its youth and it has also had a much higher rate of unemployment among young people than either the UK or USA.

Mr Ervine: Bearing that in mind, will the Member give some indication as to why Northern Ireland has had its lowest levels of unemployment for a long time, even though the minimum wage has been in existence and has been increased?

Dr Birnie: I was going to come to that point later.

In a sense, we have been fortunate that the introduction of the minimum wage in 1998 corresponded with a boom that was happening in the Northern Ireland labour market. Therefore, any negative effects on competitiveness were submerged by other changes.

However, the international evidence is clear, and I have some of it with me. If the minimum wage rate is set at too high a level for people under the age of 21 then it will destroy jobs. For example, the youth unemployment rate in France in the late 1990s was at the shocking level of almost 30%.

The House will destroy its credibility if it establishes a pattern of adopting what are simply economic wish lists. We might think that those are popular — and, of course, there are elections coming up shortly — but we

will not be delivering what is in the real, best interests of the people. Almost every economic study has indicated that when a minimum wage is set at a relatively high level compared to the market rate it causes some increase in unemployment. Perhaps the 1998 UK minimum wage did not cause obvious unemployment because the level was considered carefully by the Low Pay Commission and its introduction — *[Interruption]*

Mr Kennedy: Would the Member care to indicate what he personally thinks is an appropriate level for the minimum wage, given that he does not want to legislate for it?

Dr Birnie: My feeling is that a rate of £4.10, which will rise to £4.20 next year, as recommended by the Low Pay Commission, is not unreasonable because the commission represents industry and economic experts.

3.30 pm

Studies have indicated that minimum wages are not necessarily the best way to tackle poverty. That is another crucial point that the proposer of the motion did not adequately address. Many poor people are not in employment, so raising the minimum wage does nothing to help them. That point was recognised by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, Mr Byers, in the statement that he made on the increase to the minimum wage on 5 March this year. Moreover, many low-wage workers belong to families that are not in the lowest income categories. That point was recognised by the Northern Ireland Economic Council in its 1998 report on the introduction of a minimum wage and its impact on the local economy. The level of the minimum wage is not, in any case, a transferred matter; responsibility still lies with Westminster. The proposer recognised that, but he failed to show why we should move beyond the levels established by the UK Low Pay Commission, which are now being adopted by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

I agree with the proposer about the need to deal with poverty, but he did not prove the case that raising the rate to £5 an hour at this stage was the best means to that end. The amendment does not rule out an increase to the minimum wage, but calls for careful consideration of the impact of any increase on unemployment figures and consideration of whether that would be the best way of tackling poverty generally.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Because of the number of Members who want to speak in the time allocated by the Business Committee, I must ask that contributions be limited to five minutes.

Mr McGrady: Madam Deputy Speaker, your pronouncement cuts to pieces what I was going to say. Little can be said in five minutes.

I welcome this cross-party motion. It addresses the culture that exists in Northern Ireland of paying people

at the lower end of the wage scale. That has, in turn, created a further dependency culture, as people seek benefits and other ways of augmenting their income.

I listened with interest to what the proposer of the amendment said, especially the statistics. The problem is not new to Northern Ireland, and I am glad to support the motion. At a conference a quarter of a century ago, in 1973, my local branch of the SDLP proposed a motion calling on the conference to support a demand for all workers in the North to receive a national minimum wage that would be reviewed annually. It has taken a long time for that demand to reach fulfilment, and I think that we are still falling short of what is required.

Ms McWilliams: Will the Member give way?

Mr McGrady: I have only five minutes, so I am not going to give way.

I was glad that the Labour Party in Britain had caught up — albeit a quarter of a century later — in their manifesto for the 1997 general election.

The proposal in the motion is for a minimum of £5 an hour. People who work a 38-hour week — a full week's work — are entitled to £190 a week for their labour, whoever they are or whatever their skills. No one should object to such a basic rate. Some may think that we are getting ahead of ourselves by proposing an increase of 10p or 30p an hour, but we should consider the statistics. Of all the European countries with a minimum wage — for example, Belgium, Greece, Spain, France, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Portugal — the United Kingdom is second last.

It contributes only 38% of average earnings. Some Members are fond of statistics so I am giving them some. The United Kingdom is second last in the list; Spain is the only country that is lower. We have all the statistics we need. The low pay units have been cogitating on the matter for decades. The purpose of the amendment is to nullify the motion and remove the £5 figure. There is no other purpose for it. Statistics are coming out of our ears. We know what is happening. The SDLP is interested in creating a greater degree of social justice, less deprivation and less dependency on handouts from the state or charities. Surely to God that is not only a political commitment but also a Christian commitment. The Assembly must endeavour to give equality to the people who are working hard, long hours at wages below the minimum wage.

Since the current legislation was introduced, between 1.25 million and 1.5 million people have benefited. That is how bad the situation was, and it can be improved. In Northern Ireland 50,000 people are going to have at least a measure of their regular income — earned by the sweat of their brow — delivered to them by the motion. It is a modest increase — about 10p per hour. That is not a big deal.

The SDLP is seeking to achieve a degree of justice and equality of treatment and to give some pride to people. They should receive a just reward for their labour.

The low pay unit concluded that a national minimum wage had not adversely affected the economy. That has been statistically proven by the Low Pay Commission. Therefore another few pence will not make much difference. The SDLP supports the motion.

Mr R Hutchinson: I came to the House today with a mind —

Mr Ervine: Does the Member come without a mind sometimes?

Mr R Hutchinson: I will treat that comment with the contempt that it deserves.

I came to the House with a mind to support the amendment. However, having listened to Mr Birnie, I will not be doing so. It is a disgrace that there are 300,000 people on the poverty line in Northern Ireland. A verse that is quoted so often — “The labourer is worthy of his hire” — is a good motto for any society to live by. There are many reasons why the minimum wage should be raised to a sensible figure in Northern Ireland. Too many people are struggling. In our surgeries and in the course of our work we meet many people every day who, through no fault of their own, are struggling to pay their electricity bills and their insurance bills. They are trying to make a decent living for themselves.

Many of us have come from working-class families and are not ashamed to say that. We have watched our parents and families struggle year after year. They are people who went out to do a decent day's work but were not given a decent day's wage.

I am sad that this is a reserved matter. I hope that the powers that be take note of what has been said in the Assembly. People need to have a decent minimum wage. Mr Hutchinson said that the price of electricity is higher in Northern Ireland than anywhere else in Europe. We pay more for petrol, food and insurance. Why should Northern Ireland be treated differently from other regions in the United Kingdom and Europe?

A lot of people claim income support, and many are put off going out to work because their hourly rate is insufficient for their needs, though some break the law by doing the double. Are we encouraging people to break the law simply because the minimum wage is so low? We need to consider this very seriously. Many people need help with their wages. Imposing a minimum wage which small businesses cannot afford to pay will cause difficulties. We need to be careful to avoid problems of this kind.

Dr Birnie: Surely that is precisely what the amendment seeks to do.

Mr R Hutchinson: I have no problem with the amendment; it was your speech, Dr Birnie, that put me off.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member will address his remarks through the Chair.

Mr R Hutchinson: It is not because you are not an Orange Tory either.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member will address his remarks through the Chair.

Mr R Hutchinson: Sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Many small companies would be burdened if we raised the minimum wage too much. We have to consider them because they have provided employment over the years. I support the motion.

Mr M Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion. The exploitation of one person in the workforce is bad. However, it is an indictment of our society that over 100,000 workers in the Six Counties receive £3.60 an hour — particularly when one considers that it is women and young people who are being exploited. This is a return to the Dark Ages — sweatshop employers are exploiting the workers through pure greed.

Multinational businesses with over £1 billion annual profit worldwide come to mind. While the fat cats get fatter, the strays get thinner. We need to support workers and set the minimum wage at £5.00 an hour to lift them and their families out of the poverty trap. This will enable mothers and fathers to worry less at the end of the week about how to feed their kids and pay their bills. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Neeson: First, I would like to thank Mr Hutchinson and Dr O'Hagan for bringing this motion before the House. However, I am surprised that such a limited amount of time has been set aside for such an important issue. The Alliance Party has always supported the principle of the national minimum wage, and we have also supported the European social chapter. The two are inseparable. It is a basic human right for an individual to get a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. We welcomed the introduction of the national minimum wage in April 1999.

It became illegal for an employer to pay less than the minimum wage. We all know that, contrary to that legislation, a number of employers tried to avoid that by threatening their workers with the sack if they complained. Unfortunately, many young people became victims of that. The exploitation of the young is nothing new in Northern Ireland or in other societies around the world.

3.45 pm

One of the main benefits of the Good Friday Agreement was that it created a focus on basic human rights. I look forward to the production of a Northern Ireland bill of

rights that will, I hope, become a model for the rest of the world and will deal with issues such as this.

Under the present legislation, different categories with different wage levels have been established. I firmly believe that that sort of categorisation contradicts the spirit of the existing equality legislation in Northern Ireland. The Equality Commission should look at that issue very closely, because we are well acquainted with the whole question of whether things are discriminatory. That is an issue that needs to be looked at very seriously.

On 5 March the Government announced that the national minimum wage would increase to £4.10 per hour from 1 October 2001 and £4.20 per hour from 1 October 2002. Such a proposal shows contempt for those in the low-wage economy. I strongly urge the Low Pay Commission, under the chairmanship of Prof George Bain, who comes from Northern Ireland and should realise and understand the problems that exist in Northern Ireland, to seriously reconsider those recommendations.

It had always been my fervent hope that the uncaring and selfish society of Thatcherism was dead and buried, especially with the election of a Labour Government. I am sad to say that I have been very deeply disappointed by the approach of the Labour Party to many of the important social issues that permeate society, both here and in the rest of the United Kingdom. At the moment, Northern Ireland is being promoted overseas by the IDB as an economy that pays affordable wages. It would greatly concern me if in fact Northern Ireland were being promoted as a low-wage economy, as it has been in the past. In trying to attract American investment to Northern Ireland, the IDB makes the point that wages in Northern Ireland are 35% lower than in America.

It is vital that all these workers receive a fair wage for a fair day's work. I support the motion, not only because it reflects, in full, the policy put forward in the most recent Alliance Party paper on the economy, but also because it is fair and right. I oppose the amendment because it is a fudge and does not deal directly with the issue at hand.

Ms McWilliams: I commend Billy Hutchinson and Dara O'Hagan for bringing this motion today. I support it. I did not have to come into the Chamber to change my mind, but in relation to what Esmond Birnie said, there are a number of myths that I would like to knock on the head. Contrary to his view, the national minimum wage has not caused and will not cause a reduction in employment. All the research on the national minimum wage points to the fact that the vast majority of firms have found it affordable. Dr Birnie needs to take that on board.

Secondly, it has not caused an inflationary hike in earnings or had a knock-on effect further up the pay structures.

Dr Birnie: I agree with the Member that those conclusions have been reached. However, they relate to the rate of £3.70 per hour, which will go up to £4.10 per hour. They do not apply to the rate of £5 per hour.

Ms McWilliams: Being a good economist, Dr Birnie should surely know that those who carried out the research have also done the forecasting. They pointed out that the national minimum wage would not cause an inflationary hike in the UK or elsewhere in Europe. On the contrary, the research argues that it benefits employers.

When the Hastings Hotel Group's representative provided evidence on the tourism industry to the Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment Committee last week, I asked him about the impact of the national minimum wage on his industry. He said that it was good for the industry to have a national minimum wage. If workers are paid less than this, they are poached and move from one hotel to the other. An employer who can prove that he or she is paying good wages — with good training that leads to decent skills and qualifications — will earn loyalty and hold on to workers. That system can only be useful for the tourism industry. Those are the words of an employer.

Mr Hutchinson pointed out that for too long Northern Ireland and its tourist industry have been known for low wages. This is an indictment of that industry, and we must set a national minimum wage based on realistic living costs in Northern Ireland. It was with this in mind that the Trades Union Congress set a target of £5 per hour for collective bargaining at its 1999 conference. The UK Low Pay Commission settled on this rate also.

Unfortunately, a side effect of the national minimum wage is that certain workers have been told that they are no longer allowed to keep tips. We must have regard to this. In the past those workers have been able to supplement meagre wages by tips from customers. I take pleasure in the fact that, unlike America, we have not gone down that road and here you get what you pay for. Setting wages and reassuring customers that employees are actually getting those wages prevents us from wondering what kind of tips we should be handing out and from treating workers like servants.

Who are the low-paid? They are usually people in the private sector rather than in the public sector, although the Assembly should take a look at the staff from contract agencies who work here and who do not get £5 per hour. Members have queried this. Nevertheless, the proportion of contract agency staff in the Assembly has gone up rather than down. We may need to look at our own House in the public sector before criticising the private sector. However, more often it is the private sector that is not paying the minimum wage.

The low-paid are more often manual workers than non-manual; part-time rather than full-time; and women rather than men. It is also a problem for young people,

and the motion addresses this issue as it has been the crux of the problem in the past.

It is inconsistent with legislation to talk about equal work of equal value and then talk about age differentials. Pay should be based on skills and qualifications, not on age. If an individual has the necessary skills and qualifications or is in training, work and pay should follow accordingly. Therefore, on the basis of fairness alone, we should not allow such differentials to enter the equation. That would create a labour-market distortion, and historically younger workers have been seen as a cheap form of labour.

Those are some of my arguments for the creation of a national minimum wage of £5 per hour.

Mr Cobain: I have listened to people talk about statistics for most of the day, but any economy has the right to pay people a minimum wage. This question involves both moral and economic issues.

There was a lot of resistance to the minimum wage being set. We are now seeing this resistance with respect to how much should be paid as the minimum wage, and that is the next hurdle we will have to jump. Those who have argued against the minimum wage have lost that argument, so the next argument will be to restrict the minimum wage as we go along. These are the arguments that some people are continuing to make.

The same arguments were made regarding a reduction in the number of hours worked. It was said that the economy could not sustain a reduction in working hours, an increase in holidays, and that it could not cater for women. All those arguments have been made before and the economy has proven itself stronger than most expected.

Unemployment in the United Kingdom is at its lowest level for 40 or 50 years. This does not mean that there is not a correlation between wages and unemployment. However, it is not the direct correlation that some are trying to make. Some people in my party have been unable to get over the fact that we have stopped putting children up chimneys in the last hundred years. There are issues that the Assembly must address. The Assembly cannot deal with the matter directly, but there are issues, such as those that Mr Hutchinson raised, that the Assembly could have a direct impact on.

Moving on to the issue of poverty, we cannot have this silo effect where we deal with wages and simply forget about the rest of the issues. During the debate on the Executive programme funds the Department for Social Development, which deals directly with people who are living in poverty, received less than 1% of the £146 million that was allocated by the Assembly. Issues that directly related to poverty were excluded.

People come here and they like to make brief, media-catching statements, which really do not mean anything. The vast majority of Members are — cross my fingers

— left of centre, and the people should be benefiting from radical new ideas agreed and put into place by the Assembly. That is not happening. There are people here who have never suffered from poverty and do not look at poverty as a whole. Many of us have experienced poverty, but there are people here who have no perception of what it is like. I listen to arguments about whether the minimum wage should be £4, £4·20, or £4·30. Many of us are angered when we listen to arguments like this, especially when they come from professional people who have been born with a silver spoon in their mouths and have been helped throughout their life. These are the ones who claim that 20p an hour may have an impact on the economy.

My point is that if we are concerned about people living in poverty then the minimum wage is only one aspect. There are people living in Housing Executive homes who will be unable to have their bathrooms and kitchens replaced this year because the Assembly voted to restrict the amount of money that will be spent on that. People are dying of hypothermia because the Assembly refused to provide money for fuel poverty. In the education field, there are second and third generations who are suffering from numeracy and literacy difficulties and we have not provided money for that. I could go on for the next 25 minutes about what the Assembly could have done and yet did not do.

Many of us are deeply concerned about poverty. It is a cross-party matter. However, there are people here who are using this debate. They are hypocrites, because when it comes to issues directly related to poverty, they will refuse to vote for issues because it will, in some cases, embarrass their Ministers and Departments.

Ms Hanna: I support the principle of a minimum wage, which can and will be negotiated upwards, perhaps even higher than £5. I am no economist but I believe that the argument regarding a minimum wage having a negative impact on employment can no longer be substantiated.

4.00 pm

We have to give people a decent wage for a decent day's work. A minimum wage will go some way towards enabling those caught in the poverty trap of low-paid jobs and benefits to take up the challenge of a job — especially women, who fill three quarters of the low-paid jobs — and towards eradicating the exploitation of workers. It is a tool to tackle inequality by increasing the wages of the lowest paid. It is unfortunate that the under-18s have no set minimum wage; this might reflect their youth, and lack of training, but a fixed minimum wage would give young people some protection from exploitation.

The gap between the rich and the poor, the haves and the have-nots, is increasing. The Low Pay Unit estimates that over three million households in the UK live in

poverty, despite the fact that at least one member of each is in paid employment. UNICEF has ranked the UK as being in the bottom four of its league table of child poverty in rich nations. One in three children in Northern Ireland lives in poverty. Women who work full-time are still paid only 80% of their male colleagues' earnings, and part-time female workers receive even less.

The repercussions of these fundamental inequalities spread through every aspect of society — from education and housing to basic ill health which, for many people, is inextricably linked to poverty. To improve the health of the population, it is essential to reduce these inequalities and improve the living standards of poor households.

A higher minimum wage would have further benefits — increased productivity brought about by better staff morale, a lower turnover of workers and reduced spending on benefits. Furthermore, businesses would be encouraged to invest in training. It is essential that a focus on the training of employees is an integral part of changes to the minimum wage. We need to ensure that people are trained to their highest capability and that they are given the opportunities and incentives to further their education, qualifications and careers.

We have a Department for Employment and Learning and we are all much more conscious of the need for training for life and employment. We must ensure that children who leave school can look forward to work, not the dole. Our consultation on the future of selection at 11 is very timely. If we replace selection at 11 — and I hope we will — we must replace it with a system in which all our children leave the education system with good education and job skills. We need to match the job skills to the jobs, and we need the jobs.

This is a reserved matter, but it is very important that Departments work together and look at ways in which their remits have an impact on the living standards of the population and at ways in which we can improve the conditions in which the most vulnerable people live. A more comprehensive overview must be taken of all the issues involved in employment, but I welcome the debate.

Mr McGrady: Before the Member concludes her remarks, I would like to remove any confusion she or the Assembly might have that I was supporting the substantive amendment and not the substantive motion. I am opposed to the amendment, and I would like us to be on the same wavelength in that sense.

Ms Hanna: We are, and I never doubted that.

I rushed, and I now realise that I could have had another minute. I welcome the debate in the Chamber, and I certainly support the motion.

Mr S Wilson: This debate ought not to be simplified into an argument between Green and Orange Tories and all the good people on the other side. Many very important

issues have been raised here today. What should the level of the minimum wage be? Various contributors have pointed out that there is no consensus on that. The Low Pay Commission, which includes some trade unionists, says that it should be £4.10. UNISON recommends £4.69. Billy Hutchinson said that it should be £5, while in Europe it is £7. We could have a lottery. Will it affect employment in a buoyant economy? The evidence we have so far is that it does not, but it may well do so in an economy which is going into recession.

There are many imponderables in all this. As Ms Hanna said, to a certain extent we are debating in a vacuum. It is a reserved matter, and we can say whatever we want. Billy Hutchinson made one very important point. He said that this was a reserved matter and that, therefore, we had to ask what this Assembly could do. When he raised that question, I thought — and I am not talking politically — that he really has a strange partner in bringing this motion forward, especially when he asked what this Assembly could do. The only Minister in this Assembly who I know has encouraged workers to take a wage that is below the minimum wage is the Sinn Féin Minister of Education.

On a number of occasions I have raised in the Assembly the question of term-time-only workers. That is something that the Minister of Education could deal with at a cost of £1.15 million. Yet on 20 June, in the only pronouncement he has made regarding those workers — workers to whom he gave support before he became a Minister — he encouraged them to accept an offer that would spread over 12 months salaries that are currently paid over 10 months. That had been put forward, and he said

“I believe that this approach presents the best way forward for all involved”.

And he encouraged them to accept it.

I then received a letter from a constituent who had applied for a job with the education and library board as a school porter. The 10 months that he would have been employed for would, if holiday pay were included, have paid him a total of £6,363. Averaged over the 12 months, it would have paid him £3.49 per hour. I am using that to illustrate a point. It is fine when we talk of this as a general concept to say that we support a minimum wage of £5.00. We have already heard Sinn Féin Members talk about their support for this motion. However, when it comes down to Ministers who actually have the ability to ensure that people are paid a decent wage, it seems that the departmental mafia gets to them, and what sounds all very well in this Chamber is not actually delivered on the ground.

I have no difficulty supporting a decent wage for people who are paid low wages. It gives them dignity and encourages employers to value their employees and give them training to increase their productivity. However, we have to ask ourselves — especially given one of the

proposers of this motion — whether, when it comes down to delivering, Sinn Féin is actually doing the job.

Mr Ervine: I am not sure whether Mr S Wilson is for the motion or the amendment, but we will find out soon enough.

We have heard constantly today that this is a reserved matter. In dealing with it, let me take you on one of my wanderings. I dare say that if Mr Roger Hutchinson were here, he would take the opportunity to add something to that.

I was in Germany recently. Wages in the former East Germany are 30% below the German national average. They have achieved wage increases in the last 12 years that bring them to just 30% below.

We have to ask ourselves — and ask the First and Deputy First Ministers, the rest of the Executive and, especially, the Minister of Finance and Personnel — what arguments are going to be made to the United Kingdom Government asking them when our transition period is over. When are we going to be at just 30% below the rest of the United Kingdom? When will we be 25%, 20% or 15% below? There is some naivety on the part of the proposer of the amendment when he does not realise that in laying down aspirational markers in the Assembly and, as my Colleague Mr Billy Hutchinson said, by making the differences where we can —

Dr Birnie: The East German case illustrates precisely the dangers of a rapid increase in wages relative to productivity. Unemployment there is now 30%. Does the Member want that here?

Mr Ervine: The mark went from being worth about 2d to being worth about two quid overnight. That makes a difference. No one is asking for that. We are asking for the means to let people survive. Not only do we have the shameful circumstances of people not being paid a decent wage, but we also do not even give them permanent contracts in circumstances where they are being paid less than £5 per hour — or, at the moment, less than £4 per hour. They cannot make any judgements about their future lives based upon the degree of income that they get — which is paltry. Even if they could, they will face difficulties because finance houses and similar organisations will not take their word that they are likely to be in employment for a longer period. They get hit by a double whammy.

I accept the comment made by Sammy Wilson that there are things that we can do. There are practical measures that I need not rehearse — my Colleague has made the comment, and I am sure that Dara O'Hagan will back it up. The reality is that we have a choice. We sit here and we take what Westminster doles out to us, like some sort of nodding ducks. Then we get ourselves into an ideological nightmare over the issue of rates. If we were making the arguments sternly in a cross-party

fashion, and in a joined-up-government-attitudinal way, then I believe that the Government of the United Kingdom would be very foolish to ignore us.

However, the Government of the United Kingdom have had strange experiences. Only one Unionist voted against the privatisation of gas. I imagine that if I were to look back to when the minimum wage was passed in Britain, as part of a European initiative, I would nearly bet — I may be wrong, but I doubt it — that every Unionist voted against it.

This society's representatives have consistently offered mixed messages to the citizenry and, more especially, to the Government of the United Kingdom. That would tell me that if we can get our act together and go as a unified group of people and kick down the door of 11 Downing Street, we can definitely do better. Therefore when we see a motion like this — and Sammy Wilson identified the core element for us — what can we do about it? There are two things. There is what we can do about it and what we can make others do about it.

I advocate that Members support the motion, abandon the blocking mechanism of the amendment, and accept the reality that unless we fight strong, hard battles we are never going to be as well off as the former GDR is within Germany. We will always be second-class citizens unless we are prepared to go and demand better and more.

Mr Carrick: I have listened carefully to the debate and much has been said about the principle of the national minimum wage. However, we dare not lose sight of the end-user. The end-users in this case are people. It is a question of seeking social justice for the people. It is a question of seeking a quality of life for the people, and it is about the promotion of self-worth among the people, with the exclusion of exploitation. That is what this debate should be about.

4.15 pm

The guiding principles that were referred to when the Low Pay Commission was given its brief in the Queen's Speech in May 1997 are still as relevant today as they were then. The elimination of poverty, fair recognition of the labour that is supplied, the creation of a prosperous economy and the provision of a stable society are all very laudable.

Paragraph 3 of the executive summary of the second report of the Low Pay Commission states

"Several years will be needed to assess the full effects of the National Minimum Wage. But already it is clear that a large number of people have benefited. Two-thirds of beneficiaries are working women and, of these, two-thirds are part-time workers. Well over one and a half million workers were entitled to a higher pay by April 1999 because of the minimum wage, and our initial assessment is that the substantial majority of these workers, in the formal sector at least, are now receiving their entitlement."

That is a start. We must build on that to make sure that what we have achieved does not slip, and that those who

are still excluded and exploited will enjoy the benefits that the rest of us are currently enjoying.

One section of the report deals with small firms. While we want to give due recognition to the needs of employees, we cannot do so in isolation from the impact that will have in small firms. The small firm has been the backbone of the Northern Ireland economy. Their contribution, even in the face of adversity and civil strife over the past 30 years, has been tremendous. Yet, the loyalty and steadfastness of those small businesses has been rewarded with yet more layers of bureaucratic administration, and the imposition of unpaid tax-collecting and benefit-paying work.

The wage departments of small firms are now collecting national insurance, income tax and student loan repayments — all in an unpaid capacity. They are now paying out statutory maternity pay, statutory sick pay and the working families' tax credit. The burden that has been imposed on the small business employer has been horrendous.

We must take into account that there will be a straw that breaks the camel's back. The position of small businesses has to be factored into the thinking of the national minimum pay regime. We cannot divorce one from the other. We have got to work together to produce that social cohesion and economic dynamic that will leave us with a prosperous society.

The minimum rate, whatever it will be, must be tailored to the situation in Northern Ireland and not imposed by a set of circumstances experienced elsewhere. The Assembly will have a role in influencing those charged with that decision by factoring in the unique circumstances that exist here.

Mr Beggs: I support the concept of a minimum wage and the proposal to increase it. Everyone in Northern Ireland wants to move away from the generally low-wage economy towards a well-paid economy so that the value of all workers is recognised and rewarded.

I have listened carefully to what has been said in the debate, and I have not heard an explanation of why the figure of £5 per hour has been chosen. Would £6 per hour not be more appropriate? I would like to put it on record that, if there were agreed economic evidence that £6 per hour would be appropriate for Northern Ireland, I would support that. I would like to hear, from Members who have still to sum up, why the figure of £5 per hour has been selected.

Because of the criteria for choosing the figure I have suggested, in the amendment, which also stands in my name, that detailed economic research should be carried out in Northern Ireland. Research would make sure that we all fully understood the benefits and possible difficulties involved in choosing a level for the minimum wage. We should not pick the figure out of a hat.

It was mentioned that the TUC has advocated the figure of £5 per hour. Has that figure been applied to Northern Ireland in particular? I would welcome information on that from Members. Detailed research, specific to Northern Ireland, would surely be appropriate.

Several Members have spoken about the minimum wage in other European countries and have pointed out that those figures are higher than the figure proposed. However, Members have failed to mention the high levels of employment in those countries. In addition, I understand that the TUC has recommended a figure of between £4.50 and £5. It has not advocated a set figure.

I agree with Mr Wilson that if there is a Government Department in Northern Ireland that is not paying the current minimum wage, let alone considering future minimum wages, we must take the matter into our hands and address it now. During the summer months people who are paid that wage cannot claim unemployment benefit. Many of those people are in an employment trap. They may have difficulties finding other jobs to suit the times that they are available to work, and they cannot sign off because they will lose all benefit entitlements for some time. We should address those issues now and do what is within our power.

I also agree that it is hypocritical of Sinn Féin to have been a part of moving this motion, considering the fact that it has not put its own house in order.

How are we going to raise wage levels in Northern Ireland? We can do this through education, training and the upskilling of our entire workforce. My Colleagues and I have been pressing for investment in our higher and further education sector. Dr Birnie was critical, only yesterday, of the Programme for Government for not providing significant additional funds towards basic education, so that the value of all workers to the companies that employ them could be improved. The entire economy would benefit from that, and everyone could be paid more.

The economy would be able to make better use of the workforce if its knowledge and skills were developed, and everyone would be able to demand higher wages and in that way everyone's worth would be fully recognised. So why are we limiting the figure to £5 per hour? What is wrong with £6 per hour? I would like to hear evidence and see research done that backed up the figure that is chosen.

I would like to return to some of the comments made by Sinn Féin. When you think about the number of potentially highly paid jobs that have been lost to Northern Ireland over the past 30 years as a result of terrorism, it seems hypocritical of Sinn Féin to criticise the Government or anyone else about any level for the minimum wage. Many people in Northern Ireland do not have a job today because of Sinn Féin's terrorist activity.

If you were an outside investor, would you have chosen to create highly paid jobs in Northern Ireland

over the past 30 years? I am pleased that there has been a reduction in terrorist activity and that many new investors are looking to Northern Ireland, but we must get the stability that is required here. We still have to address the 80 or more mafia gangs, many of whom have paramilitary links, so that employers can confidently come here and trade in a peaceful society where there is no blackmailing. We need a fully peaceful society in which everybody backs the forces of law and order and supports the criminal justice system.

I will welcome such a change when those on the other side of the House eventually get off their high horses and show support for a stable Northern Ireland by their actions rather than just by fancy words. Let us all have a stable Northern Ireland in which we can all progress and our children can earn even higher wages. I hope that those of you who have been listening to what I have said know that I did not move the amendment with any figure in mind — not £5, not £4.10, not £6. A proper evaluation should be considered. Other Members have said that Northern Ireland should go it alone in certain areas. What effect would it have on Northern Ireland if other parts of the United Kingdom had a different minimum wage level?

The final decision must follow an examination of the ultimate effects on our economy, so that it is the most needy who benefit. We need to ensure that poorly paid employees do not end up unemployed and in a poverty and benefits trap, as a result of which it is not worth their while to work. It is important that we encourage people into employment, to develop skills and to continue lifelong learning so that if employers do not pay the wages they need, they can look to other employers who will value their skills. The purpose of the amendment is to have an investigation into the ultimate benefits of any possible threshold level.

Dr O'Hagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I will try to respond to most of the Members' points. Dr Birnie said that Mr B Hutchinson was only half right when he referred to him as an Orange Tory. His party Colleagues should start to question his credentials. Dr Birnie, in moving his amendment, spoke about the poor and their lack of employment in a condescending manner. We should move away from using such language.

Dr Birnie: Will the Member give way?

Dr O'Hagan: No. I have only 10 minutes.

The motion is concerned with giving people decent wages that will bring them out of the poverty trap. Dr Birnie said that this is a reserved matter, and I accept that. However, the Assembly can take action by sending out a clear message that we want to be progressive and want people to receive a decent wage.

At first I thought that Mr McGrady supported the amendment, but then it became clear that he supported the motion. He talked at length about social justice and

fair pay. I appreciated Mr Hutchinson's contributions on fuel poverty, the poverty trap and income support.

4.30 pm

He raised an important point, which I think was also raised by Mervyn Carrick, about small businesses and the possible burden on them. There is no reason for not being imaginative or for the Government, instead of wasting millions of pounds on questionable programmes such as New Deal, not taking the burden off small businesses and topping up their employees' wages to £5 per hour.

Mick Murphy and Sean Neeson supported the motion, and Mr Murphy spoke about exploitation. Many Members spoke about exploited groups, young people, part-time workers and women in particular.

Mr Neeson put the issue into context, and his contribution about equality legislation and the European social chapter was very useful. He made an important point about the IDB's web site promotion of the North of Ireland as a low-wage economy, which should concern everyone.

Monica McWilliams quite rightly said that a national minimum wage does not increase unemployment and is good for industry. The Northern Ireland Economic Council supports this stance and has stated in a report on the minimum wage that it could have a catalytic impact on a strategy aimed at improving growth and competitiveness by forcing firms to seek and explore other areas of competitive advantage — sometimes referred to as the shock effect. An increased wage rate could induce firms employing low-wage labour to improve other aspects of competitiveness such as management practice, training, the use of technology and so forth, thereby improving productivity and ultimately increasing the demand for labour.

Ms McWilliams also raised the issue of contract agencies. That should be examined, and with particular regard to contracted employees who work for the Executive and the Assembly. She painted a picture of people who are adversely affected and yet again those people were young people, women, part-time workers and manual workers — all forms of cheap labour.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Will Members please hold conversations outside the Chamber.

Dr O'Hagan: Fred Cobain and Carmel Hanna supported the motion, and Ms Hanna made the point that one in three children in the North of Ireland is living in poverty, which has an effect on housing, education and ill-health.

Unfortunately the contribution from Sammy Wilson was the usual tirade against Sinn Féin. That is all that needs to be said.

David Irvine stated that it is not simply a case of what we can do, but what we can make others do. That is an important message that should be coming from the Assembly — *[Interruption]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Dr O'Hagan: Mr Carrick spoke about small firms. I will return to that point. Roy Beggs asked why the figure of £5 per hour was chosen. The motion says "(at least) £5 per hour" and addresses the principle of a decent living wage. Ms Hanna asked why we cannot have a figure that could be negotiated up. It does not have to be £5 per hour, and I am sure that Mr Hutchinson, as co-mover of the motion, would be more than happy to see an even higher level of wages.

Unfortunately Roy Beggs's contribution turned into a typical rant again against Sinn Féin. People must understand that as a party we are entitled to bring forward motions — *[Interruption]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Dr O'Hagan: We will not stop doing that; we will not stop raising issues about — *[Interruption]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member is entitled to be heard.

Dr O'Hagan: We as a party will continue to raise issues such as low wages, poverty, inequality and injustice.

We are here by dint of our having been elected. We are entitled to be here, and we are here to stay. People like you had better get used to that.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member will be reminded to direct her remarks through the Chair.

Dr O'Hagan: Finally, I want to give a few figures —

A Member: Will the Member give way?

Dr O'Hagan: No. I have only about two and a half minutes left.

I want to give a few figures that relate to what we in the Assembly can do about the issue. First, the Assembly Commission led the way when it accepted the principle of at least £5 an hour as the minimum wage for any person employed by the Assembly. That is to be welcomed. That is very progressive and sends out a positive message to the rest of society.

A Member: Will the Member give way?

Dr O'Hagan: No, I am sorry. I have only two minutes left, and I want to get these points in about the Executive.

That is where we can make a difference. In total, the 10 Departments employ 4,285 people who are currently earning less than £5 per hour. I will break it down by Department: the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, 47; the Department of Education, 80; the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, 447; the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, 174; the Department

of Finance and Personnel, 376; the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, 130; the Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment, 239; the Department for Regional Development, 266; the Department for Social Development, 2,192; and the Department of the Environment, 334.

The message from the Assembly should be that it supports the concept of the minimum wage. We call on all Ministers to ensure that every person employed in their Departments earns at least £5 per hour. That would be a practical start.

On the wider issues of decent wages and helping people out of the poverty trap, I urge Members to support the motion and reject the amendment.

Question That the amendment be made put and negatived.

Main question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly considers the current minimum wage threshold to be too low and supports a minimum wage level of (at least) £5 per hour and calls for the youth exemption contained in the current legislation to be abolished so that the £5 per hour rate applies to all.

ADOLESCENT PSYCHIATRIC SERVICES

Mr McMenamin: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes with concern the shortage of adolescent psychiatric services throughout Northern Ireland and urges the Minister of Health to ensure that key staff are recruited immediately with a view to meeting the community need for this vital service within two years in all parts of Northern Ireland.

(Mr Deputy Speaker [Sir John Gorman] in the Chair)

I wish to applaud the magnificent work that the current teams of psychiatric consultants do throughout Northern Ireland. I recognise the tremendous pressure that they are under because of their heavy and stressful workloads.

Aside from adult psychiatrists, I am told there are 14 psychiatric consultants for children currently working in Northern Ireland. Craigavon and Banbridge have three; Down and Lisburn have two; Holywood has two; Gransha has one; the Royal Victoria and Children's Hospitals have three; Knockbracken Health Centre has one; and Tyrone and Fermanagh have two — making a total of 14. The underprovision of adequate child psychiatric services is a recognised problem in this profession.

I will not concern myself in any depth with either adult or child psychiatric services; I will, however, concern myself with the almost non-existent services for young people between the ages of 13 and 18. There is a very limited adolescent psychiatric service based in Belfast, the beginnings of one in Down and Lisburn and little if anything anywhere else. In other areas, adolescent patients receive attention on a grace-and-favour basis from some child psychiatrist, or an adult psychiatrist, but the service appears to be erratic and patchy. With such an acute shortage of psychiatric help for adolescents, those who require such help as a result of the troubles, physical or sexual abuse or straightforward mental illness are unlikely to receive it. There are only six inpatient beds available in Northern Ireland for adolescents requiring inpatient care.

In 1994, 242 young people were held in adult psychiatric wards — hardly the place for distressed adolescents. Levels of outpatient support and day-patient places are totally inadequate. Research has shown that 90% of adolescent suicide victims have at least one diagnosable, active psychiatric illness at the time of death, most often caused by depression, substance abuse and conduct disorders. Only 15% of suicide victims were in treatment at the time of their death. Between 26% and 33% of adolescent suicide victims have made a previous suicide attempt. In Northern Ireland the suicide rate among our young people is alarming. The last statistics taken in 1997 showed that we had 140 male and 17 female suicides, with a high percentage being young people.

I have talked about the pressure that psychiatric consultants are under, but there is also pressure and anxiety on parents when they realise that they need psychiatric help in one way or another for their loved one. I am thinking of a mother whose 10-year-old son was diagnosed with autism. She had known for several years that her son had a problem, and it was only through her persistence in asking to see a consultant that her fears were realised. When parents hear that their child has an autistic disorder they may experience fear, anger, guilt and other difficult emotions. Many families find that having professional guidance helps them to cope with this traumatic news. Children with an autistic disorder create great stress on the entire family. In a survey, families were asked which areas of their lives were most altered by the autistic child. In order of significance they listed recreational opportunities and finances. In addition, an autistic child creates stress for his or her siblings.

The next step was for the consultant psychiatrist to initiate formal assessment procedures so that the family and the education authority could address the young boy's specific difficulties. In practice this is good, but when you have to wait for up to a year for a report, that can cause considerable anxiety. After nine months the boy's mother called at my constituency office looking for assistance to find out how long it would take the psychiatric consultant and team to finalise her son's report. After several phone calls and a few letters, I finally contacted the psychiatric consultant, and it was only by talking to the consultant that I realised the tremendous pressure they were under. I was informed that the delay was due to a lack of manpower and resources. They were overcome by an enormous workload, with a backlog of almost a year.

4.45 pm

It is my perception that we need a comprehensive regional service that interconnects and interrelates. Having fragments of service within various trusts that do not relate together as a whole is no use. We need a long-term view. I appreciate that experts will not appear overnight but we must make the political commitment to ensure that appropriate training and the necessary skills are in place to do the job required.

It is not just medical consultants that are needed. We need a team of specialised junior doctors and a team of nurse specialists. We need the support services of psychologists and other professions. We need change outpatient and day-patient facilities. We need safe, secure and impartial facilities.

This will not happen overnight but we must start now. We must provide care for the very vulnerable people. We must do it in a co-ordinated and regional basis to ensure that no one in Northern Ireland is neglected and left to commit suicide because of our disinterest.

I ask all Members to support the motion.

The Chairperson of the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee (Dr Hendron): I congratulate Mr McMenamin and Dr McDonnell on bringing this most important motion before the Assembly. Earlier, some colleagues were present at the launch of a manifesto for children, which was produced by Barnardo's, the Child Poverty Action Group and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. That document is worth reading and I am sure many colleagues in the Assembly will be using it in forthcoming elections. The title is 'Our Children, Their Future — A Manifesto for the Children of Northern Ireland'.

The debate is about adolescent psychiatry. Our children will become adolescents either in the next few weeks, months or within the next couple of years.

The manifesto makes various points. In Northern Ireland, one in three children lives in poverty. Three children are raped each week. Twenty-six per cent of recorded rape victims are children. More than 1,800 children are killed or injured on the roads. Twenty per cent of adolescents suffer of some form of mental health problem. Fifty per cent of looked-after children leave school with no formal qualification. Two out of five young women care-leavers were either pregnant or became pregnant within six months of leaving care. Half of disabled children and their families live in unsuitable accommodation. One in five 16- to 25-year-olds is homeless at some time. Between 50% to 70% of travellers' children are hospitalised at some point in their childhood. Is it any wonder that we have serious psychiatric problems in a significant section of young people?

If we as an Assembly cannot look after young people — our children, adolescents and youths — we should not be here. Boys and girls, young men and young women, are emerging from years of conflict, which was not of their making. Unfortunately, abuse, disadvantage and insecurity are daily occurrences.

The Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee recently published a report entitled 'Inquiry into Residential and Secure Accommodation for Children in Northern Ireland'. There were 36 recommendations in that document, including one for a Children's Commissioner. A couple of other points were made in that document. The provision of an additional eight-bed mental health unit as outlined in 'Implementing Children Matter' should be expedited. The treatment of children and young people within adult psychiatric wards should cease. That is quite a horrific thing and a terrible experience for children and young people. It is important to have preventive measures. Mental health services should be available for 16 to 18-year-olds. More emphasis needs to be placed on the development of a comprehensive range of appropriately based primary and community-care services. There must be a clear separation in hospitals of adults and adolescents.

Recently, the Committee highlighted to the Minister the case of a young girl who was placed in an adult psychiatric ward. Although the girl was moved a few days later, the Minister, in a letter dated 9 February to me as Chairperson of the Committee, stated that she could not guarantee that the girl would not be admitted again to an adult ward.

That is not a criticism of the Minister; it is just the situation, and it is wrong. We acknowledge the fact that there is funding for 10 more places in the budget for 2001-02.

Dr Ewan McEwan probably knows more about adolescent psychiatry than any other person in Northern Ireland, and he gave evidence to the Health Committee. I will mention a few relevant points that he made. Dr McEwan said — as Mr McMenamin said here today — that the adolescent psychiatric service was not regional and that there had never been a good match between requirements and resources. He went on to say

“When a young person poses a problem for responsible adults, he or she may be entered into one or more of a range of channels that could lead to youth counselling, individual therapy, fostering, special schooling, residential care, detention and so on”.

In other words, there are large networks within which young people can be moved about. We say that an integrated service is required. There is an attitude in some places of “Get them in anywhere”. The lack of central planning and accountability has led to piecemeal and poorly co-ordinated changes that have resulted in the remaining residential facilities coming under intolerable pressure.

We must create a positive relationship with young people with mental health needs and provide a safe environment for them. There are significant differences between young people who fall into the care system and those who fall into the criminal justice system — that is a massive subject in itself. The focus must be on Province- wide planning and integration. Agencies and Departments with responsibility for health, social services and education and, where necessary, the juvenile justice system should be involved.

Obviously, we want to avoid the detention of young people if possible, but, if it is necessary, the environment should be safe and secure, but not oppressive. We should welcome, therefore, the decision made by the Northern Ireland Office Minister, Adam Ingram, regarding the development of the Rathgael centre in Bangor.

Dr Adamson: The motion addresses important issues for my constituency of East Belfast. The correlation between social deprivation and the prevalence of mental health problems, especially in young people, has been well documented.

The Eastern Health and Social Services Board’s needs-weighted formula, which includes a consideration of social deprivation, demonstrates that wards that have

a high prevalence of poor mental health represent 24% of the population of the area covered by the South and East Belfast Health and Social Services Trust. That compares to 1.7% for the North Down and Ards Community Health and Social Services Trust, 14.7% for Down Lisburn Health and Social Services Trust and a massive 52.9% for North and West Belfast Health and Social Services Trust. For the prevalence of severe mental health problems, the comparative figures are: 7.8% for the South and East Belfast Health and Social Services Trust, which includes Castlereagh; 0% for North Down and Ards Community Health and Social Services Trust; 1.5% for Down Lisburn Health and Social Services Trust; and 20.8% for North and West Belfast Health and Social Services Trust.

South and east Belfast and Castlereagh have traditionally been viewed as predominantly stable, middle-class areas with only pockets of social deprivation. The reality reveals a rather different picture, as highlighted by the figures for mental health problems. The area covered by the South and East Belfast Health and Social Services Trust is made up of 44 electoral wards, and the striking feature about them is the range of values shown for those wards on the Robson index of social deprivation.

The perception of affluence is apparently confirmed by the fact that 23 of the wards are among the least disadvantaged 20% of all Northern Ireland’s wards as measured by the Robson index. However, the affluence of some parts of the South and East Belfast Health and Social Services Trust area is in stark contrast to the significant social deprivation in others.

Eleven wards lie significantly above the Northern Ireland average on the Robson index, and seven of those are located among the poorest 20% of wards in the whole of Northern Ireland. A number of very affluent wards, including Cherryvalley, Orangefield, Belmont and Ravenhill, contain an enumeration district that is among the most socially deprived in the area.

The inner-city core of the area has a high concentration of social deprivation located in Shaftesbury, Blackstaff, The Mount, Island, Ballymacarrett, Woodstock and Botanic wards, while a second significant area of disadvantage is located in wards that lie on the edge of the city and stretch into Castlereagh. These housing areas include Sydenham and Inverary, Knocknagoney, Garnerville, Tullycarnet, Ballybeen, Clarawood, Clonduff, Braniel, Ardarn, Cregagh, Belvoir, Milltown and Taughmonagh, and they consist of predominantly publicly built houses with marked deprivation.

South and East Belfast Social Services Trust area reflects a diverse range of needs in terms of age, socio-economic status and health and well-being. Client groups such as the elderly are spread across the area and have increasing needs, whether they live in poorer or in affluent communities. However, mental health problems

are particularly prevalent, especially in the university area where single homelessness is concentrated, the use of illegal drugs is prevalent, and rented accommodation is available.

While there has not been a comprehensive survey of the Chinese community in south and east Belfast and Castlereagh, the Chinese Welfare Association estimates that there are between 1,500 and 2,000 Chinese people living in that area. That is one of the largest ethnic minority groups in any health and social services trust area in Northern Ireland. Research carried out by the Chinese Welfare Association, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Barnardo's shows that this community experiences a great number of problems, such as difficulty with communication, access to services, racial harassment, social isolation, and very marked mental health problems.

Depression, particularly in adolescence, is an illness that carries a heavy personal and social burden and that may ultimately lead to suicide. It is therefore no coincidence that the highest number of male suicides in Belfast occurs in the very deprived areas of east Belfast. Although there are a range of effective physical and psychological treatments available, they are of little use if depression is not recognised or the prescribed treatment is not acceptable to the patient, as is often the case in adolescence. Therefore primary care staff must be alert to the possibility of a patient having a diagnosis of depression, even when the presenting symptoms are not apparently depressive in nature or seem to be a response to social stress. The public's distorted beliefs surrounding the nature, stigma and treatment of depression must also be challenged if depression is to be more readily identified and appropriately managed.

I fully support this very well-timed motion.

Mr Berry: I support the motion in the name of our two Friends. It is tightly worded in order to drive home the real steps that need to be taken in order to resolve a very difficult situation. I commend Dr McDonnell and Mr McMenamin for drawing attention to this very important matter.

Along with those Members who serve on the Health Committee, I have first-hand knowledge of some of the difficulties that are being raised and that no doubt will be raised later in the debate. I have been involved for some time in the difficulties that staff are having. There is very low morale among the staff, and severe problems of staff being abused — daily abuse that goes on year after year. That has often led to a high level of staff absence, which seems to currently be at least 30%.

There is an over-reliance on casual staff. It is vital that a staff ratio be drawn up immediately to expose the understaffing which exists and highlight the low level of available staff.

5.00 pm

Members are continually hearing about new initiatives, but when these initiatives not only overlap but conflict with or contradict each other, it becomes evident that there is little or no co-ordination in the Department of Health. That must be addressed.

It is better to have fewer initiatives done well than to fire off in all directions and achieve little. There is a proverb that if you aim for nothing that is probably what you will hit. That explains the record of this area where there is one announcement after another. A few million pounds are thrown at a project, but then another initiative is introduced. As a result, the earlier initiatives find themselves underfunded and struggling to complete the task assigned to them. Problems build up, and there is then an outcry about the disgraceful situation that has resulted. The ongoing reorganisation that has been symptomatic of the confusion in the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has had a detrimental effect through its creation of a sense of division — that cannot be tolerated.

Dr Hendron, the Chairman of the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee, mentioned Dr McEwan, who drew Committee members' attention to the impact of the troubles on young people. Young people have also overdosed on sexually explicit images and are undermined by the powerful effects of corporate advertising and media influences. There is also an increased availability of alcohol, drugs and prostitution. That is an indication of what has to be dealt with. Can the Assembly close its ears to the problems? Can the Department of Health remain in its state of lethargy?

The motion that was ably put forward by Mr McMenamin states that key staff need to be recruited immediately with a view to meeting the community's need for this vital service within two years in all parts of Northern Ireland.

I support the motion.

Ms Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Members who moved the motion, which I support. Over a number of years, the underfunding of the Health Service has had a serious impact on services. Representatives from boards and trusts say that they do not have enough money to provide services. In addition, children's services have become the poor second cousin. The trusts and boards seem to find it easier to take away or divert money from the children's services because this sector is not always seen as being as important as other functions of the Health Service.

For several years it has been said that the boards and trusts have failed in their statutory duty to ensure that children's rights are top of the agenda. I agree. I agree with Mr McMenamin that Members need to commend the Health Service staff for their tremendous work with

the most vulnerable in society. We cannot forget them or be seen to be attacking them, which we are not, because they are doing very good work with limited resources.

A number of weeks ago I sent the Minister of Health a written question asking her to detail the number of children from across the board areas who had been admitted to adult wards and adult psychiatric wards over the past 12 months. The statistics were alarming. I was informed that over the last 12 months 6,401 children were admitted to adult wards and 103 were admitted to adult psychiatric wards.

There is something seriously wrong with a system under which children with a range of problems are admitted to adult wards. We are only adding to their problems by doing this. In the long term it will cost the Department more money.

I raised the issue when we debated the Programme for Government and the public service agreements from the Department at the start of March. The Department's 'Priorities for Action' states that by December 2001 the number of adolescent psychiatric beds will increase from six to 16. This needs to be welcomed because it is a step forward. However, we need to be realistic and ask if it will have an impact when 103 children are being admitted to adult psychiatric wards each year. What will happen to the remaining children? Should we admit them to adult wards? Should we just forget about them? What are their rights? I have stated, time and time again, in the Assembly and in the Health Committee, that investing small amounts of money properly into children's services will have a major impact on the lives of all our children.

Dr Hendron mentioned that the Health Committee recently published a report on children in residential care. The issue of children in adult wards was raised by a number of people during that inquiry. The Committee recommended that the practice must stop, and it must stop now.

In a written submission to the Committee Dr McEwan stated

"mental health problems amongst disturbed and disturbing young people have been increasing against a background of reduction in availability of key resources for safe containment and treatment. A culture of 'get them in anywhere you can find' has threatened to overtake practitioners. A lack of central planning and accountability has permitted piecemeal and poorly co-ordinated changes to be made that have resulted in remaining residential facilities coming under intolerable pressure. The facility to dilute problems posed by severely disturbed youngsters, by distributing them over a number of placements, has considerably reduced. With reduction in ability to maintain control and to defuse potentially dangerous situations by moving young people in a timely fashion, staff of children's homes have not always been able to maintain safety or retain the respect of youngsters. There has been no choice but to concentrate excessive numbers of very disturbed young people in fewer centres, resulting in the balance between containment and constructive intervention tilting in favour of the former."

Dr McEwan highlighted that we need to be aware of the view of "get them in anywhere".

The Committee, in its report, also called for the appointment of a Children's Commissioner. I welcome the Executive's recent announcement of the appointment of the Commissioner, which is out for consultation. However, we cannot sit back and allow this to take months. If a Children's Commissioner were properly and independently appointed, then at least children and young people would have someone to ensure that their rights take centre stage.

I thank the proposers for moving the motion. It is a timely motion. I also welcome the Minister's presence so that she can take on board the points that have been raised by Members today. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Ford: In the face of such unanimity so far, it will perhaps be no surprise to say that I also express my support for the motion and congratulate Mr McMenamin and Dr McDonnell for bringing it forward. If I have any criticism with the motion it is in the reference to the Minister of Health rather than using her correct and full title. I say that probably because of my background in social services where I had connections with childcare and psychiatry. There is a need to look at the entire range of services and professionals who have duties in this area, and not consider it, as the motion does not in other respects, as being too much of a medical issue.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Although the motion does not include the words "Social Services and Public Safety", I promise to use them when I put the Question.

Mr Ford: I am glad you are better informed than the proposers of the motion.

We need to look at the prevalence of psychiatric difficulties. Sometimes people forget that up to 20% of children may suffer reasonably severe psychiatric problems — behavioural and emotional disturbances being the most frequent. It is something that often gets swept aside and is regarded in terms of the numbers who require some form of acute admission rather than numbers who may be suffering from very severe problems but do not require that level of intervention.

We also know that childhood depression may lead to further problems in adulthood if it is not dealt with. It is not just the problem for children and adolescents; it is the future problems that are being stirred up. We have clearly seen in recent years the dreadful and dramatic increase in the number of suicides, particularly amongst teenagers and those in their early 20s.

There is a major issue which, as yet, we have failed to address. The first point we need to look to is the question of how we integrate children with psychiatric problems into childcare services and regard that as part of the problems children have growing up and not as a peculiar offshoot of psychiatry which does not really

need to get attended to. If we think of them like that it results in what Sue Ramsey has just been talking about — the “Get them in somewhere at any cost” model of care. However, that is not care and completely fails to meet the children’s needs.

Of course, when adolescents need to be admitted they almost inevitably end up in an adult acute psychiatric ward because there is no suitable alternative, or in a place where people, who are of more mature years, may well be displaying some very difficult behaviour. That may further traumatised the children. Secondary care is not the place that children should be referred to in the first instance, but it is what happens when GPs do not have the knowledge or any alternative facility. They refer the children to the wrong specialism for dealing with adolescents with psychiatric difficulties.

I think back on my own experiences as a social worker. There was one particular young man who was going through some family difficulties arising out of a not particularly turbulent adolescence, but one which clearly required a level of intervention. He ended up in an acute hospital ward because there was nowhere else and being treated by a psychiatrist who, as far as I could tell, had no qualifications or particular expertise in adolescent psychiatry. He was the district psychiatrist for the area from which the young man came. There were nurses on the ward who gave considerable levels of care but outwith their proper professional training and expertise — none of them had any training in adolescent psychiatry. Whatever help was given was by individuals’ hard work and serious effort rather than by people who were properly trained and resourced for the care the young man needed.

There are far too many adolescents admitted to acute psychiatric wards — a practice which is, in this century, ethically, morally, clinically and quite probably legally unacceptable. How can we say that we are meeting children’s needs when we are in the position where the clinical perspective is a lack of specialist training in child adolescent psychiatry? There are far too few doctors, nurses or social workers who have the proper experience. It is hardly clinically effective. It is more likely to be clinically damaging and have very long-term implications.

If we look at the issue of the duty of care which trusts have to these young people, how can we say that we are meeting their needs for care if we are placing them in inappropriate environments? Where does the current package in many cases stand with regard to the Human Rights Act 1998? How can we have respect for private and family life if we put children in utterly inappropriate placements on many occasions? How can that meet their long-term needs?

The Minister has acknowledged to me, as to others, that there has been historic underfunding of both childcare and psychiatry. It is clear from what is being said by

many others in this debate, Mr Berry and Ms Ramsey in particular, that where adolescents have psychiatric problems they seem to suffer all the difficulties of both childcare and psychiatry combined. The resources for the range of services needed do not exist.

5.15 pm

The first thing we must do is to stipulate that they should not be admitted to adult psychiatric wards. It is unacceptable, and there need to be alternative facilities. There must be greater action on waiting times so that people get the specialist services they need. That means better training for GPs and a range of community nurses, as well as increased resources for those providing the services.

There should be an investigation of whether nursing staff in accident and emergency departments are properly trained to deal with the aftermath of attempted suicides. A great deal of self-harm comes to light in A&E departments that can only, at this stage, be treated at a superficial level and does not lead through to the long-term services that are required. Fundamentally, there needs to be a much greater focus on the child or the adolescent themselves.

The service must go far beyond the issue of inpatient services. There needs to be a fully comprehensive service. The two residential facilities proposed for young people are welcome, as far as they go. However, can we have an assurance today that we will actually see the right therapeutic environment and not just a mini-hospital? It is not enough to say that we provide proper inpatient facilities. We need specialist teams working across the community as well. Too many of these adolescents do not require inpatient care and it is not beneficial to them. We need to recognise the dangers of hospitalisation and over-dependence on the hospitalisation model, and build an integrated team of specialists who can address the issues at a primary care level in the community and build the services that these vulnerable young people so badly need.

Ms McWilliams: I also commend Dr McDonnell and Mr McMenamin for putting down this motion. We have already raised this in the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee. Our concerns grow daily when we realise what we are facing. However, not all of the problems should be placed at the door of the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. She inherited a legacy of past problems.

In Britain, Government Ministers have pledged £84 million for the development of child and adolescent mental health services. I want to know what our new Government in Northern Ireland has pledged towards these particular services. As has been said repeatedly, our concern is that mental health services for adults, adolescents and children have ended up with little

money prioritised. As a consequence, we are storing up huge problems for the future.

I am not going to repeat the figures that Ms Ramsey and the sponsors of the motion have already introduced, except to say that an issue that has not attracted much attention and needs to is eating disorders. A recent report by Dr Clare Adams, an adolescent psychologist, and Dr Ian McMasters stated that 1,500 young people in Northern Ireland suffer from anorexia nervosa and 17,000 young people have been diagnosed with bulimia.

A recent report called 'Minding Our Health', which was a draft strategy for promoting mental and emotional health in Northern Ireland, did not mention eating disorders at all. I am also critical of the 'Investing for Health' document, which has not prioritised it either. I am not suggesting for one minute that the other areas raised are not important, but I am trying to draw attention to the fact that we do not have sufficient research on adolescent and child mental health problems.

If we had sufficient research, all these issues could be taken into account. If you do not have the information, you do not know what resources to direct towards it. This is a plea for accurate information in Northern Ireland on this issue. We know that we have a higher number of young people, particularly under the age of 15 — and the trend is moving upwards. We differ from England and Wales in that respect, so we need more funding for research rather than less.

Likewise, because of the 30 years of the troubles, we have extra special needs here. I am concerned when I read some of these documents, particularly 'Commissioning Inpatient Psychiatric Services for Children and Young People in Northern Ireland'. They frequently draw attention to the issue of disorders. One of the points that has been made — one that cannot be made often enough — is that more effort should be put into explaining the behaviour rather than emphasising the behaviour itself.

If we were to attempt to explain the behaviour, to outline the context of that behaviour and hence perhaps to extend the debate beyond the medicalised model of psychiatry by placing it in a more holistic model that would identify the background, the history of neglect, the abuse and the forms of trauma — rather than just concentrating on disorders — then we might get closer to the extent of the problem.

It is probably accurate to use Dr McEwan's description of young people as being both troubling and troubled. If we keep that in mind we will realise what we can do in relation to therapy and treatment. It also extends into our communities in the areas of prevention and promotion.

Because the motion refers to psychiatry in particular, I want to focus on that. I am concerned that perhaps we should not be putting the matters of children and adolescents together. We need to make a large distinction between

children's issues and those relating to adolescents. Has the Minister accurate information on the resources and numbers of psychiatrists in place in relation to those working with children and those working with adolescents? How far short of what we need do they fall?

The other group that is greatly neglected is that of 18 to 25-year-old people. Perhaps they are the most neglected of all — they may not fall into either of those categories, but neither do they fall into an adult category. Sue Ramsey should be commended for asking questions about the numbers who have been admitted to adult psychiatric wards. I am also greatly concerned about that. I have a further concern. What we should do if they are not admitted to adult psychiatric wards? Where are they going to go? What is the alternative? The point is made in a recent report that the reluctance of and, on occasions, the refusal by, adult services to admit these adolescents has often led to a potentially dangerous situation having to be managed in the community at high personal cost to staff. It seems that we are between the devil and the deep blue sea on this one.

If they are admitted to adult psychiatric wards, that is open to enormous criticism — and rightly so. If they are not admitted to adult psychiatric wards, enormous potential for dangerous situations in the community is created. That is why we need to address this issue. Ewan McEwan said that it is often more by chance than by design that young people are admitted to any forms of treatment.

We should not have second-class citizens in this country. It should not be a matter of whether people are lucky enough to get into an inpatient unit or the type of inpatient unit that they get into. I ask the Minister to address this issue. Is it also the case that Northern Ireland does not have any adolescent forensic psychiatry services? What happens to these young people, and where are their needs addressed? I have been to the prison and seen a young woman there. I have realised that this is a disaster in Northern Ireland. Clearly, such people should not be in prison. They have psychiatric needs, but no one will visit them, address their needs or assess their needs from a psychiatric point of view. Perhaps if that had been done they would not have been in prison in the first place. Northern Ireland will probably stand indicted — particularly in relation to the new European Convention on Human Rights — for currently having young people under the age of 18 in Maghaberry Prison.

We probably need a composite inpatient, day-patient and outpatient service, with follow-up and aftercare services. The point has been made that the mix of the small number of beds that we have for adolescents falls far short of what is required. There are only six beds — five in the Eastern Health and Social Services Board and one purchased by the Western Board. I commend the Minister for having increased the number of beds by 10 to 16 as a priority action, but will we meet that target by

December 2001? That question really needs to be asked. Will the trained staff and all the mental health practitioners be in place to have those beds up and running? Where will they be?

I have to say, however, that the young people's centre should be commended as an example of good practice. I am concerned that the commissioning of inpatient psychiatric services for children and young people in Northern Ireland had to go to the young people's unit in Edinburgh — which has only just opened — when the young people's centre was at our own front door. Why? The young people's centre has been running for more than 10 years; it has had enormous evaluation, is very proud of its practice and has an awful lot to offer in relation to what works and what does not. The centre makes the point that because it has only six beds, new patients who are very troubled have to be put alongside those who are more settled. That does not work, and if they had more beds and a purpose-built unit, they could provide the comprehensive services alongside the specialist services they need. If multifactorial issues arise in treatment they need to be addressed, as do specialist issues, such as those which may arise when dealing with people who are self-harming or those with eating disorders.

Many issues need to be raised in relation to what we are doing in the area of child and adolescent psychiatry. I would like to raise one in particular. That is the concern of the Royal College of Nurses that in Northern Ireland, there is insufficient staff training and professional development. We have had to send staff to England to be trained. That may be one reason why we may not meet our December 2001 target.

Adolescents need space and recreational facilities as well as educational facilities. In our Committee, we pointed out that educational facilities for those in care have been withdrawn. It is absolutely necessary for young people to have educational facilities if they are to go back into the community and live normal lives.

The working party has said that we need 25 beds, and 16 falls short of that. Is there a target date? That number has been criticised. Given the demographics and the troubles, it should be 33. Sixteen is only half of that.

It seems that we are continuing to shore up an enormous problem. We need a workforce planning strategy. Is there one in place, with targets and timetables for the longer term beyond this year?

Again I commend the Minister for setting a target for this year — concerned as I am that we may not reach it — but I would like to hear what we are going to do after this year. Is Northern Ireland meeting the high standards that have been set by the National Health Service for young people who are being treated in therapeutic communities — that is probably the best way to put it — rather than in the current stigmatised fashion? Clearly, we need a comprehensive regional strategy for the

future. Northern Ireland really does need to start caring for the young mind.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am sure the Minister will have taken note of your request for me to ask her to deal with the subjects you raised.

Mrs I Robinson: The motion is timely, and I support it. This is a very serious subject and one on which I welcome the opportunity to speak. The area of mental health is a poor relation when it comes to funding. It appears that our children and adolescents fare worse in the pecking order, given the horrendous stories related to us as elected representatives. The recommendation, for example, for an increase of 10 adolescent places to 25, while welcome, leaves a shortfall of some nine places.

No matter how many increases there are, there is still the serious question of staffing. That has not been given the attention it deserves. The tragedy of our modern society is that what we are witnessing was so predictable. When there is a wholesale breakdown of morality, the family and of standards, it is inevitably reflected in the casualties of adolescent behaviour. That we see an increase in such is not only costly but a sad reflection on modern living.

5.30 pm

Some disturbing realities were also presented to the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee. A negative culture in that Department of "Get them in anywhere you can find" is not the best approach. It reflects all too often the simple fact that the state makes a bad parent. It also reflects a desire to regiment everyone.

The complexity and severity of mental health problems, the lack of resources, the lack of planning and the piecemeal changes have all contributed to a sense of helplessness and to a situation in which the worst get the bulk of whatever there is and the rest are put on a very long and growing waiting list.

There is also the serious issue of the lack of specific definitions, which those involved in that area need to tackle. In the Committee's response to the Department, we stressed the need to separate adolescent and adult patients. Too many incidents have occurred because of the failure to do that and the poor record of resolving that problem. That must be tackled urgently. The Minister needs to tell us what she intends to do.

There are serious questions about the Department itself. It seems to be incapable of covering all in its remit. The evidence can be seen in how few recommendations are introduced. Take the report 'Children Matter: A Review of Residential Child Care Services in Northern Ireland'. Most of the recommendations have not been implemented. That is a serious charge to make against the Department. It raises a central question about the reports from the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee. How many of its recommendations will be implemented?

Are we not debating the motion because of this ongoing failure to have previous recommendations implemented?

The lack of places has meant that present problems will continue until sufficient places are provided. The closure of one centre after another has left health professionals without anywhere to send those in need. All that is compounded by a reduction in places in the residential sector. That reduction, which has been ongoing for some time without being paid much attention, is now viewed as having a direct impact on adolescent treatment. Little wonder that Dr Ewan McEwan makes the comment that, given the balance of risk, it is sometimes a better option to place adolescents in an adult unit. However, given the current pressure for adult places, there is little or no hope of putting adolescents into adult units. Adolescents therefore have two difficulties: few places for themselves and even fewer for them in adult units. We are in a catch-22 situation. That is not an ideal situation since what we want are more places for adolescents themselves.

The resolution of the problem is really simple — the Minister should take on board what the Committee has recommended and go through our report on residential and secure accommodation line by line. It sets out in simple terms what is needed. The recommendations are on page 7. We do not need any more reviews.

I support the motion.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms de Brún): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil leis an Dr Mac Dónaill agus leis an Uasal Mac Meanman as deis a thabhairt dúinn an ganntanas i seirbhísí síciatracha d'ógánaigh a phlé.

Thóg Comhaltai ceistanna tábhachtacha faoi na seirbhísí seo le linn na díospóireachta agus ina gcuid oibre sa Tionól. Tá mé ar aon intinn leo faoin a lán dá n-ábhair bhuartha agus tá mé tiomanta do na seirbhísí d'ógánaigh ar a bhfuil fadhbanna meabhairshláinte a fheabhsú agus a mhéadú.

Tá meabhairshláinte páistí agus ógánach ina hábhar mór inní. Tá fadhbanna meabhairshláinte coitianta i measc páistí agus ógánach. Ar na neamhoird meabhairshláinte a bhíonn ar ógánaigh tá neamhoird mhothúchána, neamhoird fhorásacha, neamhoird itheacháin, siondróim iarthráma agus neamhoird shíocóiseacha. Meastar go bhfualaingíonn idir 10 agus 20 faoin chéad de dhaoine óga galar acu seo ag am ar bith, agus tá seo ag dul chun leitheadúlachta. Tá níos mó aird á tarraingt ar thionchar gearrthréimhseach agus fadtréimhseach na bhfadhbanna seo ar chuid mhaith gnéithe de shaol páistí agus fosta ar an chontúirt go dtitfidh siad i ngalar meabhrach agus iad fásta. Táthar inníoch fosta faoin éileamh ard atá ag sárú soláthar reatha na seirbhísí meabhairshláinte.

Cúis bhuartha dúinn é gur tugadh isteach den chéad uair ar meán beagán faoi 130 duine óg idir 14 agus 17 in aghaidh na bliana chuig ospidéal mheabhairshalair sna blianta 1996 go 1999. Mar bharr ar an bhuaireamh, tugadh a mbunús isteach i mbardaí síciatracha aosacha. Le 12 mhí anuas tugadh 103 duine óg faoi bhun 17 isteach i mbardaí síciatracha aosacha.

Tá ag méadú ar an inní faoi sholáthar do othair chónaitheacha ógánta. Faoi láthair, níl ann ach aon saoráid sé leaba amháin i nGairdíní an Cholóiste, Béal Feirste. Glacann na sé leaba seo daoine óga idir 14 agus 18: cheannaigh Bord an Oirthir cúig cinn agus cheannaigh Bord an Iarthair ceann amháin. Fágann an t-ardéileamh ar na leapacha seo gur minic nach dtig le hothair teacht a bheith acu orthu. Cé nach mbíonn seirbhísí cónaitheacha de dhíth ach ar bheagán othar, is cuid riachtanach iad mar sin féin den tsamhail ceithre shraith don mheabhairshláinte ógánach — samhail ar a bhfuil glacadh coitianta.

I thank Dr McDonnell and Mr McMenamin for giving us this opportunity to discuss concerns about the shortage of adolescent psychiatric services. Members have raised important issues about those services, both during the course of this debate and in their work in the Assembly. I share many of their concerns and am committed to improving and increasing services for adolescents with mental health problems.

Child and adolescent mental health is a major area of concern. Mental health problems are common in children and adolescents. I am clear on the range of mental health disorders faced by adolescents and the need for us to ensure that the services are in place to deal with them. They include emotional and development disorders, eating disorders, post-traumatic syndromes and psychotic disorders. It has been estimated that between 10% and 20% of young people are affected at any one time, and the prevalence rates are rising.

There is a growing awareness of the short- and long-term impact of those problems on many aspects of children's lives and on the risk of later adult mental illness. There is also concern about the high level of demand, which, as many Members have said, outstrips current mental health service provision. It is a disturbing statistic that in the years 1996-99 there has been an average of just under 130 first admissions of people aged 14 to 17 to mental illness hospitals per year. More worryingly — and Members also pointed this out — most of those young people have been admitted to adult psychiatric wards.

As I said in a recent written reply to Sue Ramsey, in the last 12 months 103 young people under 17 have been admitted to adult psychiatric wards. Concerns about adolescent inpatient provision have, understandably, been increasing. Currently, there is only one six-bed adolescent inpatient facility, situated in College Gardens in Belfast. These six beds admit young people between

the ages of 14 and 18. Five of the beds were purchased by the Eastern Board and one was purchased by the Western Board. The high demand for these beds means that patients are regularly unable to gain access.

Turning to some of the specific points raised by Members, I recognise the many problems relating to suicide and parasuicide. It is necessary to invest across a range of mental health services in order to target those persons viewed as high risk and also the much larger number viewed as low risk. In this financial year I have invested an extra £2 million in community mental health services and inpatient services across the range. That will include services for adolescents.

At this stage it is not possible to assess accurately the success of those interventions, but I agree with Members that the range of factors that can influence suicide, such as unemployment and social deprivation, has to be tackled across society.

David Ford and Sue Ramsey raised the issue of the interface between mental health services for young people and specialist residential care provision. The issues relating to residential and community-based services for children with psychological and psychiatric needs will be taken forward through, among other things, the future work of the Children Matter task force.

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety's policy on young people who are survivors of abuse in adult psychiatric wards is that adolescents should not be accommodated with adults. However, in some specific cases where that is unavoidable, steps should be taken to secure the young person's welfare and to protect him or her from any form of abuse.

Inclusion of a secure treatment capability within the additional beds announced in the Programme for Government should help to ensure that younger people will be admitted less often to adult wards. It is indeed, as Monica McWilliams pointed out, difficult for us that adolescents are currently admitted to adult wards. We do not want to see that. We are also faced with the difficulty, as are others throughout the service, of how to deal adequately with those adolescents in the absence of any other provision.

Areas of social deprivation, and possible preventative measures, were also mentioned. Research has shown clearly that socially disadvantaged children have a higher risk of mental health problems in childhood and later life. Members mentioned a range of stresses and their impact on the life of a child.

A variety of social interventions aimed at improving the health and social well-being of children in deprived areas have been well evaluated. In particular, high-quality school and nursery education has resulted in improvements in self-esteem and motivation, social behaviour and other educational and social benefits.

As part of the Programme for Government we are also committed to working with the Department of Education to improve, among other things, mental health education in schools. The Sure Start programme has been resourced to protect children from developing mental health problems by giving them a better start in life. As Members have said, it is up to us to ensure that a range of services is provided for children and adolescents as well as for adults.

Current service provision for educational and rehabilitation facilities for adolescents, particularly adolescent inpatients, has been criticised, but all future planning for services will include every agency involved in providing the appropriate rehabilitation and recreational facilities for that age group. The planned units will include dedicated education facilities.

Through Monica McWilliams's question I have been informed about the Chief Medical Officer's review group. Members of the group visited the young people's centre and interviewed Dr McEwan. The team also went to Edinburgh to learn from good practice elsewhere. I remind Members about the range of difficulties we are facing. That review was specifically concerned with inpatient services, but other measures have been also taken to look at other services.

Ms McWilliams: Does the Minister agree that in the appendix to that report costings were based on the Edinburgh example rather than on information from the 10 years' experience of the young people's centre? If we are to plan a new unit, it might be more appropriate to base the costings on what that centre reckoned would work for Northern Ireland.

Ms de Brún: Obviously I do not dispute the points made by Ms McWilliams on the appendix to that report. However, I stress again that both centres were visited and that Dr McEwan was specifically interviewed at the time of the report.

Although these inpatient services are required by only a small number of patients, they are an essential part of the widely accepted four-tier model for adolescent mental health. The first tier will deal with relatively minor emotional and behavioural difficulties, and non-specialist practitioners within primary care will provide that treatment and care. The key action is to develop the adolescent mental health skills and knowledge of GPs, health visitors and social workers.

5.45 pm

The second tier will deal with moderately severe problems that require attention from professionals who have been trained in child and adolescent mental health. The priority is to establish mental health practitioners who will work within the primary care setting.

The third tier will deal with severe and complex mental health problems that require a multi-disciplinary

team approach from specialist child and adolescent mental health practitioners. The health and social services boards are addressing this.

The fourth tier will deal with the most severe, persistent and complex problems and will require highly specialised inpatient and/or outpatient services.

One of the effects of the lack of inpatient spaces is the necessity to admit adolescents to adult health facilities. No one wants adolescents to share psychiatric wards with adults. Apart from the obvious difficulties that are inherent in that practice, the patients do not receive treatment that is targeted at their specific needs. The areas of particular concern are a lack of group work with similarly aged patients, a lack of structured daily activity and access to education, and the additional stress, as Members have pointed out, caused by the presence of mentally ill adult patients.

The Department's policy statement on child and adolescent mental health, issued in January 1999, recommended that adult-based provision for adolescents should cease as soon as possible. My aim is to achieve that and I have outlined the steps that we are taking to bring that about. That statement also set health and social services boards two specific targets. Mr McMenamin talked about the need for a long-term view, and others spoke about the need for an overview.

The two targets set in 1999 were the review of the existing provision and the identification of needs that had not been met, and a commissioning strategy for delivering services based on identified needs and meaningful and measurable objectives. The first task has been carried out and everyone expressed concern at the lack of specialist inpatient facilities for adolescents. Mental health professionals, users and carers also expressed similar concerns.

The Chief Medical Officer, working with the directors of public health from all four health and social services boards, commissioned a review of inpatient facilities for children and adolescents. The report 'Commissioning Inpatient Psychiatric Services for Children and Young People in Northern Ireland', which Ms McWilliams mentioned, was completed in October 2000. It recommends that there should be 25 inpatient beds for adolescents and that those should be split into two inpatient units. There are six beds currently available.

The report also recommends that the inpatient places should be supported by an appropriate level of community-based services. I am sure that some young people who have been admitted as inpatients could have been better treated in the community, if the appropriate services had been available. The Programme for Government set a target of securing 10 additional beds by December 2001, which would leave a shortfall of nine. I will be bidding for additional resources to secure those additional beds.

The December 2001 target is very challenging, as are all of the target dates in the Programme for Government. However, I will ensure that undertaking the work that is required to obtain the additional beds will be a top priority for me and my Department.

I am aware that there is a shortage of staff trained in dealing with adolescents with mental illness. Dealing with such adolescents requires specific skills, and there is a clear requirement to understand the needs of adolescents and how those needs can be met. Training staff to develop the appropriate skills is the key to the development of an effective and efficient service. The Department has examined training necessities. There are four new trainee consultant psychiatrists who specialise in child and adolescent psychiatry coming forward each year, and the intention is to have up to 20 consultants by 2008.

There are 17 nurses involved in university training in child and adolescent psychiatry, and each year six social workers are trained in child and adolescent psychiatry. I take the point that the matter goes beyond consultant psychiatrists and that there is a need for other specialist trained staff. The resources to establish the 10 additional beds have been allocated to the health and social services boards.

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety is reviewing the many comments that were received following the circulation of the report on 15 January to the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee, the boards and trusts, the relevant professional groups, voluntary agencies and user and carer groups. Most of those who have replied to date are content with the proposal that there should be two child and adolescent mental health units — one in the east and one in the west — although some replies advocated one regional unit. A working group representative of all interested parties will determine the preferred provider, or providers, in a way that will take account of health and social needs, accessibility and equality.

I have secured resources of £1 million to provide the 10 additional adolescent psychiatric beds and a further £1 million for 35,000 additional consultations for all age groups, including adolescents, with community mental health teams. I see that as a start, but I accept that much more is needed, and I will continue to do my best to ensure that the needs of this particularly disadvantaged group of young people are met.

Dr McDonnell: I thank the Minister for her attendance and her interest. I hope that we can sustain all the developments that she mentioned in the coming years. I acknowledge the goodwill of the Department and, in particular, the Minister, but I am troubled by a feeling of déjà vu. I was one of a group of people who were involved in a similar debate 15, 16 or perhaps 17 years ago, when there was no service. That debate led to the setting up of the young people's centre run by Dr Ewan

McEwan in College Gardens. I do not think that we have made enough use of him, but I will leave that matter for the moment. I also want to thank Mr McMenamin, Dr Hendron, Dr Adamson, Mr Berry, Ms Ramsey, Mr Ford, Ms McWilliams and Mrs Robinson for taking part in the debate: I am heartened.

I became involved with the subject simply because I still try to do a bit of general practice, and I noticed a significant increase in the number of teenagers with a degree of distress and mental illness. Mr McMenamin became involved in the debate because of the approaches made to his constituency office. I subsequently learned that the demand for adolescent psychiatric services has increased by about 50% in the past 12 months. We are all well-intentioned, and we pay lip service to children's issues in the Assembly from time to time. Adolescents may not be the babies or young children on whom we usually focus our attention, but these bigger children — 13 to 18-year-olds — are, in many ways, just as vulnerable.

Adult psychiatric services have undergone a major revolution in the past 20 years. Many people who were previously institutionalised now live fairly stable lives in hostel accommodation. Child psychiatry has been around for a while, and although it leaves a bit to be desired, there certainly seems to be a reasonable service. I emphasise that good-quality mental health provision is a much wider issue than just the elimination of the gross illness that strikes us so dramatically. There is a lot of illness and poor mental health that we never see. We are, perhaps, dealing with the tip of the iceberg.

Adolescents in psychiatry, by and large, have been falling between two stools. I do not want to repeat what has already been said about teenagers being shoved into adult beds when it is totally inappropriate. In other cases, child psychiatrists have seen some individuals but not others. It is very much on a grace-and-favour basis.

The serious point that has emerged here that frightens me is that, in some cases, up to 20% of young people in parts of the community can be affected. Perhaps briefly, if only for a few weeks, they have a dip, a point of stress or illness. Adolescents have the same range of mental illness that adults have. However, these illnesses are further compounded by the stresses and strains of growing up and of being a teenager.

It is a very specialist field, and one that we, collectively, at a political level, have severely neglected. There is one small unit serving Belfast and it struggles along with one consultant and a handful of dedicated staff. Recently, I understand, a consultant has been appointed in Lisburn, but that service is limited and, to a large extent, is fairly disconnected from the Belfast service. The problem is that we need a vision for the whole regional service. It is not acceptable to have a bit of a service in Lisburn and a bit more in Belfast or a bit in north and west Belfast, and a bit in south-east Belfast. This service

needs to be regionalised and must be a comprehensive, seamless service that works and delivers the best possible support it can to these vulnerable people.

We need all of the components, and I agree with many of the structures that the Minister has outlined. We need the proper outpatient, day-care and in-care patient level of service. However, I emphasise that the in-care level needs to be subdivided because the illnesses and the types of problems are very different. It encompasses such a wide range, as the Minister outlined — for example, we have some very timid and nervous people perhaps suffering from anorexia and others who are psychotic and quite aggressive. It is difficult, or certainly not good for either party, to mix them. Some are drug addicts or are perhaps going through a withdrawal phase when they could become quite psychotic. Many have been sexually abused and, as a result, are disturbed — that is perhaps one of the biggest groups. Others have been mentally and physically abused. I do not want to lay a lot of emphasis on the issue, but some would perhaps be sexually aggressive and a serious threat to the more vulnerable female patients that might be there.

Also, without being sensationalist, we do have situations where adolescents have been involved in murders and are caught up in a whole forensic web and legal matters. It is impossible to put all these elements together in one comfortable unit. There are many experts out there, but we need to be able to get it together.

I want to echo something that Ms McWilliams said earlier. She said that we do not have the research, the quality of information or the reliable statistics on which we can build a service, and we badly need that. The structures of the service need not only to be comprehensive and coherent but also adaptable to individual needs. I suggest that a community-based service should be located in every trust and alongside that perhaps a degree of day care.

I am glad I heard someone mention 25 beds, which is an increase on the 16 that we should have by December 2001. I would like to see us setting ourselves a goal of 25 beds. However, the 25 beds will be totally inadequate if they cannot be subdivided into small units of twos and threes. I favour one regional unit because we are not going to be able to bring the proper therapeutic support to two or more centres.

There is a severe danger in shoving a load of disturbed teenagers in to one big place in that some of them could make others worse. They must be housed in comfortable, apartment-sized units where compatible people can fit together, and within that, there needs to be a proper therapeutic structure.

6.00 pm

It would probably be very narrow to look at Belfast only; I would apply a similar theory across the board. In

the Eastern Board area we probably need one adolescent psychiatrist and one child psychiatrist for every trust, and perhaps two other consultants at a central level. Those at a consultant level should be fully supported by specialist nurses, because well-trained nurses can be every bit as useful as — and in some cases more useful than — the psychiatrist or the medically trained person.

There are a number of other things that I would like to mention, but I do not want to go on. I am very glad to have been able to participate in the raising of this issue today. However, I am concerned about the need for an adolescent drug and substance abuse service. We have a service for people who are 20 — certainly 18 — or older, but we do not have one for adolescents. We have no eating disorder service for people who are 17 or younger. There is no support service for adolescents who have been sexually abused. Edinburgh has been mentioned as a best-practice model. Edinburgh is good, but I think that we also have a jewel in the crown in our own centre in College Gardens, if it could only be expanded. The fact that we do not have a forensic service for adolescents was mentioned earlier. Someone should be looking at the interface between the law and psychiatry.

Having said all that, Mr Deputy Speaker, I want to draw your attention to the fact that we have brushed only the tip of the iceberg. There are many young people out there that never quite come up on the screen. There are young people out there who are labelled as being educationally difficult, and they fall within the remit of the education boards or become statemented. Many of those children are semi-disturbed, or quite a bit more than semi-disturbed, but not disturbed enough to annoy the rest of us, and we tend to ignore them. There is a major problem out there, and until we get on top of it, we will be doing our young people a major disservice.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I want to thank you, the Minister and others who facilitated this debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes with concern the shortage of adolescent psychiatric services throughout Northern Ireland and urges the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to ensure that key staff are recruited immediately with a view to meeting the community need for this vital service within two years in all parts of Northern Ireland.

Adjourned at 6.04 pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 10 April 2001

The Assembly met at 10.30 am (Madam Deputy Speaker [Ms Morrice] in the Chair), pursuant to Standing Order 11.

Members observed two minutes' silence.

DISPLAY OF LILIES IN PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Madam Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has allocated two hours for the debate on the motion concerning the display of lilies in Parliament Buildings. A valid petition of concern in respect of the motion was tabled before the Business Office closed yesterday. Having checked the petition, I regard it as fulfilling the requirements of Standing Order 27. Any vote on the motion will be on a cross-community basis. Members wishing to inspect this or any future petition of concern may obtain copies from the Business Office.

Mr Dallat: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I ask you to list the names on the petition of concern?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have told the Assembly that copies of the petition are available in the Business Office.

Mr McGrady: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I presume that the motion was accepted under Standing Order 11(1), which indicates that earlier meetings of the Assembly may be called for specific matters of urgent public importance. Clearly, someone accepted the motion about lilies or flowers in the Great Hall of this Building as a matter of urgent public importance.

Will you confirm, Madam Deputy Speaker, that you accepted the motion under the terms of Standing Orders? It may be appropriate to explain why the display of flowers in the Great Hall is a matter of urgent public importance. Why is the matter distinct from the many crises in previous recesses, such as the blizzards and storms over Christmas, in respect of which no motions were put down?

Madam Deputy Speaker: The motion falls under Standing Order 11(1), which refers to

“a ... matter of urgent public importance.”

Thirty Members signed the motion that called for this early meeting. Thus, an adequate percentage of Members

demonstrated a sense of urgency sufficient for the motion to satisfy the requirement of Standing Orders. That is not a matter of judgement for the Speaker; the requirement of Standing Order 11 is for 30 signatures, and that requirement has been met.

Mr McGrady: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. There are two requirements under Standing Order 11(1). First, the First and Deputy First Ministers can summon a meeting, or 30 Members can sign a petition to summon a meeting, as you rightly say. The second qualification for a valid motion is the purpose of the meeting. That second qualification clearly states that a debate can be held

“for the purpose of discussing a specific matter of urgent public importance.”

A layman would not think that this is a matter of urgent public importance. Therefore the motion is invalid.

Mr J Kelly: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is not the criterion for an emergency debate — and God knows that there are many emergencies out there waiting to be debated — not the 30 signatures but whether there is an emergency? The Democratic Unionist Party has tabled this motion for purely sectarian, political reasons.

Mr Weir: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Will you confirm that the matter is of such urgent public concern that the Members opposite have signed a petition of concern?

Madam Deputy Speaker: A total of 30 Members signed the motion — a significant percentage of the Assembly — and they see the matter as one of urgent public importance.

Mr Wells: I beg to move

That this Assembly instructs the Assembly Commission to rescind its decision to display lilies in Parliament Buildings during the Easter Recess and deprecates the abuse of the voting system which brought about the original decision.

I do so in the names of the 30 Members (including myself) who signed the requisition for an emergency sitting. I thank those from a wide spectrum of Unionist opinion who took the time on Friday to come to Parliament Buildings for that purpose. Some went out of their way, and that is appreciated.

Two important points have been raised about the calling of the debate. Some Members say that the holding of a special meeting of the Assembly is a waste of time and money. I would have preferred the matter to be dealt with by the Assembly Commission. For that reason, Rev Robert Coulter and I called a special meeting of the Commission at 11.00 am on Friday. Although the Speaker, myself and Mr Coulter were available for a meeting, the representatives of Sinn Féin, the SDLP and Alliance refused to turn up. As a result, there was no quorum —

Mrs E Bell: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wells: I will not give way.

There was no quorum — *[Interruption]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mrs E Bell: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was available for the meeting at 11 o'clock but not for the one o'clock meeting. *[Interruption]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: The Member has indicated that she wants to make a point of order. I have been unable to hear what the point of order is.

Mrs E Bell: Mr Wells said that I was not available for the 11.00 am meeting. I was available. However, I was not available for the 1.00 pm meeting. It is on the record. Rev Robert Coulter was not — *[Interruption]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order.

Mr Wells: It is interesting that Mrs Bell has confirmed that she was available but decided not to attend the meeting, thus ensuring that there was no quorum to enable the Assembly Commission to rescind its decision. Mrs Bell, Mr Fee and the other representatives knew that had that meeting been held, Mr Coulter and I, with 52 votes between us, would have been able to ensure that the decision was rescinded. So there was absolutely no — *[Interruption]*

Mr Fee: My understanding is that if I am named, I have an immediate opportunity to respond. For the purposes of this debate, we might as well start with facts, because — *[Interruption]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. A Member who is named and/or criticised has a right to respond at the end of the debate.

Mr Paisley Jnr: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Standing Order 60 indicates how good order is to be maintained in the Chamber. Paragraph (1)(a) states that when a Member "wilfully obstructs" a debate in the Chamber it is up to the Speaker to take action. It is clear that a number of Members from the Nationalist and Alliance Benches are trying to make — *[Interruption]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Paisley Jnr: May I make the point of order?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have taken the point of order.

Mr Paisley Jnr: You cannot have taken the point of order for I have not made it.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Please resume your seat. I have taken the Member's advice, and I will ensure that order is maintained on all Benches.

Mr Wells: I made it clear that if 11.00 am was inconvenient, the meeting could be held at 5.00 pm, 7.00 pm, midnight — at any time on Friday, in fact. We

are here today because those members of the Commission who boycotted that meeting would not allow the democratic will of the Assembly to be exerted. They could do the arithmetic and they knew that Rev Robert Coulter and I between us had the majority of the votes of the Assembly, allocated to us for the purposes of that vote.

It is amazing how many Members have been on radio condemning what they consider to be a trivial matter. Mr McGrady, Mr Close and Mrs Bell have been tripping over themselves to go on radio to comment on something that they consider trivial. Methinks they do protest too much.

Members have referred to the calling of this emergency meeting of the Assembly while there was no such emergency meeting after Omagh. After the Omagh bombing the DUP and others called for an emergency debate, but we were not allowed to have one by the Secretary of State. So let us nail that lie.

The fundamental decision that we will make today is whether this Building, the home of the Northern Ireland Assembly, should be used for a floral display dedicated to the memory of the terrorists who have tortured this community for 30 years. Let us be absolutely clear: this is not simply about a floral display representing the Irishness felt by some Members of the Assembly. If they wanted that Irishness represented, they could have used shamrock. Through the Assembly Commission, Sinn Féin has made it clear that this was to honour the memory of the 300 IRA "volunteers" who have died in action since 1968. *[Interruption]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Ervine: Let me set the record straight. The decision that precipitated this special debate was not put forward by Sinn Féin. It was a compromise decision.

Mr Wells: The Unionists of East Belfast will note once again that Mr Ervine has leapt to the defence of Sinn Féin/IRA. Go to the people of Dee Street and try to explain — *[Interruption]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member will speak through the Chair.

10.45 am

Mr Wells: Through the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker, I tell Mr Ervine to go to the people of Dee Street and the shipyard and explain his actions. Not only did he vote for this; he was on his feet immediately to defend Sinn Féin/IRA.

For the first time in the history of the United Kingdom, a Government building will be used to display symbols that honour IRA terrorists. Many people find that an absolute disgrace. The Sinn Féin representative on the Assembly Commission who proposed that lilies should be permitted in Parliament Buildings objected to the sale of poppies in this very building. It was her view that if

poppies could be sold, then so should Easter lilies. The money collected would be given to the National Graves Association (NGA), which is purported to maintain the graves and memorials of those who have, in its words, died in the cause of Irish freedom. As Members will note, that is an attempt to peddle the lie that there is equivalence between the poppy and the lily. It is disgraceful that the Assembly Commission has endorsed the view — *[Interruption]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Wells: It is disgraceful that the Assembly Commission has endorsed the view that there can be any equivalence between those who died in trenches defending this country from anarchy and Nazism and those who died in ditches having been killed by their own bombs as they waited to murder members of the security forces. The poppy is sold by the Royal British Legion to provide support and care for the many veterans, both Protestant and Catholic, who served in the two world wars. The lily is an IRA symbol sold to maintain memorials to dead IRA terrorists. It is an insult to the dead of two world wars to attempt to draw any comparison between the poppy and the lily.

The Easter lily became the symbol of remembrance for those who have engaged in terrorist activities since 1926. It was adopted by the Republican women's organisation. When the IRA split in 1970 both the Official IRA and the Provisional IRA continued to use the Easter lily in separate commemorations. Official IRA members wore a lily with a self-adhesive backing and became known as "Stickies", while Provisional IRA supporters secured their lilies to their lapels with traditional pins.

Easter lilies are sold solely on behalf of the National Graves Association. The Easter lily has no other symbolism or use. The NGA, founded in 1898, has three main aims. I quote from its constitution:

"To restore and maintain the graves of the patriot dead of every generation; to commemorate those who have died in the cause of Irish freedom; and to compile a record of graves and memorials."

The NGA has never deviated from its guiding principle that only a 32-county Irish Republic represents the true aspiration of those who gave their lives for Irish freedom. That is what the lilies are being sold in aid of.

The NGA claims to be a non-political organisation. That is interesting. In January 2000 the NGA proclaimed that it had succeeded in having the remains of Tom Williams released from Crumlin Road Prison. Leading IRA activists such as Joe Cahill and Mr Adams, along with Liam Shannon from the NGA, carried the coffin of Mr Williams to Milltown Cemetery. Why was Mr Williams executed in 1942? He was executed for the murder of a Roman Catholic RUC officer, Patrick Murphy, whose death left eight children without a father. That is the so-called work of the NGA. Over the last three years it has supported the erection of a memorial in Dunleath Park in

Downpatrick in honour of IRA activist Colm Marks. Why did Colm Marks die? He was shot by the Army as he attempted to launch a mortar bomb into Downpatrick RUC Station.

I notice that Mr McGrady is no longer with us, but it would be very interesting to know if he supports the work of the NGA in Downpatrick. *[Interruption]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Wells: And I have no doubt that the NGA has plans to unveil a memorial to Thomas Begley, the Shankill bomber.

Did Mrs Bell know any of that before she supported the unveiling of lilies in the Assembly? Did she know the association? We are not talking about flower arranging; we are talking about emblems that honour dead terrorists.

When the Assembly Commission decided to check up on the NGA, it discovered some interesting facts. The NGA does not have a phone number; it is not a registered charity; it does not submit tax returns; and it failed to respond to several letters from the Commission. At best, it is a group of deluded Nationalists who collect money to commemorate dead terrorists. More likely, it is a front for more sinister activities. That is what the Easter lily represents.

The second part of the motion deprecates the abuse of the electoral system that allowed the decision to be taken in the first place. No Unionist with all the facts about the use of the Easter lily and the work of the NGA would ever have voted for the display of the lilies in the House. Votes were cast on behalf of one group that — and proof of this assertion will be produced later — had made it clear that under no circumstances was Mrs Bell or any Alliance Party representative permitted to cast votes in the Commission on its behalf.

Another Member was totally unaware that the decision was being made and would not have consented to it. A third group was not properly consulted and, once it was made aware of what was proposed, immediately withdrew its consent and issued a press release denouncing the decision.

Once the full information was in the public domain, and all the Unionists in the House knew what was going on, to a man they united to oppose the decision. That is why they did not permit a second meeting of the Assembly Commission; they knew that democracy would prevail and the decision would be overturned. Many in the House — and outside — will be watching with interest what is going on in the Assembly.

The original decision set democracy on its head. The second meeting resulted in the stymying of democracy, because a quorum could not be obtained. It is clear that a majority of the House will vote against the disgraceful display of lilies in the Great Hall, but the motion will be stymied through the use of the petition of concern. So

much for democracy. So much for taking into account the feelings of ordinary grassroots Unionists in this country.

Does the Commission propose to continue with the decision and railroad it through without the consent of the Assembly? If it intends to do that, then it sets a dangerous precedent.

I had the privilege of representing South Down in the Assembly between 1982 and 1986. During that time I had the sad duty of attending the funerals of 13 members of the security forces who had been brutally murdered by the IRA. At one of those funerals, there was so little left of a policeman's body that concrete blocks had to be put in the coffin to convince his wife that there was a body. There was no body. He was blown into a thousand pieces.

The Assembly is debating a motion about a decision that will allow the Great Hall to be used to honour those who committed those foul deeds. The majority of ordinary decent people in the Province will never accept that decision.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Given the number of Members wishing to participate in the debate and the time allocated by the Business Committee, I ask all to limit their contributions to less than five minutes.

Rev Robert Coulter: I support the motion. Mr Wells has covered the ground very well, but there are questions that need to be asked. We must decide whether the importance of the Easter lily can be equated to that of the poppy. I, for one, cannot. I see the poppy as a national symbol.

One of the most moving moments of my life was when I walked over the field at Thiepval Wood at 7.00 am on 1 July some years ago and tried to imagine that morning many years before when so many young men lay dead before breakfast time. Can I look upon their courage and sacrifice in the same way as I look upon those who lie behind hedges, trigger bombs, destroy lives and creep away again, some of whom were caught and are now to be remembered by the lily? To be honest, I cannot. The poppy symbolises something far beyond that which is so partisan and so sectarian. That raises a question in my mind — should the House be used for the display of partisan symbols?

Members have agreed that the flax flower should be a neutral symbol which we can all adhere to and support. Why then are we debating an issue that turns the House into a vehicle for the display of partisan symbols? If this goes through, the next request, undoubtedly, will be for a display of orange lilies around 12 July. That raises another question — what was really behind the bringing of this matter to the Commission at this time? Is it that Sinn Féin is following a policy of cultural aggravation? Is it that there is a policy of provocation, knowing that Unionists will react in a predictable way? Sadly, the end product is that Sinn Féin has succeeded in dividing the

Assembly on sectarian grounds. That is a tragedy when we have all worked and tried in the Committees and elsewhere to make progress. I say again that this is a tragedy. There will be no winners in today's debate, and the biggest loser will be democracy.

I plead with Sinn Féin to consider its policy of cultural aggravation. If it begins to hype cultural aggravation we will be back again to the killing fields and to the divisions that plagued the Province for so many years. Today is a sad day for the Assembly. Many people are suffering in the community. Their hurt is still real, and their pain is still great. We need to think about what we are doing when we raise such controversial matters in the Commission. We need to think about what we are doing to those who expect us to make progress with peace and reconciliation. There is no way in which a matter such as this — and I am not talking about the motion before the House today, but about the request to have a partisan symbol in the House — can help peace and reconciliation. The demands of peace and reconciliation cannot be satisfied if we pursue this pathway.

Mr A Maginness: People outside the Chamber are wondering what sort of lunacy has descended upon the Assembly that it has to be urgently reconvened over a bowl of lilies. *[Interruption]*

11.00 am

That is the reaction in the street — whether Members like it or not. The proposer of this motion has done a great disservice to the House. He has made it look foolish. He has made the House look as if it does not concern itself with taxpayers' money or with serious issues of politics in our society. That is the reality of the situation. People outside this Chamber are wondering if we are sane in coming back here to discuss such a subject. *[Interruption]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr A Maginness: Those responsible are, of course, the DUP. Why? Its purpose is naked electioneering. It has reconvened the House to promote its election campaigns throughout Northern Ireland. Let us recognise that today, and let us see it for what it is — an abuse of the House.

The substance of the issue is that the Assembly Commission has made a reasoned, fair and balanced decision. We should recognise that. This was a compromise worked out over a series of meetings. Members can see that for themselves — the outline, timetable and minutes of those meetings are available. The Commission worked very hard indeed to reach a consensus on the issue. A fair decision was made, one which could not be challenged, and which, I believe would stand up to serious scrutiny on independent examination. The Commission recognised the problems and the fact that

symbols in our society are divisive, but sought to reach an accommodation which would satisfy everybody.

The motion, which was accepted by the Commission, provided that over the Easter period two floral displays in the Great Hall would be replaced by lilies. There was no mention of the National Graves Association, collection of money, terrorism or of any of the things which Mr Wells has brought to the attention of the House today. This was, in effect, an inoffensive motion. The Members on the DUP Benches take offence, but everyone can see that it is simulated — imaginary rather than real. The reality is that the Commission, in its wisdom — a Commission that is delicately balanced and has made fair decisions since its inception — has worked fairly in this instance, as in others.

We need to recognise that there are many political symbols in our deeply divided society. The Commission's decision is an attempt to do that. It cannot operate effectively if its delicate and unique decision-making process is to be challenged in this manner by parties who do not get their way. The DUP did not get their way, so they are kicking up a row in the House.

We need to work toward the acceptance of one another's symbols. We must accept complete neutrality, equivalence or parity of esteem, or we must work towards the creation of consensual symbols. The SDLP would support that.

Dr O'Hagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I want to set the record straight concerning the recall of the Assembly to discuss this issue.

There are issues out there such as foot-and-mouth disease; the sectarian attacks in Glengormley and north Belfast which left one man dead; the needs of people who are living in poverty; a crisis in the Health Service — and what do the DUP Members do? They bring us back to talk about a floral display of Easter lilies at Stormont. That shows where the DUP Members' priorities lie. They have nothing constructive to offer but the old, failed politics of the past.

I want to set the record straight on some of the actual details. It has been said by other parties and by the media that this has been brought forward as an election issue. If people care to look on the Internet or at the records of the Commission they will see that this has been an issue since November. As Mr Coulter correctly stated, it arose at the same time as the issue of poppies. My view was that in the interests of parity of esteem and equality, similar provision should be made — *[Interruption]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Dr O'Hagan: Similar provision should be made for Easter lilies as a recognition that every single tradition on this island — *[Interruption]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Dr O'Hagan: Every tradition and community on this island is entitled to equal recognition and validity. It has also been stated in sections of the media that there was an acrimonious debate within the Commission on the issue. At no time was there any acrimony over this issue. The matter was debated by the Commission at various times; people put forward their points of view, and they were listened to. The Commission reached its decision in a cool, clear and level-headed manner. There was no abuse of the voting system. The DUP know as well as anyone that every Commission Member carries a weighted vote. This is a failure on the part of the DUP to accept the Commission's decision and the principles of equality and parity of esteem.

Regarding the contribution from the DUP Member Jim Wells — who is supposedly from a Christian background — there were a lot of lies in what he had to say, and I would like to refute them. First — *[Interruption]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Paisley Jnr: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. As a Member of this House who was ejected for using less robust language, I demand that you ask the Member to withdraw or exact the same punishment. Put her out.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It is unparliamentary for a Member, in referring to another Member, to use the word "lies". I ask her to withdraw that word.

Dr O'Hagan: I shall withdraw that particular word and use — *[Interruption]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have asked the Member to withdraw the word; other Members should give her time to do so.

Dr O'Hagan: I withdraw that particular word, but I want to point out that what Jim Wells said was inaccurate. First, he said that the National Graves Association failed to contact the Commission. On 2 March this year the Clerk to the Commission held a meeting with the National Graves Association to discuss the issue. Therefore that was inaccurate.

I want to turn to the issue of the symbolism of the lily. The Easter lily represents the 1916 rising. It represents those men and women who died fighting for Irish freedom. It is a cherished symbol in the Republican and Nationalist tradition.

Mr Gibson: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. It appears that the clock is not working.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the Member for pointing that out. It was turned off at the last point of order. We will correct it.

Dr O'Hagan: The Easter lily represents all those men and women who died for Irish freedom. I am not expecting any Unionist to fully embrace what I and Irish Nationalists believe in. However, as an Irish Nationalist

and an Irish Republican who sits in this House, who is elected by a constituency, who represents people and who is part of a community on this island, my views and traditions are entitled to equal validity. I do not expect Unionists to agree with that, but I do expect them to allow me to choose the symbol that I want to represent me. I do not want them to tell me what symbols should represent me.

We are coming out of nearly 30 years of conflict and have a history of conflict on this island. There should be no hierarchy of victimhood. Every person who died in that conflict is entitled to equal respect. That includes people who come from my tradition.

I am disappointed in the lack of generosity from Unionism, not only from the DUP but also the Ulster Unionist Party. The Ulster Unionist Party in particular signed up to the Good Friday Agreement, which enshrines equality and parity of esteem. Unfortunately, yet again, Unionism has failed to show generosity to Irish Nationalism and has shown that it is unable to live on an equal basis with Irish Nationalists on this island. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Neeson: Like many people, I believe that the recall of the Assembly is undoubtedly a blatant abuse of the Assembly Rules. I am particularly disappointed with Jim Wells for bringing this forward, because he is someone I have known for many years and hold in respect. I had set this week aside, like many other Members, to catch up on constituency work. That is what we have been elected to do — *[Interruption]* It is no holiday.

Easter lilies, to me, are a strong reminder of the most important date in the Christian calendar. I do not associate them with Republicanism. Republicans may have hijacked them, but I associate Easter lilies with the supreme sacrifice of Christ on the Cross and his rising from the dead on Easter Sunday.

Easter lilies have adorned Christian churches — both Protestant and Catholic — for many years throughout Northern Ireland at Easter. As someone of the Christian faith, I deplore the DUP's attempt to demean the Easter lily for electoral purposes. *[Interruption]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member has a right to be heard.

Mr Neeson: The DUP's action verges on sacrilege. It is said that a thing of beauty is a joy for ever. The lily is a beautiful flower. That is why I have grown orange lilies in my garden over the years. At present I am growing yellow lilies — I wonder what connotation is now going to be put on that.

We realise the sensitivity of this issue. Mrs Bell has been charged to represent the non-Executive parties on the Commission. She tried to contact all the other non-Executive parties. She was able to make contact with the UUAP, the Women's Coalition and the PUP, and she attempted to contact Mr McCartney.

The NIUP, however, decided some time ago that it did not want to be represented on the Commission by anybody. For the NIUP to come out now and criticise the decision that was taken, when it shied away from being represented on the Commission, is blatant hypocrisy. It is unforgivable.

11.15 am

In relation to the issue of symbols, there was no attempt to equate the display of poppies with the display of Easter lilies. We all recognise that poppies are an international symbol of those who made the supreme sacrifice in the various world war conflicts. On this issue, and other issues, Eileen Bell, metaphorically speaking, has more balls than the proposer and those who have supported him here today. These people are nihilists, for the only word in their vocabulary is "no". That is what we are getting here — "no" to a democratic decision that was made by — *[Interruption]*

Mr C Wilson: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. In the past when a person has used language deemed not to be suitable for a public place, and particularly for the Assembly, the Speaker has brought it to the attention of the individual concerned and advised him or her to refrain from using such language. Even though the Member in this case is your Colleague, perhaps you should do so.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank Mr Wilson for the point of order. I will consider the matter and issue a response to him.

Mr Neeson: Clearly, the truth hurts.

The fact is that the DUP, along with the others — and the spinelessness of the Ulster Unionists must be highlighted as well — *[Interruption]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member is entitled to be heard.

Mr Neeson: Clearly, the truth hurts, and that is the truth. The DUP is here today to overturn democracy in the Assembly. I will be voting against the motion.

Mr Ford: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. During Mr Neeson's speech I clearly heard Mr Wells say that Mrs Bell had stolen their votes. It appears to me that an allegation of theft is an allegation that would be regarded as unparliamentary in other places. I ask you to rule on it.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Thank you for that point of order.

Mr Wells: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I stand over that allegation. The minutes of the Assembly Commission show that Mrs Bell had 16 votes on every occasion. Those votes included the three votes of the Northern Ireland Unionist Party that had made it clear that it did not want her to vote on its behalf.

Mrs E Bell: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. If Mr Wells was reading from the draft minutes, perhaps it would have been better to have read from the beginning of them. In relation to our putting the original suggestion they state

“Rev Coulter and Mr Wells stated that they would not be supporting either proposal. Mrs Bell advised of her meeting with representatives from the Alliance, NIWC, PUP and UUAP Parties when it was agreed that she should present the following amendment”.

I must say that, and I will comment on it later.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have been asked to rule on a number of points of order. On the point raised by Mr Ford and confirmed by Mr Wells, I am assuming that it was a figure of speech that was used. However, I will look at Hansard and give the matter consideration.

Mr C Wilson: I am sad that the debate is rapidly turning into a farce due to the behaviour of some Members and the language of others. It is, of course, the wish of our opponents on the other side of the House that that should be the case, because they want to trivialise a debate on an issue that is of grave concern. The Easter lily to be displayed in the foyer of this Building is quite clearly a symbol of terror. No attempt by anyone, including Mrs Bell, to equate it to, for instance, the poppy, will diminish the view of the people of Northern Ireland who are aware of the history of the Easter lily.

Mr Alban Maginness of the SDLP said that this debate has been brought about because of some nonsense on this side of the Floor. The history of this debate goes back to when Mr Alban Maginness’s party decided to enter into an unholy alliance with the Sinn Féin/IRA movement. While he chides this side of the House for being afraid to deal with issues, we have witnessed over the last number of weeks and months, and no doubt will continue to witness through the run-up to the election, the SDLP being led by the nose by Sinn Féin on serious, major issues such as policing, decommissioning and now terrorist symbols.

The SDLP is not able to stand against Sinn Féin simply because it is slightly concerned about its electoral support. It thinks that playing to the gallery and to the nationalist community is likely to gain it a few additional votes and stop the meltdown of the SDLP. It will engage in whatever tricks, and go through whatever hoops, the Sinn Féin/IRA movement presents it with.

This matter could not have been brought to the Commission, and it would not have come onto the Floor of the Chamber had it not been for the antics of Mr Maginness and, indeed, Mrs Bell of the Alliance Party. She brought forward what she termed a “compromise”, but the end result was the same — the display of an offensive symbol of terror in the Foyer of this public Building.

With regard to Mrs Bell’s role in this, there was a misappropriation of votes, as it is quite clearly recorded in the Commission’s minutes that both Bob McCartney’s vote —

Mr A Maginness: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. In view of the comments made by Mr Wells, is it in order for a Member to suggest, or to say that votes were misappropriated by Mrs Bell? It is absolutely unacceptable, in parliamentary terms, to suggest that.

Mr C Wilson: The clock continued running while the point of order was made.

Madam Deputy Speaker: We will stop the clock for the point of order.

The minutes of the Commission meeting are available and they should not be referred to on the Floor of the House. They are a matter for the Commission, not for the Assembly.

Mr C Wilson: There are two aspects to Mrs Bell’s hand in this. The first issue is the misappropriation of the United Kingdom Unionist Party’s vote and my party’s vote. Quite clearly, she would not have had the support of either of those parties.

Also, it was the foolishness of some of those who represent the Unionist community on the Commission that allowed this to go through. They gave Mrs Bell the authority to claim that she had the majority vote necessary to support the motion.

Finally, we have in this Chamber today Ulster Unionists and others who rushed to sign the petition because of the publicity that they were likely to get from it by showing how staunch they were in opposing all aspects of Sinn Féin/IRA terror and all of their symbols.

There is another motion in the Business Office which calls for the exclusion of Sinn Féin/IRA from the Executive and from the Assembly. The sad fact is that they have not rushed to support that motion. What we are witnessing in the Hall is a manifestation of the cancer that is within the body politic in Northern Ireland — terrorists in government. Is it any surprise? What did David Trimble and the Ulster Unionists expect when they signed up to the Belfast Agreement? They signed up to give these people the right to come into these institutions and to propagate their beliefs and to bring these symbols of terror into Parliament Buildings.

You cannot play with terrorists. You cannot allow those who are inextricably linked to terrorism to come into government and then expect them to behave in a house-trained, proper and orderly democratic fashion. My appeal to the Ulster Unionist party and to the Democratic Unionist Party is that if they cannot remove terrorists from government then they should remove themselves from the institutions of government. It is playing about with those institutions —

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member's time is up.

Dr O'Hagan: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it appropriate for Members to refer to other Members as not being house-trained? I ask that you take a ruling on that and ask the Member to withdraw the remarks.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. There have been a number of requests for me to look into the use of language, and I will give the matter consideration.

Mr C Wilson: I still have half a minute left. The clock did not stop when the point of order was made.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Out of order. The time is up. I will move on to —

Mr C Wilson: I have to challenge that. I want to ask if the timekeepers can —

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. You have no right to challenge a ruling of the Speaker.

Mr Ervine: I am conscious that we are here on what people describe as an emergency — an issue of grave concern to the community. Has anyone noticed the sombre tone of those who brought this emergency to the Chamber? Has anyone noticed their dismay? Rather has anyone noticed their glee and excitement? It seems that we may be here for a foolish and unreasonable cause, the furtherance of individual hopes and dreams for the election.

Some things should be clarified, although five minutes, unfortunately, is not a lot of time. We have already heard that this issue has been before the Commission since November. We were nearly at Easter, and no decision had been made. My understanding is that a proposal by Sinn Féin concerned the free availability, or the sale, of Easter lilies to prove equivalence with the poppy. Another proposal was for a bunch of flowers and a card to explain what the Easter lily is. Neither of those, I believed, was acceptable. A group of people then tried to do what politics is supposed to do — to reach some formula that would get us beyond the difficulties that epitomise this divided society. What was advocated was that there would be two flower arrangements containing — but not necessarily solely comprising — Easter lilies. There would be no explanation of the Easter lily. In many ways, since the House was to have been in recess, one might argue that it was a very minimalist response to what was originally requested. It achieved enough support to be successful.

There are those who would like the Easter lily to be treated as equivalent to the poppy, and they are matched by those who foolishly allow them to do exactly that. They should not be mentioned in the same book, never mind in the same sentence. The actions of the DUP, followed on hands and knees behind by the UUP, enable Republicans to see this issue thrown into abeyance

again, to be argued over again and again, whether we like it or not. As a Unionist, I have no particular desire to appreciate or venerate the Republican dead — some of my colleagues and I might like to have added to their ranks. As members of the DUP slid about the “Armagh desert” with rolled-up manifestos determined to destroy the Republican movement, there were those of us who tried to do exactly that, more efficiently. I am sorry to say that we did not have as much success as I would like to have been able to report. However — *[Interruption]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr J Kelly: I appreciate Mr Ervine's dilemma, but is it appropriate for him to rattle on about wanting to murder more Catholics or more Nationalists?

11.30 am

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Will Mr Ervine please clarify his remarks.

Mr Ervine: I do not believe that I need to clarify my remarks. I have not used unparliamentary language.

Those who venerate the Republican dead will do so whether I like it or not. My experience of this society — as perhaps we are about to see on the lower Ormeau Road, when Republicans try to stop a people from expressing its culture — is that when you try to stop something, the problem does not go away. It gets worse.

The motion that was put forward was an attempt to reach a compromise wherein some people would accept that that was an appreciation for them and a veneration of their dead. For others it was a way to make politics work, and to take us on to the next undoubtedly problematic item on the agenda.

I am not surprised, but deeply disappointed, that when people were dying last year, none of the Members who asked for this emergency debate cared enough about seven dead people to ask for the recall of the Assembly.

Ms McWilliams: I do not think that we are in a crisis. However, I take a different view from all the Members who have spoken so far. I think that none of the Members in this Chamber understand the importance of symbols. Not only in this country, but in many other countries, symbols represent ethnic and political identity. Indeed, wars have been fought over them. It would be hypocritical of Members to go out into the communities and expect people to resolve their differences over symbols, if they cannot resolve them in this Assembly. That was what the Commission was asked to do.

The Commission was asked to resolve the dilemma of what happens in November and what might happen at Easter. Eileen Bell was put in a very difficult position. Let the record show — before anyone talks any further about those parties that could have done something about taking their votes away — that there was an opportunity for them to give their votes to another party.

They could have done that before this decision was made. I understand — and the Member is not here — that Roger Hutchinson has done that. He has taken his vote from one party and given it to the DUP.

Mr McCartney: Two parties.

Ms McWilliams: No other party has actually done that. As Bob McCartney says, there may be some confusion at times about how Roger Hutchinson uses his vote.

Let the record show that we might not be having this debate if those Members who had the opportunity to do so had taken their votes, blocked them, moved them and allowed another party to use their votes instead.

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Ms McWilliams: Mr Wells wants me to give way. As the mover of the motion, you will have an opportunity to respond at the end of the debate. I say to you that I found —

Madam Deputy Speaker: The Member will speak through the Chair.

Ms McWilliams: I found Mr Wells's remarks very intimidatory. He asked another Member to go into the shipyard and ask people how they would like to be represented. He should know that we have had debates in this Chamber about jobs in that shipyard. Those jobs do not belong to Protestants or Catholics; they are jobs for this community. Mr Wells should be ashamed of himself for, in another debate, asking people to go into a workplace and find out how they would like to be represented. We have legislation in this country about that. Perhaps he would also like to address that in his summing-up.

People are here because they have been given a mandate to come here. I too, take exception to some of Mr Ervine's remarks, but what he no doubt is pointing to is the fact that this was a dirty, rotten war. In that dirty, rotten war people fought over how they wanted to be represented. If we are to move on, those are the remarks that we should reflect on. We should understand now how far we have come, given that we are even discussing this issue in the first place.

Mrs Bell has my total support. If she did anything, she operated in the most democratic way that I have seen to date. She actually sent a memorandum around those parties that she represents on the Commission and asked us to attend an emergency meeting. We all attended that meeting — the parties that were represented at the meeting are named — and we debated a number of options. The option of selling the Easter lily was opposed at this stage. The National Graves Association is not a charity. Charities have permission to sell their products in the Assembly. That being the case, the next option was a display of lilies. That was the option that those four parties agreed, and Mrs Bell went to that meeting of the Commission and put that consensus and

compromise forward. That is what won the day, and that is what will still win the day when this debate is over.

Mr McCartney: I thought that in a fairly lengthy career at the Bar I had heard every possible form of hypocrisy, cant and dissimulation, but this debate really takes the biscuit. How anyone in their right mind can conceivably say that the Easter lily, as the Sinn Féin representative described it, is not a symbol of Republicanism in all its forms, both democratic and violent, is beyond me. For someone to say, as Mr Neeson attempted to say, that the Easter lily is a religious symbol supervening all other symbols at Easter, is rank nonsense in the context of this debate.

There is no doubt that the SDLP shares many of the political and irredentist objectives of Sinn Féin. I am sure that for many of its members, for private, political and electoral purposes, the Easter lily is just as much a symbol of their hopes for a united Ireland as it is for Sinn Féin. One can therefore understand the view that they take upon it. However, for anyone to suggest for a moment that a proposal that Easter lilies be displayed within this Building was not tantamount to the gravest provocation to those whose relatives, friends and political colleagues have been mutilated and murdered by the people who hold that Easter lily as a symbol is rank hypocrisy.

What this debate has enabled me and, I hope, the public to see is the democratic values of some of those who pontificate in this Chamber, who take a lofty attitude far above the likes of those who have a clear party affiliation. I refer to Mr Ervine, who unfortunately, while claiming to be a democrat, while constantly posturing in the media and speaking on the radio about his credentials, actually comes here — and for once I am in total agreement with the intervention made by Sinn Féin — and suggests that he regrets that he was not more successful when wearing his terrorist hat in removing more human beings from the face of this earth. That is something that everyone here should view with grave disquiet.

I am totally and utterly opposed to the activities, views and political aspirations of Sinn Féin, but I will never ever for one moment countenance that its members be dealt with other than in accordance with the rule of law, because I am a democrat. In this Chamber I have condemned violence, from whatever source it emanates, and the patronising, lofty, holier-than-thou attitude taken by some.

All this trouble stems from the fact that a symbol of violent Republicanism — a symbol adored and adorned by those who have committed the most brutal acts of terrorism and violence — is to be displayed in a building allegedly dedicated to the democratic process and the observation of the rule of law. I have heard much about the inclusiveness of this process and that it

is a healing process — I heard that today from Mr McGrady on the radio — but nothing could be more calculated to provoke, to divide and to re-emphasise sectarian differences than this proposal.

In conclusion, had the proposal been to fill those vases on 01 July with orange lilies, which, like the Easter lily, have a specific political connotation, I would have objected to that. Anyone who endeavours to equate the poppy with either of those symbols is desecrating, misjudging and misrepresenting the purpose of the poppy.

Mr Paisley Jnr: Critics of my Colleague Mr Wells have said that this is a trivial matter. For such a trivial matter, I am amazed at their turnout today. We have almost a full turnout from the SDLP and Sinn Féin, and a very high turnout from the Alliance Party and the other minor parties. I am absolutely amazed by their turnout. Indeed, most of the Galleries are also packed — some of them, I am sure, in support of the parties who say that this is a trivial matter.

To all the members of the SDLP, Sinn Féin, and the Alliance Party who are here, the question should be put as to where they were last week when this Assembly was taking very important votes and making very important decisions on agriculture and the economy. Their Benches were empty last week, but on a trivial matter they do take the time to turn up. Who is electioneering today? That is the question that should be asked.

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

A lot of people, not only in this Assembly but across Northern Ireland, will be disgusted by the remarks of Mr Ervine. He takes on a new label today as “Easter lily-livered” Ervine. Mr “Easter lily” Ervine, who today admitted that he is a failed terrorist — and I hope that after the next election it will be demonstrated that he is also a failed politician — came to the House to encourage actions that he claims he should have taken. That is disgraceful. This is the person that the Alliance Party wants to side with.

The Alliance Party should search its soul this morning. The deputy leader of the Alliance Party was on the radio this morning. He is not in the House today — perhaps he is down at SD Bell’s. I am not sure where he is, but he is not taking part in this debate. He should hang his head in shame, as should his party colleagues, for allowing themselves to be aligned with people who, quite clearly, are justifying generosity to terrorism. That is exactly what they are doing. His party colleague, Mrs Eileen Bell, tried to usurp the votes of other Members of this House that, quite frankly, are not her votes.

The statement by Mr Neeson, trying to in some way equate the Easter lily with Christ’s crucifixion, verges on blasphemy. It is absolute and total nonsense. No one equates that symbol with Christ’s crucifixion.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the SDLP has been hijacked by Sinn Féin —

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Mr Paisley Jnr that I am not Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr Paisley Jnr: I apologise for the gender mistake. I am sure you are a man — I will take your word for it. My Colleague says you are better looking than the previous Deputy Speaker, but I will make no comment.

11.45 am

The SDLP has been hijacked by Sinn Féin in this debate. Its members have never worn Easter lilies on other occasions. Weeks before a general election and a local government election the SDLP is too frightened to challenge Sinn Féin on this issue, to challenge the display of a symbol that is akin to the Nazi swastika. It is being used to encourage terrorism. It would be placed opposite a plaque that pays homage and respect to Edgar Graham and Sir Norman Stronge. That is what they are equating this with. But it is not equal to that, and it never will be. If Members of the House vote against the motion that has been brought by my Colleague, they will not only do themselves a disservice, but also do Ulster’s honoured dead the gravest disservice.

Mr McFarland: This is a divisive and unnecessary debate. The Belfast Agreement was supposed to draw a line under the past 30 years and allow us to move on. Sinn Féin, however, is acting against the ethos of the agreement. It is conducting a form of cultural warfare in place of its former occupation. We saw that in the run-up to the commemoration of the hunger strikes; we saw it yesterday when a plaque was unveiled in Enniskillen of all places, an extremely insensitive thing to do. It is hyping the tension leading to an election, and Easter lilies are part of that cultural warfare campaign.

It is accepted that Easter lilies and orange lilies are cultural symbols. The poppy is not. The poppy is not only a national symbol; it is an international symbol recognised across the world as a commemoration of those who made the supreme sacrifice in two world wars. These issues should not be linked.

Sinn Féin needs to appreciate that actions such as this damage attempts that are being made to bring us out of the past 30 years and damage the confidence that communities are trying to build.

I would like to comment briefly on the voting system. I was involved in the Standing Orders Committee where discussions took place on how the Commission should operate. As Members will know, a system was only recently devised that everyone was completely happy with. I stand to be corrected, but my understanding is that it is based on the number of Members who were here on the first day. However, I find it confusing. I would welcome Mrs Bell’s explaining how she thought she had all the votes that she had in her pocket. The

Commission has traditionally operated a system whereby decisions are taken on a consensual basis. I do not know how we arrived at a position where votes were cast for this on behalf of Members who have indicated clearly today that they were not in favour of a floral display of Easter lilies. Mrs Bell should address this matter.

We are tearing ourselves apart. It is unfortunate that we have had to have this unnecessary debate in the lead-up to an election.

Mr Fee: I wish to set straight something that Mr Wells said at the outset. He said that we were here because the Assembly Commission could not meet, as it could not get a quorum. I point out to him that I wrote to the Clerk to say that, having cancelled all my meetings for that day and rearranged a flight home from Brussels where we were discussing foot-and-mouth disease, by 5.00 pm on Thursday evening I could not ascertain whether the meeting was to be at 11.00 am or 1.00 pm the following day or which other Members would be attending. I could not, therefore, consult all my Colleagues, nor had I the luxury of reallocating my votes to anybody else. It was impossible for me to attend.

However, I fully understand why we are here. I do believe that this is a very important issue. *[Interruption]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Fee: It goes to the very heart of how we treat each other in this institution and the example we give to our communities of how society should treat its members. This is about inclusion. It is about including all sections of the community. It is about recognising the symbols that are dear and important to all sections of the community. It is not simply about recognising the middle ground; it is about recognising and including as far as is possible those people who may have felt marginalised or alienated in the past. It is an attempt to recognise everybody's place in the new democratic society in which we live.

The Assembly Commission, in its decision, was extremely conscious of the fact that it was not suggesting equivalence — and I certainly would not suggest it — between the lily and the poppy, or indeed any other symbol. They are two unique symbols that mean something entirely different and are of extraordinarily potent emotional significance to different sections of the community in which they are held in high regard and esteem.

The Assembly Commission, in the absence of any clear direction, came up with what was very much a compromise. We did not accept, under the circumstances, that the National Graves Association should be involved or that the symbol should be sold in the building. We did accept that the Easter lily has a greater significance than that which the Republican movement has attached to it. As in the past, when the Assembly adopted the flax flower, when poppies for very important reasons were

available here in November, we felt that a benign floral symbol was a sufficient compromise.

In my view, this is about putting up with things that we do not necessarily like. This very building is anathema to a large section of my community, but we put up with it. To many people who visit this building, the statues of Carson and Craigavon and other symbols are anathema, but we ask them to put up with them — they are part of our history.

The Assembly has debated the Union flag on many occasions. The Assembly Commission agreed that in the absence of any clear direction we would have to put up with the fact that it flies over this Building on designated days. We have also had a commemoration of the bicentenary of the Act of Union, and we have asked Members and visitors to put up with that. In divisive circumstances, the Assembly Commission's only option is to try to find a compromise we can all put up with. I feel that we achieved that in this case, and we are asking the Assembly to put up with that decision.

Mr J Kelly: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am sorry that the phrase “cultural aggravation” was used. Many of us will remember — or perhaps not — Leading Seaman Magennis, the only man from this part of this island to receive a VC in the second world war.

For years, a Unionist-controlled council in the city hall refused to recognise the heroism of that man. It made cultural aggravation out of the poppy in relation to him.

This debate is not about the Easter lily. It is about the continuing struggle in Unionism between those on the Unionist side of the House that support the inclusive principles of the Good Friday Agreement and those on the Unionist side who want to return to the negative and politically suicidal philosophy of a Protestant Parliament for a Protestant people.

This debate is about those on the Unionist side who want to return to the political and religious fundamentalism that has bedevilled this society since partition. This debate is about DUP triumphalism, DUP sectarianism and DUP racism. I intervened during David Ervine's contribution, but I understand what he was saying. There are those on the DUP side of the House who have engaged in violence and sabre-rattling and who have attempted to encourage young Protestants — young Loyalists — to get involved in violence. They did not do the fighting — and I understand where David Ervine is coming from in that regard — yet they sit in this House and fancy dress themselves with debates on an Easter lily.

Whatever the outcome of this futile, negative debate, and regardless of the politically confusing coalition of pro- and anti-agreement Unionists voting against the display of the Easter lily in this Building — a Building from which Nationalists, Republicans and their traditions have been excluded, a Building that is awash with

negative cultural traditions, a Building in which attempts have been made to exclude Catholics and Nationalists from participating in the politics of this part of Ireland — *[Interruption]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr J Kelly: Whatever the outcome and regardless of the negative political forces that we have here today, one thing is certain —

Mr Paisley Jnr: Bobby Sands would not be in here today.

Mr J Kelly: Bobby Sands was a courageous man. There is one thing that cannot be negated — *[Interruption]* Am I going to get silence, A LeasCheann Comhairle?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Please continue, Mr Kelly.

Mr J Kelly: One thing is certain: the transition in this part of Ireland to the equality and the parity of esteem contained in the Good Friday Agreement is irreversible. The transition to respect for the cultural and religious traditions of those who live in this part of Ireland and who by race and conviction are part of a concept of a sovereign Irish nation is irreversible. It cannot be turned back by any bogus attempt by the DUP and their Colleagues — *[Interruption]* — Yes, and Billy Wright —

Mr Maskey: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Are you in control of the meeting, or are the people across the Chamber in control? I cannot hear the debate.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order. I will attempt to maintain order, but I cannot guarantee — *[Interruption]*

Mr Maskey: I am asking you for a response.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Maskey, I am speaking.

Mr Maskey: So is everyone else.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr J Kelly: Mr Maskey has a point.

This text appeared on a poster in 1925:

“The Easter Lily is the NATIONAL EMBLEM

The Easter Lily represents the NORTH and SOUTH united in an expression of appreciation of the principles for which the men of Easter Week gave up their lives.

The Easter Lily is an emblem of Hope and Confidence in the ultimate realisation of every Irishman’s dream, ‘Ireland free from the centre to the Sea’.”

[Interruption]

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member has a right to be heard.

12.00

Mr J Kelly: A LeasCheann Comhairle, are we going to have order in the House, or is this rabble —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Kelly, I am giving you an opportunity to continue. Please do so.

Mr J Kelly: Throughout the debate we have not had order from the DUP rabble on that side of the House.

Mr Weir: Listening to the last Member, one wondered for a moment if one was listening to a speech in the Assembly or an oration at Milltown.

Some Members have said that this is not the most important issue facing Northern Ireland, and I agree. On the third anniversary of the Belfast Agreement there has still been no decommissioning; we have seen the destruction of the RUC; there are terrorists in Government; the criminal justice system has been damaged; and paramilitaries have increasing control of our society. All those issues are more important than the motion that is before us today. However, those issues, together with a wide range of economic and social issues, are dealt with in the day-to-day business of the Assembly. This issue is timely because of the approach of Good Friday, and it is important for a number of reasons.

First, today’s debate highlights the weakness of the Assembly’s voting system. Mention has already been made of the votes in the Assembly Commission, but there is also the absurd sectarian system by which, whether this motion passes by one vote or 101 votes, it will be negated simply because Nationalists are voting against it. At the time of the referendum Unionists were told that their great prize was to get power back into their own hands, yet today we find that we cannot even pass a motion dealing with Easter lilies because of the system.

Secondly, a number of parties have shown their true colours today. The SDLP is rushing headlong after Sinn Féin in the pursuit of electoral success. The Alliance Party and the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition have, unfortunately, shown their usual true colours of having greater sympathy for the Nationalist cause. The PUP has shown that its true bedfellows are Sinn Féin/IRA.

David Ervine said earlier that he regretted not having been more successful. Those were not just off-the-cuff remarks. Last night Mr Ervine said on the radio that Mr Wells and the supporters of this motion, unlike him and others, had not made Republicans cower behind steel doors. It is not my ambition in life to make anyone cower behind steel doors. I am a democrat, Sir. It ill behoves any Member of the Assembly to make that sort of boast —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member will please direct his comments through the Chair.

Mr Weir: On my third point, I find myself very much at odds with Mr Neeson. The Easter lily has been used for a political purpose, and it has been used to hijack the true meaning of Easter. That is something that borders on the blasphemous. Republicans have politicised Easter. We see at one extreme the theories of Patrick

Pearse — the blood sacrifice — which is a clear-cut example of blasphemy. However, to use any symbol connected with Easter for a political purpose is to deprecate the meaning of Easter and to verge on blasphemy.

Finally, the key point is not what individuals take as their view; everyone is entitled to take whatever action they want. Members opposite are wearing what appears to be a Blue Peter-type badge of a cardboard cut-out nature. If they want to wear some sort of green-and-white badge then that is a matter for them, but what we are debating today is the role of the Assembly.

I thought the problem with the notion of parity of esteem was that it placed my British citizenship on a par with an aspiration towards a united Ireland, thus denying the principle of consent; but it is far worse than that. Today we are placing the Easter lily, which is a symbol that has been associated with violent Republicanism, alongside the symbols that commemorate the sacrifice of all people, Catholic and Protestant, in the face of fascism. We are equating the soldiers who made that sacrifice with cowards who cowered and killed in a most despicable way, not just in the past 30 years but throughout this century, in the name of Irish Republicanism.

Esteem for terrorists is being sought today. That is utterly unacceptable and why this motion needs to be passed. A clear signal needs to be sent that the ordinary, decent people of Northern Ireland — whether Protestant or Catholic — simply will not put up with terrorists hijacking Easter for their benefit.

Mr Ervine: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Will you confirm that as I was named I have a right of reply?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I did not hear the last part of your sentence.

Mr Ervine: I am asking you to confirm that as I was named and, one could argue, attacked in Mr Weir's speech, I will be entitled to a right of reply.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I understand that you will be entitled to reply after the vote.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Will you tell us when the new rule was made that says that a person can reply to an attack after the vote? I understood that a Member had a right to reply if some personal matter was mentioned. In free debate anywhere, in any House, there would be no such thing as a right of reply after the vote is taken. I want to know on what authority you say that.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am taking advice on that. I understand that when a personal attack is made on a Member, he is given an opportunity to refute it after the vote. If I am incorrect, I will discuss the matter with the Speaker's Office and inform the Assembly accordingly.

Mr Paisley Jnr: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Mr J Kelly named Dr Paisley, Dr McCrea, Mr P Robinson and me in some way during his speech and accused us of a number of illegal activities. I assume that we will all be given the right to make a personal statement at the conclusion of this debate.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That is correct.

Mr J Kelly: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I do not recall naming any individual. On a further point, will A LeasCheann Comhairle clarify that Mr Ervine will be able to rebut what has been said after the vote or after the debate?

Mr Deputy Speaker: After the vote.

Mr Boyd: I support the motion and congratulate the 30 signatories. The display of Republican triumphalism in the Building is deliberately provocative to the vast majority in Northern Ireland. It is disgusting that there are those in the Assembly who continue to glorify Republican terrorists, and it is regrettable that there are puppets of Sinn Féin/IRA.

Very serious questions must be answered. It is disgraceful that people such as Seamus Close should trivialise the hurt of the Unionist community at Republican terrorists being glorified. For Seamus Close to say on the radio this morning that this is a meaningless debate about flower arranging was mischievous and pathetic when his party Colleague, Eileen Bell, appears to have abused the voting system. Has Seamus Close conveniently forgotten that he told us that the Belfast Agreement would provide open, transparent Government? Suddenly Mr Close and the Alliance Party are concerned about the cost of the Assembly and his holidays being cut short.

I would also correct Eddie McGrady, who, also on the radio this morning, said that every party is represented on the Assembly Commission. Eddie McGrady should check his facts. The Northern Ireland Unionist Party is not represented, and I wrote to the Alliance Party Whip months ago, instructing him not to use our party's votes on any occasion.

I want an answer today about the role Assembly Member Eileen Bell played in the vote last week and on previous occasions in the Assembly Commission. We have debated for one and a half hours, and there has still been no clarification on the voting by the Commission. Did Eileen Bell use the three Northern Ireland Unionist Party votes in favour of the display of Easter lilies, in spite of clear, written instructions to the contrary? Has Eileen Bell used the Northern Ireland Unionist Party's votes on previous occasions on any issue, in spite of clear, written instructions to the contrary? Did she use a block vote of 16, or did she not? If she did, what action will be taken to remove Eileen Bell from that position? Is Eileen Bell being honest in this matter? She clearly stated on BBC's 'Talkback' last week that she did not

use our party's votes. Is she stating one thing in public and doing the opposite in private?

It should also be noted that the so-called parties of the centre — the Alliance Party and the Women's Coalition — are once again supporting Sinn Féin/IRA, as they regularly do.

It is a wonder that they are not wearing their green ribbons and the insulting lily in the Chamber today. The Unionist family will also view with dismay — but hardly any surprise — the actions of the Progressive Unionist Party which, contrary to the wishes of most of its members and supporters, is endorsing this display of Republican triumphalism.

Today we see the farce that is the Belfast Agreement, where a clear majority in the Assembly oppose the display of Republican triumphalism, yet the decision of five people cannot be overturned. I agree with the Members who described Mr Sean "Naive" Neeson's remark that the Easter lily is a symbol of Our Lord's crucifixion as nothing short of blasphemy. It is an absolute disgrace for those in the SDLP, Sinn Féin, the Alliance Party, the Women's Coalition and the PUP to equate the poppy, which represents the fallen — both Protestant and Roman Catholic — in two world wars, with a symbol representing IRA terrorists.

It is clear that the Belfast Agreement offers nothing for Unionists and must be scrapped. It is rejected by the vast majority of Unionists who view it as an appeasement to the pan-Nationalist front, and its collapse is inevitable. I support the motion.

Mr Gibson: I am surprised to hear some people say that today's debate is frivolous, expensive or foolish. However, when I listened to the comments of Alban Maginness I was reminded of a warning I got as a young child to "Never lay your wits to the witless." I am here to record before the Assembly the feelings of people in West Tyrone. I want to speak up on behalf of the 97 families who had members murdered by those who wear the symbols of lily-white cowardice.

Mr J Kelly: Does that include Patsy Kelly?

Mr Gibson: That includes anyone who was murdered by cowards. I want to remember my schoolmaster colleague Ivan Anderson, who was murdered on his way home from work. I want to remember the schoolmaster who died a lingering death on a trolley, and who had taught my children and my neighbours' children. I want to remember my colleague, then headmaster of Castlederg High School, whom they attempted to murder on his way to work. I want to remember my neighbour and my brother, whose lorry was riddled with 49 Armalite bullets on its way to the cattle mart in Dungannon. They survived only by the grace of God, but they have since departed this life. I want to remember the colleagues of my own platoon who served with me in the defence of

the community. I am proud to record that members of that platoon were decent Roman Catholics.

I want to remind those here today that wearers of lily-white lilies of cowardice murdered more Roman Catholics than Protestants in the bombing of Omagh on 15 August 1998. Bear in mind that when they wear their lily-whites of cowardice they are not just insulting the blood corpuscles of respectability and tributes to everything decent and moral, but they are insulting their own religious colleagues whom they have slaughtered. Bear in mind that their own party leader ordered the suicide of 10 of their own men by hunger strike. That is what the lily symbolises. However, it symbolises much more than that. That bowl outside in the Hall embodies everything that is symbolised in the Belfast Agreement.

12.15 pm

I was challenged about this debate because one can become very personal and emotional. However, I then thought of my grandfather and other generations long gone. They too had to negotiate and make critical decisions.

My ancient ancestor, Bartholomew Gibson of Roscommon, had to make a decision 313 years ago. He had to decide whether he would stand for democracy, constitutional monarchy and respect for life, freedom, equality and justice or negotiate and compromise with those who wanted autocracy and dictatorship and to tramp everyone else's thoughts and beliefs underneath their feet. He made a critical decision. It was said in Enniskillen "We stand upon our guard. We resolve by the blessing of God to face our danger."

Mr Deputy Speaker: Your time is up. Many Members wish to speak.

Mr Gibson: I want to conclude more simply. The reply is still "No Surrender."

Mr Armstrong: I support the motion. The placing of Easter lilies in Stormont reminds me forcefully of the continuance of the terrorist armed struggle in this country. I am reminded in particular of the Easter Rising in 1916, which left large parts of Dublin in ruins, and of events that have taken place all over Ireland then and many times since.

I do not want to be reminded of that every time I walk through the Great Hall. Surely we all want to forget the struggles and hate of the past as we move forward? This is a deliberate action by persons in this House, a display of their terrorist culture.

A fresh start is needed. Everyone should acknowledge the need for sensitivity with symbols. In an era of bridge-building at the beginning of the twenty-first century, this is totally out of keeping and divisive, and it contradicts the precepts of the Good Friday Agreement.

The Belfast Agreement also safeguards equality and opportunity. In paragraph 5, it says

"All participants acknowledge the sensitivity of the use of symbols and emblems for public purposes, and the need in particular in creating the new institutions to ensure that such symbols and emblems are used in a manner which promotes mutual respect rather than division."

We have people in the House who have supported terrorist activities. Some still espouse symbols of terrorist organisations and are prominent here.

Apart from its distinctive appearance, this plant has poisonous characteristics. Researchers say that the lily is poisonous to cats and dogs. The toxic contents can cause kidney damage to animals, who then require immediate veterinary attention. Bearing in mind the problems being experienced by our animal population through foot-and-mouth disease and BSE, we should not encourage the use of anything that could bring suffering or stress to any person or animal.

Easter lilies can be toxic when eaten by a cat, causing kidney failure, vomiting, loss of appetite, depression and death. Is that the sort of atmosphere that we want to work in? My research also shows that unlike the shamrock the Easter lily is not a native Irish plant. It comes from the Ryukyu Islands, south of Japan, and has no particular Irish connection.

This poisonous plant will cause more division in the Assembly than anything else. Who would want to be party to the placing of such a toxic plant in an accessible place such as Stormont? Anyone in his right mind would not want to introduce such a poisonous plant, either in Parliament Buildings or elsewhere. The Easter lily has no place here — it is a symbol of Republicanism.

Mr Gallagher: I support the Commission's efforts to adopt an inclusive approach to the symbols on display in the building. Unfortunately, too many people have lost their lives as a result of either state or paramilitary violence. We must respect the views of those who have lost family members on what they consider to be the most appropriate way of remembering their dead. Unfortunately, the debate has been narrow and has focused on those who choose either the poppy or the lily as the appropriate way in which to honour those who have died.

However, those are not the only views; many others who have lost family members have entirely different opinions on how they should be commemorated. For them, flags and flowers have been monopolised and desecrated and made to represent something other than was intended. The Union Jack, as we know, is based on three Christian crosses. It may symbolise something positive, but history tells us that it has sometimes been used, or abused, to represent everything but Christianity or a coming together. On the other hand, the Easter lily, based on the colours orange and green, should symbolise the interdependency and coming together of our diverse peoples. Sadly, it has taken on a meaning that has more to do with physical force and coercion than with

promoting peace and partnership. That is a matter of regret.

Many families do not believe that their loved ones should be commemorated by symbols that give rise to division. Therefore, a much greater challenge facing us is the need to reach agreement on a common symbol to commemorate all those who have lost their lives due to violence.

There are some reference points that we can consider. Let me remind Members of the report by the Northern Ireland Commissioner, Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, in April 1998. It said that gorse, a plant common in the countryside, which flowers in spring, could be a common symbol to commemorate all of the victims of violence here. In the Republic of Ireland, a victims' commission considered the views of families who had suffered from all over Ireland and ended up recommending a common symbol. It suggested that the oak leaf be considered. As most people here will know, especially those from around Derry, the oak leaf is associated with St Columcille.

I regret that we have had an acrimonious and divisive debate on such a sensitive issue. I hope that we will quickly turn our attention to the greater problem. We must recognise and respect the suffering of all families who have lost brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers and other family members and reach agreement over how we might commemorate them all.

Mr Wells: The one thing that has emerged from the debate is that the Easter lily is not a minor issue. The telephone line from Downpatrick to Crossmaglen must have been down last night because the Chief Whip of the SDLP was unable to ring Mr Fee to tell him that it is a minor issue.

Mr Fee let the cat out of the bag when he said "Yes, this is a very important issue." Everyone knows exactly why it is important. That is why there are so many people here today and why there is so much press interest. I have never done so many interviews on one subject in all my political career.

The public are aware what is going on — unlike Mr Maskey, who appeared in here this morning in his new suit, looked around, realised that everyone else was wearing lilies and had to get one photocopied. He arrived in here without his lily. He is the only one in Northern Ireland who is not aware of the significance of Easter lilies.

Mr Paisley Jnr: Did he come in his own car?

Mr Wells: No, he came courtesy of the disability living allowance.

The most telling silence here this morning was from Mrs Eileen Bell, the person mainly responsible for this decision. Such was her confidence in the decision that she made in the Assembly Commission, that she did not

stand up to defend herself. She did not stand up to be questioned on the subject.

The point that she did not deny, in any of her interventions, was that there were express instructions issued that she was not permitted to use the Unionist votes to push through the decision to allow the display of lilies. That is the only reason that we are here this morning. All the arguments that have been made by the opposition fall flat on their face. There was an opportunity for Mrs Bell to speak.

If Mrs Bell was confident of how she used her votes in the Commission, when a second meeting was called, she could have come forward and justified her decision to that meeting. However, she realised that if that meeting were called, myself and Rev Robert Coulter would have been able to show quite clearly, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that there is not consent from the Unionist community, as represented in the Assembly, for this decision.

We are told that we have been sold an agreement which says that the consent of the Unionist and Nationalist communities must be obtained. There is not a shred of consent anywhere in the Unionist community for this decision.

Mr McGrady, Mr Ervine and others said that this is not the message that they are getting. No doubt, the areas in which they move —

Rev Dr William McCrea: I thank my hon Friend for giving way. Can he tell me why, if this was regarded by Mr McGrady as a minor issue, 22 members of the SDLP signed a petition of concern? Also, why did the SDLP have to put 22 names on it, while Sinn Féin put only four?

Mr Wells: Many ordinary people in the Province will be extremely shocked at the way in which the SDLP has grovelled at the feet of Sinn Féin on this issue. The reason for it is abundantly clear. Talk about the pot calling the kettle black — Mr Maginness suggested that perhaps there was some electioneering taking place. I know my television is broken down when he is not on it, electioneering and making party political broadcasts, along with Mr Dallat.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Please limit your remarks to the subject of the debate.

Mr Wells: The reality is that, such was their enthusiasm to grovel to Sinn Féin, that 22 SDLP Members rushed up to Stormont to sign their petition of concern. They did the dirty work for Sinn Féin on this occasion. However, the real culprit, and the reason why we are here this morning, is the so-called middle ground party, the Alliance Party. It seeks to speak for both the Unionist and the Nationalist community, yet it represents just 2.5% of the electorate. It took it upon itself to cast its 16 votes — as all the minutes indicate — in favour of the display of these emblems.

The Alliance Party was the first to admit that when it supported a Sinn Féin Mayor for Belfast it caused itself enormous harm electorally. I can tell them that they ain't seen nothing yet, when this gets out to the public. Mrs Bell, I am giving you the opportunity to defend yourself, and you have not taken it.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Please direct your remarks through the Chair.

Mr Wells: I want to return to a more serious issue. There are 2,800 innocent people in their graves today who have been put there by those that wear the Easter lily. The money that is collected by the sale of the Easter lilies is used to honour the people that have tortured this community for 30 years.

12.30 pm

No one connected to the families of any of those people is anything but aghast that this is happening. Could those 2,800 people ever have known that in Stormont, of all places, the people who put them in their graves would be honoured through the display of Easter lilies? Would they ever have thought that that was possible? That is what we are voting for today. It does not have consent.

I call on the Alliance Party to apologise to the decent people of this Province for getting us into this situation. Votes were abused, Members were not consulted and decisions were taken behind closed doors without the consent of the parties whose votes were being used. Clearly, there has been abuse. There has been abuse throughout the entire system. This decision, if it is allowed to go ahead, will be a gross insult to the innocent people of this Province who have been murdered by the IRA.

There is no equivalence with the poppy. I am glad that Members, particularly from other parties, have taken the opportunity to explain the fundamental difference between the symbolic natures of the poppy and of the Easter lily. The only equivalent to the Easter lily would be some emblem on behalf of Loyalist Prisoners' Aid, or some similar organisation. We, as a party, would not support that and we are certainly not supporting this.

I come back to this question: is the Commission prepared to fly in the face of the decision of the House, or will it honour that decision? Let democracy prevail. Let us see what the House decides this afternoon. Any proposal that honours those dead who have lain in ditches and blown up totally innocent people because they were Protestants — or because they were Catholics — has no support from any decent person in this Province.

Mr P Robinson: I assure my Colleague that that person in the Chamber — or who was in the Chamber — who purports to represent Unionism, but who has supported the commemoration of the Easter rebellion through the display of lilies, does not represent the Unionists of East

Belfast. They do not want to be represented by “Easter lily Irvine”.

Mr Wells: I have long since stopped including Mr Irvine and Mr Hutchinson in the term “Unionism”. I am talking about true Unionists with true, traditional Unionist values. In conclusion, if we approve the display of Easter lilies in the House, we insult the names of the brave dead of this province, and the people of Northern Ireland will not forgive those responsible for it.

Question put.

The Assembly divided (cross-community vote): Ayes 48; Noes 38.

AYES

Unionist

Ian Adamson, Billy Armstrong, Roy Beggs, 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, Sam Foster, Oliver Gibson, Tom Hamilton, William Hay, David Hilditch, Derek Hussey, Roger Hutchinson, Gardiner Kane, James Leslie, Robert McCartney, David McClarty, William McCrea, Alan McFarland, Michael McGimpsey, Maurice Morrow, Dermot Nesbitt, Ian Paisley Jnr, Ian R K Paisley, Edwin Poots, Iris Robinson, Mark Robinson, Peter Robinson, Patrick Roche, George Savage, Jim Shannon, David Trimble, Denis Watson, Peter Weir, Jim Wells, Cedric Wilson, Jim Wilson, Sammy Wilson.

NOES

Nationalist

Gerry Adams, Alex Attwood, P J Bradley, Joe Byrne, Annie Courtney, John Dallat, Bairbre de Brún, Arthur Doherty, Pat Doherty, Mark Durkan, Sean Farren, John Fee, Tommy Gallagher, Michelle Gildernew, Carmel Hanna, Joe Hendron, John Kelly, Patricia Lewsley, Alban Maginness, Alex Maskey, Barry McElduff, Eddie McGrady, Eugene McMenamin, Pat McNamee, Conor Murphy, Mick Murphy, Mary Nelis, Danny O'Connor, Dara O'Hagan, Eamonn O'Neill, Brid Rodgers, John Tierney.

Unionist

David Irvine.

Other

Eileen Bell, David Ford, Kieran McCarthy, Monica McWilliams, Sean Neeson.

<i>Total Votes</i>	<i>86</i>	<i>Total Ayes</i>	<i>48 (55.8%)</i>
<i>Nationalist Votes</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>Nationalist Ayes</i>	<i>0 (0.0%)</i>
<i>Unionist Votes</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>Unionist Ayes</i>	<i>48 (98.0%)</i>

Question accordingly negatived.

12.45 pm

Mr Paisley Jnr: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Do you accept that almost 56% of Members voted for this motion?

Mr Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order.

Mr McFarland: Members are becoming increasingly confused about whether or not they can reply when they are referred to by name in a contribution. The situation has become worse and worse, and today it has gone bananas. We will now have 25 people jumping up and demanding five or 10 minutes each to reply. I ask you to look at this very seriously. We must have a system to prevent a bunfight after every debate.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I thank Mr McFarland for his point of order. If he so wishes, I will read from the appropriate part of Erskine May. If not, I will advise all Members of what the ruling is.. This is not, as I understand it, contained in the Assembly's Standing Orders, and I will use Erskine May as the basis for the decision.

Mr McCartney: In another place it is unprecedented for Members who are mentioned in another Member's speech to demand in a debate a right of reply. If that were permitted, the business of the House — and of this Assembly — would be choked up and obstructed. I wish to confirm what Maj McFarland has said that a definitive ruling — *[Interruption]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Mr McCartney is correct. What he has said follows closely my understanding of Erskine May. The matter is causing a great deal of confusion in the House, and I will ensure that it is clarified for all Members.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: With all due respect to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, I have to say that Members were confused about the way you put your ruling.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I cannot hear Dr Paisley.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: Mr Deputy Speaker, what you said was that it would have to be after the debate. It would be so far after the debate that the aggrieved Member would have to write out a statement. That statement would have to be ruled to be in order by the Speaker, and it would have to be read out in the very words that the Member had submitted to the Speaker. There would be no confusion if that were rigidly adhered to.

However, in a debate where there is cut and thrust, the only time that a Member can make a personal statement is if they have been accused by an opponent of something that is outside the law. That is the only time that a Member can intervene and say “No.” In today's debate Mr Wells gave Mrs Bell an opportunity to stand up and explain her situation, but she did not do that. Therefore, she does not have much to worry about,

even though she did colloque earlier with Gerry Adams and others on his Bench.

Mrs E Bell: I take on board what Dr Paisley has said. However, I have to say that I sought advice this morning about what I should do. I did not particularly want to take part in the debate, because I knew what would happen, but I did want to comment on the many inaccurate statements that have been made in relation to the voting procedure. I was told at that stage that if I handed in a statement I would be allowed to make a statement on the facts after the vote had been taken. I have now been told — and I accept the Deputy Speaker's decision — that that cannot be done. I am sorry that my reputation has been sullied by that, and I want this matter cleared up. Can the situation be cleared as soon as possible so that I can speak at the next available opportunity?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mrs Bell, I understand from speaking to my advisers that you may have received conflicting advice. It is for that reason, and for that reason only, that I am going to allow you to make your statement.

Mr C Wilson: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. It may help Mrs Bell if, in making her statement, she could provide the House with the one vital component that has been missing from the debate. Was she voting for the Alliance Party, the Women's Coalition, Mr Denis Watson and the PUP? The Assembly needs to know on whose behalf she was voting.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order.

Mr Paisley Jnr: Mr Deputy Speaker, can you confirm that Mrs Eileen Bell submitted a text before the debate took place and, therefore, before she was attacked? Is that what happened? Will you confirm when you received the text of her statement?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I received the text of Mrs Bell's statement after the debate whilst Members were in the process of voting.

Mr P Robinson: Every decision taken by the Chair becomes a precedent for future occasions. I wish to express

my concern that a Member who had an opportunity to express her views throughout the debate, and declined to do so, should be allowed a special set of circumstances in which to do so without other Members being allowed to reply.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Robinson is quite right. As I understand it, Mrs Bell is not responding to the debate; she is responding to an accusation. I am setting a precedent on this occasion because I understand that Mrs Bell has been given conflicting advice.

Mrs E Bell: Mr Deputy Speaker, you are quite right — I am not going to comment on the debate. Mr Wells, Mr McFarland and others have made a number of allegations about the voting procedure. It has been said that I cast votes on behalf of a group that had made it clear to me that no Member from the Alliance Party was entitled to vote on its behalf. Mr Wells should have said that I acknowledged that at the time. I also acknowledged that I was unable to get in touch with Mr McCartney, and that I did not wish to cast votes for either the NIUP or Mr McCartney. When I subsequently got in touch with Mr McCartney, he confirmed that he did not want his vote to go either way.

It was also said that another group was not properly consulted and subsequently issued a press release to denounce my amendment. I convened a meeting of the Alliance Party, the PUP and the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition. The UUAP was represented by its Leader. I agreed the substance of my amendments with other parties at that meeting. Therefore, that was the amendment.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. A vital part of the issue is the fact that Mrs Bell did not turn up to a meeting of the Commission at which the matter could have been put right. She has given no explanation for that at all. Why did she arrange a meeting and then boycott it?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I cannot allow any cross-examination. That is not a point of order.

Adjourned at 12.57 pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Monday 23 April 2001

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

ROYAL ASSENT

Mr Speaker: I wish to inform Members that Royal Assent has been signified to the Street Trading Act (Northern Ireland) 2001 and the Electronic Communications Act (Northern Ireland) 2001. These Acts became law on 5 April 2001.

FOOT-AND-MOUTH DISEASE

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development that she wishes to make a statement on the current position in relation to foot-and-mouth disease.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers): The position in relation to foot-and-mouth disease has changed greatly since I last made a statement to the Assembly, and I would like to bring Members up to date on it and on my response to it.

Members will recall that I reported that we had received regionalised status for Northern Ireland. With some difficulty, we mounted a substantial exercise to seal off the Newry and Mourne District Council area against exports of relevant animals and products, and we seemed to be on course for full regionalisation on 19 April. Much to my dismay, we almost immediately became aware of a possible second outbreak at Ardboe, County Tyrone. There were some puzzling aspects to the symptoms, which made it possible that something other than foot- and-mouth disease was at work. As always, we imposed restrictions and carried out tests. On 12 April 2001 we received the results of the preliminary tests from Pirbright, which indicated that it was not foot-and-mouth disease. Members will recall that there was great public interest, and — as we have always done, and in line with my policy of openness — we announced that result, albeit with the reminder that it was subject to confirmation following other tests.

To my great surprise the results of those further tests, when received on Good Friday night, were positive, thus giving Northern Ireland a second foot-and-mouth disease case. As the Assembly will be aware, that was followed on Saturday 14 April by the discovery of a third case in Cushendall. Since then there have been other suspects, both hot and cold, but the situation on Friday last was that we had only the three confirmed outbreaks I have mentioned and three hot suspects. One was close to the Ardboe outbreak, one was adjacent to the Cushendall outbreak and the other at Ballintoy, County Antrim, was linked to the Cushendall case. The animals concerned have all been slaughtered.

As Members will be aware, the test results for the Ardboe suspect have now been received and have confirmed foot-and-mouth disease at a second farm in the area. This is now Northern Ireland's fourth case. I still await the results relating to the Ballintoy suspect and the suspect case adjacent to the Cushendall outbreak. Late yesterday afternoon I received negative test results on other suspects at Limavady, Martinstown, County Antrim and Armagh.

As far as the confirmed outbreaks are concerned, the usual three and 10-kilometre zones are in place around all of these areas, apart from Meigh where the zones

were lifted at the end of last week. All the in-contact animals are being slaughtered and incinerated, as are some other animals on a precautionary basis.

One encouraging aspect of this situation is that the testing of sheep flocks around the Meigh outbreak has indicated no evidence of residual infection in the remaining sheep. There is evidence that the present situation is a consequence of the virus circulating in sheep where the symptoms are not apparent. Consequently, I placed a complete ban on the movement of all susceptible livestock to allow us to carry out the necessary tracing of animals and to prevent further disease spread. I have now been able to relax that ban a little to allow movement direct to slaughter, and I hope to be able to ease it further very soon so as to allow some welfare-related movements.

I fully appreciate the impact that these restrictions are having on farmers, but I implore them to ensure that no unauthorised movements take place, however inconvenient or even painful that may be. Such movements have been responsible for introducing foot-and-mouth disease to Northern Ireland in the first place and have been instrumental in allowing its spread since then. The unauthorised movement of susceptible livestock is a criminal act which endangers the whole future of our industry, and it must stop. Sheep represent a dangerous threat, and it is essential that no movements of sheep occur in order to eradicate foot-and-mouth disease.

My priority now is to find out the extent of the unauthorised movements that have already occurred. To that end I have made several well-publicised appeals for information and have written to every sheep farmer with a personal plea for information relating to purchases of sheep before the Meigh outbreak.

To deal with this situation I have established a contingency plan for my Department to ensure that it can cope should there be widespread further outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease. We have acquired additional veterinary manpower by contracting private veterinary practitioners to carry out work for the Department.

Agri-food representatives have been fully briefed on the situation. The inter-departmental group of officials has identified additional Northern Ireland public sector manpower which can be mobilised if the need arises.

I have continued to have essential support from the RUC and the Army, and, as a result, the Army has been assisting with the disposal operation under Department of Agriculture direction. The police continue to assist with the checking of movements of animals, road closures, and so on. Representatives from those organisations are now based in Dundonald House.

I have extended serological testing to all sheep within the 10-kilometre zones around the outbreaks in order to determine the extent of the virus in those areas. I will be widening that exercise in due course.

Following what appeared to be a complete closure of the border to exports of all Northern Ireland produce on 14 April, my representations to the Dublin Department led to the resumption of permitted exports, although there were problems over the Easter holiday, and I subsequently discussed these with Joe Walsh last week. Against the background of evidence that lax observation of fortress farming principles by some has been partly to blame for these outbreaks, I have been trying to drive home the message that responsibility for disease control rests primarily with farmers. The Ulster Farmers' Union (UFU) and the Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers' Association (NIAPA) have been helpful in getting the message across. In fact, I have already initiated a four-week publicity campaign to emphasise that very point. We have been providing technical and moral support to farmers and rural communities by means of a helpline, counselling telephone numbers and local liaison channels.

I would like to say something about my Department's slaughter policy, because there has been some public confusion about this. While no two cases are the same, the normal sequence of events is that all infected animals are slaughtered and incinerated on the farm. Animals on any outfarms of the infected premises are also slaughtered and incinerated on site. Next, pigs in the surrounding three-kilometre zone are slaughtered, followed by sheep in the surrounding three-kilometre zone and cattle in the surrounding one-kilometre zone, working inwards from the outer limits of the zone. Subsequent to this, any animals that are suspected of being at risk are also slaughtered. That means that when new outbreaks occur, the focus may shift from low-risk slaughter in one area to high-risk slaughter in another.

As far as disposal is concerned, infected animals must be incinerated on site, but other carcasses may be incinerated, buried or rendered, depending on the circumstances. There has been much discussion about vaccination, and some seem to think that it represents a quick and easy cure for the disease in individual animals — it is not. Current veterinary advice is that the immediate slaughter of animals around the location of an outbreak provides the best protection against spread of the disease. By contrast, vaccination takes several days to take effect, and it is a less desirable option. While it can, in certain circumstances, be a valuable weapon against foot-and-mouth disease, it has serious drawbacks. We must be prepared for further outbreaks of the disease in Northern Ireland, and the number will dictate the scale of the resource problems we will face when dealing with them. If there is a significant number of widely scattered outbreaks, the problems will be greater than if they were geographically grouped.

I have already outlined how I propose to deal with the manpower implications of any such spread, but as far as physical resources are concerned, there may be pressure on slaughtering capacity. I am in dialogue with the meat

plants, which have offered to help establish options for a solution. There will be pressure on disposal capacity, and my officials are working with the Department of the Environment and the Department for Regional Development to identify a possible site or sites for mass burial, should they be needed. The Executive Committee has declared its support, and I have been assured that any resources needed to deal with the problem will be made available. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Social Security Agency have been asked to examine any additional counselling and cash needs that they could help to meet.

In conclusion, the situation remains serious, and the farming community needs to take responsibility for its salvation. All my efforts and those of the Executive will come to naught unless all farmers take every step possible to protect themselves and their fellow farmers from this disease. Dealing with the disease will be a joint effort. As I have said, I will be carrying out serological testing, and I am acting to trace all relevant sheep movements. For their part, farmers must ensure that the virus is locked up by observing the movement restrictions that I have had to put in place. I again appeal to them to inform my Department, any public representative, the UFU or NIAPA of details of any irregular movements of livestock which they know about.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development (Rev Dr Ian Paisley): I thank the Minister for her statement today. I want to ask her some questions about compensation.

10.45 am

What amount of money is set aside for the future? Where will the resources come from to pay compensation, and will the level of compensation remain stable throughout this crisis? Is the Minister satisfied that payments made to farmers in Meigh in respect of the foot-and-mouth disease outbreak there have been based on genuine claims? What checks and balances, if any, are in place to guard against claims that could be made by those unscrupulous persons who have done real damage to the farming industry? Is the Minister aware of the serious difficulties on farms with welfare and putting cattle out on to grass, and does she realise that it is not enough —

Mr Speaker: Order. One must restrict questions to a reasonable number. If Members ask a series of questions, the Minister is under no obligation to reply to them all. It would be better if some opportunity to ask questions were left to other Members as well.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: I accept that, but these questions are linked, and it is impossible to ask one without following up with another. This is a very serious crisis in the farming industry, and time must be allowed to let the Minister answer these questions.

Mr Speaker: Order. There is adequate time, but it must be available to all Members, not just to some.

Ms Rodgers: Mr Speaker, I am afraid I did not get all the questions, because they were asked in quite rapid succession, but I will deal with those that I did get.

To date, £1.3 million has been paid out. That amount relates to the Meigh outbreak and the cull in south Armagh. The money will come from the Northern Ireland block. It is impossible for me to say how much will be required. Clearly, that is a matter for the Department of Finance and Personnel. The Department is abreast of the situation and will be taking account of the fact that more money will be required.

I missed some of the other questions. There was one about something genuine in Meigh, but I did not quite get the last bit of the sentence, so I cannot deal with it.

I am very much aware of the difficulties being encountered by farmers because they cannot get their animals out to grass. I am extremely anxious about that and am dealing with it urgently. In fact, my officials have been working on it over the weekend.

I hope to be in a position to allow movement across roads on to grassland by April 30, which is this day week. I want to be sure that when that happens, it will be under strict veterinary supervision and that there will be no possibility of abuse, of cattle coming in contact with land which has had sheep grazing on it in the last 14 days and of spreading the disease. For that reason my officials are working to put in place the necessary measures which will ensure that when it does happen, it happens in a restricted and very controlled manner. However, I am very much aware of the pain and difficulties being experienced because of this, and I ask those farmers affected to bear with me. If at all possible, I will allow that movement earlier — perhaps on Wednesday or Thursday of this week — but at the very latest by April 30.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development (Mr Savage): I too welcome the statement from the Minister this morning and thank her and her staff for all the work they have been doing over the weekend. I have to come back to the matter of the movement of cattle across roads.

Stock has now been housed for seven months. Farmers have to keep to a tight schedule; they have to plan, and there are now only 25 weeks before livestock are brought back in again. I am speaking of three farms in particular. The Minister knows them very well, and they have to get their cattle out. I know she is aiming for 30 April, but I hope that the problem can be solved in two or three days' time. I also welcome the involvement of local vets, because they have sound local knowledge. I urge the Minister to try as quickly as possible —

Mr Speaker: Order. I must ask the Member to put his question to the Minister. This is an opportunity for questions not speeches.

Mr Savage: The welfare of cows that cannot cross a road and horses that cannot be taken to vets' surgeries is the problem that I am asking the Minister to take seriously here.

Ms Rodgers: I thank Mr Savage for his initial remarks about myself and my staff, who have now been working overtime for a number of weeks. I appreciate the Member's point about the need for planning. Some farmers have already run out of fodder, and if we knew how long this situation was going to last, farmers who have food would help others who have none. My officials worked over the weekend because of the urgency. At the very latest I hope that movement can be resumed by 30 April, and earlier if at all possible.

I understand the problems that people are encountering with horses. However, the whole community is encountering problems — and that is not to downgrade the problems of the farmers. For instance, there are problems in the tourism industry. My priority is to stop the spread of foot-and-mouth disease. This requires sacrifices, and I ask everyone to recognise that and bear with me. I am doing my best to get the balance right between risking a further spread of the disease and allowing for the alleviation of a serious welfare problem.

Mr Byrne: I too would like to pay tribute to the Minister and her officials for the way in which they are managing this situation. Can the Minister tell the House if there are any investigations into the illegal movement of animals? Most decent farmers are disgusted that the spread of foot-and-mouth disease has resulted from illegal movement of animals.

Ms Rodgers: I thank Mr Byrne for his remarks and for his question. Several investigations are ongoing, as are follow-up investigations and interceptions. Nineteen cases of illegal importation are being followed up and investigated, most of them by the RUC, but in three cases by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's own investigation unit. The vast majority of farmers are becoming increasingly angry with the very small minority who are putting them all at risk.

Mr McHugh: A Cheann Comhairle, I have stressed the need for an extension of the IACS (Integrated Administration and Control System) by going to Europe and asking for it, as has been done in the South. At the moment people who have leasing arrangements to make do not know if they can take land. People cannot get onto land to fill out forms. The Minister knows the difficulties that farmers will face if we find ourselves using the penalty system. This must be done immediately.

Members have already mentioned livestock movement, and 30 April seems a long way off if you have already

run out of feed for cattle. Which is the greater evil — farmers bringing feed from 20 different sources or farmers bringing cattle across a road to be beside their farms?

Farmers will be asking those questions — they are critical. They are ringing the stress line now in a panic over the movement of animals. That has to be dealt with.

Ms Rodgers: The IACS situation, of which I am very much aware, has been raised by the unions and many farmers. The cut-off date for IACS remains 15 May. However, negotiations with the Commission are afoot for a 30-day window to allow changes without penalty. Normally there is a 15-day window for changes with penalty. Given the present circumstances, we are now negotiating for a 30-day window to allow for changes without penalty after 15 May.

Mr McHugh also referred to the problem of feeding, which has been raised already. There are many evils in this situation, but the greatest evil would be the further spread of the disease throughout Northern Ireland. That is what I am trying to avoid. I am very much aware of the problem, and, as I have already said, I am trying to allow alleviation earlier than this day week if possible. I hope that it will be, but I cannot guarantee it — I am doing my best.

Mr Ford: I too thank the Minister for the efforts that she and her staff have put into controlling foot-and-mouth disease over the holiday period. However, can she clear up a degree of confusion over the slaughter policy? I am glad she explained the way in which slaughter is carried out when there is an actual case. What is her Department's slaughter policy where there is a suspected case? I know of at least one example where people were told that animals were to be slaughtered on their farms before being told they were not to be because of a suspected, as opposed to a confirmed, case on an adjacent farm.

Does the Minister believe that there is a case for further checks on roads, especially on the border with the Republic? Many people have commented on an anomaly in the full check applied when goods travel south, including bizarre examples of tins of food and unopened packets being confiscated by the guards. Given that there is a degree of concern over where foot-and-mouth disease may exist on this island, is there not a greater case for also checking northbound vehicles?

Ms Rodgers: The slaughter policy in the instance of a suspected case is clear. Each suspect is looked at in view of the clinical evidence and the circumstances surrounding the case. In some cases the veterinary advice is that while animals may be showing clinical signs, they may not necessarily be signs of foot-and-mouth disease. Other circumstances, as happened in the Donnelly case, place a big question mark over whether an animal has foot-and-mouth disease. In such a situation, the veterinary advice is to place the farm under restriction until test results have been obtained. That is

what we have done in all cases, and in some cases we have moved into slaughter immediately. We did that near the Donnelly farm in the Ardboe area where we slaughtered on a farm about three kilometres away because the animals were showing clinical signs. Moreover, it was in the vicinity of the outbreak already in Ardboe. Because of that it was a highly suspect case, so we slaughtered. As it turned out the test result, five or six days later, was negative. However, some you win and some you lose. There was a suspect case near Armagh city, and the vets, on the night that they did the clinical examination, advised me that we should move to slaughter the next morning. I agreed. When they examined the animals the next morning they discovered that they were responding to antibiotics, which indicated that it might not be foot-and-mouth disease, so we halted the slaughter. The Armagh case has now proved negative.

We look at all the circumstances. We look at the clinical assessment made by the vet, and we make a decision. The situation is such that sometimes we will get it right, and sometimes we will get it wrong. We will continue to err on the side of caution as we have done previously.

11.00 am

On the question of border checks, the Member will be aware that there are export controls on products exported from Northern Ireland — which is no longer foot-and-mouth-free — to the Republic. Therefore the strict controls are to ensure that no prohibited products get into the Republic. We do not allow meat products to be exported from here to the Republic. That is why people are having their cars stopped and are being asked whether they have food with them. It is because the Republic has been declared to be disease-free while we are not.

With regard to our own checks, we are targeting our resources where we feel they will be most effective. That is at the farmgate and in raising the awareness of people — particularly the farmers — to what needs to be done. We also must make the public aware of areas that they must avoid going to — for example, the advertisements that we have put in the papers today tell people what they need to do if they are organising public events and other such things. The recent outbreaks had nothing to do with border controls, rather they were to do with the unauthorised movement of animals.

Mr Douglas: I am sure the Minister will agree that over the last few weeks I have been fairly supportive of her and of the Department. I will continue to be supportive, because, as she said, we are all in this together. However, it seems that it is only now that we have good precautions in place at the ports and are taking blood samples from wider areas throughout the country. My criticism is that it has taken too long to get to this stage. The entire farming community has been held to ransom by a few, and we have many difficult problems with welfare in the

country at present. Will the Minister promise to put in place whatever is necessary to ensure that in future we will be able to trace stock coming from across the water and from local areas much more quickly?

I am not so concerned about stock movement at this time but rather about the people who brought stock in over the previous months. It has taken weeks and weeks to get on top of this, and we need some structure in place to allow us to tie this up in a matter of days. We have it for cattle, and we need something similar for sheep. I hope that the Minister will promise to do her best to ensure something is done about this.

Ms Rodgers: I thank Mr Douglas for his remarks and his support over the previous weeks and months. The precautions that we put in place at the ports were not put there just recently. Mr Douglas will be aware that the first step I took when foot-and-mouth disease was discovered in Great Britain was to close down the ports. That was an extremely important step at the time. We have had precautions in place at the ports. We have people handing out leaflets, and passengers are informed about what needs to be done. We have arranged for mats to be put on the boats, which people cross when picking up their vehicles or when boarding. I understand that the Chairperson of the Agriculture Committee visited a port about a week ago and expressed himself satisfied with the precautions there.

We are now taking blood samples from sheep, because our vets have said that the recent outbreak has shown that the infection is present in sheep, which we were not aware of. It is very difficult to diagnose the disease in sheep. They can have the disease and recover from it without its being seen. However, they can continue to infect others. As I have stated, we carried out blood sampling in the south Armagh area, and that has been satisfactorily completed.

The other blood sampling is currently the most important part of my strategy in trying to get ahead of the disease. While the investigations that are being carried out and the information that is being sought are, in a sense, trying to catch up with where the infection may have gone, the blood sampling is a clear example of trying to get ahead of the disease before it gets any further and to establish where it is and where we can deal with it.

I take the point that the tracing of animals, particularly sheep, has now been identified as a serious issue. Although sheep flocks in Northern Ireland were tagged, sheep were not tagged at all in Great Britain or in the Irish Republic. We just tagged the flocks, not the individual sheep. The vision sub-group that I have asked to look at all the lessons to be learnt from this recent outbreak is urgently examining all the issues, including the tracing of animals, and will be reporting to me and making recommendations.

Mr Speaker: Contributions — whether they are questions or contributions to debate — ought to be made

through the Chair. What that means, if Members are unclear about it, is that they should be couched in the third person, not in the second person. There are very good reasons for that, as I am sure Members are aware. Some Members are very attentive to this, but others have become a little loose in their application.

Mr B Hutchinson: On 2 April, the First Minister assured us that there would be cross-border co-operation on the illegal movement of animals. Can the Minister tell us whether any resources have been committed to stopping the illegal movement of animals on both sides of the border and across it?

Ms Rodgers: The attempt to stop the illegal movement of animals is being dealt with mainly by the RUC, which is assisting us through both static and mobile patrols. Over the weekend there have been six interceptions of illegal animal movements by the RUC, and prosecutions are being followed up.

Rev Dr William McCrea: The Minister said in a previous answer that she believed that all the missing sheep that were roaming Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic had been identified. Does the Minister still believe that? Where did the flock that brought the infection to mid-Ulster, specifically to Ardboe, come from?

The Minister will also be aware that, because of a second confirmed outbreak in mid-Ulster, the area of Ardboe is gripped with fear. That fear is heightened by reports that animals have been buried in an area that is not on the affected farm. Surely the only way that the Minister and the Department of Agriculture can allay those fears, or bury the rumours, is to excavate that clearly identified site in the interests of the particular farmer and of the surrounding community.

Ms Rodgers: I did say on a previous occasion that all the sheep that had come in to Northern Ireland since 1 February had been identified. That is the situation. We traced all those sheep and found that, as Members are aware, one consignment did not go to Lurgan Chilling as it was supposed to. That consignment ended up in Meigh and subsequently in the Republic. All those sheep have been accounted for and have been monitored.

We have now traced back to 11 to 19 January. We are going back beyond 1 February, which we believed was the first date when infection could be possible. To be sure, we are going further back to 1 January. Two thousand two hundred sheep were brought into Northern Ireland legally between 11 January and 19 January but were illegally traded. We are investigating that matter at the moment, and we will go back to 1 January eventually.

We have not identified the source of the infection in Ardboe, but we are investigating that urgently. It is not easy to identify the source of the infection. However, the sooner we find it the better. The second outbreak was on a farm adjacent to the Donnelly farm. It was disappointing

but hardly unexpected given its proximity to the farm with the outbreak. Several allegations have been made; I have read them in the paper, and allegations have been made to my Department and to my officials. I assure Mr McCrea that all of the allegations are being investigated. Some of them have been found to be spurious, but we are following up and are thoroughly investigating every allegation that is made.

Mr Armstrong: I thank the Minister for her statement. It is obvious that farmers appreciate having their own Minister of Agriculture, and we can see the benefits of that during this crisis.

Livestock farmers have reached the time of the year when livestock should be put out to grass. That cannot happen due to the ban on stock movement, and it creates problems for the breeders and finishers of cattle. We do not want to put others at risk. Can the Minister advise farmers how long they might have to keep their stock confined? Uncertainty causes concern. We know what the welfare problem is now: the problem of moving stock across roads — an everyday occurrence in the dairy cow situation — and the movement of store cattle to permanent grazing for the next three or four months. We do not want to see farmers moving stock unnecessarily and without control.

Beef farmers supply stock to abattoirs. However, abattoirs have been out of stock for six weeks. Could the Minister relax the rules in areas where there are no sheep so that beef farmers can avail of store cattle to keep the food chain going? Breeders' farms are overstocked, and finishing farmers have no stock.

Ms Rodgers: From today, I have allowed the movement of animals to abattoirs for slaughter. I have responded to Mr Savage and to other questioners about cattle moving to grass and across roads. I hope to be able to make an announcement next Monday at the very latest. I hope that it will be sooner, if I can get everything into place.

My advisors in the local veterinary offices are working with farmers on the problems of animal feed. Farmers are being advised individually as to where they can access animal feed.

Mr Bradley: I welcome the Minister's statement. I look forward to the day when the Minister will not be compelled to attend crisis meetings of the Assembly. Can the Minister advise the Assembly on the level of harmony that exists between Government valuers and the owners of culled livestock? Has any conflict arisen during the valuation process?

Ms Rodgers: There have been problems inasmuch as farmers have expressed, as Mr Bradley will be aware, not so much dissatisfaction but confusion. They have sought clarification on what the compensation method would be.

11.15 am

In each of those instances I have been able to assure those concerned that my Department's policy is that animals will be valued at what is considered to be full market value. That is precisely what happens in Great Britain and in the Irish Republic. Compensation will be paid. If a farmer has a concern about that, he has the option of asking for an independent valuation from one of three named valuers. In very few cases in recent times, if any — perhaps one or two — farmers have taken that option. That leads me to believe that there is no dissatisfaction with the present situation.

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for keeping Members up to date with the foot-and-mouth crisis.

There have been reports that the amount of compensation being paid to farmers will be reduced. Can the Minister reassure farmers in the Ardboe and Antrim areas that they will not suffer any further loss, that they will be paid at a similar rate to those who have already been compensated, and that as the crisis continues, there will be no such reduction?

Will the Minister also take into account the situation that farmers are in? Normally, if a farmer sells animals at a mart, he or she can buy stock again and go back into farming. However, in this situation, farmers are receiving compensation for stock but cannot go back to farming and are not clear when they will be able to do so. Account needs to be taken of the fact that farmers will not be able to get an income from that.

Does the Minister consider the movement of animals across roads to be an illegal act? Can she clarify how one of our Committee members, Mr Gardiner Kane, was able to say at the Committee meeting this week that he had had to move his own cattle across the road and that the Minister would simply have to abide by that? Do some people have a special licence to move animals across the road while, for everyone else, such movement is restricted?

Ms Rodgers: There is no question of the compensation policy being changed. It remains the same and will remain the same — that is, compensation at the full market value of the animal, as assessed by the valuer, with recourse to independent valuation if the farmer is not happy with the initial valuation.

I agree that the fact that farmers cannot immediately go back to farming is a huge disadvantage. Farmers will be in a difficult position, but it is an issue of consequential, rather than direct, compensation. It is not an issue for me to deal with, as I try to cope with the problems of eradicating this disease. I fully sympathise with the farmers in that position and the advisors on the rural stress hotline and in the Department — and I understand that the Department for Social Development is working

at this also and has announced that it is setting up networks to help people in difficult situations. It is working to try to alleviate the very difficult situation that these people, who now have no income, are in.

I repeat that unauthorised movement of animals is illegal. This weekend there were six interceptions by the police, and prosecutions will follow.

Mr Wells: The Minister has concentrated entirely this morning on the effects of foot-and-mouth disease on the farming community. However, she will be aware that many businesses throughout the Province have suffered greatly as a result of this crisis. Has any further progress been made on the issue of payment for consequential loss? Has any form of assistance been given to, for instance, hoteliers, riding schools and feed companies, which are incurring enormous losses as a result of this crisis? Has she had any discussions with her counterparts in the rest of the United Kingdom? Has there been any progress on this important issue?

Ms Rodgers: I thank Mr Wells for his question. He will understand that my responsibility as Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development is solely to the farming community. However, I am aware that other sectors are suffering as a result of the present situation. I assure Mr Wells that the Executive have discussed the matter on at least two occasions.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Durkan, is looking at how some measure of relief might be given to people who are suffering consequential loss. It is a very difficult area, because the payment of direct consequential compensation could be infinite. The Department of Finance and Personnel is looking at issues such as the deferment of rates. I hope that we will be bringing a paper on the matter to the next meeting of the Executive. I am aware of the problem, and the Executive are looking at it.

I had raised the issue at a meeting with the Prime Minister some time back when consequential loss was raised. I have made it very clear that in the area of consequential compensation — if it is agreed by the Treasury — Northern Ireland people should not be treated any less generously than those across the water.

Mr McClarty: I thank the Minister for her statement. I want to take up the point made by Mr Wells. Since the last plenary session of the Assembly, a very responsible decision has been taken by the organisers of the North West 200 to cancel this year's race on the recommendation of the Executive. As the event attracts over 100,000 people to the Causeway coast area, its cancellation will have a profound detrimental economic effect on those involved in the tourism and hospitality industries. Do the Minister and her colleagues have any plans to alleviate the hardship caused to those businesses by some form of business rates relief, as is the case in other parts of the United Kingdom?

Ms Rodgers: I thank Mr McClarty for his comments. I will take this opportunity to agree with him about the responsible attitude shown by the North West 200 organisers. I recognise that it was a particularly difficult time for them, and it was a huge sacrifice. The loss is in the region of £5.5 million to the local area. I am totally appreciative, as is the farming community, of the responsible attitude that they have displayed in the situation.

Consequential compensation is being looked at, and the Executive, on advice from the Department of Finance and Personnel, are looking at all possible ways to help people who have suffered loss as a result of the present foot-and-mouth disease situation.

Mr McMenamin: I compliment the Minister and her officials on their sterling work during this major crisis. This morning she has talked about compensation, but farmers have expressed concerns regarding the compensation being offered for animals about to be culled. Can the Minister indicate whether those concerns have been addressed and have the fears been allayed?

Ms Rodgers: I thank Mr McMenamin for his remarks. Concerns have been raised at various times by groups of farmers in different areas. My officials have met with farmers on each occasion and have explained and clarified the situation. As far as I understand, concerns have been allayed and farmers have been assured that compensation will remain at full market value.

Mr M Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. What effect are the emissions from culling pyres having on the environment? Given the forthcoming elections, has the Electoral Office been in touch with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to give directions on how members of the farming community should register their votes in order to protect themselves and their fellow farmers from spreading the disease? Go raibh maith agat.

Ms Rodgers: I thank Mr Murphy for his question. The first part of the question concerned emissions from culling — I assume that Mr Murphy was talking about the emissions from the burning of animals. As the Member will be aware, this issue has now been raised, particularly across the water. I will be in consultation with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Department of the Environment about the issues involved. I will be guided by those Departments in any recommendations that they may wish to make, given that, so far, we have burnt animals on site. We are working as an Executive and working in a cross-departmental manner; these are not issues for my Department but for the Department of the Environment and the Department of Health. I will be taking their advice on those issues.

In relation to voting, I have had so many other things to think about that voting has been the last thing on my mind. Perhaps I should not be saying that, but that is the

reality. Clearly it is, and will be, a serious issue. I have had no contact with the Electoral Office on this matter.

Mr Kane: Is the Minister aware that the majority of decent farmers in Northern Ireland are resentful of the use of the word “rogue” when referring to any of their number? Can the Minister confirm that the rogues are those individuals who, in this instance, used an opportunity to distribute infected sheep brought into the Province under authorisation from her Department? Can she therefore confirm that the roguish activity conducted by these individuals, and its disastrous consequences, is an indictment of the Department — an example of negligence on its part by failing to ensure that sheep imported for slaughter were in fact slaughtered?

Ms Rodgers: I thank Mr Kane for his comments. The vast majority of farmers in Northern Ireland are ordinary, decent people eking out a living in what is a very difficult way of life. Most people get Saturdays or Sundays off — unless you happen to be the Minister of Agriculture at the moment — but farmers do not get Saturdays or Sundays off. It is a 24 hours a day, 7 days a week job. It is not just their livelihood, but it is part of their whole way of life. They are going through a very difficult experience. The vast majority of them are people of integrity who work very hard. Yes, there are rogues, but there are rogues in every walk of life. I am sure that there are even rogues in politics.

Farmers are as keen to rid themselves of the rogues as the rest of us are, because the rogues are bringing the whole farming community into disrepute. That is extremely serious at the moment for the very many decent farmers, and I regret that it is happening. The last thing that I want to see is a few farmers — a few bad apples, as happens in every case — giving the whole barrel a rotten name. The fact that I have referred to a few rogue farmers is not in any way an indictment of the whole farming community, and I would be appalled if anyone would even consider that.

I take exception to the Member's remarks in relation to the movement of animals and the fact that the whole thing is the responsibility of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. Live imports into Northern Ireland are certified at the ports, and, under EU regulations, spot checks are carried out on their destination. The EU is a free market, and, therefore, it is not possible to do 100% checking. That would be against EU rules.

11.30 am

The reality is that some people broke the law; they abused the situation, and instead of bringing the legally imported animals to their legal destination in Northern Ireland, they took them to other places. We have been successful in tracing those animals and dealing with the issue. I absolutely refute the idea that is the fault of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development that those animals ended up where they should not have

been. It is the fault of those who acted illegally for whatever reason, be it small profit or large profit.

Mr Beggs: I thank the Minister and her Department for their efforts in trying to control this disease and bring it to an end. I should declare an interest in the subject, as someone who assists on my parental farm on a part-time basis.

Is the Minister satisfied with the current level of fines imposed on the tiny minority of rogue dealers who have made illegal, unauthorised animal movements in Northern Ireland and have put our entire economy at risk? The Public Accounts Committee recently examined evidence that showed that there was a low level of fines for fraudulent agricultural transactions. Has the Minister any proposals to increase the level and severity of the fines? Has her Department been in contact with the courts in order to maximise the fines that are currently available?

Is the Minister aware of any investigation into illegal animal movements into my constituency of East Antrim, bearing in mind the outbreaks that have occurred in the Glens area?

Ms Rogers: I can assure Mr Beggs that the question of fines is under review. The Member will be aware that in all situations, much depends on the attitude taken by the courts. There might be a very high maximum fine, but it is up to the court to decide what the actual fine will be. I suspect that at this moment, the courts might take a very severe view of anyone who has been guilty of breaking the regulations or acting illegally.

Over the weekend the RUC intercepted illegal movements in six cases, and prosecutions will follow. I cannot say exactly where each of those took place or whether they took place in the Member's constituency.

Mr McGrady: We all recognise the enormity of the situation. This Assembly and the community also recognise the total commitment of the Minister and her officials to resolving this problem, and it is our job to assist them.

I draw the Minister's attention to the problems in rural mountain areas such as south Down, south Armagh and others, where the grazing of livestock always takes place across a lane or road from where they have been housed for the winter. That is a very important issue, and one which the Minister has already touched upon, but I would like her assurance of total security within this framework.

Additionally, there is the question of the horse-breeding fraternity. This is the time of year when mares must be moved if there is to be an end product at the appropriate time. The mares are now totally restricted and cannot be moved to stud. Can the Minister look at that as a matter of urgency?

There is also the question of horse racing. We know that both Downpatrick and Down Royal racecourses have heeded the advice of the Department. The meetings that

have been postponed or cancelled are the total lifeblood of the end product of horse breeding in this country. Can the Minister give help or advice to the horse breeders?

Finally, regarding this statement, I was deeply concerned when the Minister said that any compensation funding would come out of the Northern Ireland block. I find this totally unacceptable when the Exchequer at Westminster has a multi-billion pound surplus. No sector in the Northern Ireland block should be put in this situation in order to pay such compensation. We should get extra funding from the central Exchequer.

Ms Rodgers: I thank Mr McGrady for his —

Mr Speaker: Order. Members should be aware that if I hear remarks made from a sedentary position, and I refer to them, they will be put on the record. If they are on the record and are critical of the Chair, then they fall foul of parliamentary procedure. Members need to be aware of that.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I do not normally take points of order during the question time. However, it is coming to a close soon, and I will take the Member's point of order at that time.

Ms Rodgers: I thank Mr McGrady for his initial remarks. With regard to his comments about the winter house stock going out to grass, if I were in any doubt about the strength of feeling on the severity of this situation, the fact that so many Members have reiterated that point today clearly indicates just how serious the situation is. I am urgently trying to address it — I hope during this week but at the very latest next Monday.

In relation to the horse-breeding fraternity, I am also aware of its difficulties, particularly in getting horses moved to stud. I am addressing that issue at the same time and will be guided by the vets. I hope to be able to make an announcement on this very soon. With regard to horse racing, I will be guided by the veterinary advice on this.

Regarding compensation from the Northern Ireland block, I agree with Mr McGrady. It is my earnest wish that all compensation could and should come from the Treasury, and I will be making that case very strongly — in fact, I have already made it. I still hope that Her Majesty's Treasury may top up the compensation money.

Mr J Wilson: I congratulate the Minister on the work that she and her Department are doing. I want to draw her attention to that part of her statement that deals with vaccination. She says that vaccination, in contrast, takes several days to take effect and is a less desirable option. It can be a valuable weapon, the Minister says, in certain circumstances but does have serious drawbacks. Is the Minister in a position to elaborate a little on what those circumstances are and also on what the drawbacks are?

Ms Rodgers: Vaccination, as I understand it, takes a number of days to kick in and would not be an effective way of dealing with the disease at present. The longer you wait, the more chance there is of the disease spreading. The most effective way of dealing with the disease is to cull immediately — thereby killing it off. The serious drawback of vaccination is that it would blight our export trade. In Northern Ireland we depend on our export trade — for example, 80% of our milk product is exported, with 30% of that going to the Republic. We are very dependent on exports, and vaccination would have serious implications for the economy.

It would also mean that we would not be considered disease-free and would be considered as having an endemic problem of foot-and-mouth disease. Those are serious drawbacks, from the point of view of our whole industry.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. At the beginning of the debate you called me to order for the way in which I was putting my questions. Why was that ruling not applied to everyone? I have been listening carefully. For instance, Mr McGrady asked three completely distinct questions. I asked only one question on compensation before moving on to welfare, but I was called to order. Why did that happen? Is there one rule for one Member and another rule for another?

Mr Speaker: The answer is simple. I was counting the number of questions that you asked, and, when it came to six or seven, I intervened. A Member might say that he had asked one question with six or seven parts or legs to it; that would be a matter for judgement. I counted some six or seven questions before I intervened. The Member then moved on to the question on welfare. Mr McGrady asked three questions — or perhaps four — but not six or seven.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: We will see the six questions in Hansard tomorrow.

Mr Speaker: I did not quite catch what the Member said. Not all the Member's questions were answered. As I advise the House generally, the greater the number of questions asked of a Minister by one Member, the less likely it is that every question will be answered. It is much more likely that questions will be answered in full if fewer questions are asked. One cannot force Ministers to answer questions, as the Member knows from the House of Commons. One must simply put the questions.

Rev Dr William McCrea: An hour was set aside for questions this morning, and we did not take up all of that hour.

Mr Speaker: The Member is incorrect. Standing Orders require that not more than an hour be taken. There will now be a further statement on foot-and-mouth disease to which, I have no doubt, the Member will wish to attend fully, as will the rest of the House.

AGRICULTURE (FOOT-AND-MOUTH DISEASE)

North/South Ministerial Council Sectoral Meeting

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers): I should like to report to the Assembly on a special meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in its agriculture sectoral format held in Dublin on Friday 6 April 2001. Mr Sam Foster, Minister of the Environment, and I attended the meeting, and the Irish Government were represented by Mr Joe Walsh TD, Minister for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. It was the third meeting of the Council in that sector, and it was exclusively devoted to foot-and-mouth disease and the efforts to combat its spread on the island of Ireland.

The Council received an update on the situation and acknowledged with gratitude the part played by so many people — North and South — in guarding against the spread of the disease by following the respective guidelines and acting responsibly. The Council fully understood the difficulties being experienced by agriculture and other sectors of industry and acknowledged the reasons why both Administrations were keeping restriction measures under continual review. It was hoped that, in the light of the determined manner in which the outbreak was being tackled North and South, the scale of the difficulties would be kept to a minimum and that that approach would bring real benefits to everybody in the long run. Ministers reiterated their personal determination, and that of their respective Administrations, to ensure that everything possible would be done to alleviate the difficulties.

Acknowledging that both Administrations attached the highest importance to animal health, the Council again underlined the value of enhanced co-operation on the issue. The Council noted that since the foot-and-mouth disease outbreak, collaboration between the two Administrations had intensified, with the primary purpose of containing and eradicating the disease. It emphasised that the events of recent weeks illustrated the importance of an island-wide approach to such issues, and it agreed that sustained co-operation between the two Administrations was essential to reduce the risk of further spread of foot-and-mouth disease.

11.45 am

The Council therefore agreed that both Administrations should continue to: closely monitor the situation in their respective herds and flocks; exchange all relevant information in respect of animal movements; strongly encourage the public — particularly the farming and agri-business community — to continue to follow the advice being given to prevent any spread of the disease;

review the activities that might be resumed and the conditions under which such resumption might be permitted; liaise closely in the prevention of the importation of susceptible animals from Great Britain; maintain co-operation in ensuring that proper disinfection arrangements are applied at all entry points to the island; monitor ongoing developments in respect of cross-border issues; and maintain liaison with the port and other authorities in Britain to ensure that appropriate disinfection procedures are maintained at ports and other exit points from Britain to this island.

The Council decided that officials of the two Agriculture Departments should develop a strategy for the control of animal movements on the island of Ireland, drawing on work done in both jurisdictions. It also decided that in the light of the experience gained from the current foot-and-mouth disease outbreaks, officials should consider the means of prevention, containment and eradication of future epizootic disease outbreaks on the island.

The Council requested that the officials report back to subsequent Council meetings in the agriculture sector. The Council agreed that the next meeting of the agriculture sector would take place in the South in June 2001. Following the meeting a joint communiqué was issued. A copy has been placed in the Assembly Library.

Mr Hussey: Mr Speaker, I hope you will understand the difficulty that one has in responding to the second statement without making reference to the first. I thank the Minister for her statement. She rightly said that the Administrations are ensuring that everything possible is being done to alleviate the present difficulties. The House has heard of roguish actions having been being carried out, but that is an erroneous term. Deliberate illegal actions or actions of — at the very least — economic terrorism are being carried out.

What is being done on a North/South basis to address that issue? The Minister talked about the lax observation by some and the evidence — not reports or perceptions — to that effect. Will the Minister outline the sort of lax observation being talked about and tell the House who the “some” are?

Ms Rodgers: The Governments North and South are continuing to share information about their investigations, and some of the lines that we are following with a view to prosecution are as a result of shared information between the two jurisdictions.

Will Mr Hussey repeat the other part of his question?

Mr Hussey: Mr Speaker, I thank you for your indulgence. I said that it was difficult not to relate the Minister’s two statements. The Minister mentioned lax observation by some and said that there was evidence of it. I asked her to reveal to the House the type of lax observation that there is and who the “some” are that there is evidence against.

Ms Rodgers: I thank Mr Hussey for that clarification.

In my original statement — and I am not sure that I should be responding to it now, but I will indulge the Member — I referred to lax observation of fortress farming by some farmers, and I emphasise the word “some”. The people delivering census forms are arriving at avenues and lanes in the country, but how are they to know whether they are at a farm if there is not a foot-and-mouth notice warning people to keep out? Lots of people live in the country but do not farm. Some people are not observing all of the advice that has been given about fortress farming, and that is what I referred to in my statement.

Mr Bradley: Can the Minister assure the Assembly that no four-footed animals of any kind are being imported from Great Britain or Europe on to the island of Ireland?

Ms Rodgers: Not all four-footed animals are susceptible. Horses are not susceptible, but there is always the danger that they will carry the disease if they have been in touch with susceptible animals. I can speak only for Northern Ireland; I cannot speak for the Republic of Ireland on the four-footed animals that are allowed on to that part of the island of Ireland. However, I assure Mr Bradley that no four-legged susceptible animals are getting into Northern Ireland.

Mr Paisley Jnr: What discussions has the Minister had with the Dublin Government about smuggling? Can she confirm if any of the 19 people who are under investigation by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development are also under investigation in the jurisdiction of the Irish Republic? Have any of those people been paid compensation or sought an amnesty from either Government? Has the matter been raised and discussed by Ministers? Has any compensation been paid from departmental money to those who have sought an amnesty or are under investigation? If so, what advice has she received from the Dublin Government?

Ms Rodgers: The 19 cases that I referred to are being prosecuted by the RUC in Northern Ireland. Three cases are being dealt with by the veterinary investigation unit. I cannot speak for what is happening in the South, because I do not have the information here. However, I assure the Member that any information that we receive is shared with the Republic. I would be very surprised if it is not being followed up, because the Republic is taking a very hard line. It has already changed its legislation, and we are now looking at changing ours.

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has not offered or considered giving amnesty at any stage to people who have acted illegally. The compensation already paid out has been paid in the south Armagh cull area and the Meigh area where there was a precautionary cull of infected animals. No compensation

was paid in at least two cases where the people involved were guilty of illegal activity. That is the policy.

Mr C Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. What animals are considered susceptible, and what animals continue to be imported from Britain? Will the Minister comment on the continued criticism from the Government and media circles in the South on the disparity between the approach to prevention and eradication by the Department in the North and the Department in the South? Will the Minister assure us that her Department operates on the same philosophy as the Southern Department? The priority is to eradicate the disease rather than take the London line which appears to be damage limitation and give the impression that things are OK. The priority is to eradicate the disease as the Southern Department is doing.

Ms Rodgers: No susceptible animals or horses from Britain are allowed into Northern Ireland. The susceptible animals are cows, pigs, sheep and goats. Horses are not susceptible. However, if they are in touch with those animals, they can be a danger, and they can carry the disease.

With regard to eradication of this disease, I am pleased to clarify the confusion raised by some recent remarks. At my meeting with Joe Walsh last week I also clarified the fact that our policy on dealing with suspect cases is based on our commitment to eradicate the disease and to err on the side of caution and cull if there is a doubt in our mind about whether the disease is present.

Our policy is exactly the same as that in the Republic. When we come across a suspect case, the vets make a judgement as to whether it is likely to be foot-and-mouth disease or whether there are other circumstances that point to its not being. If there is less concern about it, we restrict the farm until we get the result. If there is more concern, we err on the side of caution and we cull. That is precisely what happens in the South. I am aware that, for instance, last week there was a suspected case in the South, and they restricted the farm but did not cull. In one case in Armagh we decided to cull, then changed our minds on foot of further evidence. As it happened, we were right, because the result was negative. From the beginning, my priority has been to eradicate the disease.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for her statement and take this opportunity to reiterate the value of the North/South Ministerial Council. At a time when this whole island is under serious threat from a deadly animal disease, joint action is being taken to halt this plague. That can only be welcomed by every right-thinking person. I also point out that that special meeting was called — and rightly so — to show the determination of both Governments to tackle this serious problem.

How quickly will the strategy for the control of animal movements be agreed and in place? Has the Minister

any plans to tighten the regulation on the individual tagging of sheep?

Ms Rodgers: We will certainly look at the tagging of sheep. A subcommittee of the vision group is already working on the lessons to be learnt from the present situation. That issue is being looked at, and recommendations will be made. I will be very surprised if movement is not made in that direction. I also understand that the view of the Republic is to move towards individual sheep tagging.

Mr McCarthy: Will there also be control of animal movements?

Ms Rodgers: I believe that the Member was talking about movements across the border, rather than within Northern Ireland. We will be looking at how we can co-ordinate our efforts and our legislation, initially to minimise the incentive for that type of movement as well as to deal with it.

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

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development (Mr Savage): I thank the Minister for her comments on the North/South meeting. One point was that both Administrations should continue to

“maintain co-operation in ensuring that proper disinfection arrangements are applied at all entry points to the island”.

At the Committee meeting last week it was said that automatic demisters were to be installed. Can the Minister tell me when that will happen?

Ms Rodgers: Automatic sprayers — not demisters — are to be installed, and we have been working on that for some time. I cannot give the Member a definite date, but I imagine that it will be before the end of this week. At the time of my last enquiry, it was a matter of sorting out the contract — the sprayers have to be made to specification to fit the vehicles — but I expect that they will be installed very soon. Automatic sprayers are not an improvement in the controls, but they need very little manpower and will simply allow us to use necessary resources elsewhere.

12.00

Mr Gallagher: In today's statement there is a recognition of the difficulties faced by the Department of Agriculture and other sectors. I want to ask about a sector which has been particularly hard-hit in Fermanagh and South Tyrone. Retail outlets in that area rely on customers from the Republic of Ireland for a large proportion of their business. That is true in towns such as Aughnacloy, Augher, Belcoo and Belleek. The traders in those towns purchase milk and dairy produce from suppliers in the Republic of Ireland. However, when customers from the Republic purchase supplies in those areas — and I am sure this happens in other

constituencies — under present restrictions they are not allowed to take those supplies into the Republic. This has led to a marked drop in trade for these retailers, and it seems that the local authorities are being far too diligent. Will the Minister raise this matter with the Minister in the South, and will she continue to press for more sensible arrangements to be put in place? Of course, such arrangements would be in line with the necessary precautions to prevent any further outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease.

Ms Rodgers: I have been made aware of the issue and have raised it with Joe Walsh, who assures me that this is being dealt with. I am also aware of the fact that Easter eggs were removed from people crossing the border; that was over-diligence. A number of issues arose over the Easter weekend, but Joe Walsh has assured me that they have now been dealt with.

Mr Berry: From the Minister's statement I noticed that the North/South Ministerial Council meeting, which she attended on 6 April, was exclusively devoted to the foot-and-mouth outbreak. Were concerns raised at that meeting about grants, subsidy and inspection staff in Northern Ireland being ordered off a cull site when fraud was being investigated and exposed? Were concerns expressed that it was not a so-called farmer in south Armagh who ordered those staff off the site, but a veterinary officer?

Are the Minister and the people who attended that meeting on 6 April not concerned that there may be members of staff in the Department of Agriculture who are aiding and abetting smuggling in south Armagh?

Ms Rodgers: The matter was not raised at the North/South Ministerial Council meeting for the simple reason that it was not an issue. There is no truth in the allegation, and I have to refute the suggestion that grants and subsidy staff were ordered off the cull site. I have thoroughly investigated the allegations made and am satisfied that the implication that staff were somehow involved in collaboration with illegalities is most certainly not the case.

Mr McHugh: A LeasCheann Comhairle. It is welcome to have these discussions taking place on an all-Ireland basis, particularly with regard to the foot-and-mouth outbreak.

In the Minister's discussions with the Minister in the South, has it been suggested that the controls and traceability systems for livestock and food production should be harmonized on an all-Ireland basis? Given that the disease affects both parts of the island, has an all-Ireland approach to determining, through an inquiry, the cause and impact of the foot-and-mouth outbreak here and in the South been discussed?

Ms Rodgers: An official working group is examining the matter of tracing to which Mr McHugh referred. I

have clearly indicated that we are taking an all-island approach through our use of the North/South Ministerial Council. The Council has already been described by Mr McCarthy as a very useful way of dealing with this outbreak — it has been co-ordinating, where useful, our efforts and exchanging and sharing information. This is helping us, on both sides of the border, to deal with what is an all-Ireland animal health problem. As the Member may be aware, as early as last November the North/South Ministerial Council set in train working groups to look at harmonised animal health strategies on the island of Ireland as a whole. At that stage, of course, there was no indication that we were going to witness this crisis, but we were already recognising that animal ill-health, infections and viruses do not recognise the border.

Mr Kennedy: On the question of North/South co-operation, it is important that Members compare the compensation paid to farmers affected by foot-and-mouth disease in each of the neighbouring jurisdictions. Will the Minister undertake to publish details of the compensation awards made so that Members can monitor those payments and assess if payments made here are comparable to those made in the Irish Republic?

Ms Rodgers: Throughout this unfortunate incident, I have operated on an open and accountable basis. I do not think that anyone would expect a Minister to operate in any other way, but, of course, any necessary details will be put in the public domain, and I expect that they will be thoroughly scrutinised. I simply reiterate that compensation has been, and will continue to be, made at full market value. I cannot say if the market value in the Republic is the same, higher or lower than the market value here. However, we will be paying to farmers the full market value for Northern Ireland animals in Northern Ireland.

Mr Byrne: I welcome the Minister's statement on the North/South co-operation on foot-and-mouth disease. Does she consider that co-operation on the future operation of cattle marts and the movement of animals could be necessary? Has the Minister any view on the opinion that meat plants should conform to the strictest possible monitoring of all animals that are presented for slaughter?

Ms Rodgers: The sub-committee of the vision group which is looking at the implications of, and the lessons to be learnt from, this whole episode will be examining the operation of the marts, as well as every other aspect of the industry. I am certain that the North/South Ministerial Council will hold discussions to try to share our experiences, learn lessons from each other and, if necessary, co-ordinate our activities.

In Northern Ireland our veterinary inspectors inspect everything that arrives in and goes out of the meat plants. That is very carefully monitored. I cannot speak for the Republic of Ireland and how they operate there. Clearly, every section of the industry needs to ensure

that it is operating in an open, transparent and correct way.

Mr Gibson: What arrangements are being made for my constituents in West Tyrone? Directly or indirectly, they have been distressed financially. As the Social Security Agency's personnel cannot visit due to foot-and-mouth disease and our constituency offices are being used as form-filling centres, that distress is compounded. Can the Minister assure us that some arrangements will be made for the immediate payments of much needed distress funds?

Ms Rodgers: I understand that there is a great deal of distress as a result of the present situation, and I sympathise with those concerned. The Member will be aware that the payment of social security is not a matter for my Department but for the Department for Social Development. I understand that arrangements have been made to deal with that problem. Clearly I am not in a position to answer that question, but perhaps Mr Gibson could address it to the Minister for Social Development.

Mr McFarland: I thank the Minister for her report. Did she see a report in the 'Sunday Tribune' at the weekend which states that some 15,000 sheep were imported from Longtown into Northern Ireland in the first seven weeks of the year? It is thought that a number of these have gone south. Indeed, the junior Agriculture Minister, Noel Davern, says that he is expecting a sizeable number of prosecutions. Hundreds of these sheep are unaccounted for.

'Private Eye' magazine has a record for whistle-blowing and being proven correct. Has the Minister seen an article in that publication which states that foot-and-mouth disease was rampant in the national flock in Britain in January? If these articles are correct, we would appear to have a sizeable problem here. What credence does the Minister give to these allegations? When does she expect the missing sheep, in both North and South, to be identified?

Ms Rodgers: I suspect that we are moving into the business of the last session rather than continuing with the business of the present one. This session concerns my statement on the North/South Ministerial Council. I am quite happy to respond to those questions if they come to me during the debate, or even by way of a written reply. I have no difficulty in answering them, but we should stick to the rules.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I have been quite lax with Mr McFarland. If he wants to write to you, I am sure he will receive a response.

Mr Armstrong: Can the Minister assure the House that the importance of animal health is acknowledged by both Administrations? There may be product coming from another country through the Republic into Northern Ireland and placing the Province's farming community in jeopardy.

12.15 pm

We know nothing about unaccounted sheep that could have slipped into the Irish Republic before 1 February. There could be foot-and-mouth disease or some other problem down there, and it could slip into Northern Ireland. I would like an assurance that everything is being done along the border to ensure that nothing is happening that will jeopardise our farming community.

Mr Deputy Speaker: May I again remind Members not to repeat questions that may previously have been answered, partially or totally.

Ms Rodgers: Animal imports from the Republic of Ireland are not the problem. We have four outbreaks in Northern Ireland, so the problem is vice versa. However, we are enforcing the controls, and the hypotheses about unaccounted sheep are endless. We will continue to monitor and scrutinise every situation where there may be a possibility of the disease's either being brought in or spreading further in Northern Ireland, or on the island of Ireland for that matter. Our priority is to contain the disease and then eradicate it.

Mr O'Neill: I welcome the Minister's statement and congratulate her and her officials on all their recent hard work.

I am particularly pleased to see a strategic approach to animal movement and the prevention and containment of disease. Does the Minister agree that this not only underlines the need for cross-border co-operation but points to the need for even more serious steps for agriculture in general?

I am at something of a loss. Before the Speaker left the Chair he indicated that although six minutes were left, he would not take my question then but would allow me to ask it later on the back of this statement. I suppose I could dress it up by asking the Minister if, given her relationship with her counterpart in the South, she has been offered any assistance with the problem of sheep movement. Is she aware of the growing welfare problem in my constituency — malnutrition and death among lambs because of the shortage of green grass grazing? There is virtually no substitute for fresh green grass to provide the quality of nursing milk that lambs need. The Minister has already indicated that sheep movement does present a particular problem. Can we make progress on this as quickly as possible?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I will leave it to the discretion of the Minister whether she answers the Member's question.

Ms Rodgers: I thank Mr O'Neill for his initial comments and his remarks about the need for a more strategic common approach to agriculture on the island of Ireland. Agriculture is the one area with the clearest commonality of interest, North and South and within the North/South Ministerial Council. In conjunction with

Joe Walsh, I have been moving to strengthen the co-ordinated approach on the island to animal health and other related agricultural areas.

I have dealt with the welfare problem on a number of occasions, and I refer Mr O'Neill to my previous responses.

Mr Poots: Bearing in mind that the discussion was solely on foot-and-mouth disease and that the disease was brought in through smuggling, was that issue discussed at the North/South meeting? Were the issues of herds with alarmingly large numbers of twin births in the Irish Republic and of dealers who buy large amounts of calves and cattle into their herds, which subsequently disappear, discussed? Was the Republic of Ireland's Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development aware that farmers who were involved in the sheep smuggling that brought foot-and-mouth disease in had requested an amnesty? Was it also aware that some of those people were subsequently paid large sums of money for hauling livestock to the cull in Newry?

Ms Rodgers: I thank Mr Poots for his question. I am afraid that I did not hear the last part. Regarding the issues specifically raised at the meeting, we agreed to continue to share information on all illegal activities, which involves smuggling. We have been doing that from the beginning, and we will continue to do so. It is perhaps as a result of that that some of the investigations in the South have proved so fruitful.

I could not possibly comment on an amnesty in the Republic of Ireland. I know nothing about it. You would not expect that to be discussed at our meeting, because whatever they do in the Republic is a matter for them.

NORTH/SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

Special EU Programmes

Mr Deputy Speaker: Members, I have received notice from the Minister of Finance and Personnel that he wishes to make a statement on the North/South Ministerial Council sectoral meeting on special EU programmes held on 9 April 2001.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):

I should like to report to the Assembly on the meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in the special European Union programmes sector held in Dublin on Monday 9 April 2001, which Mr Dermot Nesbitt and I attended. The Irish Government were represented by Mr Charlie McCreevy TD, Minister for Finance. The report has been approved by Mr Nesbitt and is also made on his behalf.

The Council welcomed the recently appointed chief executive of the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), Mr John McKinney, and recorded its appreciation of the contribution which Mr Philip Angus had made during his time as interim chief executive.

The chief executive gave a presentation on the progress made by the Special EU Programmes Body since the last meeting in that sector on 15 November 2000. He identified progress made towards the development of a strategic plan that will enable the body to fulfil its mandate. The Council was pleased to note the work in progress and the evolving structure of the SEUPB.

The Council agreed that the various programmes within the remit of the body had a major role to play in the development of peace and reconciliation and economic and social progress on the whole island, particularly in the border areas. The Council highlighted the importance of the chief executive's role in that respect and looked forward to working closely with him in implementing those important tasks.

The Council received a report on proposals for a revised staffing structure for the body that had emerged as the result of a review carried out by external consultants. The Council acknowledged that, while an initial staffing structure had been agreed at the sectoral meeting on special EU programmes in June 2000, it had been agreed that that structure would have to be reviewed as the body developed and its responsibilities became operational.

The Council agreed that it was important that permanent staff be appointed as soon as possible and stressed the need for the body to secure value for money by ensuring an appropriate level of staff at the minimum cost to the public purse.

The Council noted that the proposals for a revised staffing structure were now the subject of an urgent full structural analysis and job evaluation, and it approved the immediate recruitment of five new posts, the cost of which would be met from the SEUPB's approved budget for 2001.

The Council received a report on the outcome of the public consultation on the draft Equality Scheme which the body had drawn up in accordance with its statutory responsibilities under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Council stressed the importance of the application of the principle of equality of opportunity by the body in all areas of its work, and it approved the submission of the draft Equality Scheme to the Equality Commission.

The Council considered the draft targeting social need action plan which had been prepared by the SEUPB in accordance with the requirements of the New TSN programme. The draft plan, which outlines how the body proposes to conform to the principles of New TSN, was approved by the Council as a basis for consultation during April and May 2001. The Council looked forward to the outcome of the consultation and to seeing the final draft of the plan at the next North/South Ministerial Council sectoral meeting on EU programmes.

The Council received a report on the progress of negotiations on the Peace II operational programme and programme complement since the last sectoral meeting on EU programmes on 15 November. The Council was pleased to note that negotiations on the Peace II programme were now complete, and it welcomed the formal approval of the programme in Belfast on 22 March during the visit of the European Commissioner for Regional Policy, Michel Barnier. The Council noted the progress made by the SEUPB on the programme complement and that a draft of the programme complement would be put to the Peace II monitoring committee at its next meeting.

The Council stressed the need for the monitoring committee to be given every support in discharging its responsibilities so that it can give careful consideration and agreement to the programme complement as soon as possible. The Council urged the body to ensure that funding comes on stream in the very near future.

In the context of the Peace programme — in particular, the cross-border elements of the programme — the Council indicated that it would expect to hear about progress on the common chapter at the next meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in this format.

The Council received a report on the new partnership arrangements being put in place in Northern Ireland to further develop partnership-working at local level by establishing more effective mechanisms to reinforce and extend the social partnership model and to make it sustainable beyond the lifetime of the Peace II programme. The Council noted that a new regional partnership

board, chaired by the two junior Ministers in the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, is being created and that the SEUPB will provide the secretariat for that new board. This will help to achieve co-ordination between the roles of the body in relation to priority three of Peace II and the wider roles of the partnerships and the board in developing and extending the principles of partnership-working to other areas of European and mainstream public-expenditure-funded activity.

The Council also noted that the SEUPB would take over secretariat functions for the existing Northern Ireland Partnership Board to help to ensure a smooth transition from the current partnership arrangements to the new arrangements.

The Council noted that it is planned to establish a central payments unit in the SEUPB to process payments on behalf of implementing bodies in Northern Ireland under Peace II. The Council agreed that the establishment of a central payments unit would enhance the ability of the SEUPB to monitor spending at a more detailed level under Peace II. It also agreed that the establishment of the unit would go some way towards addressing concerns expressed by the European Court of Auditors about some aspects of financial management and control systems under Peace I.

12.30 pm

The central payments unit will not compromise the authority of the various implementing bodies appointed under the programme to take decisions on the allocation of funding to individual projects. The Council also noted that further consideration will be given to embracing payments under other EU programmes under the system.

The Council received a report of the progress made on the negotiations of the community initiatives with the European Commission. The Council welcomed the progress made on the INTERREG III programme and noted that formal negotiation was about to commence. The Council agreed that the finance departments and the SEUPB should maintain pressure on the European Commission to enter into substantive negotiations as quickly as possible. The Council also urged the body to make as much progress as possible on the preparation of the programme complement for INTERREG III in advance of the completion of negotiations.

The Council also noted that the EQUAL programme for Northern Ireland had been revised in response to the Commission's comments and that the revised programme would be submitted to the European Commission shortly and was expected to be formally adopted during April. The Council noted that comments had been received from the Commission on the Northern Ireland LEADER programme and that that would enable negotiations to proceed.

The Council also noted that the URBAN programme for Northern Ireland, which is one of a package of 13 bids submitted by the UK, was currently the subject of discussions between the European Commission and the UK about the total number of programmes to be submitted from the member state.

The Council received a report from the action team, which was established under the chairmanship of the SEUPB, to consider how the border corridor groups could contribute to decisions on spending from the new round of structural funds support in the border region. The Council agreed a set of principles to underpin the work and roles of the border corridor groups that would give those groups a greater input in deciding on the priority for spending of EU funds in the border corridor area.

The Council noted that work would continue to develop an operational framework for the application of those principles and to examine a proposal for an expenditure performance indicator. The Council asked to be updated at the next NSMC sectoral meeting on EU programmes about the progress on how the principles outlined in the report were being implemented in practice.

The Council considered a paper outlining the progress of spend on the Peace I programme and INTERREG II programme. The Council noted that overall expenditure at 31 December 2000 stood at 79% for Peace I and 86% of the INTERREG II initiative allocations. The Council agreed that that was an important area of work and that while progress had been made since the last report to the NSMC in November, further sustained effort will be required to ensure that full expenditure is achieved by 31 December 2001.

The Council also noted that the body will provide a further progress report on the implementation of both programmes at the next NSMC sectoral meeting on the special EU programmes. The Council stressed the need for the body to ensure that all the EU regulatory requirements for closure of the programmes are met and asked to be advised at the next NSMC sectoral meeting on progress made by the body in implementing those requirements.

The Council will meet again in this format in the North in June 2001. The Council agreed the text of a joint communiqué issued following the meeting. A copy of the communiqué has been placed in the Assembly Library.

Dr Birnie: The penultimate paragraph of the third page of the Minister's statement refers to the new regional partnership board replacing the current Northern Ireland Partnership Board. Can the Minister indicate when that process will be completed, the size of the new board and its sectoral composition? Can he elaborate on the middle sentence that refers to the role of the partnership board and links that to extending the principles of partnership working to other areas of European and mainstream public expenditure-funded activity? What

does that mean? Does that contain some sort of financial and constitutional innovation, or is it quite innocuous?

Mr Durkan: The point made in the statement reinforces and confirms a point I made in a previous statement that the operational programme for Peace II had been signed. In that context, both in answers to questions and in the statement, I addressed issues about how we saw the future development of partnership working, and we do want to develop it. The Executive have rightly stressed the need to ensure that we do not use the partnership model only for certain European programmes or for one priority area in the peace programme. If we really believe in and advocate the partnership model, we should extend it to other areas of European programme funding. Beyond the period when we have the special additional EU money available we want to be able to extend it to our own mainstream funding activity. It will mean that more decisions involving different areas of public expenditure and policy management and co-ordination will be informed by the strategic thinking of partnerships at local level.

In the next period, part of the role of the new regional partnership board will be to work not only with local partnerships to help to oversee and support what they are doing under the priority three measure of the Peace II programme but also to foster and develop more partnership thinking and working across a wider range of areas so that we achieve more from partnership and from public expenditure.

Mr McGrady: I welcome the complex and all-embracing statement by the Minister. Once again we see that, in the same way as its predecessor Peace I, the special EU programme for Peace II is a vote of confidence in the people of Ireland, North and South, and in the institutions that were set up through the Good Friday Agreement.

Can the Minister indicate what will be the timetable for the completion of the programme and the complements? When does he expect the resources to flow to the various communities so that the peace process can be deepened further? What special or enhanced arrangements will there be to ensure that the management and direction of the new regime will be based on the equality agenda and on the rural-proofing agenda and extend itself into the communities that are most in need of such support and most vulnerable?

I welcome the enhanced participation by the various bodies, boards, partnerships and district councils in the formulation of the strategy.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for his comments welcoming the contribution that has been made by a number of interested parties to the development of the proposals and, just as importantly, to the management and success of the Peace II programme.

The operational programme was signed on 22 March in this Building. Under European regulations the programme complement that will set out the specific actions and measures to be undertaken must be agreed by the monitoring committee within three months of that date. Therefore we must agree it by 21 June.

Only when the programme complement is agreed by the monitoring committee will we be in a position to invite applications. We want to do that before 21 June. The Special EU Programmes Body, the two Finance Departments and all other Departments want to do it as soon as possible. If we are able to invite applications in June, we hope to see funding being allocated in September.

The monitoring committee will have a key role, not just in agreeing the programme complement, but with regard to key horizontal principles that apply right across the community support framework, including the Peace II programme. Those principles include equality and balance considerations. In this round, the monitoring committees will be encouraged to set up working groups that can focus on specific interests. There might, for instance, be a dedicated working group for rural issues.

Mr Poots: I thank the Minister for making available the communiqué. The communiqué from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development was not available when I called into the Library. Sometimes they are more revealing than Ministers' statements. It should also be noted that the all-Ireland council meetings are moving full steam ahead, following a slight blip when the Ulster Unionist Party withdrew briefly.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Do you have a question for the Minister?

Mr Poots: Yes. My question relates to the moneys that will be allocated to the cross-border element of the European programme. Will the Minister guarantee that that money will be better distributed than it was in the first round? Can he assure the House that the Unionist community, which I represent, will not be discriminated against? Given the demographics of Northern Ireland, North/South funding is more likely to go to people from the Nationalist section of the community. Will there be matching funding for the Unionist community?

Mr Durkan: Obviously, cross-border measures have particular relevance to border areas, but they are not only relevant to those areas. The monitoring arrangements that will be in place for the next programmes are a significant improvement on previous monitoring arrangements. Adherence to horizontal principles and good monitoring practice will reassure everybody that the allocation and management of the funding is fair. If funding is given to us for specific measures in particular areas, we must use it for those measures and in those areas. Where criteria such as targeting social need are involved we must fulfil those criteria. We will see a fair and competent adherence to all the principles and

requirements of EU regulations and to our own equality and TSN obligations.

Mr McHugh: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome this comprehensive statement, which deals with a matter that can be confusing for anyone dealing with the implementation of the programme.

The Minister spoke about the "near future". People will want to know when the "near future" is. Such target dates tend to move, and there is great confusion among groups about them. There is much work to be done in border areas, and there is money that can be used to the benefit of those areas.

12.45 pm

However, groups need information about how things will happen and when things will happen. They need to know how they can go forward, how they can set up and implement projects, and how to direct themselves towards the right type of projects. They need to know the timescales, and there is a considerable amount of confusion in the industry about that. Single identity groups mentioned by Mr Poots can be dealt with on the basis of information drawn down to them.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for his questions, and I acknowledge his point about the complexity of some of these issues and with the number of different programmes and the varying dates that are involved.

Obviously there has been a big concentration on the question of the Peace II programme. As I have indicated, we need to have the programme complements agreed by June. It will be on that basis that we will be able to invite applications for funding. I have said that we hope to be looking at allocations by September. We are trying to be clear and committed in relation to that date.

Some of the other programmes are still subject to further negotiation with the Commission, particularly the community initiatives, so we cannot specify some of those dates at this stage, because we cannot say exactly when negotiations will commence and conclude. We are not entirely masters of the timetable in relation to all of the programmes.

We have sought to communicate as much information as possible to various interested groups, not least in the context of gap funding arrangements, through which projects can apply for interim funding to cover the period from April to October 2001, because that period is clearly related to the fact that we hope to be able to look at allocations from the programme in September.

Mr Kennedy: Can the Minister outline what specific steps, if any, are being taken to address the acknowledged problem of the lack of applications and the underfunding of projects from the Protestant/Unionist community in Northern Ireland?

Mr Durkan: I have touched on this matter before, because a number of Members have already raised this question. It was a concern, not least at the interim stage in terms of Peace I. Various measures were identified by programme managers, not least in local partnerships, and were designed to ensure that a greater rate of applications would be encouraged and stimulated across the community. There was some success in that regard.

Members need to be careful about relying on impressionistic accounts of what has or has not been happening. I do not pretend that it has been the subject of a definitive and incontestable analysis, but some of the analyses undertaken show that there has been no difference. For instance, the rate of allocations to the two communities has been no different to the rate of applications; so there is no higher relative success rate.

The problem is about how you measure particular projects, whether you are classifying them as being from one community or another. Analyses, such as those by PricewaterhouseCoopers, indicate that significant amounts of funding are going to groups that are in essence cross-community and are able to show cross-community involvement and benefits.

We need to take account of the broader picture as well as try to ensure that we get full adherence to the horizontal principles in the new programme. Those horizontal principles place an emphasis on equality and balance.

Mr O'Neill: I too welcome the statement and congratulate all those involved in the Minister's Department on their work on the EU programmes. Can the Minister confirm that all parties are represented on the various monitoring committees and that the DUP, in particular, is sitting on the cross-border Peace II monitoring committee and playing a full and active part in its cross-border activities?

With regard to INTERREG III, at what stage can we expect to get details of the introduction and implementation of the operational framework and the involvement of the border corridor groups, as they are described in the new arrangements?

Mr Durkan: Four Northern parties are represented on both the Peace II and the Building Sustainable Prosperity programme monitoring committees. Five parties are represented on the overall community support framework monitoring committee. In each instance those parties include the DUP, and all members are playing a full and active role in the monitoring committees. The committees have a serious amount of work to undertake in the next period, and there must be concentration on agreeing the programme complements. I hope that all parties will play their full parts in that.

In respect of the timetable for INTERREG III, I cannot definitively answer that question, because we are

awaiting negotiations, and we must see how things are going there before we will have any precise idea of when they will conclude.

I met the border corridor groups in January. Charlie McCreevy, Minister of Finance in Dublin, also met the groups. We are both very happy to acknowledge the very significant contribution that they have already made and the particular contribution that they could make to the future success not just of INTERREG III, but of other programmes as well. That is why an action team involving members of the cross-border corridor groups was established under the chairmanship of the Special EU Programmes Body. At the sectoral meeting we noted the report from that action team. We intend constructively and positively to pursue some of the issues and ideas in that report, not just for the good of the cross-border corridor groups, but for the betterment of those programmes and the particular areas represented by those groups.

Mr Savage: I too welcome the Minister's statement. Over the years the partnership boards have done sterling work. I am sure that they are very keen to know what is going to happen. The members of the one in which I am involved want to know what the plans are going to be, because they are starting to run out of money. Have all the applications for funding to be made through the partnership boards, and how long is the lifetime of these new boards?

Mr Durkan: I acknowledge the questions from Mr Savage. I want to make the point that the new local strategy partnerships have a particular focus as far as the management of priority three of the Peace II programme is concerned. That is for the life of that programme. We are trying to make sure that we develop the whole partnership model in a sustainable way. That means that we have to see the partnership model being able to work outside priority three of the Peace II programme and, indeed, outside and beyond the Peace II programmes and European Union-funded programmes in general. We are trying to develop the model of partnership during the next peace programme in ways that will sustain it beyond that particular programme.

Many of the local partnerships that had legitimate concerns and misgivings about how things might go have been somewhat reassured by the approach that is now visible to them. I can understand that there were communication and clarity difficulties that meant that people did have legitimate concerns. I hope that more people involved in partnership activity are now encouraged in relation to the proposals that we have for moving forward. They can see that they are about moving forward for all the very good reasons that the Member identified.

Mrs Courtney: I too welcome the Minister's statement and, in particular, the continued success in firmly establishing the Special EU Programmes Body. This

body, which is a product of the Good Friday Agreement, is a vital component in building peace and reconciliation. We must encourage its work and ensure that it receives support in its development. Can the Minister give details as to the progress being made regarding the Peace I programme, and will every effort be made to ensure that this programme closes successfully?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for her strong recognition of the contribution that the Special EU Programmes Body can make.

I said in my statement that all the Ministers involved are determined to ensure that we complete our spend on Peace I on time this year. The reliable figure that we had was from 31 December 2000, and it indicated that we were at 79% of actual spend on Peace I. The on the hoof indications from the Special EU Programmes Body are that we are looking at an 84% rate of spend at present. It is important to make sure that we spend the rest between now and 31 December. It is also important that we make good some of the spending shortfalls in other areas. It is not that the money is not allocated, but for various reasons it has not been drawn down. We need to look at whether we should move into some reserve allocations for some of the funding as the best way of ensuring that we complete the spend.

Mr A Maginness: This and other meetings highlight the effectiveness of the North/South Ministerial Council and the need for it to progress issues such as EU funding and special EU programmes.

Unlike a previous Member who presented his question to the Minister, I do not represent one community. I aspire to represent both communities. Everyone in this House should aspire to represent both communities. We in north Belfast, an area of very high deprivation, look forward to the completion of negotiations between the UK Government and the European Commission in relation to URBAN II. It is vitally important for the development of north Belfast and those communities that have been so badly deprived over the years, both Catholic and Protestant, Nationalist and Unionist.

It is disappointing to note that the UK Government have not yet reached agreement with the European Commission. When does the Minister believe that agreement will be reached in relation to URBAN II?

1.00 pm

Mr Durkan: I want to acknowledge the important point made by Alban Maginness about how we approach and look at these important areas. We should particularly consider that part of the way we have lobbied for and sold the whole concept of these programmes to the European Commission has been on the basis of the significant impact that they can have at a cross-community level in fostering peace and reconciliation. It makes it all the more important, when we are deliberating on these

programmes, that we try to think on a whole-community basis and not on a sectional basis.

Regarding the URBAN programme question, I cannot answer that. Alban Maginness will have heard me say before that prophecy is the most gratuitous form of error. I am not going to say when exactly I think negotiations will be completed. I can point out — as he recognises — that the difficulty is not one that arises because of the particular proposals submitted from Northern Ireland. The difficulties arise because our proposals are one of a package of 13 bids for this programme submitted by the UK, and there is a disagreement between the Commission and the UK Government about the number and format of programmes submitted by the UK. We have serious concerns about the Commission's approach and have registered those concerns. We have also raised them with Stephen Byers, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. It is his Department that handles these issues at UK level.

Ms McWilliams: I also commend the Minister for this statement and, indeed, for his work, given the enormous difficulties he has faced both on the issue of the gap funding and with regard to the future programmes under Peace II.

My first question concerns the timetable. I welcomed the announcement on March 22, which included an operational timetable. They hope to have received bids and projects by August and to make decisions by September. This seems to me to be a very tight deadline. Is there any flexibility? It is worth putting on the record that it is an impossible deadline. Indeed, we may be back here looking for that flexibility in September, as we may not be in a position to allocate the first round of funding. This may not be as a result of anything that the Minister has done, but I ask him to create a little bit of flexibility, given the concerns that I am hearing on the ground. People do not feel that they may be able to meet the timetable as currently set out.

I also welcome the fact that the social partnership model may be extended beyond Peace II. This has been raised with us, particularly by visiting American delegations, who have come to look at the role of civic society in Northern Ireland, which is of enormous importance to the peace process. One of the points made to us is that the European Community may be creating a monster. Many groups are now being funded, but when Peace II runs out what is going to happen? It is extremely important, through the work of the Minister and others, that we have achieved the substantial amount of funding for Northern Ireland that takes us through this transition. It is a very difficult period for us. What are the plans for mainstreaming?

I remember when we set up women's aid refuges in the 1970s, and everyone said we could not sustain them and that the Government would never take them over. Today no one would think of closing women's refuges; that highlights the enormous role they have played in

saving lives. I have an enormous concern about closing, or attempting to close, after Peace II, many of the wonderful projects that have been started in communities, particularly by women's organisations. The Minister will be aware, no doubt, that the rural women's network and other women's support networks have written to him with this concern that they no longer want to have to be dependent on European funding. There should be a parallel discussion with Departments about mainstreaming many of these programmes

Mr Durkan: It has been recognised that significant work has been involved and is still ahead. There are challenges for everybody in this. There are challenges not just for me and my Department and for other Ministers and their Departments, but for many of the bodies that have been involved in Peace I and have very strong ambitions and legitimate motives for being involved in Peace II as well.

We have been very conscious that there has been a great deal of frustration because the timetable keeps being pushed back. The operational programme was agreed and signed on 22 March. Under EU regulations, we have to have the programme complements agreed within three months of that date. That takes us up to June. On the basis of having the programme complements agreed, we would then be in a position to invite applications and bids. That is not a cut-off date. Applications can come after that time as well. In fact, bids can be made at any stage throughout the lifetime of the programme.

We want to respond to the fact that there is a great deal of concern and frustration. On the basis of the evidence that comes across my desk, there are very good proposals out there. In trying to move to being in a position to invite applications soon, we are not trying to set any deadlines that would make it very hard for groups or projects. We want the best possible spend and use of this money. We are not going to use timetables in ways that would militate against that.

I agree with Ms McWilliams on the need to have a strategy for mainstreaming the partnership model and making sure that the strategic thinking of partnerships influences and informs much more of what we do across a range of measures, not just at local level but also at regional level. How exactly that will be developed and managed will be one of the key roles of the regional development board.

In the new programme, the regional development board will not be preoccupied with micromanaging what local partnerships are doing. It will have responsibility for sponsoring and fostering a much stronger and more strategic approach to partnership that goes on for much longer and affects much wider areas than the Peace II programme.

The sitting was suspended at 1.08 pm.

On resuming (Madam Deputy Speaker [Ms Morrice] in the Chair) —

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION

North/South Ministerial Council

1. **Mr Maskey** asked the Minister of Education to detail those areas which are unable to be advanced as a result of not holding a North/South Ministerial Council in education sectoral format. (AQO 1303/00)

4. **Dr O'Hagan** asked the Minister of Education to list those areas which have not progressed as a consequence of his non-attendance at a North/South Ministerial Council meeting in education sectoral format. (AQO 1308/00)

The Minister of Education (Mr M McGuinness):

With your permission, a LeasCheann Comhairle, I will take questions 1 and 4 together.

In my statement on 5 June 2000, reporting on the inaugural meeting of the education sectoral Council meeting that took place on 3 February 2000, I advised the Assembly that several working groups were established to consider a series of important issues in a number of areas. A special educational needs provision working group has been focusing primarily on autism and dyslexia.

Three working groups were set up to consider several important issues relating to educational underachievement. One of those groups has been looking at ways of encouraging pupil attendance at school and their retention in education. The second group has been looking at good practice in the improvement of literacy and numeracy skills in young people, and the third has focused on child protection issues. A working group was also established to look at issues that might adversely affect teacher mobility on the island of Ireland.

The education sectoral Council also commissioned an independent study to evaluate school, youth and teacher exchanges. All of those working groups were to have reported formally to an education sectoral meeting with their proposals on the priorities they had identified, the measures that might be put in place and projected time frames for progressing particular tasks. That meeting was scheduled for last autumn. However, I regret that there has not been an education sectoral meeting of the Council since 3 July 2000. Consequently it has not been possible to receive and consider reports on the work of each of the working groups, take decisions on their

recommendations or authorise further actions in those important areas.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, Madam Deputy Speaker. Paragraph 13 of strand two of the Good Friday Agreement states that the North/South Ministerial Council and the Assembly are mutually dependent and that one cannot successfully function without the other. Does the Minister agree that the First Minister's continuing obstruction of the workings of the North/South Council in sectoral or plenary format has serious implications for the agreement?

Mr M McGuinness: I share the Member's concern. Under the terms of the agreement, the Assembly and the North/South Ministerial Council are mutually inter-dependent, and one

"cannot successfully function without the other."

The obstruction of North/South Council meetings prevents me from fulfilling my responsibilities as a member of that Council. As a result, the potential for co-operation on issues affecting the education of all of the children of the island of Ireland is not being realised. The fracture of the institutions agreed on Good Friday needs to be repaired urgently.

Dr O'Hagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Does the Minister agree that the British Secretary of State, Dr John Reid, has the power and responsibility to direct the First Minister to make the appropriate nominations to the North/South Ministerial Council?

Mr M McGuinness: I understand that the British Secretary of State has the power to intervene in that way, and I have made that point to him repeatedly.

Mr Gallagher: The issue is the North/South education meetings that have not been sanctioned. Many issues arise in my constituency regularly that have a North/South aspect, and it is regrettable that the meetings are not taking place. Nevertheless, it is important that arrangements continue to be made for meetings of the North/South Ministerial Council. Has the Minister instructed his staff to continue to make the arrangements for North/South meetings?

Mr M McGuinness: I have instructed my officials to proceed with making the arrangements for North/South meetings. It is a difficult situation for me as Minister of Education, because it is vital that every single aspect of the agreement is implemented, and my duties and responsibilities centre on the stewardship of the Department of Education.

I have attended meetings of the North/South Ministerial Council and sectoral meetings on education, and I have struck up a good relationship with the Dublin Minister for Education and Science, Dr Michael Woods TD. There is a will on the part of the two Administrations to press forward on all fronts and deal with important

educational matters that affect all children in Fermanagh and throughout the island of Ireland.

Mr Gibson: In view of the low standards in the South of Ireland — perhaps the lowest in Europe — why does the Minister see benefits in our harmonising with the South of Ireland in every field of education? Northern Ireland, where a review of education is ongoing, has some of the best standards of education in Europe. Are we not harmonising downwards, rather than trying to achieve success for pupils in Northern Ireland?

Mr M McGuinness: Through the sectoral meetings, we are trying to increase co-operation between the education authorities in Dublin and Belfast in the best interests of all children. It is a matter of seeing where the good practice is and deciding how we can implement it in the interests of all the children who live on this island. It is common sense for us to make progress in that way.

In the United States of America, I met the Education Minister from the Clinton Administration, Dr Richard Riley. The officials who accompanied me on that visit and others have been in constant contact with American officials. They have found it highly beneficial to avail themselves of the incredible amount of research into many different aspects of education that the Americans have. We must have open minds, and we must build relationships with people all over the world. This is a small island, and we have a duty to work together to improve levels of co-operation.

North/South Child Protection Working Group

2. **Ms Ramsey** asked the Minister of Education to report on the impact of the work of the North/South child protection working group and, in particular, on the provision of counselling for children. (AQO 1297/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The Department of Education continues to work in conjunction with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety on the introduction of legislation aimed at preventing unsuitable people from working with children. The First Minister announced the legislation to the Assembly on 11 September 2000. The work is being led by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

One of the working groups established by the North/South education sectoral Council focuses on child protection issues. The last education sectoral meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council took place on 3 July 2000. At that time, none of the working groups had reported back to the Council. A further education sectoral meeting was planned for late November but did not take place, and there have been no meetings of the education sectoral Council since. None of the work, nor any work under the auspices of the North/South

Ministerial Council, has any impact on the provision of counselling for children.

Many schools have responded to the need for counselling support by dedicating members of staff in their pastoral care teams to provide it and arranging for such staff to have suitable training. In some situations, counselling support is provided by staff from the education and library boards' psychology service, the education welfare service, or staff who are specifically appointed for that purpose. In other situations, counselling support is provided by staff from voluntary or community groups with appropriate expertise. Access to such support is far from universal, and there are variations in the quality and duration of the support being provided.

The time is now right for evaluation of the various approaches to providing counselling support to pupils under stress. The findings from such an evaluation should be used to inform a strategy for the development of counselling support to pupils and their parents. In addition to issues such as the role of counsellors, appropriate qualifications and further professional development, a key issue will be whether counselling support should be school-based or provided independently of the school. I am pleased that I have secured some £350,000 from the Executive programme's children fund to enable the work to proceed in the current year.

Ms Ramsey: Does the Minister share my concern that the ban on his attendance at North/South Ministerial Council meetings delays progress on important issues relating to the education and protection of children across this island?

Mr M McGuinness: Of course I share that concern. I have already said that I regret that there has been no education sectoral meeting since 3 July 2000. I stress that I want to hold an education sectoral meeting as soon as possible so that work can be completed on these important matters relating to our children's education.

Mr Kennedy: Does the Minister not accept that the abject failure of his party to make political progress on the arms issue is the main stumbling block to his non-attendance at North/South Ministerial Council meetings?

Mr M McGuinness: Were I to accept that analysis, I would effectively be turning the Good Friday Agreement on its head. I do not think that anyone has the right to do that. My work as Minister of Education must remain over and above the outstanding difficulties of the process. Important work needs to be done in the field of education. We have to co-operate with the Southern authorities to put in place the best possible education system, North and South, and it is vital that we continue with that work. I deal with issues of great importance to all children, no matter where they live or from what section of the community they come on this island. Absolutely nothing should be done by any Administration to inhibit that.

Mr S Wilson: Instead of whingeing about the bad faith of the British Government and seeking to put forward his interpretation on the Good Friday Agreement, will the Minister and his party not face up to their responsibility to give up the means of terror and the acts of terror which are perpetrated in his name? Will the Minister tell the House what he intends —

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The question to which we refer here was about the impact of the work of the North/South child protection working group. Will the Member please state how his question relates to the child protection working group?

Mr S Wilson: Since it was the Minister who raised his non-participation in North/South bodies because of the actions which have been taken to ban him, I think that the reason for my question is fairly obvious.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Will the Member repeat the specific question?

Mr S Wilson: I am more than happy to repeat the specific question.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The question which relates to the question asked.

Mr S Wilson: The Minister has told the House that the North/South bodies' work on child protection has been affected by his inability to participate in them. Does he not therefore accept that his first responsibility to the House, and to those for whom he claims to wish to introduce protection, is to give up the means of terror and the acts of terror which have barred him from participating in the North/South bodies? Or does he intend to continue to abuse the court system which his Colleagues have blown up — and let us not forget the judges he has killed — to get redress for this?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr M McGuinness: Again, I hear a Unionist spokesperson attempt to turn the Good Friday Agreement on its head. Under the terms of the agreement, all the pro-agreement parties — including the two Governments — share a collective responsibility to resolve the issue of arms. I am certainly prepared to continue to fulfil my responsibilities in that regard.

The actions of the First Minister with respect to the North/South Ministerial Council have clearly not served to resolve this issue. The continuation of these actions must cause us to question his motivation. It is also worth remembering that the judicial review of the First Minister's action ruled that the obstruction of one element of the agreement could not be justified on the basis of the promotion of another of its objectives. I contend that I, as a Minister in the Executive in the North and as a member of the North/South Ministerial Council, have done everything in my power to resolve the issue to which the Member refers.

2.45 pm

There is a duty on all of us, not just those in the pro-agreement parties. There is a duty on the MLAs from the Democratic Unionist Party and other parties in the House to work with the rest of us to bring about the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. Serious questions need to be asked about the way in which people have sought to abuse the Good Friday Agreement in their efforts to place the responsibility for dealing with the issues on the shoulders of one political party.

Special Educational Needs: North/South Group

3. **Mr M Murphy** asked the Minister of Education to detail (a) the tasks undertaken and tasks completed by the North/South special education co-ordination group and (b) when this group will formally report. (AQO 1283/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The last education sectoral meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council took place on 3 July 2000. At that time none of the working groups, including the special education working group, had reported back to the Council. I reported that position when I made my statement to the Assembly on 11 September 2000.

A further education sectoral meeting of the Council was planned for late November but did not take place. Thus, no formal report of the working group has yet been made. I am unable to provide specific details of the work completed so far, as I am bound by the procedures of the Assembly and by the ministerial code. These require me first to report progress to the Executive and then, by way of a statement, to this Assembly after the next sectoral meeting takes place.

I stress that I wish to hold an education sectoral meeting of the Council as soon as possible to enable the working groups to report back so that decisions can be taken, thus avoiding further delay in progressing the important issues that the working groups have been considering.

Mr M Murphy: Can the Minister outline any steps he has taken, or intends to take, to ensure that North/South Ministerial Council sectoral meetings on education take place in the near future?

Mr M McGuinness: The Member will be aware that I took this matter to the courts, and the actions of the First Minister were found to be unlawful. Officials from my Department have, on my behalf, served formal notice on the North/South secretariat that I am seeking a North/South Ministerial Council sectoral meeting on education at the earliest possible date. I recently met with the British Secretary of State, John Reid, and outlined my view of the options available to him in the event of the First Minister's continuing to act unlaw-

fully. I will, of course, consider the various legal options open to me arising from any repetition of the refusal by the First Minister to nominate me to attend the North/South Ministerial Council.

Mr Hussey: I concur with the position of my Colleague Mr Kennedy and the support for that line from Mr Sammy Wilson. I am sure that the Minister realises that the solution lies with himself and his own party. Will the Minister detail, by subject and date, those educational matters on which he has requested a North/South Ministerial Council meeting since July 2000?

Mr M McGuinness: Since July 2000 we have been looking to progress all the matters that I outlined earlier in the course of my answers. I do not intend to waste the time of the Assembly by repeating those issues, but I am sure that the Member and his party are well aware of them.

It is important that we get these matters into perspective. The duty and responsibility of Members, and of myself as a member of the Executive, is to ensure that we make politics work and continue with what has been a considerable amount of good work done since the Assembly and the Executive were established.

The vast majority of people on the outside, who watch these proceedings with considerable interest, want to see politics and politicians working on their behalf. As Minister of Education, I have tried to work on behalf of everyone in the community without fear or favour. It is important that I be allowed to do my job to the fullest and that no obstacles be placed in my way. I am one of those people who believe that if we can press on to make politics work, all the difficult outstanding issues that create problems for people on the Unionist side can be resolved.

Assumption Grammar School (Ballynahinch)

5. **Mr McGrady** asked the Minister of Education to detail the steps he is taking to provide capital expenditure for an extension programme at Assumption Grammar School, Ballynahinch; and to make a statement. (AQO 1260/00)

Mr M McGuinness: I fully accept the need to extend and refurbish the accommodation at Assumption Grammar School. The school was considered for a place in the capital programme, which I announced last month, but it was not possible to include it, given the resources available to me. The school continues to have a high priority in the distribution of capital funding, and it will be reconsidered next year.

Mr McGrady: I remind the Minister that, when he wrote to me on 17 October, he said that his Department

fully accepts the need to extend and refurbish the accommodation at Assumption Grammar and that planning for this was at an advanced stage. He now accepts that that is the situation and that despite the advanced stage which had been reached last October, a decision on funding has now been put off until next year. I can only question what is meant by "priority" in the case of Assumption Grammar School in Ballynahinch and the other very urgent case of St Patrick's Grammar School, Downpatrick. These two voluntary grammar schools, which are in my constituency, have not received any of these grants, despite the Department's admission that they have high-priority need. Is the imposition of a waiting period of 12 months, plus an additional period, a correct interpretation of the word "priority"?

Mr M McGuinness: The Member will know, a LeasCheann Comhairle, that around 30 schools were competing for a place in the schools capital building programme, totalling some £200 million. I sympathise with every school which eagerly anticipated the announcement of the awards to be made under this year's programme. This is always a very difficult matter for any Minister to deal with, simply because of the very limited resources available. The school is still a high priority. I accept the arguments put forward by Mr McGrady on behalf of his constituents, and I appreciate that, as Minister of Education, I have a duty to continue to lobby the Executive as best I can to acquire as much funding as possible to alleviate the difficulties experienced by many schools such as Assumption Grammar School, Ballynahinch, St Patrick's Grammar School, Downpatrick, and others throughout the North.

Nursery and Primary Schools: Healthy Eating Programme

6. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Education to detail his plans for encouraging the consumption of milk and yoghurt in nursery and primary schools as part of the healthy eating programme. (AQO 1290/00)

Mr M McGuinness: My Department is committed to encouraging the consumption of milk and dairy products, including yoghurt, in schools. Last year, when the European Commission reduced the subsidy payable under the EU's school milk scheme, through which nursery and primary pupils may purchase milk at a subsidised price, my Department, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety agreed to co-fund the shortfall to ensure that the cost to pupils would not increase. My Department is also preparing a consultation paper on the implementation of new compulsory nutritional standards for school lunches. The proposed standards will require every school lunch for nursery and primary pupils to contain milk or dairy products, and drinking milk will be required as an available option every day.

Mr Dallat: I am sure the Minister will agree that, at the moment, good news for the agriculture industry would be most welcome. Does he agree that this is an opportunity to develop an interdepartmental approach, which would enhance the health of our children while promoting Northern Ireland dairy products? Will he undertake to continue his discussions with his ministerial Colleagues in the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Health so that the health of our children, and of our dairy industry, can be protected?

Mr M McGuinness: Yes. I agree that it would make sense if every Department continued to exercise cross-departmental co-operation. Many will know that, under the Executive programme funds, there are opportunities for co-operation between Departments. The Department of Education, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety should continue to consider these opportunities.

That said, a considerable amount of work is still being done, and we are at pains to continue to review the situation to ensure that there is a very high nutritional standard in schools.

Western Education and Library Board: Payment of Bills

7. **Mrs Courtney** asked the Minister of Education to ascertain the procedure adopted by the Western Education and Library Board for payment of bills to small contractors. (AQO 1279/00)

Mr M McGuinness: I have been advised by the chief executive of the Western Education and Library Board that the board pays its trade creditors in accordance with the better payment code and Government accounting rules. On receipt of an invoice from a contractor the work is inspected and approved by the appropriate staff. The approved invoice is then sent for payment to the board's accounts department, which ensures that where relevant the requirements of the construction industry's tax scheme are complied with before payment is made.

Mrs Courtney: I am glad that the Minister's response means that the Department's guidelines and Government guidelines are complied with. He may be aware that in the past some small firms have been forced out of business because money just did not come through in time. I refer in particular to the Derry City Council area, so I am glad that the Minister is now taking an interest in it. I hope that systems will be put in place; that those which are in place will be adhered to; and that firms will not go out of business again.

Mr M McGuinness: I understand that the Western Education and Library Board paid over 60% of invoices within 30 days of the invoice date over the financial periods 1998-99 to 2000-01. The last audited figure was 63% in 1998.

The chief executive has assured me that the board is extremely conscious of the need to ensure prompt payment of invoices. To that end, it has developed and implemented new procedures and payment arrangements continually to improve on past performance. Of course I sympathise greatly with the plight and difficulty of businesses, particularly small firms who find it very difficult. I can assure the Member that I am very conscious of the need to ensure that we continue to improve our performance.

Services for Hearing-Impaired Children (Ards Borough)

8. **Mr Hamilton** asked the Minister of Education to detail what services are available to children with hearing difficulties at schools in the Ards Borough Council area.
(AQO 1269/00)

Mr M McGuinness: I understand from the South Eastern Education and Library Board that four different levels of service are provided for children with hearing difficulties in the Ards Borough Council area. These are: support teaching from the board's peripatetic teaching service for the hearing-impaired; classroom assistance in mainstream schools; weekly hearing aid checks; and annual — or more frequently if requested by the school — hearing tests of those with fluctuating hearing loss but no hearing aids. Weekly and annual checks and tests are carried out by peripatetic teachers of the hearing-impaired.

Mr Hamilton: I represent one of the largest growing constituencies in Northern Ireland of which the Ards borough comprises a considerable portion. Can the Minister tell me the exact number of places that are available for each of the four different levels of service he has described? I have a sheaf of letters in my office from residents of the Ards borough who have children with hearing difficulties and cannot get them placements for aid.

Mr M McGuinness: Currently, seven children receive support teaching, four receive classroom assistance, 13 have weekly hearing aid checks, and 29 have annual or more frequent hearing tests. A special education unit for the hearing-impaired was attached to Donaghadee High School and another existed at Rathmore Primary School in Bangor in the adjoining North Down Borough Council area. Neither of these units is currently in operation because there are insufficient hearing-impaired pupils in the schools' catchment areas. If demand for these services were to increase, the South Eastern Education and Library Board would consider reinstating them.

3.00 pm

Department Budget

9. **Mr Berry** asked the Minister of Education to detail the budget for his Department in each of the last five years for which figures are available. (AQO 1267/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The budgets allocated to the present Department of Education since it was created in 1999-2000 were £1,165 million, and £1,274 million for the year 2000-01. These relate to the services for which the new Department is responsible — schools, youth provision and their associated services.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Time is up.

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Madam Deputy Speaker: I would like to inform Members that question 11, in the name of Mr McGrady, and question 12, in the name of Mr Fee, have been withdrawn.

North/South Ministerial Council

1. **Ms Ramsey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what progress has been made by the Health, Social Services and Public Safety working group set up under the North/South Ministerial Council.
(AQO 1281/00)

8. **Mr Maskey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail those areas which are unable to be advanced as a result of not holding a North/South Ministerial Council in health sectoral format.
(AQO 1306/00)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms de Brún): Le do chead, a LeasCheann Comhairle, freagróidh mé ceisteanna 1 agus 8 le chéile ós rud é go mbaineann siad le comhoibriú Thuaidh/Theas.

With your permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I shall take questions 1 and 8 together, since they both relate to North/South co-operation.

Bunaíodh comhghrúpaí oibre faoi choimirce na Comhairle Aireachta Thuaidh/Theas le machnamh a dhéanamh ar an dóigh arbh fhéidir comhoibriú Thuaidh/Theas ar chúrsaí sláinte a mhéadú i gach ceann de na cúig réimsí aitheanta: seirbhísí taisní agus éigeandálaí, pleanáil éigeandálaí, trealamh ardteicneolaíochta, taighde ar ailsí agus cur chun cinn na sláinte. Bhí sraith cruinnithe ar leibhéal oifigiúil ann cheana féin. Cuireadh cruinniú earnála ar shláinte agus ar shábháilteacht bia a socraíodh don 3 Samhain ar ceal cionnas gur sháraigh an Chéad-Aire ar a dhualgas reachtúil a chomhlíonadh de réir mhír 52 d'Acht TÉ 1998 le hAiri cuí a ainmniú don chruinniú.

Joint working groups were set up under the auspices of the North/South Ministerial Council to consider how North/South co-operation on health matters could be enhanced in five identified areas: accident and emergency services; emergency planning; high-technology equipment; cancer research; and health promotion. A series of

meetings has taken place at official level. A sectoral meeting on health and food safety scheduled for 3 November 2000 was cancelled as a result of a breach by the First Minister of his statutory duty under section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to make the necessary ministerial nominations for the meeting. This action by the First Minister, which has since been ruled unlawful by the High Court, continues to hamper further progress.

The absence of North/South Ministerial Council meetings has meant that there has been a lack of strategic ministerial direction on the work being taken forward in each of the five areas, as envisaged under the Good Friday Agreement. It is also having a detrimental effect on the working of the Food Safety Promotion Board, and, as a result, the implementation of proposals for enhanced co-operation, which would be beneficial for people, North and South, has been delayed.

Ms Ramsey: Does the Minister agree that any continuing obstruction of the work of the North/South Ministerial Council will erode confidence in the political institutions?

Will she further agree that the acquiescence to such an obstruction by the British Secretary of State, John Reid, places the British Government in breach of an international agreement?

Ms de Brún: I share the concerns expressed by the Member and regret that I was unable to hear her properly because of the disruption in the Chamber.

Paragraph 13 of strand two of the Good Friday Agreement states clearly that the North/South Ministerial Council and the Assembly are mutually dependent and that one cannot function successfully without the other. Therefore, any continuing obstruction of the workings of the North/South Ministerial Council, in sectoral or plenary format, will have serious implications. It will impede the work of the institutions and erode confidence in them.

The North/South Ministerial Council is the subject of an international agreement between the British and Irish Governments, and while it is a matter for the Irish Government to consider the options open to them, it is obvious that the continuing obstruction of the workings of the North/South Ministerial Council will have a damaging effect on all of us.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat. Can the Minister outline any steps that she has taken or intends to take to ensure that a sectoral meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council on health and food safety takes place in the near future?

Ms de Brún: Like my Colleague, the Minister of Education, officials from my Department have on my behalf formally notified the North/South secretariat that I am seeking a North/South Ministerial Council sectoral meeting on health and food safety at the earliest possible

date. I have also written to the British Secretary of State, John Reid, on two occasions reminding him of the powers available to him under section 26 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to direct the First Minister to carry out his statutory duty to make nominations to the Council. I have recently met separately with both John Reid and Taoiseach Bertie Ahern. I outlined my view of the options available to them in the event of the First Minister's continuing to act unlawfully. I will consider the various legal options available to me if there is any repetition of the First Minister's refusal to nominate me to attend the North/South Ministerial Council.

Mr Hussey: It seems as though we have returned to the first ministerial set of questions and answers. I would remind the Minister that the solution to her problem lies with herself, her ministerial Colleague and the rest of her party.

When I asked the Minister of Education a question, which the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety must have heard, I did not receive an answer, so I wonder whether I will receive one on this occasion. Will the Minister detail, by subject and date, those health, social services and public safety issues for which she has requested that a North/South Ministerial Council meeting be held? Or, like her ministerial Colleague, has she not even bothered to request them?

Ms de Brún: If the Member wishes to look at the press release of 3 November following the sectoral meeting in Enniskillen, he will see details of the issues that were dealt with at that meeting that were of great benefit to the people of Ireland, North and South. Those were the issues to be dealt with at the North/South Ministerial Council meeting that I requested yet was not able to attend because of the First Minister's breach in refusing to nominate me.

Mr Hussey: The Minister has not answered the question.

Ms de Brún: I have answered the question; I am answering the question. Since then I have instructed my officials to request another meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council. For example, members of my staff and those from the Department in Dublin have held meetings on accident and emergency services in Belfast and Dublin to identify areas for enhancing co-operation in cancer services, staff training, development and exchange. Those are five matters that I would like to take up.

There are reviews of renal services to exchange information. There is a North/South paper, still at the development stage, on proposals for further local inter-hospital collaborative projects. That was discussed at the meeting in Enniskillen under the auspices of co-operation and working together (CAWT). The question of the Food Safety Promotion Board also needs to be dealt with. That board's work is being held back because it has been unable to appoint permanent staff. It continues to operate with an interim chief executive and has not

been able to obtain agreement on a strategic plan. The establishment of the scientific advisory committee on nutrition (SACN) awaits approval by the North/South Ministerial Council, and its formal appointment is essential to underpin the board's credibility. That is all happening at a time when the agrifood industry is at its lowest ebb and people need help and guidance.

On the issue of planning for major emergencies, as Members will know from previous questions, a working group has been asked to look at the question of an air ambulance service. In the Fire Service, papers are under review on current co-operation, fire safety education awareness and co-ordination of cross-border responses to road traffic accidents. Those will be dealt with at a meeting of the working group.

Those are all matters which, when prepared, will go in front of the North/South Ministerial Council, should such a meeting be held. I am running out of time, but there are matters that relate to the operation of high-technology equipment and hospital, and community-related, emergency planning. There are further questions about the area of health promotion, including projects we wish to take forward that were discussed at the last meeting. Some of those relate to health in the workplace; others, such as smoking, particularly by young girls in school, will be discussed in conjunction with the Minister of Education. Those and other health promotion issues are ones that we wish to deal with at the next Ministerial Council meeting. The five different areas of co-operation and the work that the Food Safety Promotion Board needs to do at this critical time will be dealt with at the next possible opportunity.

We have the question of whether co-operation to date in plenary meetings has brought to light issues on which we might wish to expand the present co-operation and put forward ideas for a further work programme for the coming year. I hope that answers the Member's question.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The Member asked for detail, and he certainly got as much if not more detail than he wanted. *[Interruption]*.

I have been asked to take a point of order. Points of order come at the end of questions.

Mr S Wilson: Does the Minister not find it odd that, at a time when she claims her Department is short of money and the budget is tight, she has spent money fighting political battles through the British court system, which IRA/Sinn Féin has consistently tried physically to destroy? Perhaps she will explain to the House why, given the antipathy of IRA/Sinn Féin towards the British Government and everything British, she has, by her own admission, written two begging letters to a British Secretary of State asking him to support her getting a North/South meeting called?

Ms de Brún: The Member has, as usual, asked a question in his own inimitable style. I suggest that he look at the Hansard record, which will show that I clearly said that I was reminding the British Secretary of State of the powers available to him under the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to direct the First Minister to carry out his statutory duty. I was also perfectly capable of doing that in person on the occasion that I met with the British Secretary of State.

I do not have a variety of different court systems to choose from, so I happily use the one available to me. I do so because I am the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for all of society — for those constituents that the Member represents as well as for my own constituents; for those whom he represents in political outlook as well as for those whom my political outlook represents. My ability to do my duty for all of those people is being hampered by the continued refusal of the First Minister to nominate me to meetings of the North/ South Ministerial Council.

I also refer the Member to previous answers in which I have shown that the co-operation that we have been able to achieve, specifically in relation to health promotion issues, has been cost-effective and has saved us all money.

Alcoholism: Drinks Marketing

2. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to indicate what research she is undertaking to measure the influence of drinks marketing techniques on the rate of alcoholism. (AQO 1305/00)

Ms de Brún: Sheol mé 'Straitéis an Choiste Feidhmiúcháin leis an Dochar Alcól-Ghaolmhar a Laghdú' an fómhar seo caite. Ceanglaíonn seo de thrí chuspóir ghinearálta sinn: ar an chéad dul síos, dearcadh ciallmhar ar an ólachán a chothú; ar an dara dul síos, seirbhísí éifeachtacha cóireála a chur chun cinn; agus ar an tríú dul síos, daoine aonair agus comhphobail a chosaint ar an dochar a fhéadann mí-úsáid alcóil a dhéanamh.

3.15 pm

Last autumn I launched the strategy for reducing alcohol-related harm, which commits us to three broad objectives. These are to encourage a sensible approach to drinking; to promote effective treatment services; and to protect individuals and communities from the damage that alcohol misuse can cause.

Within the framework established by the strategy my Department is working to develop an information and research programme. Priorities for the research programme will be set through consultation with a wide range of organisations and agencies. That will provide an opportunity to analyse and assess local drinking

patterns and behaviours, including the influence of factors such as marketing techniques.

Mr Dallat: The vast majority of people involved in the drinks trade are decent, honourable people who share my concerns. Does the Minister agree that some of the marketing techniques referred to that promote alcohol — for example, “two for the price of one”, happy hours and other attractions such as prizes and awards — could be a cause of increased alcoholism for some?

Will the Minister ensure that there is very close monitoring of such promotions in the drinks trade, so that her Department is in a position to make sound judgements about possible links between questionable marketing and alcoholism? Her Department could then take appropriate measures to counteract such practices.

Ms de Brún: I certainly share the Member’s concern about such marketing techniques. The strategy for reducing alcohol-related harm highlights that as an issue that should be pursued.

We will take the opportunity, through the implementation of the strategy, to highlight again the advertising codes of the Committee of Advertising Practice and the Advertising Standards Authority. Those codes state that

“Particular care should be taken to ensure that advertisements for sales promotions requiring multiple purchases do not actively encourage excessive consumption.”

We will also work with the drinks industry to address common areas of concern. We aim to have agreed joint policies for enhancing responsible trading next year, having reviewed the whole issue of responsible trading with the drinks industry, local strategy implementation groups and other interested bodies.

Mrs Carson: Is the Minister not aware that a major part of the European Declaration on Alcohol is a commitment to ensure that young people can grow up without undue exposure to the promotion of alcohol? Will her Department give specific attention to researching the correlation between drinks marketing techniques and binge drinking among young people?

Ms de Brún: Again, I share the Member’s concerns about marketing techniques, and I refer her to the answer that I gave on the points that we will be taking forward.

The specific link between marketing and binge drinking is certainly another aspect that must be examined with regard to the implementation of that part of the strategy. We certainly know that binge drinking is a particular problem here.

We know from a health promotion survey of adult drinking patterns carried out in 1999 that males who drank 10 units or more and females who drank seven units or more in one sitting were classified as having participated in a binge drinking session. Under that criteria, even at that time, 39% of male drinkers and 28% of female

drinkers had experienced a binge drinking session in the week prior to the survey.

We will be taking specific measures to look at the question of binge drinking by young people. However, as I have said, the priorities for the research programme will be set through consultation with a wide range of organisations and agencies, which will provide the opportunity to address, to assess and to analyse that as an issue that needs to be researched.

Dr O’Hagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Can the Minister indicate what measures are in place to target under-age drinking and to educate young people about the dangers of under-age drinking?

Ms de Brún: Under-age drinking must be tackled seriously. It is an offence for licensees or their employees to sell alcohol to anyone under 18 years of age, and it is an offence for anyone under 18 to buy alcohol or present themselves as being over 18 for the purpose of buying alcohol. We will review the adequacy of the current controls as one element in the implementation of the alcohol strategy. As part of the school curriculum all young people receive health education to discourage them from under-age drinking. The curriculum includes education on alcohol, tobacco and illegal drugs. The Health Promotion Agency has also carried out research and delivered public information programmes.

Further work under the new alcohol strategy will develop a health promotion and education programme targeted at children and young people. The programme will provide training for teachers, other educators and youth workers. The target date for the development of these programmes is December 2001.

Ulster Hospital

3. **Mrs E Bell** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current situation in the Ulster Hospital as regards (a) waiting lists, (b) intensive care unit (ICU) staffing and (c) the general financial situation of the Ulster Community and Hospitals Health and Social Services Trust. (AQO 1257/00)

Ms de Brún: Is don ráithe a chríochnaíonn ar 31 Nollaig 2000 a thagraíonn an t-eolas is déanaí atá ar fáil ar liostaí feithimh. Ag an am sin, bhí 3,605 duine ag fanacht le dul isteach in Otharlann Uladh mar othair chónaitheacha.

Cruinnítear eolas ar dhaoine atá ag fanacht lena gcéad choinne othair sheachtraigh ar bhonn iontaobhais agus chan ar bhonn otharlainne. Ag deireadh Nollag 2000, bhí 15,406 duine ag fanacht lena gcéad choinne othair sheachtraigh ag Iontaobhas Phobal agus Otharlanna Uladh.

The latest information available on waiting lists refers to the quarter ending 31 December 2000. At that time 3,605 people were waiting for inpatient admission

to the Ulster Hospital. Information on people waiting for their first outpatient appointment is collected on the basis of trust rather than hospital. At the end of December 2000, 15,406 people were waiting for their first outpatient appointment at the Ulster Community and Hospitals Trust. The current staffing levels in the intensive care unit are adequate, having been increased in the past year.

A reference was made to the general financial situation of the trust. My Department has recently allocated an additional £1.35 million to enable the trust to deal with its cumulative deficit at the end of this financial year. My Department is also engaged in ensuring that the trust has an agreed recovery plan that will enable it to maintain financial stability in future years.

Mrs E Bell: I thank the Minister for her answer, especially with regard to the financial situation. From the time that the Ulster Hospital was built, it has been promised extra money, and it is good that a local Minister is allocating that money now because it is really needed. Anyone who has been in the Ulster Hospital will be aware of that. Does the Minister accept that money is needed for the casualty unit tomorrow — in fact, it was needed yesterday — to ensure that recent incidents do not recur and that waiting lists are reduced as quickly as possible?

Ms de Brún: Some aspects of the programme for the Ulster Hospital were implemented urgently because we understood the need for them. My Department acted quickly to address the individual deficit problems at the Ulster Community and Hospitals Trust, and other trusts, by requiring formal recovery plans from the relevant organisations. We understand the need for capital investment for the business case that the trust has been working on and has brought to us. We will give it our consideration.

Dr Adamson: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

There are many “ologies” in medicine — and I am sure that the Minister has met quite a few of them — ranging from anthropology to zoology. I am sure that she has met a bit of “codology” as well. Dermatology services are one of the Cinderellas of medicine. Can the Minister detail the present state of the dermatology services in the Ulster Hospital and how they are to be developed because of the increase of skin cancer in our area?

Ms de Brún: As regards waiting lists, dermatology is one of the three main specialities accounting for the majority of the change in the numbers of people waiting for both inpatient and outpatient treatment. Clearly, there is a need for work in this area. The majority of the change can be accounted for by dermatology, plastic surgery and trauma, and orthopaedics. We have taken that matter on board.

However, part of the change is due to an increase in referrals and in emergency admissions to the Ulster

Hospital in respect of these specialities, including dermatology. The trust also undertook a programme of work to rationalise the process by which referrals are sent by GPs, and that has led to the trust dealing with a number of referrals that, in the past, would have been referred to other trusts. That is something that we need to take on board and to look out for in the future.

Madam Deputy Speaker: In answer to the previous question, I do not think that there is a treatment for “codology”.

Dr McDonnell: I am interested in the 3,605 waiting list patients in general. However, can the Minister tell us what percentage of operating theatre time is lost because of theatre staff non-availability — in other words, where nurses or theatre support staff are not available, yet surgeons and others are?

Ms de Brún: I cannot give a specific percentage of operating time lost, but I certainly share the Member’s concern regarding the availability of nursing specialists. That has been the case in waiting lists generally, and in some specialities more than others the availability of theatre time and staff has impacted on waiting lists. The Member will be aware that we have looked not only at the question of increasing nursing numbers — and we are increasing the number of nurses in training by 100 places each year for the next three years — but specifically at specialities within that area. That is something that will be addressed.

Lagan Valley Hospital A&E Department

4. **Mr Molloy** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to explain how Lagan Valley Hospital was granted permission to build a new accident and emergency department before the acute hospitals review group has given its report on acute services.

(AQO 1298/00)

Ms de Brún: Is é atá san obair ar an roinn taismí agus éigeandálaí ag Ospidéal Ghleann an Lagáin ná athchóiriú na n-áiseanna reatha le cinntiú go gcoinneofar na seirbhísí atá ann faoi láthair. Chuir mé in iúl go soiléir nár cheart d’obair an athbheithnithe ar ghéarospidéal aon bhac a chur ar sholáthar leanúnach seirbhísí. Ní gá don iontaobhas cead a iarraidh ar an Roinn le tabhairt faoin obair mar nach dtéann na costais chaipitil thar £500,000.

The work on the accident and emergency department at Lagan Valley Hospital is, in fact, the refurbishment of the current facilities to ensure the maintenance of existing services. I have made it clear that the continued delivery of services should not be impeded by the work of the acute hospitals review group. The trust does not require permission from the Department to undertake the work, as capital costs do not exceed £500,000.

Mr Molloy: Is the Minister aware that this is a manoeuvre being pulled by the trust to ensure that it does not have to get approval and that the cost, as discussed by the trust, is more likely to be in excess of £700,000 when equipment, and so on, is in place? The Department has said that accident and emergency units, or variations of them, should not be changed until the Hayes review of acute services is delivered. The danger is that if this refurbishment takes place — or what I see as a completely new accident and emergency unit, publicly advertised as such by the trust itself — it could make the Hayes review redundant.

At the same time, in my area hospital, the South Tyrone Hospital, the accident and emergency unit has been closed for 12 months, and people are on long waiting lists in Craigavon. We need to view this not as refurbishing —

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Will the Member please put a question to the Minister?

3.30 pm

Mr Molloy: Does she accept that this does not constitute refurbishment and that the actual cost will be in excess of £700,000 rather than £500,000?

Ms de Brún: I am not aware of any evidence that suggests that the work on the capital costs will exceed £500,000. If that is found to be the case, the trust will require the Department's permission, and I will have to take the matter up with that trust. However, on the basis that the acute hospitals review should not affect the continued delivery of high-quality services, I expect trusts to take the action necessary to ensure that patient services are up to standard. That includes continued refurbishment, where necessary, in hospitals.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Our time is up. I thank the Minister.

Mr Beggs: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Under Standing Order 19(5), the Speaker may from time to time consult the Business Committee on the need to provide additional time for questions. Will the Minister examine the length of some of the answers given? By ensuring that answers are brief and to the point, additional time could be created, and this would enable us to get further than question 4 on the Order Paper.

Madam Deputy Speaker: There are two other points of order.

Mr Armstrong: In answer to an earlier question, the Minister said that she was not able to fulfil her duties because of her party's exclusion from the North/South bodies. If that party and its associates were to decommission their weapons and explosives, they would not have a problem.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order. Will the Member please refer to the Standing Order to which he is referring.

Mr Armstrong: The Minister said that she is not able to carry out her duties because of her non-attendance at North/South bodies. She could do a good deal of work here in Northern Ireland.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have ruled that this is not a point of order.

Mr Davis: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. In the light of the fact that just four oral questions have been answered this afternoon, will the Minister not consider in future, as a courtesy to the House, answering all the questions in English, as this would not take up so much time?

Ms de Brún: We have been over this matter several times, and the time taken up by answers in Irish has no impact. Members should consider that oral questions — not written questions — comprising parts (a), (b) and (c) are allowed and that that has a clear impact on the length of answer that a Minister is expected to give.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. These points of order have been responded to by the Minister, and that has prolonged this section of Question Time. I will respond to the points of order that have been made. Five questions have been dealt with during this 30-minute period. The first question was amalgamated with question 8. It is important that points relating to the length of questions and their responses be brought to the Business Committee by the Whips. That is where these issues should be discussed.

Mr Maskey: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. With reference to the last point of order, I will take guidance from you, but, in my opinion, it was inappropriate for you to refer that question to the Minister. The Standing Order that Mr Davis was referring to is an Order of this House.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The question which was originally introduced as a point of order was not referred by the Deputy Speaker to the Minister. The Minister sought to respond immediately on her own behalf.

Mr Poots: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it not in order for you to step in when it is clear that the Minister is filibustering to avoid later questions?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order. We must move on.

Dr O'Hagan: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. With regard to the points of order on the Irish language, if proper translation facilities were available in the House, there would be no need to hold up the debate.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Time is up. We must move on.

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Madam Deputy Speaker: Question number 12 in the name of John Fee has been withdrawn.

Access to Children's Fund

1. **Mrs Courtney** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail when the children's fund can be accessed by organisations other than Government Departments.

(AQO 1287/00)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):

The Executive propose to consult with the voluntary and community sector on arrangements for the children's fund. An interdepartmental working group has been established to work with the voluntary and community sector with a view to putting in place the necessary arrangements so that funding can be allocated in September 2001.

Mrs Courtney: Can the Minister confirm how much remains in the children's fund following his first round of allocations? Will he ensure that those voluntary and community organisations with valuable advice and input to give in this area will be consulted on the best use of the remaining resources?

Mr Durkan: There is £29 million in the Executive programme fund entitled the children's fund. Based on the previous announcements made in the House, we have allocated £10 million. That leaves £19 million. We have not determined the precise balances that are to be allocated to direct bids from the community and voluntary sector or to the bids from Departments. Even those areas of the fund that have been subject to bids generated by specific Departments or between Departments can have application to the community and voluntary sector. It is not the case that bids from Departments would simply be confined to Government activity. They could also fund activity in other sectors. We have an amount of money in the fund that can assist the community and voluntary sector where there are good proposals.

Mr McFarland: Can the Minister assure me that priority in the allocation of funds to non-governmental organisations will be given to established children's charities rather than to bureaucratic intermediary bodies, thereby ensuring that children themselves benefit from this innovative programme?

Mr Durkan: One of the things that the Executive want to achieve with Executive programme funds is maximum direct benefit to the community and to particular services. However, we also want to ensure that there is a good strategic impact. There will also be many instances, not least in the children's fund, where some of the funding will be to pilot schemes, or pilot initiatives, that could include some direct services. This might also involve some developmental work being undertaken by bodies that might be classified as intermediary bodies or bodies that are representing a wider service interest. What we would be trying not to do is to have the funds soaked up by schemes or projects that are not of themselves adding new, additional or developmental benefit. We cannot say at this stage that

particular priority or preference will be given to certain organisations above others.

Peace II Money: Distribution

2. **Mr Poots** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if it is his intention to ring-fence Peace II money to ensure equitable distribution. (AQO 1301/00)

Mr Durkan: The funding to be allocated under the Peace II programme has been agreed by the Executive, and the respective financial allocations for each priority and measure are specified in the operational programme which was formally agreed with the European Commission on 22 March.

Mr Poots: I am not sure what question the Minister was answering, but he did not address the issue of ring-fencing the Peace II money. Clearly, that was a problem with Peace I. Where money was ring-fenced, it was more equitably distributed.

Is it the Minister's intention to ensure that Peace II is ring-fenced so that the Unionist community can get a piece of the cake and not just the crumbs that it received last time?

Mr Durkan: I did address the issue in the question. I made it quite clear that the funding is available and will be allocated on the basis of the criteria that are set down in the operational programme and will be further defined in the programme complement. The community support framework provides a set of horizontal principles that will be fully adhered to. Monitoring arrangements are in place for the next Peace programme, and I believe that they are much stronger and more effective than in the last Peace programme.

I also believe that the Member's latter point acknowledges that, notwithstanding many of the perceptions that have existed about this, progress has been made on this issue in ensuring that there has been a better spread of applications coming forward, and in turn there may be a healthier balance of allocations. Equality and balance are two of the key issues in the horizontal principles, and when we fully apply those measures in that way, people throughout the community will be satisfied with the outcome.

Mr Hussey: Will the Minister confirm that the £6.67 million ring-fenced for victims is to be allocated specifically to the victims of terrorism? What sum has been ring-fenced to support ex-prisoners? Perhaps it would be better if such funding were allocated to ex-prisoners via non-ex-prisoner-type organisations, which would better assist the process of rehabilitation.

Mr Durkan: The Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister will manage the money in relation to victims. The junior Ministers have already spoken to the House about those plans. We have agreed the

operational programmes. The programme complements have to be agreed, and that will include details of the precise measures and criteria. That is still to be determined.

The emphasis is that the funding will be for people who have suffered injury, bereavement or direct suffering as a result of violence in our community. Ex-prisoners' groups and interests are eligible for consideration under a number of measures in the Peace II programme.

Peace II Programme: Community and Voluntary Sector

3. **Mr Maskey** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the role envisaged for the community and voluntary sector in respect of the Peace II programme.
(AQO 1304/00)

Mr Durkan: The community and voluntary sector will continue to have an important role in Peace II overall, and, because the terms of reference for the new local strategy partnerships will be wider, the scope for that sector to influence strategic priorities at the local level should be increased.

Mr Maskey: Does the Minister agree that a number of organisations and representatives from the voluntary and community sector have already made their concerns known to the Department in respect of the strategy partnership? Concerns have been expressed that the community and voluntary sector might be swamped by some of the more mainstream or statutory bodies.

Mr Durkan: I acknowledge that that concern exists and has existed for many people in the community and voluntary sector. I have some sympathy with that. I am pleased to observe that many people in that sector have been reassured by the further plans and thinking that we have been able to show, particularly as we have agreed the Peace II operational programme. In turn, we have been able to concentrate on some of the more detailed issues of the transition to new partnership models.

Many of the fears that people had have now been seen to be ill-founded, and many are looking forward positively to the sort of prospects opening up for partnership in the new Peace programme. However, they are clearly conscious that the real test will be how things work in practice. If seized properly these new proposals will allow the community and voluntary sector not just to get a significant turn for itself, and those that it serves, out of the Peace II programme, but also to make a very significant contribution to the activities of other sectors.

3.45 pm

Mr J Wilson: Can the Minister explain why it has taken two months to deal with the appointment of the intermediary funding bodies (IFBs) for Peace II? When does he expect a final decision to be made?

Mr Durkan: I will try to avoid any issues of anticipation in this answer as the subject of the next question is also IFBs. I can assure the Member that there has been no delay. The advertisement calling for applications was published in January, with a closing date of 2 March. A significant number of applications were received. It is a competitive process, and those applications have had to be processed and evaluated. In that sense two months is not a delay; rather it is a reasonable time for the submission and consideration of bids. We are now hoping to move forward.

Peace II Programme: Intermediary Funding Bodies

4. **Mr McGrady** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail what bodies will be selected as intermediary funding bodies for the delivery of funds from the Peace II Programme; and to make a statement.
(AQO 1258/00)

Mr Durkan: As I just said, at the end of January an advertisement was placed in newspapers, North and South, asking for interested organisations to submit tender applications for appointment as IFBs under Peace II by 2 March 2001. An independent evaluation of the tenders received has been completed by outside consultants, and the results will be considered by the selection steering group later this week. The selection process is expected to be concluded next month.

Mr McGrady: I thank the Minister for his reply and his answers to the previous supplementaries. However, considering that the Rural Development Council has already achieved a very high level of expertise and has a proven track record in delivering funds from the first Peace programme, what assurances can the Minister give that it can and will be selected as an intermediary funding body for the delivery of those programmes that pertain to the rural community?

In the interim, what will the Minister do to ensure the sustainability of ongoing programmes, which have been so important in the rural communities?

Mr Durkan: The process for selection of IFBs for the next programme has been an open and competitive process and still has fully to run its course. The consultants will be referring their consideration on the proposals submitted to the steering group later this week. Therefore I cannot anticipate that any group, which may or may not have tendered for this, will be successful. It would clearly be inappropriate for me to enter into any speculation, never mind give any commitments in that regard. However, I am happy to recognise the very strong, important and invaluable contribution that all the intermediary funding bodies have made to the success of Peace I and that many of them make in a number of

other fields through their other responsibilities and efforts as well.

As for gap funding, we are trying to ensure that we are open for applications before the summer to minimise the gap. In the meantime interim funding opportunities are available. Groups that were previously funded from intermediary funding bodies are eligible to apply. Individual projects have received information through advertisements and through responses to specific requests.

If the Member has any particular concerns about the working of these arrangements, I will be happy to look at them.

Mr Beggs: Will the Minister indicate the criteria used to determine the effectiveness of the intermediary funding bodies under Peace I, and if success in giving, or more often than not failure to give, a fair and equitable geographical and community spread of the previous funding will be taken into consideration when appointing new intermediary funding bodies?

Mr Durkan: I have to be careful about being drawn in too deeply in reply to the Member's question, because it asks me to speak specifically about the performance of groups as intermediary funding bodies in Peace I, and many of those groups have tendered to be such bodies in Peace II. I cannot associate myself with some of the pejorative references in the Member's remarks concerning the performance of those intermediary funding bodies, because it would be prejudicial to the selection process.

I reiterate that I am happy to acknowledge the important and valuable contribution of intermediary funding bodies in difficult territory. The issues the Member raises about the difficulty in satisfying everybody in geographical spread and community balance are not confined to intermediary funding bodies or to programmes funded by the European Union.

Procurement

5. **Mr Ford** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to confirm that current policy on procurement operates on the lowest common denominator of value for money; and to make a statement. (AQO 1277/00)

6. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail what progress has been made on the procurement review. (AQO 1288/00)

Mr Durkan: With permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will take questions 5 and 6 together as they both deal with public procurement policy.

As I stated to the Assembly on 12 March 2001, current policy is that all public procurement is to be based on value for money, having due regard to propriety and regularity. Value for money is defined as the optimum

combination of whole-life cost and quality or fitness for purpose to meet the users' requirements.

The implementation team that has been established to make progress on the findings and recommendations of the initial procurement review has met on four occasions and is planning to engage in public consultation during May. This will assist in bringing forward proposals that take account of the equality dimension for consideration by the Executive Committee in June.

Mr Ford: I thank the Minister for his reply, which I think was "Yes", although I had some difficulty in interpreting it. On the assumption that it was a "Yes", and that all we currently have is a lowest common denominator, let me quote to the Minister, from a 1999 report, the second half of the sentence from which I took my question:

"...there is insufficient management information to measure achievement against such a policy."

Will the Minister tell the House whether in the last two years any management information has come to hand and what his estimates might be of the potential benefits of properly implementing a value-for-money policy?

Mr Durkan: As I have indicated previously on the procurement issue, one reason that we are now involved in the implementation exercise is precisely to make good the sort of gaps and deficiencies that the report identified — gaps and deficiencies that probably surprised many of us, and that included management and information. The implementation exercise will look at that important issue among others. It is important for value for money and also for other relevant public procurement considerations.

Mr Dallat: The Minister will be aware that a number of recent reports produced by the Comptroller and Auditor General are highly damaging to public confidence. Can the Minister confirm that the findings of the review team will take account of the equality issues involved in procurement and will ensure that all proper procurement procedures suggested by the review will be followed? We do not want a repeat of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board's printing contract shambles, and we want to ensure that the opportunity to operate cosy cartels or golden circles is gone from the procurement process for ever.

I am sure that the Minister agrees that the Assembly has a major task to perform in that regard.

Mr Durkan: A number of concerns have been raised for Members by Audit Office reports that, among other things, have looked at some procurement issues, and they are not confined to the one mentioned by Mr Dallat. There are others. The implementation exercise in which the Department of Finance and Personnel is engaged should try to ensure that the new arrangements that operate should also serve to help prevent any repeat of those difficulties.

The Department of Finance and Personnel wants all Departments to use the Government Purchasing Agency (GPA). The Department wants to make sure that the practices, procedures and opportunities available to the GPA in respect of value for money, probity, fairness and equality are used to serve the public that the Assembly represents. Equality considerations are a significant dimension to the work of the implementation exercise. The Department of Finance and Personnel wants to make sure that public procurement is conducted in the public interest and that the Executive are paying as little as they need to for good services and goods. The Department also wants to ensure that everybody is able to compete on a fair and equitable basis to provide services or goods under public procurement.

Peace II Partnership Models

7. **Mr Gallagher** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to give details of the consultation involved in the process of drawing up the arrangements for the new partnership models in Peace II. (AQO 1286/00)

Mr Durkan: Last October, I set up a working group that consisted of representatives of district councils, district partnerships and intermediary funding bodies. The purpose of that working group was to draw up proposals for best developing the role and functions of partnerships in each district council area in the new Peace programme and more widely. The working group's proposals were endorsed by the Executive in December, and arrangements for their implementation were discussed at a colloquy in Ballymena on 31 January attended by representatives of all the organisations that had been involved in the delivery of Peace I.

Following that, the chief executive of the Special EU Programmes Body convened a focus group to draft guidelines for the formation and operation of the new partnership model. Throughout that period there were also consultations with the European Commission on the development of the new partnership model.

Mr Gallagher: Given the many excellent initiatives that have come to fruition as a result of the effort and energy of the voluntary and community sector, will the Minister confirm that as a result of his actions there will be no downgrading of the role of that sector? Will he confirm that, on the contrary, the sector's influence will increase so that the concept of partnership will develop and continue long after the EU moneys have been spent?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for his questions and concur with his positive assessment of the contribution that the partnerships have made to the success of Peace I and, as a result of that contribution, to wider efforts at local and regional levels. The partnerships have had a pathfinding role, and the community and voluntary sector has played a positive defining role. That is something

that I want to see not only continued but developed as well.

I repeat the assurances that I have given in the House and in meetings with the community and voluntary sector. The Department of Finance and Personnel is concerned with seeing the partnership model succeed and flourish — not in ways in which it is just confined or in gateways to a particular EU programme, but where it can influence and inform strategic progress across a number of sectors.

4.00 pm

The community and voluntary sector will be well placed to continue to make a significant and positive contribution in that regard. There will be challenges for that sector in the new partnership model. There will also be challenges for other sectors, not least the statutory sector.

Peace and Reconciliation: EU Structural Funds

8. **Mr Berry** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to state what impact European Union structural funds have had in achieving peace and reconciliation in each section of the community. (AQO 1265/00)

Mr Durkan: A full assessment of the impact of structural fund programmes is a major research project which cannot be undertaken until the programmes in question have ended. The ex post evaluations of the 1994-99 Northern Ireland single programme and the 1995-99 special support programme for peace and reconciliation will begin before the end of the current financial year. These will aim to assess all programme impacts including peace and reconciliation.

Mr Berry: Does the Minister agree that more needs to be done to ensure that there is an equal distribution of the EU structural funds, given that the Unionist community has been overlooked for many years? I appreciate the Minister's reply to my Colleague Mr Poots that equality and balance are the key issues. I agree 100%, and I trust that he will do everything in his power to address the issue of the Unionist community's being overlooked in the distribution of funds.

Mr Durkan: While appreciating the Member's point, I stress again that we need to be careful about making sweeping assumptions about the balance of allocation with regard to some of these programme funds.

With regard to the Unionist community's being overlooked, the interim report of 1997 from the three MEPs, including Ian Paisley, stated that there was no question of discrimination. While it noted that there appeared to be a lower rate of applications from communities in Protestant areas, that, in itself, did not imply any discrimination. That exercise, and other efforts, recognised

the need to try to improve the situation and particularly to mitigate some of the legitimate concerns that were being expressed at that time. That work continues.

We need to remember that many of these measures have to work according to particular criteria. Targeting social need and deprivation factors can be relevant. Targeting social need considerations will not necessarily be synonymous with some people's interpretation of what an equality consideration may mean.

Dr Birnie: I am sure that the Minister is glad to be answering a question on funds other than Peace II. Will he confirm that sustainability will be a key consideration in the outlay of future funds with regard to Peace II, the transitional funds and the peace and reconciliation criteria to ensure that more jobs are created in areas which have genuine economic competitiveness to underlie them?

Mr Durkan: The Peace programme, important and valuable though it is on the basis that it is additional money, is one part of the community support framework. The other larger part of the community support framework is the programme for building sustainable prosperity. A number of important principles have to inform the allocations and planning in respect of that programme. Not least of these is sustainability with regard to any project or measure. Longer-term sustainability with regard to underpinning longer-term economic development and supporting continuing prosperity is also important.

We need to ensure that we are making very clear, hard-headed decisions. This is not additional money, and many people seem to be under the illusion that it is. Since it is not additional money, it cannot be used, as some people seem to be suggesting, as a runner-up fund for projects that do not quite come through in relation to the Peace programme.

Clearly, the competition is going to be intense. We have to remember that the distinctiveness of the two programmes is important, and that is often emphasised to me by people who are very concerned to see that the integrity of the Peace programme is respected. That also applies in relation to the integrity of the programme for building sustainable prosperity.

Rates Arrears

9. **Mr Close** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to give his assessment of the effectiveness of measures taken by his Department to reduce the level of rates arrears. (AQO 1276/00)

Mr Durkan: The level of rate arrears expressed as a percentage of the gross collectable rate for each rate year has fallen from 3.8% in 1985-86 to 1.86% in 1999-2000. The lowest level of rate arrears was 1.72% in 1997-98. The Rate Collection Agency has consistently secured an arrears level of less than 2% over the last five years. The

performance compares favourably with that delivered by similar public sector revenue collection organisations in other jurisdictions.

ASSEMBLY STANDING ORDERS

Madam Deputy Speaker: I would like to explain how I propose to conduct the debate. As the next four motions relate to Standing Orders I propose to conduct only one debate. After the debate I will ask the Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures to move each motion, and I will put the question with regard to each motion without further debate.

As with all motions on Standing Orders, the question can be resolved only on a cross-community basis. However, where there are voices from all sides of the Chamber for the motion and none to the contrary, I regard a division as unnecessary. If that is clear, I shall proceed.

The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Mr C Murphy): I beg to move

That Standing Order 10(2), line 3, be suspended until the Summer Recess.

The following motions stood on the Order Paper:

In Standing Order 15(1) line 2 and line 3 delete “at least one hour prior to the commencement of business” and insert “not later than 9.30 am”.

[Mr C Murphy]

In Standing Order 20(1) line 7 after “concerned” insert “normally”.

[Mr C Murphy]

In Standing Order 10(2)(c) line 2 after “shall” insert “normally”.

[Mr C Murphy]

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The motion to suspend Standing Order 10(2) line 3 is the result of discussion over a number of months following a request from some parties. Standing Orders provide time slots for many things but not for party business. The larger parties have more difficulty in this regard. There are no provisions for fixed time allowing parties to debate plenary matters or those generally pertaining to the Assembly.

The Committee on Procedures was asked to include this as part of an overall investigation into procedures in the House. Research has identified that, from the start of the current session, the average period for lunch on Mondays has been one hour and 45 minutes and the plenary sessions have generally lasted less than six hours. On numerous occasions the Assembly has adjourned much earlier than 6.00 pm.

Plenary sessions start at 10.30 am, and it is not possible to arrange party meetings during the lunch period, given that we do not know how long it will last. We considered a number of options for a later starting time for plenary sessions.

Under Standing Orders, the current starting time for plenary sessions is 10.30 am. Suggested options included a mid-afternoon start, finishing much later in the evening. However, after detailed consideration and taking on

board the need to strike a balance with family-friendly policies which underscored the initial Standing Orders laid down for the Assembly, the Committee agreed that a starting time of 12 noon, finishing at 6.00 pm, should be introduced on a trial basis from now until the summer recess.

The removal of the lunch period will provide the Assembly with the same amount of time to consider business as before — roughly six hours. The Committee agreed that the new starting time would be an experiment until the summer recess and that it would then review the matter. For that reason, in this motion we are seeking a suspension of Standing Order 10, rather than proposing a new Standing Order. If, as we approach the summer recess, a review identifies that the later start time of 12 noon has been beneficial, the Committee will then undertake to table a motion at the start of the next session to make the change permanent. I beg to move the motion.

Madam Deputy Speaker, do you want me to speak to the rest of the motions now, or do you wish them to be read first?

Madam Deputy Speaker: We are having only one debate on all four motions, so could the mover of the motions please speak to all four in his initial statement?

Mr C Murphy: I was aware that all four motions had not been read; only one had been read. Do you wish to have the other motions read first, Madam Deputy Speaker?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Please speak to all four motions.

Mr C Murphy: The second motion proposes a change to Standing Order 15 in relation to amendments. The current practice is that amendments have to be submitted in writing to the Speaker at least one hour prior to business commencing, which is normally 9.30 am on Monday and Tuesday mornings. This amendment seeks to ensure that where plenary sittings start at 12 noon, then further time is available to consider any amendments tabled by 9.30 am. Presently parties have only 60 minutes to consider amendments to business on the Order Paper, and this time is reduced by virtue of the fact that the amendments must be submitted to the Speaker who, within that time frame, considers if the amendment is competent. We propose that the time for submitting amendments be kept at 9.30 am on a Monday morning, rather than one hour before business commences.

The other two motions are connected and seek to amend the Standing Orders to deal with the issue of private notice questions. According to the present Standing Orders, a private notice question may be asked immediately prior to the start of the afternoon's Adjournment debate. There is no flexibility for a private notice question to be taken at any other time, and if a Minister were not available, then the question would fall, and the opportunity

for a Member to hear a ministerial response on a matter of public importance would be lost.

There is a precedent in this matter involving the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. With the indulgence of the Speaker, a very important question was allowed to be taken earlier in the day so that the Minister could be present to answer it. Had the period just preceding the Adjournment debate been rigidly stuck to, the Minister would have been out of the country and the question would not have been answered.

These two proposed changes to the Standing Orders are to allow a degree of flexibility as to when the Speaker may take a private notice question, in light of ministerial availability, to ensure that important issues are addressed.

I beg to move the motions.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Mr Dalton): I support the motions put forward by the Chairman of the Committee. These motions deal with minor changes that the Committee believes will be of benefit to the operation of the Assembly.

I will work in reverse order and deal with the motions relating to private notice questions. The Committee Chairman mentioned the private notice question to the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. From that past experience we have seen that had flexibility not been exercised by the Speaker to take the question at that point — although contrary to the Standing Orders as currently drafted — we would have lost an important private notice question. It was the Committee's view that it would be foolish not to allow such questions to go forward simply because a Minister was unable to attend. By allowing a degree of flexibility and discretion, a Minister will be able to fit these into his or her timetable and ensure that private notice questions can be properly raised. This will be of benefit to the entire Assembly. Those are my reasons for supporting those secondary motions.

On the biggest change — the suspension of the timings — there was, again, a lengthy discussion in the Committee. A number of parties have indicated that the 10.30 am start time on a Monday is awkward — especially for the larger parties. They have a considerable logistical problem in properly discussing, debating and deciding how they are going to react to the day's business. By allowing extra time, the larger parties, in particular, will be able to facilitate that. It will benefit the Assembly as a whole and especially those Members who are travelling from the west of the Province first thing on a Monday morning. Perhaps it would not be unreasonable for the House to indulge those who have to travel getting on for 100 miles from Castlederg. I am looking for my Colleague Mr Hussey, but I see that he is not here. The

extra time would be useful as well. That would be my main reason for supporting that proposal.

4.15 pm

The Committee discussed the idea of extending our time into the evenings as well. It was decided that that would not be appropriate, in the light of the family-friendly policy that was adopted by the Standing Orders Committee. We are putting forward a motion to suspend the Standing Order for this period, but we do so simply in order that we can sit from 12 noon until 6.00 pm. The Assembly will not lose any time, because there will not be a lunch break. The sitting time available will be the same as that previously available.

The change will have no impact on family-friendly hours, so that policy, which was agreed by the Assembly, will be maintained. I say that particularly to those Members who are concerned that the motion would take away the pleasurable time that they might spend with their families — or not, if that is their preference.

Mr Dodds: I have no difficulty with the proposals on private notice questions. They are sensible suggestions, and they provide a degree of flexibility. The Speaker has already exercised such flexibility, despite the current wording of the Standing Orders but with the agreement of the Business Committee.

There is a problem, however, with the first motion, which provides that the Assembly will not sit until noon on Mondays. Although it is only a suspension and an experiment, such things have a habit of becoming permanent. We are being asked to accept a proposal that will allow for debate to be foreshortened on Mondays. At the moment, we can have seven and a half hours for debate in the House — from 10.30 am to 6.00 pm — if required. There have been occasions on which the Business Committee has timetabled debates and motions that have carried on right through lunchtime. That has happened on a number of occasions on which it has been deemed to be necessary; on other occasions, there has been a lunch break. There is also a facility in the Standing Orders to extend time beyond 6.00 pm.

Judging from what the Deputy Chairman of the Committee said about the thinking behind the motion, it is clear that the Committee's desire to keep family-friendly hours — stopping at 6.00 pm — will ensure that there will be less time available for the Business Committee to play with when agreeing business for Mondays. That does not reflect well on the Assembly.

Just over a week ago, we debated an issue that necessitated the recall of the Assembly. Many Members said then that there were many important social, economic and other issues that had to be debated in the House. Today, we have a suggestion from the Procedures Committee that we should reduce the time available for plenary sittings. Sometimes, we are in danger of forgetting about

the views of the people who pay our salaries and who elect us to this place. They expect that, rather than devoting less time to discussion of matters of public interest, we should perhaps devote more time to it.

Members spend time in Committees and in their constituencies carrying out very important duties, but it does not reflect well on the Assembly to suggest, at this stage, that we should reduce the potential time for debate on the Floor of the Assembly.

I suspect that the real motive behind the proposal is that some parties are unable to get their act together sufficiently for a 10.30 am start. That may apply to one or more of the bigger parties whose Members have already spoken in the debate — it certainly does not apply to us.

It is amazing that those who are arguing for a lie-in on a Monday morning, and who have already spoken, say that there is a logistical problem and that they need extra time. If Members have not been organised to speak and amendments have not been thought about from 9.30 am, when they are submitted, it is unlikely that much extra work will be done between 10.30 am and noon.

Some Members, particularly those from west of the Bann, travel very long distances to be in the Assembly. However, to be fair, some of those who travel long distances are often in the Assembly before those who travel from considerably nearer places.

During the very bad weather, when the Assembly was very reduced in numbers, it was the Members from west of the Bann and from very far afield who made it here, struggling through very adverse conditions to their credit. If travelling long distances were really an argument for a later starting time, why are we leaving Tuesdays as they are? Surely the Committee should be suggesting that proceedings on Tuesdays should also start later? The argument does not stand up.

Mr McFarland: If the Member accepts family-friendly hours, that the time available from noon to 6.00 pm is the same as that available at the moment, given the lunch hour, and that we have the ability to extend past 6.00 pm if required, would he clarify his objection to the new hours?

Mr Dodds: I am happy to do so. The Member is clearly labouring under a grave misapprehension. I have not accepted some of the things that he mentioned. I have not accepted that we will have the same hours under the proposal as we do at present.

At the moment, the Business Committee has seven-and-a-half hours to play with, with the potential for extending beyond 6.00 pm if it wishes. Under the proposal to start at noon, according to the Deputy Chairperson, the Business Committee will have only six hours — so it is actually a reduction.

I do not accept that the number of hours will be the same. They would be the same if there were always a

lunch break, but there have been occasions — and we are meeting on three days this week — when the Business Committee and the parties have agreed that we should continue through lunch.

Sometimes we have not had to continue through lunch because debates have not gone on as long as they were expected to. However, we are reducing the number of hours that the Business Committee has to play with on Mondays from seven-and-a-half hours to six hours. That is the situation, and I hope that the Member accepts it.

The Member also raised the issue of family-friendly hours. I did not make any comment about my views on the Assembly's stopping at 6.00 pm — the reference to family-friendly hours came from the Deputy Chairperson. Indeed, other Members have referred to that on previous occasions.

We should try to conclude our business in and around six o'clock whenever possible. I am not against extending that timescale if the business merits that. There are occasions on which I have supported an extension, in the face of opposition from others, because I believed that the subject under discussion merited it. Therefore I am not against an extension on all occasions. However, the proposal not to start the business until 12 noon will make it potentially more difficult to stick to the 6.00 pm deadline.

Those are some of the reasons why I will oppose the removal of the requirement to start Assembly proceedings at 10.30 am on Mondays.

Mr A Maginness: I support the Chairperson and the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures who have presented the arguments fairly and properly to the House. I do not understand the argument objecting to the temporary suspension of the Standing Orders that Mr Dodds has put forward. The temporary suspension is merely to see how things will pan out. It will show whether starting at 12 noon and moving on to 6.00 pm suits the House in the efficient dispatch of its duties. It puzzles me why the Member is so strenuously opposed to the experiment. That is all that it is — an experiment. If the suspension fails, and we discover that by moving the times we are, in fact, losing valuable time for debate and discussion, we can revert to the present position after the summer recess. We will have lost nothing. Therefore I do not know why the Member is so perturbed about the matter.

There is a fair argument that the parties in the House do need time to reflect on Monday mornings on the business for the week — not just the business of the House, but the business in Committees and so forth. There is a great deal going on; parties must inform one and other about what is happening in the various Committees. On Monday mornings it is important they have time to get to grips with the business, and starting at 12 noon seems to be a sensible thing to do. I cannot

see how anybody could have any great objection to the experiment. I hope that the House can support the suspension. It will be an interesting experiment, and if, in fact, it does turn out to be a bad one, we can learn a lesson from it.

Mr Neeson: I am delighted to hear the optimism from all around the House that the Assembly will go on beyond the summer recess.

It is right and proper that we review Standing Orders from occasion to occasion. While I largely accept most of the proposals that are being put forward today by the Chairperson and his Committee, I have serious reservations about the first proposal. The Business Committee normally meets on a Tuesday, and, to a large extent, the business for the following week and weeks beyond is decided at that meeting. Therefore it provides opportunities, between Tuesday and Friday, for parties to meet and work out who will deal with the various business issues for the following week. My party meets at lunchtime on Thursday.

I accept the Chairperson's words when he says that it is still the Committee's intention to preserve the family-friendly hours. However, my fear is that we will reach the stage, maybe on a Tuesday, where we do not get the business completed, and that will necessitate special meetings of the Assembly on a Wednesday.

4.30 pm

The Assembly has been functioning very well for a year, and it is clear that the amount of legislative business coming through the various Committees is increasing. I have serious reservations about whether we will be able to get through all of that business.

Subject to the approval of the Business Committee tomorrow, we will be meeting next Wednesday to discuss the item that we were supposed to be dealing with this Wednesday. That shows that business is building up and that the Assembly is functioning well. I echo what Mr Dodds said — once something becomes temporary, it can well become permanent. We must remember that Members also face other pressures.

For example, many of us are members of councils, and every Monday evening many of us have council meetings to attend as well. In the circumstances, my party and I find it difficult to accept the first proposal and urge the Chairman and his Committee to rethink the matter.

Preserving family-friendly hours may seem like a worthwhile gesture to those who do have concerns. However, there is plenty of time to deal with the issues, through you, Mr Speaker, between Tuesday and Friday. We oppose the first motion.

Mr Beggs: I would like to concentrate on how amendments are dealt with when put forward on a Monday morning. The deadline for amendments is 9.30 am. They are to be submitted to the Speaker's Office by that time.

They have to be marshalled, and the Speaker must determine which amendments are to be listed on that day's Order Paper. Assembly Members are frequently notified of the Marshalled List at 10.00 am or, on occasion, before 10.30 am. I consider it inappropriate that Members are given only thirty minutes' notice, or sometimes no notice at all, of the Marshalled List of amendments before entering the Chamber.

That occurs through no fault of the Speaker, but rather through the fault of the procedures that are in place. I favour a trial period purely because it will provide an opportunity for amendments to be properly discussed in each group before a decision is made. It is inappropriate that amendments are presented to Members without proper time for discussion and debate in each of the groups before they enter the Chamber. Some parties may not have the same level of discussion.

Mr Dodds: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. I agree with the thrust of his remarks about the time available for the notification of amendments. The Assembly should address that issue. However, given the point that he makes — and I am sure that this will resonate throughout the House — I fail to understand why we are leaving matters as they are on a Tuesday. We now have separate Order Papers for Mondays and Tuesdays, so we will be in exactly the same position on Tuesdays as we are on Mondays, whereby amendments can be tabled up until 9.30 am, and Members can be given as little as 30 minutes' notice, or sometimes no notice at all. I agree with the point, but I wonder why is it a good idea for a Monday but not for a Tuesday.

Mr Beggs: I agree with that point and would have supported a proposal to apply the proposed changes to Tuesday's sittings also. That argument works in favour of having a trial period during which we would be able to see whether there were any benefits from applying the arrangements for Mondays' sittings to Tuesdays'. There would be a two-month period during which the arrangements will apply on one of the Assembly's two plenary days, with an opportunity to compare how business is conducted on the different days.

Some parties may not have the same level of internal discussion and debate as others. In my party, it is difficult for everyone to make himself available at a fixed time, given the fact that there is a party Member on every Assembly Committee. It would be difficult not to eat into time during which Members should be at a Committee. I value the democratic nature of my party, and, as an ordinary Back-Bencher, I value the opportunity to discuss every issue and to have an input on the resultant party line. I strongly support the proposal.

Mr Gibson: I am sometimes amazed by statements that I hear in the House. I thought that it was the role of the Business Committee to make businesslike proposals. I thought that those, in particular, who are so adamant

that this place should work, would demonstrate a businesslike administration of their work. However, they are really admitting to the parties' inability to organise themselves — that is the nub of this whole argument.

The only real argument that emerged — that which took place between Mr Beggs and Mr Dodds — concerned the question of how much time the parties should have to consider amendments. The Committee should go back to this question and have an honest discussion about it. There is concern that at 9.30 am the Speaker has to make a judgement and may have to assess not just one contentious amendment, but possibly three or four. Having made his decision, he has to publish it to the various parties. I can see that this creates some logistical problems.

I want to make a further point concerning logistics. Every Member from west of the Bann, apart from Mr Byrne and me, has disappeared — and quite rightly so, given that they have work to do in other areas. If a sitting begins at midday and ends at 6.00 pm, some of us, because of traffic congestion, will not arrive home until 8.00 pm or later, and bear in mind that in a rural constituency, if a Member wants to do worthwhile work, he has to travel a further 30 or 40 miles. Given the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease, how many of us want to drive on to farmyards and run the risk of contamination?

The one sensible thing that Mr Alban Maginness said was that time is important. I would have no objection if a sitting started at 9.30 am and finished at 5.30 pm. Those of us who have to spend time travelling would have more time to carry out constituency work when we returned home. There are constituency offices to run. Some parties cannot manage their affairs, so they are calling upon the Assembly to accommodate their inability to be businesslike. That is not a reasonable argument for the rest of us to accept.

I start quite early in the morning, and although I do not claim that everyone else should do the same, we have taken on the task of representation. We have, therefore, a duty of care to be businesslike and to demonstrate that responsibility not just in the Assembly, but in our constituency efforts. While I am sure Mr Dalton would say that he has a right to family-friendly affairs, I need to be convinced of it. Others among us have family commitments. Some travel from as far as Garrison and Castlederg, and the rest of us must travel considerable distances. This is a design some people have dreamt up because they could not handle their own business.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr Speaker: The Member has now taken his seat.

Mr Leslie: I welcome these amendments to the Standing Orders, such as they are. Both the Business Committee and the Procedures Committee have a great deal more work to do if we are to run our affairs to

optimum effect. A number of remarks are pertinent to the proposals put forward today.

In the past, and sometimes in a slightly different context, we have debated one or two of these matters. I have never subscribed to the view that family-friendly hours should be a particular consideration when deciding how to run our affairs. On the whole, politics is not a particularly family-friendly occupation. I speak as one with a very young new member of my family, so I have some sort of position on that at home as well as here.

However, none of the proposals that I have heard suggests that we lock everybody up in here until about 10.00 pm every night of the week. For the most part, proposals surround the idea of one late sitting a week, and for the time being, at least, that is not the proposal that we hope to run with. The business of the Assembly would be far better conducted if we sat into the evening on the first day, which currently is a Monday, and Members were not inclined to travel a distance to their homes that night. It would be normal practice to stay overnight in the vicinity of the Assembly.

That is a fairly normal practice in most legislatures of countries of any size. In Scotland, which is somewhat bigger than Northern Ireland and has a population of about five million, they manage to conduct their plenary affairs in a day and a half. They conduct their Committee affairs in a further day and a half. They assume that Members will spend two nights staying in the environs of the Scottish Parliament, enabling them to put in three very full days of work.

This has a bearing on the remarks that Mr Gibson has just made about attending to constituency affairs. It seems to me that that is the way to do it as that allows the maximum amount of time in one place and then the maximum amount of time in the other. If you are running your time efficiently, you should not spend too much time running between the two. I have a journey of slightly over an hour, provided I travel outside rush hour to get here. We have not yet fully probed all angles about the times during which we should have plenary meetings.

From time to time, I hear it remarked that many Members sit on councils and have to attend to council business on Monday evening. This is of no concern to the Assembly. We have Members who do two, three and four different jobs, all of them in a pretty patchy manner as far as I can judge. If a Member chooses to try to do two jobs at once, that is his affair. It is not the affair of the Assembly.

We could have addressed a number of other matters when reviewing our Standing Orders that might have tidied things up — such as the banning of Members from reading pre-scripted speeches. That might have made things a little more succinct. We would have a perfectly ample amount of time available if the Business Committee were more selective and critical in its choice

of motions, particularly those to be taken on Tuesdays. If we did not devote time to discussing matters well beyond the jurisdiction of the Assembly, we would save a great deal of time. We have some way to go before we can claim that we are operating in the most sensible and efficient manner.

4.45 pm

Finally, I entirely support Mr Murphy's proposal that amendments should still be tabled by 9.30 am for a 12 noon start. The matter of amendments to motions for debate on Tuesdays was raised in debate. It seems to me that if we start at 10.30 am on Tuesday, then logically we should seek to have amendments tabled by 6.00 pm on Monday, so as to allow a similar amount of time for the amendments to be dealt with.

If more time were available, these matters would be better dealt with and debated. There is an inappropriate obsession that the Assembly is more macho the longer it sits and that it does greater good the longer it sits. I contend that the reality is the opposite. The excessive amount of time spent in plenary in this Assembly reduces the amount of time available for proper consideration of issues, and it reduces the time available for Members to be properly informed.

Consequently we have a great deal of debate that seems to be poorly informed. While the point I am about to make is more a matter for the Business Committee, I think it is worth making: I calculated that this Assembly will, if it gets to the end of this term, have sat for 37 weeks over the three terms of the year. That is totally illogical. It takes four weeks to do a cycle of ministerial questions. Logically, the number of weeks that the Assembly sits in plenary for a year should be a number divisible by four — 32 or 36.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has digressed well outside this debate and the Standing Orders that are under consideration. We must be reasonably efficient about our time.

Mr Leslie: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am actually speaking in parenthesis on the point about the amount of time spent in plenary. That time is both the time in hours on Monday and Tuesday and the time in hours over the year as a whole. Therefore, the point that I have just made is relevant. I do not think that there are very many legislators that have 37 weeks of plenary. Perhaps we will return to that matter on another date.

My final point relates to the starting of our business. Showing flexibility in working hours, enabling at least some of the population to travel to work outside the rush hour, can only be a good thing. However, there are other Members — perhaps like myself — for whom I do not anticipate any change in the time that they start work on a Monday. I start at around a quarter to nine. The work

that I normally do on a Sunday, I might now be able to do on a Monday.

I support all the motions.

Mr Byrne: I support the motions. The first motion is causing the greatest debate. As someone who travels 75 miles on Monday mornings, I think that it is important that there be a discussion within party groups about the order of business for the week. It is unfair to the business of the House if there is inadequate discussion within groups at the start of the week on the order of business.

Currently we have about one hour and forty-five minutes for lunch on a Monday. This motion, under which we would be starting official Assembly business at 12 noon, means that we would be losing under half an hour of actual Assembly time. In order to make sure that all our Colleagues in all the groups are fully apprised of what is going on in the Assembly formally and what is going on in the Committees, it makes sense to have proper discussion in our groups.

It is also important that the Whips have a clear understanding of what is happening so that we have an efficient method of voting on our motions. That would enable smooth functioning and running of Assembly business.

Mr C Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Members who contributed to the debate and those who indicated their support for the amendments we are proposing. The most significant amendment is the first one concerning changing plenary times. It was interesting to hear some of Mr Dodds's arguments opposing the change of time for starting plenary sessions. It would have been helpful to hear those arguments in Committee. Mr Dodds is a member of the Procedures Committee, as is Mr Paisley Jnr, but they chose not to attend any Committee meetings except when the Committee visited Edinburgh, when we were travelling abroad — *[Interruption]*.

A Member: Scotland is not abroad.

Mr C Murphy: It is under a foreign country.

Mr R Hutchinson did turn up, and his only contribution to the debate was to tell us that the DUP would be opposing it. Many of the points raised by Mr Dodds were debated and argued at length in the Committee. Had he been there to give his viewpoint, perhaps we could have answered some of the questions he has raised.

On the question of permanence, as Alban Maginness stated in his contribution, this will become permanent only if it proves to be beneficial to the Assembly. It is experimental. We cannot get away from the fact that Mr Dodds says that there will be a reduction in time. The Committee undertook a survey which showed that since the start of this session the average time taken for lunch has been one hour and 45 minutes — wasted time, in

effect. The larger parties cannot plan for that because you cannot legislate for when that may happen.

As for the reduction in time and the amount of hours the Business Committee has to play with, if Mr Dodds had bothered to turn up for Committee meetings, he would have known that we are proposing a suspension of that Standing Order, which means that the Business Committee can decide the time. We are not asking the Assembly to adopt a Standing Order that says we start at 12 noon on a Monday. We are, in fact, proposing the suspension of the Standing Order that dictates that we start at 10.30 am on a Monday. If the Business Committee feels that the business merits it, it can decide to start earlier than 12 noon. Our recommendation to the Business Committee is that we try an experimental start time of 12 noon. That is not in the proposal, and it is up to the Business Committee to decide — *[Interruption]*.

Again I make the point that if the Member or his Colleague had bothered to turn up —

Mr Dodds: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The Member keeps referring to the “bottle” to turn up. I am here today to make points in this debate. Rather than engage in insidious sniping and personal remarks, the Chairperson should answer the arguments in detail, as I did.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Dodds: I engaged in the argument.

Mr Speaker: Order, order.

Mr Dodds: I remind the Member that Scotland is part of the United Kingdom.

Mr Speaker: Order, order. The Member will resume his seat. That is not a point of order, as he knows.

Mr Shannon: It was a good point, and it was very eloquent.

Mr Speaker: It may be a point, but it is not a point of order.

Mr C Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. If Mr Dodds had been listening, he would know that I did not say he did not have the “bottle” to turn up; I said he did not “bother” to turn up to meetings. I will make the point again. It is all very well and good making arguments now. However, when a Committee spends months thrashing something out, and Committee members do not bother to take part in that debate, it is somewhat invidious of them to turn up and make their points here.

Mr R Hutchinson: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The Committee did not spend months debating this issue.

Mr Speaker: I am not sure what the intended point of order is.

Mr C Murphy: That is an indication of the level of contribution from Mr Hutchinson to the Committee debate.

I return to the purpose behind this motion. There were some suggestions, attempts at media sound bites, that this was to give Members a lie-in on a Monday morning. That is clearly not the case. Members, especially those from the larger parties, will start work at the same time on a Monday morning, which is the intention of those from the larger parties who support this motion. Rather than coming straight into the plenary session or, as stated by Roy Beggs Jnr, spending less than half an hour dealing with any amendments, they will have two hours to debate among themselves, which is what democratic parties usually do. The DUP has a different approach, which is somewhat ironic considering its party name. That is what democratic parties do; they not only debate the order of the business for plenary days but also Committee business and general political business in the Assembly.

Almost all other items of business in the Assembly have an allocated time slot, apart from party business. There was clearly a deficit in that parties were struggling to find time to meet.

Travel is not the main consideration — it is obviously one consideration, but it is certainly not the main one. The intention of the parties who proposed the motion — from discussion at the Committee — was that they would start their own party business at 9.30 am to 10.00 am on a Monday morning rather than come into the Chamber. That would provide them with time, rather than having a rushed approach, given that the plenary session starts at 10.30 am and that amendments are not available to the parties until perhaps 10.00 am.

Sean Neeson made several points — and I accept that his party is not represented on the Committee because of the way the membership fell. The Business Committee, by and large, agrees the content of the Order Paper on a Tuesday afternoon. However, the Order Paper is not finalised — as the Speaker knows, and as Mr Neeson and his party Whip will know — until Thursday afternoon. Therefore, the full and final content of the Order Paper is not available to the parties until Thursday afternoon when the Speaker has signed it off.

As regards having party meetings on Thursdays, two Committees meet on a Thursday afternoon, and the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee meets on a Friday morning. Most Members attempt to give Fridays over to constituency business and will operate out of their constituency offices. Therefore, for any of the four largest parties, any party meetings called on Thursday afternoons or on Fridays are likely to have up to five members missing due to there being a clash with Committee meetings. This proposal is an attempt to find a slot for the parties to meet when all party members should be available because there is no other Assembly business to keep them from meeting with their party Colleagues.

As regards the Member's worry about the proposal on extending beyond 6.00 pm, I remind him that we are not making such a proposal. The Assembly already has that facility, although it has been very rarely used. We discussed the matter in depth, and we are making no proposal to extend beyond 6.00 pm in this experimental change to Standing Orders.

I agree with Roy Beggs that the current procedures provide too little time. Nigel Dodds reinforced that point when he mentioned the Tuesday morning set-up, and other Members also made the point. The Committee must address the issue, and Members, including Mr Dodds, are correct in saying that 30 to 45 minutes is not sufficient time for people to consider fully the implications of an amendment. It is not enough time for a large party of 18, 20, 24 or 28 members to decide how they will vote on an issue and have a proper democratic discussion on it. Clearly, there is a case for a review of the Tuesday deadline. James Leslie suggested a Monday evening 6.00 pm deadline for amendments, and that is something that the Committee is going to have to consider again.

I remind Oliver Gibson that it is the Procedures Committee that are making these proposals, not the Business Committee. The Business Committee can be businesslike, but I do not know if we can be "procedures-like". The matter of amendments is one that we are going to have to keep under review. It has been raised here, and the Committee will want to pay attention to it.

I agree with the point about family-friendly hours. On many occasions when I have debated this issue with people, I have said that family-friendly hours do not apply to those who live in places such as Fermanagh, West Tyrone or Derry — by the time they get home, they will have travelled for maybe two to two-and-a-half hours. Family-friendly hours do not have much value then.

We must also consider that family-friendly hours do not apply to Members only; they apply to the Assembly staff who are obliged to stay on. That was one aspect considered by the Committee. Assembly staff are obliged to stay for at least an hour after the Plenary session is finished. That was one of the arguments against extending into the evening.

I do not agree with James Leslie's point about over-night stays. I would prefer to go home. However, any matters may be tabled for discussion by the Committee, and if Mr Leslie, through his party representatives on the Committee, wants to table that suggestion, I am sure that it will be discussed.

I hope that I have answered most of the points made. I regret that, at Committee stage, we did not have the opportunity to debate some of the points raised with the Members who made them today. However, it is their preference to choose whether to attend Committee meetings.

5.00 pm

Question put.

The Assembly divided (cross-community vote): Ayes 41; Noes 22

AYES

Nationalist

Alex Attwood, P J Bradley, Joe Byrne, Annie Courtney, John Dallat, Bairbre de Brún, Arthur Doherty, Mark Durkan, Tommy Gallagher, Carmel Hanna, Alban Maginness, Alex Maskey, Alasdair McDonnell, Barry McElduff, Eddie McGrady, Martin McGuinness, Gerry McHugh, Pat McNamee, Francie Molloy, Conor Murphy, Dara O'Hagan, Eamonn O'Neill, Sue Ramsey.

Unionist

Ian Adamson, Billy Armstrong, Roy Beggs, Billy Bell, Esmond Birnie, Joan Carson, Fred Cobain, Robert Coulter, Duncan Shipley Dalton, Ivan Davis, Derek Hussey, Danny Kennedy, James Leslie, David McClarty, Alan McFarland, Ken Robinson, George Savage, Jim Wilson.

NOES

Unionist

Paul Berry, Gregory Campbell, Mervyn Carrick, Wilson Clyde, Nigel Dodds, Oliver Gibson, William Hay, David Hilditch, Roger Hutchinson, Gardiner Kane, Maurice Morrow, Ian Paisley Jnr, Edwin Poots, Iris Robinson, Mark Robinson, Jim Shannon, Denis Watson, Jim Wells.

Other

Eileen Bell, David Ford, Kieran McCarthy, Sean Neeson.

<i>Total Votes</i>	<i>63</i>	<i>Total Ayes</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>(65.1%)</i>
<i>Nationalist Votes</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>Nationalist Ayes</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>(100.0%)</i>
<i>Unionist Votes</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>Unionist Ayes</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>(50.0%)</i>

Resolved:

That Standing Order 10(2) line 3 be suspended until the Summer Recess.

Resolved:

In Standing Order 15(1) line 2 and line 3 delete "at least one hour prior to the commencement of business" and insert "not later than 9.30 am".

Resolved:

In Standing Order 20(1) line 7 after "concerned" insert "normally".

Resolved:

In Standing Order 10(2)(c) line 2 after "shall" insert "normally".

TRAFFIC-CALMING MEASURES IN WEST BELFAST

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn — [*Mr Speaker*]

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat. Obviously the Adjournment motion — [*Interruption*].

Mr Speaker: Order. If Members are depriving themselves of the debate on traffic-calming measures in west Belfast, perhaps they would do so quietly. Please continue, Mr Maskey.

Mr Maskey: On a point of order, is it not unusual for the Minister not to be in the House? He has, in fact, just vacated the Chamber.

Mr Speaker: It is unusual, but it appears that the Minister is seeking some sustenance for the verbal journey ahead. Please continue.

Mr Maskey: The motion relates to traffic-calming measures in west Belfast. However, I want to talk about traffic conditions and, to a lesser extent, car crime in the area, and how traffic-calming measures can impact on that in a positive way.

I welcome the fact that traffic-calming measures have been introduced in a number of estates and roads in the area over the last few years. I also welcome the fact that officials from the Department of the Environment and the Department for Regional Development have been involved in discussions with several local schools, together with the West Belfast Partnership Board. However, those discussions were designed as a pilot survey of road traffic and safety issues around some schools only. There is a clear need to complete that survey.

West Belfast is an area defined as suffering from serious social disadvantage, and there is already clear evidence that there are more accidents, road deaths and injuries in such built-up areas. Therefore, I argue that west Belfast should be accepted as an area that requires further extensive action on traffic calming.

The Department constantly tells us that there are established published criteria for the provision of traffic-calming measures. However, it is my experience — and I argue that it is also the experience of many others — that unless there is community and political pressure the Department will rarely act voluntarily to provide such measures in an area. Consequently, these measures are provided in a piecemeal manner and only after long local campaigning.

5.15 pm

I understand that traffic-calming measures in themselves do not solve all the issues of traffic management or anti-social behaviour. However, there is evidence to back up the fact that they can help. A variety of measures can be introduced, such as ramps, road narrowing, traffic

lights, or crossing islands, which do not always require a huge amount of money.

Given the identified traffic problems in west Belfast such as on the Westlink, Falls Road, Andersonstown Road, Blacks Road and others, most estates are used as rat runs for drivers seeking to avoid the congestion on the main roads. It is welcome that under new planning regulations housing developments will incorporate traffic-calming measures, but this will not affect existing developments or roads in the area.

I refer the Minister for Regional Development, Mr Campbell, to his response to my question on 5 February. He said that his Department remained keen to investigate properly any problems raised by assessing what contribution safety engineering might make to difficulties in any area. Clearly this assertion totally contradicts the response that I received from his Department three weeks later, on 28 February, in relation to the specific question of the Monagh bypass. I use this example to illustrate the difficulty.

The acting chief executive, Mr Fraser, informed me that a meeting to discuss the Monagh bypass would not be of any benefit in tackling the traffic problems and anti-social activity, which continue to bedevil the residents in that area. That response from a civil servant is unacceptable, and I would appreciate an explanation from the Minister as to why his official refused a meeting with a local elected representative.

Over the last few weeks the Monagh bypass has featured quite extensively in the local press due to car crime. Physical measures can and must be introduced on this road, as they have been on others, to discourage speeding and car crime and so ensure the safety of other drivers and pedestrians.

On 7 February, the Minister advised me in a written response that resources had not yet been allocated for the year 2001-02 and that Members would be informed when the allocation had been finalised. At that time the Minister could not give any specific commitment to increased measures in any area. To date, I have heard nothing. I read with interest at the weekend that a councillor — in east Belfast, I believe — claimed that extra funding has been made available for the area. I am happy to hear that.

West Belfast, like many other areas, needs to have a planned programme of traffic-calming measures introduced. It needs to be done in a phased, planned way over a period rather than because of local pressure or accidents in the area.

I seek an assurance from the Minister that his Department will honour the commitment that he gave in the House on 5 February and will explore all options with respect to traffic-calming measures in order to alleviate the chronic traffic problems and car crime that exist in west Belfast. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Attwood: I would like to approach this issue from three levels. First, there is traffic calming itself. Secondly, there is the issue of road strategy in west Belfast, and, thirdly, there is the issue of wider development in the city of Belfast and how it impacts upon west Belfast.

I agreed with Mr Maskey when he stated that there are published criteria in respect of traffic-calming measures. The Roads Service will state what those measures are when one writes to it. Will the Minister ask his officials to consider a review of the current criteria for the installation of traffic-calming measures? In the view of many people those criteria are not exhaustive; they are no longer as applicable as they might once have been, and they should be broadened.

If people write to Roads Service they will get a letter back confirming that the factors included in the assessment of road traffic-calming measures are: the accident history for the previous five years; the volume of cars and heavy goods vehicles (HGVs); the speed of traffic; the width of footpaths and the distance from street to house; the presence of a school or playground in or near the street; the presence of a hospital, clinic, home or suchlike in the street; and the presence of shops or public buildings in the street. These are valid criteria, but they need to be reviewed and broadened, because they do not take account of a number of significant traffic considerations. I will give a number of examples.

First, should the criteria not be broadened to include an assessment of the volume of traffic using roads adjoining those that are being considered for traffic-calming measures? You cannot consider the issue of traffic calming in one street without considering the traffic flow in adjoining streets, especially where those adjoining streets are arterial routes or primary routes going through parts of the city of Belfast, particularly west Belfast. I ask the Minister to consider whether the criteria should be revised to be more explicit or to expressly include that criterion.

Secondly, the current criteria correctly identify issues of traffic management and safety given the presence of a school or playground in or near the street. However, the criteria do not take into account the age profile of the people who might be living in that street. Although a school around the corner might have an impact on having a traffic-calming measure in a neighbouring street, it would not necessarily include consideration of traffic calming, given the age profile of that street, whether that profile is very elderly or very young — having a lot of older people or a lot of children. It would be appropriate and relevant for the criteria to be revised to take that factor into consideration.

The third issue that I want the Minister and his officials to consider the probable future use of roads in particular areas of west Belfast, the city in general and beyond. If there is going to be growth in traffic volume in west Belfast — and empirical evidence suggests that that is

likely — then that is also an issue that should be considered when it comes to traffic-calming measures. If there is going to be a likely significant increase in traffic volume in parts of west Belfast because of developments in and around the area that I will detail shortly, that should be factored into the determination of traffic-calming measures.

I want to broaden the discussion, because the revision of the criteria can apply to west Belfast and to other parts of the North, and so it should. However, there is an issue particular to west Belfast, and Alex Maskey referred to it. That is the disproportionate number of accidents — fatal and non-fatal — in west Belfast relative to other comparable areas of the city and of the North in general. That is true not only in the case of road traffic accidents, but also in respect of other accidents.

One of the indicators of the quality of life in west Belfast is that there is a high accident rate. It is a high accident rate in terms of road use as well. Given that particular factor in the area, it seems appropriate that there should be a general review of road traffic-calming measures in west Belfast independent of the review of the specific criteria for traffic-calming measures because of the particularly high volume of accidents in that area. I ask the Minister and his officials to consider that.

The second point that I want to make, which I referred to in my opening comments, is about the probable increase in road use. If that is going to be a factor it should be the case that the Department, as a consequence, look at a far-sighted traffic-calming policy in areas that are going to be affected by the probable increase in traffic. That is particularly relevant to west Belfast. Over the next two, three and four years there is going to be a significant increase in traffic volume there arising from at least three or four developments.

First, the builders are currently on site at Springvale campus. The first new build of Springvale is under construction at the moment. In three years and three months time, there will be 3,000 people going onto that campus every single day — students, teaching staff and ancillary staff. It is quite clear that that is going to have a very significant impact on the area. The Department for Regional Development should be anticipating that and should anticipate, as a consequence, road traffic-calming measures in and around that area and in the other routes that lead to that area.

Secondly, there is likely to be the Westlink development. Among the road-use consequences of that development, Department officials refer, *inter alia*, to the fact that, given that there will be, for a time, less traffic able to use the Westlink, they anticipate that some of that traffic will go into the adjoining areas — one of which is west Belfast.

There is going to be a knock-on effect, if Westlink proceeds, on traffic volume exiting from the M1, both at

Lisburn and at Kennedy Way, going into west Belfast in order to avoid the backlogs that will arise further down the Westlink and into the city of Belfast.

Thirdly, there are some very large planning proposals in west Belfast, particularly at Lagmore. There is potentially one at St Patrick's Training School and one off the Monagh Road. If they proceed, they will have enormous consequences for traffic volume in west Belfast.

Whether all of those do or do not proceed, it is quite clear that over the next four years there will be significant increases in volume of traffic going into and coming out of west Belfast. The increase will be caused by traffic both indigenous to the constituency and traffic using the roads to avoid gridlock elsewhere.

As a consequence of that, the Department should be sponsoring a review of how that will impact in the area so that there are traffic-calming measures to mitigate some of the effects of those developments. In that regard I agree with Alex Maskey. The Department for Regional Development says that such developments as I have outlined are developer-led and that it is for the developer to come up with road traffic management proposals. That is valid, but it is not enough.

It should also be for the Department to anticipate where the difficulties are going to be and to plan for those difficulties. That includes sponsoring a traffic-calming survey in those areas of particular need and particular growth over the next two and three years.

The final issue that I want to raise, moving beyond traffic calming and increased road use per se, concerns the wider development strategy. The Minister's Department — and I know that the Minister is specifically considering this matter at the moment — is currently looking at a draft strategic framework for planning policy in the North.

One of the issues that the Minister, the Regional Development Committee and others are looking at is the issue of greenfield and brownfield development.

If the Minister and the Government go down the road of concentrating on greenfield development and disregarding or diminishing the role of brownfield development, they will create a situation with increased traffic coming into town and into areas such as west Belfast to avoid congestion elsewhere.

5.30 pm

When the Minister looks at that issue, will he ensure that the greenfield/brownfield mix is consistent with other cities of the size of Belfast, given that the strategic proposal and policy are long term and the consequences that will come to the streets of west Belfast, other streets in Belfast and elsewhere if the policy is not right? I suggest that the mix should be 30% greenfield to 70% brownfield. The provision of 10% for over-zoning should not be granted to developers. The suggestion of

greenfield villages on the outskirts of Belfast — of which there are 16 or 17 in the air at the moment — should not be approved. Brownfield should become a key element in strategic planning and development policy over the next 10 to 15 years.

It is a multidimensional approach that might incorporate those proposals so that the immediate and the longer-term problem of traffic calming and traffic safety in west Belfast and elsewhere can be properly addressed.

Ms Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle.

I welcome the chance to speak on this issue. Traffic calming is a serious issue in our communities, faced by young people, the elderly and the disabled. It is also an issue in combating car crime. Sometimes it is the only thing preventing a life-threatening situation. The provision of traffic-calming measures in west Belfast as a whole has been poor, but some small measures have been provided lately. However, I am concerned that it is being done in a piecemeal fashion, rather than areas being looked at as a whole.

Mr Maskey and Mr Attwood listed the criteria that the Department uses to provide traffic-calming measures. The criteria are based on statistics such as the clustering of accidents at a certain spot and requests from residents.

A number of years ago I was involved — and I see some officials here who were involved at that time — with the local community from Twinbrook and Poleglass in response to the tragic deaths of a number of children from my own area. The residents, community groups and local political leaders were on board, and we consulted everybody from the residents to the business community to the local Housing Executive and the health centre to see what traffic-calming measures were needed.

The area included three estates with over 30,000 residents, and at that stage there were no traffic-calming measures in place. We produced a traffic-calming scheme document that we thought was relevant to that community, because it was what the community thought was necessary to have an impact and try to reduce the senseless deaths. At one time, six or seven kids were killed in a two-and-a-half-year period.

We realised, following consultation with officials from the Department, that because we were talking about a wide area the schemes could not be implemented right away. We took on board that finance was not available for the full scheme to be implemented. We accepted that the schemes must be phased. We were concerned that what the residents had asked for, because of the background work that they had done, was not going to be followed through. We had heated meetings with departmental officials on a number of occasions, because we felt that we were only getting tins of paint when we wanted roundabouts.

We did fulfil several of the Department's criteria, and we were amazed to find that our fight was only beginning after we produced the traffic-calming scheme. We did not give up when we discovered that thousands of pounds had been spent on traffic-calming measures in south Belfast, even though the criteria had not been met. The residents there did not ask for the traffic-calming scheme. The Comptroller and Auditor General produced a report on traffic-calming measures, saying that the scheme was flawed and highlighting the inequalities in the Department's criteria.

On a positive note, there has been some movement on introducing traffic-calming schemes in some areas. However, I am concerned that the Department is still not looking at entire areas and is just putting in traffic-calming measures for the sake of it, without considering the impact of such measures. There was reference earlier to new housing developments such as Lagmore. Regardless of whether those are public or private schemes, they should not proceed unless traffic-calming measures are included. There are over 10,000 people in a new housing estate in Lagmore, but the Department has not adapted the roads. There is no long-term strategy for traffic calming.

Alex Maskey spoke about the level of car crime faced by the community in west Belfast. Residents want traffic-calming measures, because they believe that such schemes will have an impact not only on daily car crime, but on speeding in the area. We should get rid of the Department's criteria and have just one criterion — saving lives, not money. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr McFarland: We have heard much detail about west Belfast and the need for traffic calming there. However, this is a wider issue, which needs a broad strategy. The problem can be commuting rat runs, and Ms Ramsey has described how people drive through estates in order to take short cuts. More often, the basic problem is young men in small, fast cars; we are all familiar with that. It is not just a problem in west Belfast; it is a problem throughout the Province. The tyre marks caused by handbrake turns can be seen in any shopping centre and any other place that allows that sort of thing to happen. I was admiring some in Bangor shopping centre car park yesterday.

This is a social issue. The young men see it as a measure of their courage to drive cars quickly. It is a form of breast-beating; it is the "young-man-out-hunting" syndrome. It involves those who own small cars and those who steal cars, wiring them up and driving them away. Between Belfast and Bangor there are the "Wacky Races"; cars are stolen in various parts of Belfast, and there is then a competition to see how quickly the driver can get to Bangor and steal another car to get back. Some of the thieves end up in court, and the local paper covers such stories regularly. Others end up mashed into a wall

around Hollywood somewhere, and that is also a relatively frequent occurrence.

The aggressive use of cars is a symptom of a problem found in many areas — a complete lack of facilities. There is nothing for young people to do, so they take to cars. There is little co-ordination of youth provision, and there are few positive role models. In some areas of England efforts have been made to introduce young lads to rallying and stock car racing and teach them car mechanics. When I was that age, I was car mad, and I spent several years rallying and driving cars around in circles and overturning them. It is fairly normal behaviour, and it can be channelled. Unfortunately, in many cases, there is no place to channel it.

It is an increasing problem. Yes, traffic calming can have some impact locally, but I call on the Minister to get together with his Colleagues in social development, in health and in education to try to work out an overall strategy to deal with this problem.

If the question of young men and their cars and how we take that forward as a general social issue were dealt with, we might be able to ease up on what is undoubtedly a massive expense. If one area has it, then why can all areas not have it? I suspect that the Minister will tell us that there is not enough money to put it everywhere. We need to track it back in to the core problem, and, while traffic calming is important, we need a cross-departmental task force, perhaps, to examine the core issue.

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Campbell): I want to take the opportunity to outline the background to traffic calming as a concept, and what my Department has endeavoured to do in relation to it.

The objective of a traffic-calming scheme is to improve driver behaviour and to keep speed at a level in keeping with the surrounding urban street environment. Traffic calming can do a number of things such as reduce the number and severity of casualties resulting from road traffic accidents, discourage heavy vehicles and through traffic from using unsuitable routes, reduce speeding, improve the urban street environment and reduce community severance, promote a greater feeling of safety and promote cycling and walking.

West Belfast is included in the eastern division of my Department's Roads Service. For information, I can advise the House that the eastern division alone receives approximately 200 requests for traffic calming each year. In fact, I am advised that there are 10 times more applications for traffic calming in Northern Ireland than there are resources to implement them.

In order to make a fair comparison between the various requests and to identify those sites where the greatest benefit may be achieved from traffic calming, primarily in terms of accident reduction, an assessment procedure has been devised that takes into account the

following factors, to which some Members have referred: a five-year accident history, details of which are obtained through police records; vehicle speeds; volume of cars and heavy goods vehicles (HGVs), calculated using detector equipment placed on the ground; environmental factors such as the width of footways and distance from the street to the house; the presence of schools or playgrounds in or near the streets; the presence of hospitals, clinics, homes or suchlike; and the presence of shops or public buildings.

Sites are assessed and points allocated under these headings, and a priority rating is assigned to each site. It is simply impossible to meet all of the many requests for traffic calming, given the limited funding that is available and the engineering staff resources that are needed for consultation on the various schemes. I have referred to this on various occasions in the House, and on Tuesday April 10 I was pleased to announce my traffic-calming initiative.

There are three key elements to the initiative, which I hope will go some way towards addressing these factors. The first is one that I hope the House will welcome. I have been able to announce a 30% increase in the funds available for traffic calming in the 2001-02 financial year. That is an increase of £400,000 from £1.4 million to £1.8 million.

The introduction of traffic-calming partnerships on a pilot basis is designed to give local communities more say in the development of schemes, which I hope will mean implementing schemes more quickly.

5.45 pm

I am signally attracted to that particular element of the scheme, because I want to hear what local communities have to say is the best scheme for their area. Finally, a traffic-calming leaflet will be launched to inform communities of the criteria for traffic calming and the types of calming measures available.

I want to turn now to west Belfast in particular. A pilot scheme has been identified under my new initiative for Stewartstown Park, Stewartstown Avenue, Horn Drive and Falcarragh Park and will be implemented during the current financial year. The area was assessed using the standard criteria and had a high points score due to the number of accidents and the speed and volume of traffic in the area. The estimated cost of the scheme is £40,000.

Roads Service staff attend the Lenadoon Housing and Environmental Forum meetings on a regular basis, and the next meeting is scheduled for today, 23 April, when details of the pilot scheme will be discussed and the Partnership Charter initiated. Given the time of this Adjournment debate, I imagine that the meeting has concluded — at least, I hope that the meeting has concluded.

In addition to the pilot scheme, Roads Service plans to implement four further schemes in west Belfast

during the current financial year, all of which have a high priority under the standard assessment criteria. The Edenmore Drive area is to be granted a 20 mph zone, including the provision of road humps. Gardenmore Road in Twinbrook will be given road humps, as will Summerhill Drive in Twinbrook. Suffolk Road will be given central islands and road markings.

West Belfast has been widely treated with traffic-calming measures for which the total expenditure has been £454,000 since 1995. In total, 17 schemes comprising 104 streets have been treated with various measures, the most common being road humps.

Our current programme for the next two years, that is 2001-02 and 2002-03, for west Belfast totals a further estimated £200,000, with nine schemes comprising 26 streets due to be treated. This programme is preliminary, and further areas may be added as resources permit. I think it was Mr McFarland who guessed that I might mention that resources were inadequate to enable us to carry out all the schemes that have been suggested. Indeed, that is the case.

The schemes that have been carried out both in west Belfast and generally across Northern Ireland have been very successful. For example, in 1996-97 five schemes were carried out on 25 streets. In those streets there had been an average of 10.6 accidents a year over the five-year period prior to treatment. In the three years after completion of the work, the accident rate has reduced significantly to an average of 3.7 accidents per year — that equates to a reduction of almost two thirds.

Members can appreciate, however, that a wide range of factors can cause traffic accidents, and it would be wrong to assume that speed control measures, in their various forms, can create an accident-free zone.

Traffic-calming measures are, of course, not confined to west Belfast. I would like to give the House some equivalent figures for Northern Ireland. Since 1995, £6.1 million has been spent Province-wide on traffic calming, with 191 schemes completed. Since traffic-calming schemes were implemented in the three-year period from 1995-96 through to 1997-98, 121 fewer accidents have occurred in Northern Ireland than the yearly average prior to the work's commencing.

There are many different types of measures used to calm traffic. I will not go into the details today, but they are described in the traffic-calming leaflet that I introduced two weeks ago. The leaflet is available from any Roads Service office. Suffice it to say that one of the most effective speed control measures is the road hump. These are normally considered for residential streets where the main objective is to reduce average vehicle speeds to approximately 20 mph.

Where there is a self-contained network of streets and self-enforcing measures such as road humps can be

provided, it may be appropriate to introduce a 20 mph speed limit zone. We have implemented two 20 mph zones in west Belfast since 1995, namely the Riverdale Park area in 1996, and the Ballymurphy/Glenalina area in 1998. This year, Turf Lodge has been traffic calmed, and a 20 mph speed limit will be introduced shortly following the completion of the legislative process. A further zone is due to commence shortly in the Edenmore area between Glen Road and Andersonstown Road. That will increase the number of 20 mph zones to four.

In total, Roads Service has now implemented eight 20 mph zones throughout Northern Ireland. Sufficient measures must be provided in the area to ensure that the scheme is self-enforcing before a 20 mph speed limit can be considered. Signs in isolation have been found to be very ineffective.

In concluding, I want to deal with some of the issues raised by various Members in the debate. A number of Members referred to future development, both in the greater west Belfast area and in other parts of Northern Ireland. It should be acknowledged that in the future, where extensive plans are being finalised, Roads Service will, as a policy, insist on measures that will assist with traffic calming and speed control being included as an essential part of that development.

Mr McFarland referred to an interdepartmental approach on the social issues arising. That is an issue that I will consider. I will respond after having considered that adequately.

There were a number of other issues regarding the disproportionate number of accidents in the greater west Belfast area. I have no figures either to prove or disprove that. The required criteria are a contentious issue, and I know that because local residents complain that there have to be a number of accidents before consideration will be given to traffic calming. At the moment, I am getting 10 times more applications than there are resources to complete them, and I am sure that Members will agree that it is more prudent to deploy that small amount of resources into areas where there have been accidents, rather than into areas where there have not been accidents.

I will look at the issue of disproportionate numbers of accidents. If it is the case that there are a higher number of accidents, then any area with a higher number of accidents should find itself in the front line in terms of getting traffic calming. That is one of the essential criteria.

I understand that there is an issue with regard to increasing traffic volumes, and again that meets a set of the criteria.

The issue of saving lives and not money was raised. I hope that the announcement that I made two weeks ago, in which not only did my Department devise the traffic-calming initiative, but we managed to increase the amount of expenditure on traffic calming by 30%, shows that both my Department and I take the issue of saving lives very seriously. That is why we have deployed as much as we have, and I want to deploy more. If I had a 1,000% increase in resources, we might get close to doing all of the requested schemes.

An issue was also raised about civil servants not meeting with public representatives. Where public representatives request relevant meetings with civil servants, I will be happy to ensure that civil servants attend those meetings. I understand that the meeting was to do with anti-social activity and car theft, which is a matter primarily for the RUC. I would be quite happy to instruct my officials to go along to such a meeting, which would include representatives of the RUC.

In conclusion, I want to emphasise that the aim of self-enforcing traffic-calming measures is to ensure that vehicles are driven at speeds appropriate to the local conditions. Such measures should not be seen as the answer to all road safety problems. It is only with an integrated approach, involving engineering measures, road safety education, research and enforcement, together with a change in attitude on the part of some road users, that the road safety problems on all our streets can be addressed effectively.

Adjourned at 5.57 pm

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 24 April 2001

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

ASSEMBLY BUSINESS

Mr Speaker: At the sitting of the Assembly on Tuesday 10 April 2001, a number of Members raised concerns about the procedure in respect of the opportunities for Members to reply when they have been referred to in a debate. I previously ruled on this matter on Monday 18 December 2000 — Hansard, Volume 8, No 3, page 79 refers. However, since there still seems to be some lack of clarity in the minds of Members, let me make one or two remarks on this issue.

A Member making a personal statement usually conveys matters of a personal nature to the House. An opportunity to reply may arise when a Member has been referred to in a particular way in a debate. The arrangements for personal statements are described in detail on page 312 of the twenty-second edition of 'Erskine May'. Personal statements with regard to matters of a personal nature are taken before the start of public business and require the leave of the Speaker. These statements are not subject to intervention or debate, and I require that the text of such a statement be made available to me in advance.

Members may not depart from the agreed text, and no debate or other comments should subsequently ensue. However, when the matter referred to in the statement relates to another Member, he or she will be allowed to give a further brief view on the matter and to say whether the statement is accepted. I expect Members to restrict their comments to the issues raised in the statement, and I will not in any circumstances permit prolonged or repeated verbal exchanges on matters raised in a personal statement.

Members know that other avenues of recourse are available to them in respect of differences between Members. They can be dealt with through the Committee on Standards and Privileges, formally by way of a private Member's motion or through contact with the relevant Whip's offices.

In respect of an opportunity to reply to accusations made of them by another Member, Members have sought advice on how they may respond in situations where they are

referred to by name in a debate. Page 386 of the twenty-second edition of 'Erskine May' advises that Members must conduct business in a spirit of "good temper and moderation".

It also provides that Members should

"guard against all appearance of personality in debate".

While that may come as a substantial disappointment to some Members, the maintenance of good order and parliamentary decorum requires the application of this principle to the proceedings of the Assembly. However, I regret that some Members have on occasions alleged that other Members have been involved in unlawful activity when the Member has not been convicted of the named offence.

If it is requested and seems appropriate, I will, on occasion, permit an opportunity of reply to those of whom specific reference has been made in relation to breaches of the law and where there has been no conviction. However, I will not permit an opportunity of reply in other circumstances, and certainly not when accusations of a purely political nature are made. An opportunity to reply will be made available at a suitable time.

I note from Hansard that a number of points of order were raised regarding unparliamentary language. I have studied those, and while I am clear that none of the comments were any ornament to the debate or to the Official Report, they do not seem to be unparliamentary. However, it is hoped that they do not become habitual language in the Chamber.

TOURISM

North/South Ministerial Council

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment that he wishes to make a statement on the meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in its tourism sectoral format held on 30 March 2001 in Letterkenny.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Sir Reg Empey): Following nomination by the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, Dr Seán Farren and I represented the Northern Ireland Administration at the tourism sector meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council. The Irish Government were represented by Dr James McDaid TD, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation. This report has been approved by Dr Farren and is also made on his behalf.

The Council noted a formal progress report on the establishment of the new tourism company and also received an update from Ms Ann Riordan, vice-chairperson of Tourism Ireland Ltd and Mr Felix Mooney, a member of the board. Work is progressing on the further development of Tourism Brand Ireland, marketing programmes for 2002, staffing structures and proposals for the company's Dublin and Coleraine offices. The Council considered and approved the draft codes of conduct for board members and for the staff of Tourism Ireland Ltd.

The Council also discussed a paper jointly produced by the Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment and the Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation in conjunction with the Council for Education, Recruitment and Training (CERT), the Irish tourism and hospitality training authority. The paper outlined the support mechanisms and training arrangements for the tourism and hospitality sector in both parts of this island and referred to joint initiatives already undertaken. The paper also identified key areas where joint activities in both jurisdictions would be beneficial. It put forward possible future initiatives for consideration by the appropriate Departments.

Ministers discussed the serious implications of the foot-and-mouth crisis for the tourism industry North and South. They reiterated the determination of both Administrations to combat the crisis in every way possible. Ministers also expressed their determination to ensure that the future of tourism in both parts of this island is positive and that its potential is realised to the full. The council also approved the provision of IR£1,500 per annum to Ms Ni Fheargusa as the board member nominated to assist the chairperson of Foras na Gaeilge.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee (Mr Neeson): In view of the adverse publicity that Northern Ireland, Ireland and the British Isles are getting due to the foot-and-mouth outbreak,

does the Minister have any special plans to promote Northern Ireland, particularly in North America? His counterpart is currently visiting the United States to deal with that issue. What involvement did Northern Ireland have in the recent visit of international tour operators to the United Kingdom?

Sir Reg Empey: As the Member will know, I recently launched a substantial recovery plan that had been prepared by the Tourist Board in consultation with the industry. That will involve a series of activities spread over the next couple of months in North America — both in Canada and the United States. I am currently looking at whether, and when, I should attend. A programme has already been prepared and is under active consideration.

I am aware that Dr McDaid is currently in the United States. We were not consulted by the British Tourist Authority (BTA) about the arrangements. As Northern Ireland was almost clear of the disease at that stage, the authority hoped that we would be able to market ourselves as a completely disease-free area. Therefore, we were not included in that visit. It was also argued that the time required to transport people to Northern Ireland would have been prohibitive in view of the very strict timetable.

Mr McClarty: It is my belief that the Irish Minister, Dr James McDaid, has gone to the United States of America on a tour promoting Ireland as a whole, and it is my understanding that tourism in Ireland is to be promoted as a whole. Did the Minister approach Dr McDaid to find out whether there was a possibility of a joint promotion between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland?

Sir Reg Empey: That was mooted at a press conference following the Council's meeting in Letterkenny, and I stated my willingness to participate in such a promotion. However, Dr McDaid has proceeded with his own promotion. Tomorrow I will attend a meeting in Glasgow of all four United Kingdom tourism Ministers. I hope to find out what joint promotion activities we can undertake. I also hope to examine the experiences of other tourism Ministers to see what we can learn from them and what advice we can translate into practical action to help many of our struggling businesses.

10.45 am

Dr McDonnell: I thank the Minister for his statement. I strongly welcome it and the details about the new all-island tourist company. I have a fear, a suspicion, a worry that perhaps there is a risk that we will abandon our responsibilities and leave everything to this new company in the hope that it will solve our problems. Even before foot-and-mouth disease we badly needed to refocus and restructure our responsibilities to make the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) more effective to carry out the responsibilities not contained in the new all-island tourist company.

Can the Minister tell us if there is anything moving on that front? If not, perhaps he could tell us when something will be moving? Those responsibilities are every bit as vital. If we do not have our act together, the all-island tourist company will not function for us as well as it should.

Sir Reg Empey: I thank the Member for his comment. He used the words “a fear, a suspicion, a worry” that we are leaving everything to the new company. I assure him that that is not the case. This is primarily a marketing company the main function of which is to create a brand and market it internationally, and the creative nature of that work is proceeding. Consultants are already at work. We have not yet seen the draft proposals for 2002, but we must nevertheless remember its main function.

The Tourist Board is currently preparing a three-year plan. Action is therefore underway with regard to refocusing its activities. That is necessary because of the changed circumstances. As the Member will know, the NITB gives grants similar to those given by the IDB and other organisations. The administrative part of that is being transferred to the new Economic Development Agency, but the primary function of the NITB will continue to be promotion, and it will have regulatory functions. The board is part-owner of the company, and its chairperson and chief executive are directors, so there is no way in which we are going to see a situation develop in which the NITB does not have — any more than Bord Fáilte does not have — an overview of tourism as a whole in Northern Ireland. I can assure the Member that we do not intend to leave everything to this new company.

Mr Wells: While I welcome the Minister’s statement, it was somewhat bland in character. It was similar to those issued after the meetings of many North/South bodies — “We had a meeting, made a couple of decisions, doled out a bit of money, issued a press statement and then went home”. Members would like more detail about what exactly happened. For example, have the minutes of these meetings been made available to anyone? Perhaps they could be made available to the appropriate Assembly Committee so that they could be probed in detail, we would know what was going on, and there could be a more standard consultation process.

Does the Minister accept my view that the BTA initiative was extremely unfortunate? While we accept that it might have been difficult to bring all the incoming tour operators to Northern Ireland, at the very least the Minister or a leading NITB official should have been invited to address them, give them an insight into Northern Ireland and tell them that Northern Ireland is still open for tourist business.

On a much more serious matter, the Northern Ireland tourist industry is facing a crisis on a par with that faced by the agriculture industry — particularly in South Down. In any of his recent negotiations, has the Minister made any proposals to the Executive on a consequential loss

package to make up for the millions of pounds already lost by the tourist industry?

Sir Reg Empey: There are a number of matters there. The Member will know that a synopsis of the proceedings of these bodies is sent on a regular basis to the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee. That is now done routinely following a request from the Committee. After each meeting I make a statement to the Assembly, and we have questions, as is happening at the moment. All the matters discussed at the meeting are contained in the statement. In the synopsis, items such as the agenda for the meeting are made available to the Committee. Everyone can therefore see the matters that we are discussing, except perhaps personnel issues that it would not be appropriate to detail. Nothing is being discussed which does not appear in the synopsis.

I accept, and agree with, what the Member said about the BTA. I was annoyed that the situation happened the way it did. The explanation which was forthcoming was also unfortunate. Officials from the BTA will be present at the meeting in Glasgow tomorrow of UK Tourism Ministers, and I hope to have the opportunity to pursue the matter directly with those officials.

On the broader point about consequential loss, my Department is currently dealing with 36 cases of businesses that are showing signs of distress. These vary from companies that have sustained losses of 10% to 25% to those that have had their income taken away from them entirely. I am aware that that affects the Member’s constituency and, indeed, the constituencies of other Members.

I must make a point here. The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development made it clear yesterday that some people were still defying the advice given by her Department from the outset of this foot-and-mouth disease outbreak in relation to the movement of animals. Unlicensed movements of animals are still taking place. The people involved in these movements — although they may be a tiny minority of the agriculture community — are putting in jeopardy the livelihoods of thousands of people in the Province. People have tried to build up businesses over the years, and these are being put in jeopardy by a handful of people who are behaving in an irresponsible and selfish manner.

This House can send out the message that people must not move animals without a licence. Irresponsible people have brought the disease in and are spreading it in the Province. Such actions are grossly irresponsible, and that is why the Executive are urgently studying what steps to take. I will also be asking tomorrow about what steps are to be taken nationally and what help is to be provided from the contingency reserve. These are matters that we cannot be expected to handle on our own.

Mrs Courtney: I too welcome the Minister’s statement and the fact that attention is being given to the impact of

the foot-and-mouth disease outbreak on the tourism industry, particularly rural tourism.

The Republic is currently having a major drive in the USA and is using the services of high-profile performers such as U2 to get the message across that the Republic is a place to visit. Has the Minister any plans to use a similar strategy for Northern Ireland? In his statement the Minister said that key areas had been identified where joint activities in both jurisdictions would be beneficial. Can he outline some of the initiatives that could be taken?

Sir Reg Empey: The latter point relates to actions that my Colleague Dr Seán Farren could be taking in his Department with regard to training and identifying common areas. As the Member will be aware, there has been co-operation for some considerable time, and a representative of CERT — the Irish Government's hospitality training body — was present at the meeting alongside representatives from Dr Farren's Department. They are looking at proposals which I hope will be brought to the next meeting. I will, of course, report to the House on the detail.

I am very conscious of the need to get the message across, and we are looking at what we can do in overseas markets. I made it clear that I was prepared to do joint work with other UK Ministers or with Dr McDaid, but it takes two to tango, and it is up to them to make up their own minds.

As far as we are concerned, we have launched our own campaign in all the European and North American markets where the bulk of our overseas visitors come from. However, as the Member understands, we are dealing with a very deep-seated misconception, particularly on the part of people from North America. They start from the assumption that, in some cases, your hands and feet fall off as a result of the disease. That is what some people truly believe. We have to get more exposure to make people realise the facts. Last year there were outbreaks of anthrax in the United States, and that is a far more serious disease than foot-and-mouth, by any stretch of the imagination. Nevertheless, Americans still expect us to visit North America.

We have an extremely difficult task, one that will require consistent effort over the next few months to save next year's business at least.

Mr Clyde: Does the Minister have any plans to give financial aid to hotels and to bed-and-breakfast establishments to help them over this crisis? Was this discussed at the meeting on 30 March?

Sir Reg Empey: The subject of compensation for businesses in Northern Ireland would not have been discussed at the meeting in March. The matter is being examined by a special working party set up by the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. They have asked each of the relevant Departments for input on how its

sector is being affected. My Department has responded. I have indicated to the House that we are currently dealing with 36 cases of people in difficulty. As Members know, some interim steps have been taken with regard to short-term assistance for companies to alleviate some of the problems — for example, the Inland Revenue and the Customs and Excise have helplines and are offering deferments regarding PAYE and VAT. The Rate Collection Agency has a helpline and is offering deferment. We accept that these measures merely put off having to pay a bill, but in the short term that can be very significant.

There is also a more long-term benefit in the small firms loan guarantee scheme. This is a UK-wide scheme, which has now been amended to include the hospitality sector. I have written to the banks; I have pointed out that this loan guarantee scheme is available, and I have asked them to exercise sensitivity and discretion in their dealings with people from this sector. We await the report from the working party to see what is available. I repeat that I will also be waiting to see what will be done nationally. The Prime Minister and the Government have made it clear that they have got to help businesses and industries to get back on their feet. However, so far, as the saying goes, the Chancellor's two arms are "the one length".

Mr Dallat: I thank the Minister for his endeavours to deal with the crisis in the tourist industry. Will he confirm that the next meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council will be held in Coleraine? As the new tourism company is to be based in that town, does he agree that this will be a highly significant occasion, given the importance of the tourism company to the Causeway coast? Finally, does he agree that the new tourism company has a critical role to play, given the present crisis in the tourist industry caused by foot-and-mouth disease and the important lessons to be learned from that sad experience?

11.00 am

Sir Reg Empey: The next tourism meeting of the NSMC will be held in Northern Ireland. The precise location has not been determined, but the Member has put an idea into my head. The Coleraine office is one of the matters that we regularly refer to, in both correspondence and discussions between us. I am looking forward to its establishment. It will have a very significant role to play.

The Moyle and Coleraine areas have suffered major blows to tourism in the last few weeks, particularly with the cancellation of the North West 200. We are anxiously waiting for an announcement on the suspected case of foot-and-mouth disease in Ballintoy, and we hope for good news there. However, there has been a major hit to one of our most important tourism areas. There is no disguising that.

The primary function of the tourism company is to increase the market of international visitors to both jurisdictions. As the Member is aware, more than 70%

of our international visitors come to Northern Ireland via the Republic. We must increase that number, however, and get more people who visit the Republic to come to Northern Ireland. Indeed, parts of the Republic are very anxious to get people to visit their areas — Donegal and other places feel even more isolated than Northern Ireland.

This is not simply a Northern Irish issue — it is a geographical issue. To get more people who visit areas such as Cork, Kerry and Dublin to come up north is a major exercise, the success of which the company will be judged upon. We will at least be able to measure what it achieves, even though the particular circumstances of this year will make it extremely difficult to use that as a benchmark.

Mr Hay: There is a perception that the whole emphasis of the foot-and-mouth epidemic seems to be on the farming industry and on the financial package available for farmers. There is nothing at all wrong with that. The Minister has commented on the tourism industry, but, given the serious nature of the issue, can he tell the House when decisions will be made to try to help the tourism industry across Northern Ireland?

There is a feeling abroad in Northern Ireland that the longer the disease goes on and the longer it takes for decisions to be made on how aid goes to the tourism industry, the worse the problem will become. The quicker those decisions are made, the better. Does the Minister have a timescale for that?

Sir Reg Empey: We all sympathise with those in the agriculture community, some of whom have seen a life's work literally go up in smoke before them. There is no way that anyone cannot be deeply affected by that.

There is also a misconception that a farmer who loses his or her animals is compensated for the loss of the capital asset — the animals. They are not compensated for a future loss of income, nor are they compensated for the years, and indeed generations, that it would take to rebuild a herd, particularly a pedigree herd. Farmers are not getting a bonanza from this — their livelihoods have stopped. They cannot put animals back on their land for months, and their income is, of course, nil.

I have previously made it clear that I regard people in the tourism sector as often being the forgotten victims of this crisis. The income of people who own guesthouses, for instance a husband and wife, has not just dropped — in some cases it has stopped, but the costs continue. I cannot emphasise enough that we are very conscious of that. That is why I expressed anger at the irresponsible actions of a very tiny minority who are giving the agriculture sector a bad name that it does not deserve.

In so far as timescale is concerned the matter is critical. I cannot be precise, but I expect that it will be possible to identify what we can do in the next two weeks. However, that is subject to what happens nationally, and we must

understand that we cannot assume that it is appropriate for us to take the entire burden here. The contingency reserve is there to help in a national emergency — this is a national emergency. I am looking to the Chancellor to divvy up the contingency reserve and help, bearing in mind that foot-and-mouth disease was imported to the Province; it did not start here.

Mr Gibson: I congratulate the Minister on his forthright condemnation of those who imported the foot-and-mouth plague. Mavericks spread it, and it is threatening the community. We have been trying to create farm diversification in west Tyrone for six years. We have encouraged many farm businesses that were finding it difficult to survive to try to diversify. Many of those businesses have been singularly hit, not only by the agriculture crisis, but also by their dependence on a diversification that was also agriculturally related or dependent. The situation is beginning to have a serious impact in west Tyrone. Sperrins Tourism Ltd launched the “kick-start” initiative on a Thursday, and on the Friday it was struck in the teeth by the outbreak at Ardboe.

I appeal to the Minister to consider this matter nationally and, as soon as he can, to give us a timetable. Survival in west Tyrone is critical for our agriculture community and for those who depend on it.

Sir Reg Empey: The Member is right that, for some time now, we have been encouraging people in rural areas to add another string to their bow. The reason for that is that agriculture has been suffering for several years for a wide variety of reasons that are structural and will not go away. Even if we get over the foot-and-mouth crisis — when we get over the crisis — those problems will remain.

We have encouraged and grant-aided people. We have put public funds into physical diversification, whether in the form of conversions, the erection of chalets, or whatever. Marketing assistance is offered, and, indeed, computer bookings are also available. There is no doubt that in encouraging people to move from an industry that was under enormous pressure, they have been encouraged to move into another industry that is also under enormous pressure. The Member is perfectly right to draw attention to the matter.

The consequential effects of foot-and-mouth disease are far reaching. It is almost impossible to draw a clean line around the sectors that are affected; they go far and wide. A comment by Mr Bell of the Institute of Directors in the business section of the ‘News Letter’ today draws attention to these issues. I sympathise with the Member.

I notice that some people in the north-west are considering proposals to run a festival as opposed to the North West 200. If those people have a proposal and draw it to the Tourist Board's attention, it will be looked at as sympathetically as possible. It may be that that example could be followed in other areas. I am sure that

Sperrins Tourism Ltd will not be behind the door in coming forward with ideas.

Mr Shannon: The Minister has rightly recognised the effects of the foot-and-mouth disease on the tourist industry. It has been confirmed in today's papers that the Balmoral Show will be cancelled this year, resulting in the loss of some £6 million of income and revenue to the area. What steps will be taken to compensate people who have lost bed spaces as a result of the cancellation of the show? What study will be done into the impact of this on the capitalist structures —

Mr Speaker: Order. The Minister has been fairly generous in his preparedness to respond to matters broadly within his remit, even though they did not arise from the North/South Ministerial Council statement. The question that the Member is asking falls somewhat outside, not only the issues covered in the statement, but issues covered by the Assembly. Perhaps the Member does not recognise that, as he was not in the House to hear the statement. If that is the case, it would be wrong to press further on the Minister's generosity by asking him to respond to a question that deals with a matter well outside his area of responsibility.

Mr Shannon: I read the Minister's statement prior to entering the Chamber, so I am aware of its contents.

Mr Speaker: Then the Member has very little excuse.

Mr Shannon: I will ask two other questions.

The first relates to consequential loss. Can the Minister look at how that is going to affect the country's sports and leisure activities in relation to the North/South body and the relationship that the Tourist Board has with local councils? In my own area, the local council has been very active in promoting tourism across Northern Ireland and further afield in the Republic of Ireland, the United Kingdom and Europe. What relationship does the Tourist Board have with local councils in trying to help promote those areas specifically, and others further afield?

Sir Reg Empey: I do not know quite where to begin. The Member for Strangford is always creative in these matters.

We all deeply regret yesterday's announcement. The Balmoral Show is one of the highlights of Northern Ireland's year, not only for the tourism and agriculture sector, but beyond that, because it attracts people who otherwise would have no connection with agriculture whatsoever. It is a huge blow.

We do not want to see people lose out as a result of this crisis. However, we would be naïve in the extreme to believe that, even if there were no financial constraints upon us, everybody is going to come out of this as if nothing has happened. That is just not the case, and the Member knows that. Certainly, we are looking at the financial and economic impact of this crisis on all sectors. Within a week or two we should have a report, and the

Executive will be able to make recommendations at that stage.

Regional tourism organisations are supported by the Tourist Board and will continue to be supported by the Tourist Board. They will have a role to play in the recovery programme, as it will be necessary for those organisations to do some of their own marketing work. The Tourist Board will look at any proposals that may be advanced by those organisations. Of course, not every local authority is in a regional tourism organisation, but where there are proposals and suggestions from the local authorities, they should be brought to the Tourist Board as quickly as possible, while we are considering this.

The whole issue comes down to cash. At the moment, the Tourist Board is spending money that, strictly speaking, it does not have. I have made it clear to the board that it is to take whatever steps it feels are necessary and appropriate. It will be my task in the months ahead to find the resources for that. However, local authorities have a contribution to make, and I have little doubt that those directly affected will be generous in their resource allocations.

11.15 am

PRIVATE STREETS (CONSTRUCTION) (AMENDMENT) REGULATIONS (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2001

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Campbell): I beg to move

That the Private Streets (Construction) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 be approved.

The Regulations amend the Private Streets (Construction) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1994, which set out the standards and detailed requirements for the construction of private streets in new housing developments. The 1994 Regulations provided for the deposit and approval of plans and for the giving of notice for the commencement and completion of various stages of work. They also provided for the inspection of work, carrying out of investigations and tests and the taking of samples to ensure that work was in conformity with the regulations.

The proposed changes are necessary to implement the provisions of the primary legislation — the Private Streets (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1992 — which placed responsibility for the provision of street lighting in new developments on the developers. The effect of the proposed amendments to the Regulations will be to introduce changes in two distinct areas. First, regulation 15(a) and schedule 8 prescribe standards for the provision of street lighting in private streets. Secondly, they amend regulation 20 of the 1994 Regulations to extend the specified expenses to include the cost of inspection of street works during construction and to provide for the bearing of such costs by developers.

Consequential amendments relating to the deposit and approval of plans — regulation 3(8) — the notice of commencement of stages of work — regulation 3(9) — and detailed requirements for goods and materials to be used in the construction of streets — regulation 3(13) — have been made. In addition, references in the 1994 Regulations to various technical publications have been updated.

The proposed Regulations were circulated for comment to the Construction Employers' Federation, Northern Ireland Electricity, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and other public bodies. The comments received by my Department during the consultation period have been taken into account in the Regulations now before the Assembly.

The Chairperson of the Regional Development Committee (Mr A Maginness): I welcome the Minister's statement. Because of the legislation, developers will not only have to comply with prescribed standards, but they will have to meet the cost of inspections. That is not an unfair burden. It is important that we note that, and I

welcome that move. It is also fair to say that, following widespread public consultation, there was a general welcome for the measures. The Minister has made a progressive step that the public will welcome.

I shall not detain the House unduly on such straightforward Regulations, but I ask the Minister to ensure that the Department for Regional Development puts in place stringent inspection standards for street lighting before it adopts a road as a public road. I am sure that my fellow members of the Regional Development Committee will agree. It is all very well for the Minister to introduce the Regulations and put the burden on developers, but developers will take short cuts and will not comply properly with the standards that have been laid down by the House.

The anticipated saving of £1.5 million is to be welcomed. I ask the Minister to ensure that the money that is saved as a result of the implementation of these regulations and the carrying of the burden by the developers will be used for further road development by the Department. It would be the best use of these savings if the money were ploughed back into the road network, which is sorely in need of additional funding, as the Minister and the House will recognise. Small amount though it may be, £1.5 million would be very welcome.

I also have a concern, which I am sure is reflected by other members of the Committee, that developers may seek to pass on the additional costs to house purchasers. I ask the Minister to assure the House that these costs will not be added on to house prices and that developers will bear them. It would be unfair if house buyers were to be further burdened with additional costs that rightly should be borne by the developers.

The Committee in its consideration of these Regulations was supportive, and I reiterate my welcome, as Chairperson, and that of the Committee for them.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development (Mr McFarland): I too welcome the Regulations and support the Chairperson's remarks. Will the Minister clarify the timing factor? In many developments we see houses completed but the infrastructure, the roads and the lighting have been left in an extremely rough state. How long will a developer be allowed to leave an estate like that before he is obliged to comply with the Regulations? This often happens where a developer has built one group of houses and is hoping to move on to a second group. He will try to leave the infrastructure unfinished until he has built his second batch. We need to have a clear idea of how long a builder will be allowed before he must fulfil his obligations under these Regulations. I welcome them again.

Mr Hay: I too very much welcome the Minister's statement this morning. The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee asked a very important question. We have all seen, especially as council representatives, that it can

take many years for roads to be adopted. It has taken over 20 years for some roads in my constituency to be adopted.

We need to be very clear on this, because developers can take quite a while to finish anything. My fear is that they might also throw street lighting into that. We need clear assurances from the Minister that contractors will not be able to treat street lighting in the same way as they treat the finishing of roads. Is there a developer who is creating problems with the finishing of street lighting? What penalty points will be given to him? With regard to roads and adopted roads, a bond exists at the moment, but that bond can be taken away if the Department feels that it must finish a road itself. Will this also apply to street lighting?

Mr Byrne: I welcome the proposals as the Regulations in Northern Ireland are now in line with other regions of the UK.

It is important that the £1.5 million savings be retained within the Department. It could be used for improvement to roads in either small capital works programmes, or in road maintenance schemes. The developer is being asked to incur only a marginal extra cost to a development, and that should not cause any undue extra financial burden.

Mr Hay made reference to many unadopted roads. There are roads throughout Northern Ireland — particularly in urban areas — that have never been adopted, causing pain to many householders. Will the Minister look at this issue soon?

Mr Wells: Is the Minister aware that one of the losses incurred by this decision is that his Department for Regional Development has decided to move the design consultancy street lighting service from Downpatrick to Lisburn? That means the loss of three jobs in Downpatrick, and those staff will be moved to Lisburn. Does the Minister accept that I have made numerous representations to his Department to move the new unit to Downpatrick, thus creating 12 new jobs? Will he agree to discuss this issue with me? It is a matter of great concern that we are losing jobs from south Down to the greater Belfast area.

Mr O'Connor: I welcome the announcement, and, on a constituency note, I would like to see the £1.5 million being diverted to East Antrim.

The onus is now going to be placed on the developer. Mr McFarland said that developers build small clusters of houses as phase 1, phase 2 and phase 3, and when they get to phase 5 or 6, the roads in phase 1 are still not adopted. My concern is that the same thing will happen with street lighting. It will be left to the end, and the limited company will suddenly go out of business — having made its profit from the houses — without having had the financial implications of having to provide street lighting and other facilities.

Once a certain number of houses have been built, could the street lighting be provided for those houses prior to starting the next phase? If a developer were to go under, the Department would not be left with the financial responsibility for a developer who has already made quite a hefty profit.

Mr Hay mentioned that a large number of roads have remained unadopted for 20 years. That seems to happen throughout Northern Ireland. Is there any way that the Department can put the ball firmly in the developer's court so that if one developer defaults in his obligations, he cannot create a new company and repeat the process? Cowboy builders have set up companies and sub-companies in the past without any overall responsibility.

They all seem to have the same structure — all the profits go back to the same person, but the company is actually split into four or five different parts for convenience.

I thank the Minister for his initiative.

11.30 am

Ms Morrice: I am going to take advantage of this occasion to ask the Minister a question posed to me yesterday by a constituent living in Robinson Road in Bangor. The census enumerator noticed that she did not have street lights, and my constituent asked me to ask the Minister what she should do about that. She lives in a new development, and in the context of these Regulations, I would like to know to whom my constituent can turn to get street lighting put in. With the onus being on the developer under these new Regulations, if there are not enough street lights, will constituents be able to go to the developer and ask for street lights to be put in? Also, who will be responsible for the upkeep of this lighting? Obviously, the more serious question is the huge importance of street lighting for safety in these areas, especially for women. Finally, what about trees? Will there be any onus on developers to plant trees as well?

Mr Wells: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. It is becoming apparent that Members believe this to be a statement on which they can ask questions. It is, in fact, legislation, and speeches can be made. I have only just discovered this after asking my question. I could have gone on for half an hour about the plight of the street lighting section in Downpatrick, but unfortunately it is too late.

Mr Speaker: On this occasion this is a point of order. It is somewhat surprising that the Member has not read the Order Paper, which makes it clear that this is a motion for the passage of Regulations — that is secondary legislation, as he has said. It is not a statement by the Minister; it is a motion for the passage of secondary legislation. The Member is correct that speeches are appropriate. Whether the Chair would have been content for him to go on for half an hour is another matter, but

this does give Members an opportunity to speak. However, I should point out that it is the passage of a piece of legislation and not an opportunity for Members to ask constituency questions of Ministers.

Mr Wells: Who, me?

Mr Speaker: The Member points to himself. It is not an opportunity for Members to ask constituency questions, any more than it would be in order for a Member to put down an amendment of a constituency question on the passage of a piece of primary legislation. Of course, Members may wish to refer to their constituency experiences in supporting a piece of legislation, but that is not entirely the same thing.

Mr Gibson: I welcome this legislation. I have three areas of major concern. First, will the Minister tell us when this legislation is going to kick in? In other words, precisely when will this legislation start?

My second point is in relation to the bond, which has already been mentioned by Cllr Hay. In Omagh we have a no-man's-land —

Mr Speaker: Order. I really wonder how much Members have prepared themselves for this debate. One Member has just said that he did not realise that it was a motion rather than a statement. A second has now raised the profoundly important question — he says — of when this will come into effect. I point the Member to the first paragraph of the Regulations, where it says that they shall come into operation on 1 May 2001. It is not in order for Members to waste the time of the Minister or the House by asking questions on things that they have not looked up, which are not only relevant, but are, indeed, the matters on which the House will be voting.

Mr Gibson: I stand corrected, Mr Speaker.

My last question is the most important of all. Will this not add to the cost of houses? After all, who pays for all of this? I wish to be assured by the Minister that for those people who wish to purchase property, there will not be an added bill that prohibits them from doing so.

Mr Shannon: I will certainly not be asking any questions about the Balmoral Show or anything else. I will be specific to the issue. I am glad that the street lighting legislation will bring us into line with the UK mainland, and I welcome the Minister's statement. However, at the same time it is important that the responsibility falls upon the shoulders of the developers. We all hope to see that, and this legislation will enable that to happen.

I have a couple of questions, and they are not to do with my constituency; they are specific to the legislation. Is there a deadline by which a developer must provide street lights, and who will ensure that this is adhered to and that people have sufficient street lighting?

In relation to the development itself, again it comes down to monitoring the street lighting that is installed.

Who will ensure that a developer has the expertise to install street lighting to meet the standards of the Department, and who will ensure that it is brought up to the standard that will enable the Department to adopt and look after it?

Mr Campbell: There were a number of issues, and, Mr Speaker, I am glad that you dealt with some of them yourself. I will try to respond to Members in very generic terms.

A number of Members raised the issue of the savings that will result from the legislation. There will be a saving of £1.5 million, and I assure Members that I will look at how that can be utilised and what benefit it can bring. Obviously, there are people who have campaigned on rural street lighting and other issues, and those issues will have to be looked at in the light of this saving.

Mr Wells raised the design unit. I responded previously, and I will respond again on a separate occasion. On the commencement of the onus being on the developer, all those matters will be raised in the Roads Service, and it will ensure that the bond that any developer takes out to construct private streets includes an element which has street lighting as an essential part of it. If there is any failure on the part of a developer, that section of the bond can be used to ensure that the work continues.

We will also use best practice from the rest of the UK and other parts of Europe to ensure that the best parts of legislation elsewhere are contained in our legislation and that the pitfalls that have been experienced elsewhere are avoided in Northern Ireland.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Private Streets (Construction) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 be approved.

LOCAL MANAGEMENT OF SCHOOLS (LMS) COMMON FUNDING FORMULA

The Minister of Education (Mr M McGuinness): I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the publication of the consultative document and the intention to introduce a common formula for funding schools.

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I am delighted to have the opportunity to introduce the motion before the House today.

School funding is a very important matter. Formula funding to schools in the current financial year will total almost £750,000 million, which will be used to deliver education to 340,000 pupils, employ 23,000 teachers and 20,000 other staff in schools, including administrative staff, caretakers, classroom assistants and technicians, purchase books and equipment and heat and maintain 1,200 schools.

The level of funding and the way in which it is spent have a direct influence on the quality of education that schools can provide. It affects the number of teachers that can be employed, the level of support staff, the learning materials available and the quality of the school environment. Finance is on the agenda of almost every meeting I have with school representatives, and it forms a large part of the correspondence received by my Department. It may not generate as much interest among the public as the review of post-primary education, but rest assured that it does command the attention of schools.

The main concern is about lack of funding. I share that concern. Our primary and post-primary schools are under-funded compared to similar schools in England, Scotland and Wales, and I have consistently argued the case in the Executive and the Assembly for additional funding. That has met with some success, as the record shows. During the last year I obtained additional funds to assist schools with energy costs, reading schemes and maintenance. I also secured an additional £20.4 million for direct allocation to school budgets. Those extra resources will make a difference to the quality of education that our schools can provide. However, our children deserve better, and I will continue to press for further resources to ensure that schools are properly funded to meet pupils' needs.

The other concern regularly raised by schools is that the distribution of funding is unfair. Some school representatives feel that if their school were in a different area or sector, it would receive more money. There are seven local management of schools (LMS) formulae used to allocate funds; one administered by each of the five boards and two run by the Department in respect of the grant-maintained integrated schools and voluntary grammar schools. Each of them is different, so it is hardly surprising that schools and others find the system of funding

complex, confusing, inconsistent and unfair. I agree with that view.

The present system has become inequitable. With just over 1,200 schools to fund, I cannot see why seven different LMS formulae for the allocation of resources are required. Therefore, I am committed to the development of a single common funding formula. The objective is relatively simple — to ensure that schools with similar characteristics receive similar levels of funding, regardless of the area or sector in which they are located.

However, the realisation of that objective is more complex because of the differences across boards in funding levels and in the make-up of funding formulae. Although useful progress has been made over the last few years in harmonising the current LMS formulae in preparation for the introduction of a common formula, significant differences still remain. Those differences must be tackled if schools are to be funded fairly. Therefore, the publication of the Department of Education's consultation document represents a major milestone in the achievement of equitable funding for all schools.

The document proposes some significant changes. The appropriate balance of resources between the primary and secondary sectors is a difficult issue, but one which must be addressed. Representatives of the primary sector have presented a robust case that they should have a larger share of the available resources. They have pointed to the fact that under current formulae a primary school pupil here generates about 65% of the amount generated by a post-primary pupil. That differential is much wider than in England and Wales, where an investigation by the House of Commons Education Committee concluded that primary schools should get a larger share of resources.

While there are different needs in the two sectors — particularly in the scope of the curriculum and its mode of delivery — the current differential is too wide. Intervention and additional support in the early years of primary education can reduce or prevent the development of many learning difficulties experienced by children at post-primary level, where remedial measures are not only more costly but also less effective. Investment in the early years of education, therefore, is a sound one.

Despite a reduction in the funding differential between primary and post-primary schools in recent years, an increasing number of primary schools are encountering difficulty in containing expenditure within budget. That is also reflected in rising primary pupil/teacher ratios. Taking those factors into account, I am satisfied that there is a case for further narrowing the resource gaps. I propose to increase primary sector funding by around 4%, or approximately £12 million, on the basis of the 2000-01 budgets.

This would mean that a primary school pupil would attract 67% of the funding attracted by a post-primary

pupil, compared to 65% at present. This will help considerably to ease the pressures in the primary sector.

11.45 am

Targeting social need (TSN) is one of the Executive's key priorities, and it is a particular priority for me as Minister of Education. We must tackle underachievement among pupils from all backgrounds, whether they are regarded as socially disadvantaged or not, and we must help schools to deal with the problems of children from disadvantaged circumstances. The document proposes the use of educational indicators alongside entitlement to free school meals in the allocation of TSN funding to address these aspects of social need.

I also propose to increase the funding allocated under TSN from 5% to 5.5% of the total schools' recurrent funding. This represents a 10% increase in TSN funding in LMS. On the basis of the 2000-01 budget it would have the effect of increasing expenditure in TSN from £40 million to £44 million. This additional investment of £4 million underscores my commitment to tackling social need and disadvantage in education.

LMS is only one of a number of means by which the Department of Education seeks to fulfil its TSN role. The substantial range of other TSN-related education activities will continue. These include the school support programme, the group 1 schools initiative, the targeting of pre-school education, the code of practice in special needs and initiatives to help marginalised groups such as travellers and those educated under the EOTAS (education otherwise than at school) programme.

One factor at the heart of the current disparities in funding levels is the variation in the levels of funding delegated by education and library boards to schools. One board delegates 74%, whereas another delegates 67%. I accept that these variations reflect in part the different characteristics of board areas. For example, more rural boards will have higher transport costs, and more disadvantaged boards will have more free school meals. However, they also reflect differences in the level of service provided by boards and the manner in which they are delivered.

I am determined to bring levels of funding delegation to schools across boards on to a more consistent and higher level, and in doing so, to increase the size of school budgets. The Department has already urged boards to take positive action this year to increase allocations to schools. In introducing a common funding formula I will seek to realign existing budgets and will work to increase funding delegated to schools by up to £15 million or 2%. This is the high aggregated schools budget (ASB) model presented in the document. Priority must be given to the classroom, and my officials will work closely with boards between now and the end of the year to determine how this can best be achieved.

I am anxious to ensure that the debate on the common formula is founded on educational principles and arguments on what is best for pupils rather than whether an individual school is a winner or a loser. However, schools and other education bodies will, of course, want to know what effect the proposals will have on their particular circumstances. To assist these considerations, the document contains extensive tables and graphs setting out the potential impact of a common formula on school phases, sectors and management types. It also contains funding outcomes for a wide range of hypothetical schools of different types chosen to reflect variations across the key characteristics which affect the level of funding, that is, enrolment, premises and social disadvantage. These funding outcomes give as clear an indication as possible of the likely impact of the formula. However, it must be recognised that they rely on assumption and will be affected by any changes to the key factors between 2000-01, the year on which the data is based, and 2002-03, when commonality will be implemented.

Some people may have wanted the document to spell out the implications for individual schools. However, for the reasons just mentioned, such spurious precision would run the real risk of misleading schools. I am satisfied that the funding outcomes presented give all schools and sectors a good idea of how they are likely to be affected by commonality.

This is not to seek in any way to minimise the importance to schools of a change in their level of funding. In an exercise of this kind it is inevitable that there will be winners and losers, and the implementation of the new funding formula will need to be managed very carefully. The document proposes transitional protection arrangements to limit the annual change in individual school budgets and to assist an orderly and smooth adjustment to new levels of resourcing over a three-year period.

The consultation period will extend to 29 June, and the common formula will be implemented in April 2002. I will wish to make final decisions on the formula in September, following consultation with the Education Committee and discussions with the Executive Committee. This timescale is required to provide sufficient time for the new operational arrangements, including any new IT systems, to be developed and tested, so that schools can be provided with their budget outcomes early in the new year.

The proposals in the consultation document have been developed through extensive — albeit informal — discussion and debate with our key partners such as officials from education and library boards and CCMS, and representatives of the Governing Bodies Association and the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education. I thank everyone who has contributed to this process, and I acknowledge in particular the contribution made by the various board officers and school staff members who sat on working groups in the early stages. Their

input has been very helpful in framing the current proposals. I also take this opportunity to pay tribute to the Education Committee for its constructive approach in the discussion of these proposals. The Committee made a number of helpful suggestions which I have been able to reflect in the document. This is yet another example of the very constructive and positive relationship between the Committee and my Department, and I am most anxious that it should continue.

I cannot emphasise enough that this is a genuine consultation exercise. No decisions have yet been made, and I encourage everyone who has an interest to participate fully in the wider debate so that all views and suggestions can be carefully considered before the new formula is finalised. It is important that schools fully understand and respond to the proposals. My Department, together with the boards, has arranged two briefing conferences for all schools in each board area. Invitations have been issued to the principal and to the chairman of the board of governors of each school. The conferences are designed to give officials an opportunity to explain the proposals and to clarify any issues raised by school representatives. The first conference was held today, and others will be held between now and next Tuesday.

I want to emphasise again the importance of this issue. The introduction of a common funding formula forms a key part of my Department's contribution to the Programme for Government. It is a major lever in relation to the quality of education delivered by each of our schools, and it is therefore vital that we get it right. The current system cannot continue. It is manifestly wrong that the level of funding received by a school and the quality of education it can provide for its pupils can depend on the area or sector in which it is located. Our objective is to resolve this inequity through the introduction of a fairer system of funding, common across all areas and school sectors. I believe that this is good news for schools and will be widely welcomed. I trust that Members will also support the concept and principles of a common funding formula.

I look forward to hearing Members' views during the debate, and I assure them that these will be considered very carefully over the coming months before any final decisions are taken.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education (Mr Kennedy): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this important debate on this vital issue. I will address the Assembly as Chairman of the Education Committee and then in my role as Ulster Unionist Assembly spokesperson.

The Education Committee welcomes the publication of the consultation document. The issue of how schools are funded has generated the greatest number of requests for meetings with the Education Committee, and representatives from all sectors and all sizes of schools have expressed their concerns on this matter. As the Minister

has indicated, there are a large number of formulae used to fund schools under the current LMS system.

As a result of this complex method, schools with the same characteristics receive entirely different allocations based on their location or sector. That needs to be addressed. The situation is neither satisfactory nor equitable. The Committee welcomes the key objective of ensuring that schools with similar characteristics receive similar levels of funding, regardless of which sector or area they are in.

The proposals comprise a number of welcome initiatives. The Education Committee strongly believes that investment in early intervention is an investment in the future and that it must be a priority. Funding for the early stages of the education process can result in long-term savings through a reduction in or prevention of learning difficulties and low achievement, which often lead to children becoming disaffected with education, subsequent problems with attendance and other difficulties. The proposed increase in primary-sector funding is, therefore, very appropriate.

I also welcome the intention to increase the proportion of the budget to be delegated to classrooms to help provide our young people with the best possible education. I support the proposal to revise the balance of funding based on the factors of social deprivation and special educational need. There should be a fifty-fifty funding distribution, which would provide greater support for tackling low educational achievement. All pupils who perform below the expected level need additional support, regardless of their social background.

The cost of teachers' salaries is the most significant element of a school budget, and it often accounts for 80% of the total expenditure. I welcome the fact that this document seeks views on whether the formula should reflect actual teacher costs or whether teachers' salaries should be excluded. The Ulster Unionist Party and myself favour a system that will take account of actual teacher costs rather than average teacher costs, as under the current system. This would be a fairer system and, in my view, a more realistic one. I have some concern that, in general, LMS funding has not encouraged long-term planning by schools and has led to a short-term management style. There is evidence that the current arrangements have contributed to the dramatic fall in numbers of newly qualified teachers who gain permanent contracts. I hope that this consultation exercise will highlight such issues and the implications of LMS funding generally.

The Education Committee encourages as many schools, education bodies and other interested organisations and individuals as possible to participate in the consultation exercise and to contribute their views to inform Members in their consideration of this most important issue.

We have expressed concern to the Minister about the length of the consultation period. Given the detailed and complicated nature of the issues, and the fact that there

will be winners and losers if these proposals are implemented, it is most important that an adequate consultation period be provided. The Committee, noting the consultation document was due to be launched early in the new year, has proposed that the consultation period should be extended until the end of June to allow schools to submit their views. The Minister accepted this point of view. However, the publication of the document did not take place until April, and that period has now been considerably reduced.

I call on the Minister to address this matter immediately. In developing these proposals, we will need to take account of the review of post-primary education, the curriculum review and other consultative issues that prevail in the education sector.

12.00

As the Ulster Unionist Party spokesperson on education in the Assembly, and on a personal note, I have to express serious concerns about the proposal in this consultative document to introduce a provision relating to Irish-medium units. The proposal is to provide Irish-medium primary schools in units with an extra £100 per pupil and Irish-medium post-primary schools with an additional £25 per pupil. I do not agree that pupils in specific sectors, such as Irish-medium schools, should receive more funding than pupils in other sectors. The proposal is unfair to the majority of pupils. The current arrangements under which Irish-medium schools are funded on exactly the same basis as other schools are appropriate and should be continued. I therefore serve notice to the Minister that the Ulster Unionist Party will oppose this clause if it is included in any subsequent legislation. The clause is inequitable, and I stress that this is an education issue, not a political one. It is important that this debate be conducted on the basis of educational need and that other issues should not cloud this need or be allowed to interfere.

This consultative document is important. It comes in a long line of other important documents that have been mentioned, including the post-primary curriculum review. Many teachers, and others in the field of education, are weary of the weight of advice that is being sought from them from on high. That is another argument in favour of the Minister's considering an extension of the period involved. The Ulster Unionist Party will be making a formal request for an extension to this period. The issue is very important — perhaps the most important issue — to primary school principals, boards of governors, secondary schools and all schools, regardless of the sector they are in. It is a major concern to anyone with an interest in education.

It is important that we address the issue quickly; we must also address it properly, and we must move to a situation where sensible legislation can be introduced, which can be supported by those at the coalface of education, as well as Assembly party members. Therefore, I hope

that the Minister will hear my plea for additional time to be given to this consultative body. I encourage schools, individuals and other interested parties to make submissions to it.

Schools and boards of governors will study the proposals to see how their school will fare under the new arrangements. That is an understandable reaction and one that will bear heavily on the representations that they will make. The current system is unfair, and we want to move to a more equitable one. The assessment of actual teacher costs, rather than average teacher costs, is one way of ensuring that all schools can feel that they are being fairly treated. I look forward to the Minister's comments on the extension of the time period and on my views about the Irish-medium factor.

Mr Gallagher: The motion offers us a useful opportunity to have some discussion from the outset of the consultation period. Everyone must agree that the document is complex and detailed. If it is implemented, almost all schools will experience changes in the way that their budgets are allocated. Changes will be favourable for some, and while others will see no significant gain, some will have their school budgets reduced.

The proposed changes are set against a backdrop of radical curriculum changes and the resultant pressures on all schools over the last decade. Changes must also take account of current population trends, which see school enrolments, at both primary and secondary level, falling. Many schools are already experiencing severe financial pressures.

The founding principles of the document are very sound. We hope to achieve a system that will be easy to operate and understand, will be transparent and will reinforce wider education policy. The other changes, which I believe will be welcomed, include basing school budgets on the preceding year's census. That is a sensible suggestion that most schools will welcome. The extension of teacher salary protection will particularly facilitate smaller schools.

Funding will be increased for children from the travelling community and for those children for whom English is an additional language. Some tests on targeting social need (TSN) have been carried out. Social need factors are clearly defined in the document and are based on the twin criteria of social deprivation and special educational needs. TSN funding will be divided fairly on a fifty-fifty basis.

However, that will all happen without any extra money being available. We are commencing a new exercise by moving money around schools in a different way. As the Minister said, how that is managed will be a key factor. If all goes well we will have an efficient system that will give the Department of Education increased bargaining power with the Executive. If, on the other hand, it does not go well, that will present different problems.

When the Minister launched the document he said that the proposal would ensure that similar schools would be treated in a similar way. While nobody would disagree with that, careful consideration must still be given.

A number of questions immediately spring to mind. How are similar schools to be defined? For example, a 300-pupil school in one of the County Fermanagh sectors may look similar to a 300-pupil school in the same sector in Ballymena, yet they may not have much in common. One is urban while the other is rural. One relies heavily on the school transport service, whereas the other does not depend on it as much. One relies heavily on an adequate school meals service, whereas it may not be as important for the other because of its location.

The terminology must be clarified. The definition of a "similar" school needs to be looked at in greater depth. Before anything is changed we need clear information on how the Department proposes to arrive at the definition of "similar" when using the phrase "schools with similar characteristics". Every school, as we know, must be looked at from its social context, its position in the community and what access it has to services such as leisure facilities. The surrounding infrastructure and how that assists or has an adverse effect on school transport must be taken into account. All these elements must be considered before we can identify schools with "similar" characteristics.

Another aspect to consider is the shifts and changes that there will be in the school system and the education and library boards. The boards receive an allocation; they hold some of the money centrally for transport, support services and school meals, but they send the greater part of it to the schools. If we implement all the proposals, some boards will find that they are able to hold more money centrally, so the services that are centrally controlled by those boards will gain, whereas other boards may be required to give more money to schools and will have less to hold centrally. The result of that will be that their centrally held services may be under pressure.

I am speaking as a representative of a large rural constituency that depends heavily on what is, at present, an unsatisfactory school transport service. I do not want, as a result of this exercise, to end up with a situation that leaves school transport or the school meals services under greater financial pressure. The paper does not deal with how the funding will be allocated, under a relative needs exercise, to the boards. In the interests of equality and the overall good of the education system, we need to be fair to those who administer education as well as to those who benefit from it in the classroom. Together with the review of the local management of schools we must review how the money is allocated to the boards. If we do that, we will end up with a better system.

Mr Gibson: I welcome the opportunity to speak. I will focus, particularly, on pages 27 and 28 that deal with the key principles for common formula funding. These

are the fundamental principles that underpin the direction and the objectives involved.

The first point that I want to make, not just to the Minister but to everyone in the Assembly, was made yesterday afternoon when many of us on these Benches pressed the Minister of Finance and Personnel to consider the idea of equality. We tried to persuade him to ensure equality by ring-fencing. He quickly retreated, on three or four occasions at least, to the wording of the criteria. I am therefore asking that all schools and all boards of governors keenly participate in the exercise. I ask the Minister, as the discussions progress, to reveal the criteria that underpin the key principles to the Committee and all the relevant bodies, because the thinking is emerging that they are involved.

12.15 pm

We can have a very nice sounding term such as the "common funding formula", but if the criteria involved do not support that, it can be totally misleading. I want everyone involved in the delivery of education to scrutinise carefully and objectively what is going to be involved.

Point 3.1 indicates a vision. Point 3.2 says that "schools should be funded according to their relative need." Why did the Minister not use the term "educational need"? Is the word "relative" an escape route to try to manipulate the criteria, and could that mean that the funding is not common but skewed for a variety of reasons that are not to do with educational needs? I would alert everyone to that point.

What does he mean by "objective measures"? How does the Minister intend to spell those out? What are those measures? How can we study the criteria and benchmark them against objective measures that have not yet been revealed? Then the Minister uses very nice words like "underpin", "reinforce wider education policy and objectives", "transparent" and "comprehensible". None of these principles is transparent or comprehensible, and they cannot be reinforced unless we know exactly what the Minister wishes to achieve.

That the formula is easy to administer, I would have thought, is a very sensible and important point. I know that my words will be used against me. I have yet to be convinced that there is a great correlation between social need and educational need, because most of the large body of educational information supporting that here and in America is outdated. However, there is much newer evidence coming forward. The old debate over environment versus innateness that has raged for a century is now history in educational terms and thinking. The ideas of how we measure intelligence is now past history. We are looking at new systems and methods of measuring intelligence. A whole new raft of educational thinking has emerged. There is an idea, still current with many people, that somehow you can use social engineering

to achieve a predictable outcome. Again, history is littered with a host of failures in that field. One of the great experimenters was dear old Adolf himself, who was so sorely tempted into social engineering that it led him to the idea of genetic engineering. History has dealt and dispensed with many of those ideas, so the Minister had better be very careful about what the real objectives of this exercise are.

Sometimes when I listen to people talking in social jargon I am convinced that they have developed a disease called "socialitis". I myself have a very strong social conscience, a very strong sense of fairness and a very strong sense of justice. However, that idea can be carried to the extreme where it so dominates one's thinking that one loses sight of the real issues.

What is the real object of the exercise? I put it to the Minister that it is to equip our generations with the education to enable them to compete in a competitive world. We can no longer risk experimenting with the education of our young people. Common funding should be fundamental to the idea that we need to continually improve our educational outcomes and standards. However, as another Member has mentioned, common funding should not be used for anything other than producing the best educational outcomes.

We do not want to reinvent ghettos. I can already see this prospect creeping into the thinking of those in my own constituency who feel beleaguered. At times they feel it is worthless and a waste of time to participate in an exercise the outcomes of which seem predestined. I am asking everyone, including the Minister of Education and his Department, to start to exercise their minds on the outcome of a common funding formula.

We are all too well aware of the inequalities of the last system. A lobby group from north Armagh compared two secondary schools, one of which was receiving about £50,000 a year more than the other. The group was also able to point to gross disparities in funding between primary schools of a similar size. I must stress that in my experience the educational performance of a pupil was never affected by whether he or she could pay for school meals. Many of us could quote similar glowing instances.

As section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 becomes an enforceable issue, the whole idea of equality will now be of paramount concern to those of us whose interest lies in the controlled sector. We are going to be thinking of fairness and justice. We will be looking critically at European legislation; I hope that this will be proofed by European legislation against ideas of unfairness or injustice. I wish this discussion well. I hope that everyone involved in our education system will take a vigorous, healthy and wholesome interest. This is important; its outcome is critical to our future generations.

Mr McHugh: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to speak as a

Committee member on this subject. I welcome the consultation and the statement by the Minister.

This is one of the current educational objectives of both the Minister and the Department. It is one of the milestones in the educational calendar, along with capital investment in schools and the abolition of the school performance tables.

The Irish-medium promotional body has already been mentioned. Irish is a growing language, and it should be cherished as part of the national heritage of the people of Ireland. The need for Irish-medium education has been proven, and it is a growing need. That should be welcomed, rather than considered to be an unnecessary expense.

There are three reviews that are currently running together. The post-primary review is probably the most important review for a long time. There is also the review of the curriculum and the local management of schools consultation on a common funding formula for grant-aided schools. I welcome the consultation, and in particular the Minister's assurances that no decisions have yet been made. That is important for all those in schools and anyone who might want to have input into the consultation. I appeal to all the partners in the education system to submit their views by 30 June, or, if that is changed, whatever date is decided.

The need to simplify the budget allocation must not take precedence over the need to allocate funding fairly to where it is most needed, even if complex calculations are required in order to ensure that all the relevant factors are considered. These calculations are part of the Department's work, and it has expertise in that area. It is important to decide whether we feel that the principles of justice, equality and support for the disadvantaged are appropriately dealt with and acted on.

I draw attention to the issue of the maintenance of school buildings. I have visited schools where windows do not close properly and where there is a lack of insulation. Those schools have higher heating bills than schools that have been recently updated. That particularly affects schools in rural areas and small schools, where there are already difficulties and costs to deal with as a result of the drop in the number of teachers. There is also a health and safety issue when schools become old and dilapidated. In some cases, windows are nailed shut.

The sum allocated to schools for maintenance must take into consideration the age of the premises and the time since the school's last refurbishment. Small schools, especially small primary schools, need to be protected, as they are an essential part of the life of local communities, especially rural communities. Any new funding formula must ensure investment in high-quality, locally accessible primary education and full-time early-years education which have an effect on the future achievement of pupils.

The Committee for Education has said that schools with similar characteristics but in different areas or sectors receive varying budgets. That is not acceptable, satisfactory or equitable. The Committee welcomes the key objectives of ensuring that schools with similar characteristics receive similar levels of funding, regardless of the area or sector in which they are situated. Therefore, we ask everyone in the education sector — individuals, schools and others — to take part in the consultation and make their views known. That is more than important at this time.

One difficulty is that there is quite a short time for consultation at what is a very busy time for those in the educational field who want to make their input. We will have to see how that goes along. It is vital that everybody make their views known. Go raibh maith agat.

The sitting was suspended at 12.30 pm.

On resuming (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr McClelland] in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Mrs E Bell: I, like many others, have many concerns about the current system, and I am also very aware that a review is necessary.

Any Member who is also a member of a school board of governors will know the problems that the current formula has produced for teacher provision, teachers' salaries, pupil numbers, implementation of the current curriculum, and so on.

The Minister's key objective in introducing a common local management of schools (LMS) formula — which was to ensure that schools with similar characteristics receive similar levels of funding, regardless of the areas or sectors in which they are located — has to be welcomed. We must work to achieve this objective which, if successfully implemented, will improve the situation in schools for teachers and all pupils.

It is vital, however, that consultation on this process is thorough and relevant. The consultation document should prove very useful. My party will be looking at this document and at the proposals very seriously, on the basic premise that a common funding formula must achieve its objective to benefit all schools and all pupils.

I will outline a few concerns that I have. I am aware that the main factor in funding procedures is the age-weighted pupil unit (AWPU). That should still be the main determining factor, as pupil enrolment numbers determine the number of teachers, support staff, type of equipment, and so on. The present formula for calculating the AWPU is complicated. I will be looking closely at the more simplified proposals contained in the document, and I broadly welcome the skewing of resources towards primary schools. However, the AWPU must be reviewed continually to allow for evolving situations in pupil

numbers, classroom conditions, et cetera, especially when the proposals in the Burns review are implemented.

The consultation document states that the funding of individual schools should be in accordance with the relevant need, and I am concerned about what that means. It is down as the first criterion for ensuring needs are met with clear responsibility to all types of pupils. That need must be obvious, and it must be relative to the educational needs in each school. That term will need to be made clear to boards of governors, and they will need proper training with regard to central expenditure. It is clear from the current LMS formula that there is potential for widespread inefficiency with moneys given to them. Guidance must be provided to maintain the efficient and economic provision of services.

Best value initiatives — as mentioned in the document as a mechanism for best practice — may not be as familiar to individual governors as they are to the Department of Education. They must clearly understand their responsibilities and the procedures so that effective implementation can occur.

I must also express my concerns about depending on free school meals or targeting social need (TSN) figures as the basis for funding figures, as they do not always present the correct picture across the schools. I welcome the increase in the TSN funding. However, a closer look needs to be taken at schools which may not be obvious contenders for free school meals or TSN applications but which have low achievers.

I also welcome the introduction of the special education needs factor. Again, I need to be confident that this will be implemented properly, as I have already expressed concerns about the current statementing process, never mind the situation with those children who are difficult to deal with but who are not statemented.

It is encouraging that the document comments on the fact that there are winners and losers under this new formula. I hope that the transitional protection offered will avoid undue and unacceptable turbulence in the funding levels. We must also ensure that the transitional arrangements are effective in helping schools to adjust to the new resource allocation. It would be useful to be told how the "cushioning" method that is mentioned will be implemented. Who will assist that? Will it be the Department or the education and library boards? It must be made known what will happen after the three-year period of adjustment.

I agree that it is vital that we assist and support our primary schools, but we must not do so at the expense of either nursery or post-primary schools. If we are to prepare all our children for future life in a meaningful way, we cannot replace one inequitable system with another. The priority, as the Minister states, must be in the school. Factors such as small school support, the extension of the teacher salary protection factor, funding

for the new sports factor and the continued inclusion of other factors mentioned this morning — for example, special unit funding, travellers, English as an additional language, Irish-medium schools and, I hope, integrated education schools, and children of service personnel — must be welcomed. It is essential that the inclusion of all children, whatever their background, be encouraged.

The Alliance Party fully supports a common formula to replace the seven that are currently used to allocate resources to schools. We welcome the consultation document and the helpful response document, in which some of the questions and concerns are highlighted for easy response. I hope that will in some way go towards addressing the concerns that we all have about the timetable for this consultation process. We hope that the consultation, whatever the timetable, is a success. It must be remembered, however — as we in the Assembly know only too well, and sometimes to our cost — that devolving decision making to the local level does not always result in an efficient and effective response, either in financial or people-power terms. I can only hope that the current tensions and problems that are present in schools because of funding difficulties will be eased by these proposals.

To achieve a successful outcome to this process we must ensure that all pupils will have improved facilities and conditions, that teachers will feel better valued and protected and that education overall will be the winner. I hope that everyone interested in those goals will use this process. I support the motion.

Mr B Hutchinson: First, I declare an interest as a member of the Belfast Education and Library Board. As a city councillor I represent the council on that board. I am also on the board of governors of two primary schools in north Belfast.

I have previously been in contact with the Minister and have discussed the issue of local management of schools and the funding element in particular. Having read the document, there seems to be quite a lot of good things in it. On reading it a second time, I have to say that I have concerns, particularly about the Belfast area and the schools that have to exist there. I know from local Protestant primary schools, especially those in north Belfast — and I am sure that it is the same across Belfast — that we have a shrinking population. There are a number of reasons for that, quite a few of which are down to successive Governments and to planners who badly planned the whole notion of Belfast and its dormitory towns. As a result, we have a shrinking population.

One of my difficulties in this is that we have not looked at teachers' wages, which are paid out under the local management of schools. While that continues, those sorts of schools will suffer. The reason is that they have teachers who have served more than seven years and who have to be paid on the top line — there is

nothing we can do about that. If a school with 104 pupils or less tries to employ all of those teachers, year on year the board of governors will be faced with having to make people redundant. It is not a very nice choice to have to make, particularly if there is no voluntary redundancy. One has to decide who is going to leave the school. Those are always going to be the difficulties until we decide that wages should be taken out and paid centrally.

Some of the issues that stem from that are long-term sick and maternity leave, particularly if subs are brought in. A top-line sub costs £132·86 a day. Usually, all of that must come out of the budget unless the relevant education board pays for that centrally, in which case it pays £100 a day leaving the added cost of £32·86 in statutory sick pay. Those are issues we need to get to grips with.

In my opinion, the Minister has developed many other relevant matters. The changes he has made to the curriculum reserve fund will probably benefit some of the schools that I represent; recognising that there must be redundancies, he has tweaked to cover for that. I can verify that, until now, a number of schools in Belfast that have had to do that have not benefited in any way from the curriculum reserve fund and have been left out for several reasons.

We continue to view school meals as indicative of social need, as indeed they are. However, we also need to remember that a number of these schools are based in socially deprived areas and that education has to be a fundamental right for everybody. That must be considered in the review of post-primary education.

At the beginning of this debate, the Minister expressed the view that investment in early years has to be welcomed. Most of us recognise that that is where investment is needed, so that by the time pupils get to post-primary education they should have the ability to achieve in those particular schools.

Concerning the budget, I want to discuss the whole system of schools having to pay out for maintenance following vandalism. In Belfast both Protestant and Catholic schools are often vandalised. I am not differentiating here, but quite a lot of schools in peace line areas are damaged due to sectarianism. When schools re-open after a break, whether after Easter, when the Easter Rising is commemorated, or when returning in September after the Twelfth of July, the damage caused by vandalism must be paid for out of the budget, and no one wants to take up that issue.

I recall having to fight hard for a school that had been subject to a sectarian attack. Intercom systems that had been put in place because of the tragic massacre in Dunblane in Scotland were destroyed. Still and all, the education board would not pay out. Rather, it told the school to pay it out of its own budget. Consider how many books that money could have bought for that school.

I am also concerned about LMS demands that schools have composite P6 and P7 classes. In the deprived areas where these schools are situated, that policy does not give pupils the opportunity for a proper education and proper preparation for secondary school.

As regards the document's proposal for sport, I am concerned that the money might be put into equipment rather than expertise. If we seriously want to do something about sport, we should ensure that we have PE teachers in primary schools and that we invest in teachers rather than in equipment. Equipment will not make a difference to the pupils; we need expertise if we really want to produce quality pupils in sport.

I ask the Minister to consider the whole of Belfast and how this would have an impact on it. Unless we remove the budget for teachers' salaries, then schools in Belfast are going to suffer. Someone spoke earlier about the different sectors. I believe that parents should be allowed to choose which sector they send their child to.

One case that I want to make today is for the integrated schools. I believe that over the last 20 years, parents have come together to make a choice. We are all told about the choice that we have in education. I believe that choice, not only in education but in other walks of life such as employment, is a weasel concept.

Sometimes we are told that we can have one or the other rather than having a choice of more than one. It must be recognised that some parents in our sectarian society have decided that they would like their children to be educated together, and Members should seriously examine how that can be facilitated. Parents who would like their children to be taught in an integrated school should not be prevented from doing so and should not be discriminated against.

2.15 pm

Unless the wage bill is removed from LMS, not even a dent will be made in the problem. I welcome the vast majority of the Minister's document, but the fundamental flaw is the wage bill.

Ms McWilliams: I commend the Minister for the reception he received at the recent teachers' union conferences. I am delighted that he did not have to run the same gauntlet as his counterpart in the Republic, the Minister of Education and Science, who has not received quite the same welcome when attending similar conferences. However, here comes the sting. Although I welcome the consultation document it falls far short of what the education system needs. It tinkers at the edges, whereas what is needed is an entire overview of the education system.

Given the proliferation of expensive bodies and administrative systems in the Department of Education, would it not have been better to have asked for consultation on how Members would like to see the education

system administered? The management of schools and the formula could then have been examined in the light of that consultation. We are looking at only one aspect of the issue. Sometimes it appears as if we are starting at the wrong end, and we may not get it right.

Gerry McHugh mentioned the Burns review on post-primary education. If recommendations emerge from the review, this could all be a temporary expedient, because Members may be back here shortly re-examining this issue, especially since it addresses the primary and post-primary sectors. I am concerned that Members are seeking responses now when recommendations that will impact on the Minister's decision will shortly be available.

Given the number of bodies in the Department of Education, I was surprised that it used a private consultancy firm, Coopers & Lybrand, to carry out this exercise. Is the education system so bitty that the Department could not have looked at the issue in a co-ordinated way rather than handing over the job to someone else? It does not speak well for devolution if those jobs have to be given to private consultancies.

I am also concerned about the evidence for increasing the formula for TSN. I welcome TSN, but how was the percentage of 5.5% arrived at? Members will need evidence to convince them that that increase was all that was required. I take issue with Oliver Gibson, who argued that TSN should not be based on issues such as whether children are entitled to free school meals. Social policy research states that where there is deprivation and many children require free school meals, there are parents on benefits or very low incomes. However, the parents may not be on low incomes because that factor has been taken out of the system. But from what we know about deprivation, the children of parents who are on benefits have particular needs, and special resources should be targeted at those children in schools.

As Billy Hutchinson said, the central part of this dilemma is teachers' salaries. Some 80% of funding goes towards paying the wage bill, which creates enormous insecurity in schools every year as to whether they will have to make teachers redundant.

Surely it would be more sensible to adopt a central funding system, which excludes salaries, to avoid the apparent increasing lack of morale. We do not want to reach a situation similar to that in the Republic of Ireland where teachers are on strike. That is having a huge impact on young people's education. Northern Ireland may face that situation unless we seriously address the issue of giving teachers permanency and security. Continuity is the most important factor when teachers are educating our children. They will know the children better if they have been in the school for some time.

I am also very concerned about private finance initiatives. The consultation document does not ask for responses on this, and the public/private partnerships

may lead to problems in the future. If the projected enrolments in new-build schools are not meeting the targets, will money have to be allocated to cover the cost of the rebuild and redundancies? I am still concerned that opportunities are missed when documents such as this, particularly those relating to the long-term funding and management of schools, go out for consultation without the views of teachers and others having been sought.

Counting, particularly the age-weighted pupil units, is a very difficult issue. On the one hand, we do not want to prejudice the system against schools that are trying to expand. In the past, Mr Billy Hutchinson, Mrs Bell, myself and others have raised the matter of new schools, especially those in the integrated sector. We do not want to prejudice opportunities for them, but we would be doing that if we were to detract from funding for smaller schools. On the other hand, we do not want to put larger schools at a disadvantage.

I received a letter from the principals of five primary schools who argue that the recent round of funding disadvantaged them, and I am sure that the Minister received the same correspondence. Extra funding was given to smaller schools, and the creation of a maximum for larger primary schools meant that they received less funding per pupil. It is not impossible for us to get around that problem. There should never be large numbers of losers in this system.

Skewing resources to the primary and early years sector is an important target. However, given the recent demographic trends that point to the need to sustain post-primary schools, how will the Minister meet both sectors if we are not to have losers? In other words, the numbers are going to fall in early years in primary schools, but we have always agreed that we should target that and set an aim for our education system to improve, particularly where there is disadvantage, the education of very young children. In doing that, I hope that secondary schools are not put at a disadvantage.

We need more research on equity and effectiveness. Clear equity issues exist with regard to provision for post-16 and vocational students and allocations to sixth form grammar school students. Equity between the school systems is also an issue — the integrated sector versus the controlled, maintained and voluntary sectors. Not all integrated schools are permitted to establish sixth forms, and not all existing sixth form provision is cost-effective. The entry and exit rules must be examined. I hope that those rules will be examined in detail at the end of the consultation process. If the research is falling down anywhere it is that we are lacking in accurate information.

Finally, I agree with Mr Billy Hutchinson's point about pupils who have special social needs — disruptive children. I am sure that other Members have received

many letters from parents whose children have been expelled or suspended from school.

They have attempted to get them into other schools, which are reluctant to take those children unless they receive extra resources. The frequently disruptive child has an impact on the receiving school, and extra resources may be needed.

We must ensure additional resources per pupil. If we do not examine the formulae, many of those children may go into what were, in the past, considered to be schools that no one wanted to touch. The schools that accept those children should be given extra resources. In that way, we can continue to give the children some incentives, rather than having them in a system in which their behaviour is reciprocated by their peers. If those children mix with other children who are settled, the receiving schools and their teachers should have their needs addressed accordingly.

That said, this is an important document in relation to the current consultations. I hope that the Minister has allowed considerable flexibility. I hope that he will respond to some of those issues, because my major concern is that we are putting the cart before the horse.

Mr S Wilson: I am not sure why this debate has been called in this form. I did not hear the Minister's explanation this morning, because the debate started earlier than anticipated. The Assembly should note that it is most unusual for a Minister to announce a consultation document in that way. Given the Minister's background and the way in which he has abused his portfolio for party political ends, I can only assume that there are one or two explanations for that.

We all — especially those of us who have been directly involved in the Committee for Education — have received considerable representation, from some sectors in particular, concerning the funding of schools. There is a belief that small schools and primary schools have been disadvantaged. I suppose it is hoped that the general impression given by the consultation will be that all those problems will be magically sorted out. However, on reading the small print, and given that it is unlikely that sufficient resources will be made available to bring us up to the high aggregated schools budget (ASB) scenario, there will be losers. That, of course, is in the fine print and for later.

Perhaps another reason for bringing this forward at this stage is that when the Department's initial document was produced, there were some elements from whom the Minister would have been very unhappy to have had criticism, especially those more sympathetic towards the maintained sector. Those people were jumping up and down before the Committee for Education, because there was a suggestion that there would be some loss to the maintained sector as a result of the proposed changes.

I note — and perhaps this is the Minister's reason for bringing the motion forward in this form — that without any explanation, using exactly the same arguments and without even having the ingenuity to change the words around, the Minister has changed the formula. In doing so, he was able to satisfy both the strident complaints of the SDLP and the more restrained voice — because they could not do anything about it — of his own party about the results of the initial document.

2.30 pm

The Minister is using his position to manipulate his portfolio to please a particular constituency and calm fears that may have arisen before an election campaign.

He has blatantly directed half of this year's capital funding towards the Sinn Féin target constituencies of West Tyrone, Mid Ulster and Foyle and totally ignored the criteria set down, even by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS). When a Minister abuses his position like that, I can be forgiven for my interpretation of the exercise.

Before people jump up and down in support of the matter, one should note the conclusions reached at the start of the consultation document. It states that some schools will lose more than 5% — some nearly 10% — of their budget. Those schools are likely to be from the Belfast Education and Library Board area and in the controlled sector. I will spell it out for some Members. For a secondary school of around 1,000 pupils, the loss in its budget could be in the region of £150,000 to £170,000 a year. Even if a third of that can be absorbed by cutting back on books, heating and lighting, et cetera, that is the equivalent of losing four teachers, which would put average class sizes up by two pupils per class. That is the bad news contained in the document. It admits that a large part of the budget loss is directed at the controlled sector. Therefore we can see why totally unjustified changes have been made to the original document presented to the Committee for Education.

It would be unrealistic for anyone to expect that if you are going to cut the cake up in a different way, some sectors will not lose out. Some good arguments have been advanced by the primary school sector. The whole thrust of the current education debate has been to devote resources early on in the primary school year to ensure that problems that arise later are nipped in the bud. That requires making more resources available, especially at the lower primary level — hence some of the changes in the age-weighted pupil unit (AWPU) and some other suggested changes. That will be a long-term exercise, but if it eradicates some of the difficulties that lead to extra expenditure in the post-primary sector, that will be a worthwhile investment.

I wish to discuss other aspects of the document. The main difference between the original document presented to the Committee for Education and the consultation

document is on the aspect of targeting social need (TSN) and particularly the emphasis placed on free school meals. That is why there is a skewing of resources away from the controlled sector and towards the maintained sector.

That was the sop that the Minister gave to those who nearly blew a gasket when it was first suggested and who made it clear that they would not support the measure if that outcome was retained in the exercise.

Targeting social need will now be divided into two sections — the social deprivation section and the special educational needs section. An arbitrary amount of additional money was to be poured in, increasing the top slice from 5% to 5.5%, without any rationale. Initially, the available sum — £44 million — was to have been divided equally between the social deprivation factor, which was to be based entirely on free school meals, and the special educational needs factor. I would have thought that special educational need would be based on some educational factor. It was suggested that it should be based on the Key Stage 2 tests. Thirty-five per cent of the money would be allocated on that basis, and the allocation of another 15% would be based on free school meals.

The argument in the consultation document is — word-for-word — the same as that in the original document, which was sent to the Committee for Education: not even a comma has been changed. Yet the percentages in the formula have magically changed, giving approximately £5 million extra to people on free school meals.

The argument is that free school meals are a good indicator of educational need. However, according to the Department's own statistics, that is not the case. I do not care what anyone in the Assembly has said about the correlation between free school meals and educational disadvantage. The Department has produced statistics on absence rates and on achievement at GCSE level. According to those statistics, 60% of results fall outside a range of 5% above or below the suggested trend line. There is no correlation. The scatter diagram shows that the correlation that people talk about so glibly does not exist. Somehow, the Minister, without changing his argument, has changed the formula in the consultation document. The result is that one section of the school population, concentrated in Belfast, is going to find itself disadvantaged by up to 10% of the school budget.

Mr B Hutchinson: As someone who lives and works in a working-class area, does the Member agree that if we were to take away the definition based on free school meals, things would be even worse for deprived schools in Belfast?

Mr S Wilson: No, I do not. I will give you my reasons. If you look —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member should address his remarks through the Chair.

Mr S Wilson: If the Member looked at educational achievement in those schools, he would see that if money were to be allocated on the basis of achievement, funds would still be skewed towards many of the schools in working-class areas. The best measure of what a school needs to deliver the curriculum and achieve a certain output is the educational achievement of the youngsters. As Mrs Bell said, low educational achievement is not confined to people from low-income families.

When you allocate most of the targeting social need money on the basis of free school meals, you disadvantage those youngsters. More importantly, the Minister has changed the figure arbitrarily, because that gets around a particular difficulty he was having with some of the SDLP Members — a difficulty that he would also have had with his own constituents eventually. That is where the unfairness lies.

When the Minister talks about the principles that he is adhering to, he says that the formula should be transparent and as comprehensive as possible. He has got off to a very poor start. On one hand his officials present the Committee with a certain formula, and then without any explanation, other than it gives a different outcome as to which schools win and which schools lose, he changes that formula totally. That is hardly transparency or fairness. Perhaps that is what we have come to expect from the current Minister of Education.

The Minister stated in the list of principles that the formula should support schools in delivering the curriculum. It should also underpin and reinforce wider educational policy and objectives. If the Minister is abiding by those principles then why is the money that is being top-sliced and the money that is available for special educational needs not being targeted at educational measures as opposed to social measures? That is an important question.

Billy Hutchinson and Monica McWilliams mentioned something that worries me also. There is a certain amount of sympathy for removing the wage bill from school budgets and determining it centrally. I thought that the whole idea of local management of schools, of which this is part, was designed to allow them to make their own decisions about how they wish to deliver the service to youngsters. It may well be that some schools will decide that that can be best achieved by promoting teachers and retaining experienced teachers. It may well be that other schools are happy to allow experienced teachers to leave and have lower paid, less experienced teachers just to keep pupil/teacher ratios down.

Once wages become centrally funded, that aspect of the local decision-making process will be removed — *[Interruption]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask Members not to engage in idle conversation.

Ms McWilliams: A point that teachers make to their union representatives is that it would be good if it worked like that and that local schools could decide to promote teachers or recruit new teachers — obviously at a lower pay level, at spine point six.

The problem is that teachers might have been at the same schools for a long time. Therefore those schools would not have any choice and would have to pay wages at spine point nine. Consequently, they would have to make new teachers redundant or amalgamate classes, and it often happens that two classes of 23 pupils end up in a single class of more than 35 pupils. Those are the choices that schools are facing. It is argued that it is unfair for teachers and local school management to face such choices and that it would be much better if we looked at the matter strategically and sensibly.

Mr S Wilson: That would be a fair point if there were an unlimited amount of money in the central fund. Where funds are limited — which will happen — that flexibility will not be exercised, and the Department will ultimately determine the number of teachers at each level and the total number of teachers in each school. That is where the flexibility will be taken away.

The issue of how teacher salaries are dealt with needs to be very carefully addressed. It is not as simple as taking money from the Budget and giving it to the Department. If you do that, you will lose flexibility.

2.45 pm

Members must look closely at the conclusions reached in this document. We must look closely at the changes that have occurred in the document since the original version was presented. The Minister, if he wants to be transparent, must explain why he has produced a different formula when using the same arguments. He must show whether those changes have been designed to ensure that the outcome favours one particular sector of education that, of course, he is prone to lobbying for.

Mr K Robinson: I am sure that the Minister, by this stage, feels like the man who asked for directions and received the answer, “If I were you, I would not start from here”. Many conflicting statements have been made.

Minister, has this document been produced in Irish and Ulster-Scots as well as in English?

Like Billy Hutchinson, who has now left, I wish to declare an interest. I too am a member of two boards of governors, and, therefore, I come to this with some background in education.

I preface my comments on this long-overdue but nonetheless welcome consultation document by reminding the Minister of his Department’s key objective as stated on page five. If that principle is firmly adhered to and all

schools, regardless of the sector or area in which they are located, receive similar levels of funding, such an equitable and transparent system will be welcomed by all in the House. In that vein, the matter of actual teacher costs rather than average teacher costs must be resolved. That could make a fundamental difference to small schools, rural schools and schools in TSN areas.

Although the teachers' salary protection mechanism has been in place and has lessened the financial difficulties experienced by schools, the Minister must revisit and refocus on that area. Teaching costs have also been referred to; they often reflect the length of service of staff. Therefore boards of governors, in an effort to balance the books, may on occasion be tempted, for financial reasons, to seek less experienced and, therefore, less expensive staff. That can often happen at a TSN school that most needs the expertise of an experienced teacher but finds that the financial implications unfortunately outweigh the educational necessities.

The common funding formula would also ensure that these schools could skew more of their budgets internally towards the provision of books and materials. It is frightening to look at the few pounds that are spent on books and materials. The figure of 80% for teachers' salary costs has been referred to; I suggest that 90% is, perhaps, a more accurate figure.

The efficient delivery of the curriculum via the most proficient teachers available should outweigh any consideration of the sanctity of the current LMS model. I refer the Minister and his officials to page 75 of the consultation document. In an attempt to justify the LMS model, the Department is frightened that it might be seriously weakened if the actual teacher costs were taken back into the Department. Sammy Wilson referred to teacher and principal flexibility. I welcomed LMS when I was a principal; I looked forward to creating a nest egg from which my school could benefit and to producing all those things that the education and library board could not give me. Unfortunately, that was not how the system worked. Most teachers and principals now find that there is little real flexibility in the system.

The proposed introduction of the most recent enrolment figures will be helpful for schools in their pursuit of local management of resources. It will diminish the prospect of a future clawback scenario, which is currently a consideration in many schools that have seriously fluctuating populations. We have seen that par excellence in Belfast during the summer months, with school populations disappearing almost overnight.

The premises factor presented the Minister with the opportunity to be as radical as possible. It was a chance to integrate the voluntary grammar schools and the grant-maintained integrated schools under the umbrella of the education and library boards. Surely that would have led to a reduction in the duplication of services, a

simpler formula and the opportunity to use the undoubted expertise that resides in the education and library boards.

I welcome the small percentage increase in TSN, which will enable schools to tackle social deprivation and special educational needs — the core problems long associated with low achievement. Despite reference to local and international research — and the uptake of free school meals has been referred to in the Chamber as a very good indicator of social need — I am still not totally convinced. However, the task is about tackling educational underachievement, wherever it is found, and I am pleased that extra resources will be made available to tackle the problem.

I note the working party's concern that there might be some local difficulties as Key Stage 2 results, which are essentially school-based, could also be used as performance indicators. However, if the Department puts proper safeguards into place, Key Stage 2 results will prove to be a step in the right direction, especially if they can be linked with a robust, baseline assessment at year 1.

I remind the Minister of my previous request for a review of the current early-years arrangements so that we can be totally sure that we are building our primary and post-primary sectors on an educationally sound foundation. Other Members have expressed the same concern in their comments today.

As regards small school support, being the former principal of a two-teacher school west of the Bann, I fully appreciate the benefits that small rural schools can accrue, now that their problems have been identified. It has taken many years, but I am glad that the document has at least identified the problems faced by principals who teach in that scenario. I fully support the mechanism that would release those principals from the classroom situation for at least one day per week, so that they could attend to their increasing administrative and management duties.

I am not fully convinced about the Department's reference to teachers' salary costs and the role that boards of governors may have had in the past as having led to financial difficulties for some schools today. I am sure it is not beyond the ingenuity of the Department to introduce stricter guidelines to curb the enthusiasm of some boards of governors — the situation will slowly resolve itself via teacher retirements and movements to other posts and other schools. Again, I refer to the actual, as opposed to the average, teacher costs. While the teacher salary protection factor is welcome, it is only a safety net and should be used only in the interim.

I welcome the new sports factor, and I congratulate the authors of the consultation document for including it. It is, at least, a realisation that there has not been equality of provision and of opportunity in sport across our educational sectors. The sports factor is to be welcomed, as it will ensure that the equal and efficient

delivery of that part of the school curriculum is a fact and not just a fiction. It is also welcome on general public health grounds, as it will enable schools to properly introduce all pupils to the joys and benefits of a wide variety of physical activities and team sports — surely something that will help build habits of personal endeavour and community co-operation.

I welcome the emergence of the document, and I encourage all who have an interest in our children, and in the future welfare of our society, to look at it in detail, to study its contents, to reflect upon its many implications and to respond with positive suggestions.

However, the proof of its effectiveness will be evident when schools in TSN areas feel that they are operating on a level playing field and schools in non-TSN areas are confident that they have not suffered any diminution in their resources as a result. That is an objective we should all be working towards. I commend the document.

Mr Dallat: Several Members have declared an interest. The only interest I can declare is 30 years in the teaching profession in which it was obvious that there were serious inequalities. Now there is an opportunity to address those inequalities for all children, not just Protestant or Catholic children.

I have read the document carefully, and I may have made some mistakes and picked up some things incorrectly. However, even Sammy Wilson makes mistakes, if one is to judge by his latest press statement on the DUP website, in which he attacks the SDLP's policy on education. The Member really ought to use a spellchecker on it and rejig the grammar.

Agreeing a common funding formula for grant-aided schools has to be one of the greatest challenges ever faced by the Department of Education. Yet it is an absolute necessity, given that there are seven formulae in use at present, some with different emphases and with little to do with education, targeting social need or addressing basic equality factors.

The consultation document is well-presented and sets out what appears to be some very simple options. Yet, as the Minister freely acknowledges, children are more complex than that. The existing inequalities are much more fundamental. There has to be some degree of apprehension that in order to reach agreement, please the majority of people and win approval, key factors could be missed. That would be a tragedy. We have to ask: is the funding adequate?

Given that one in four people leave school with serious problems with literacy and numeracy — and I am not really including Mr Sammy Wilson in that — and that there are worrying differences in levels of attainment across the five education and library boards, one has to ask if the proposals in this document will improve the situation or make it worse in some cases. Will disparity

between boards continue to exist? Does the reaching of a common formula divert the focus, at least temporarily, from serious issues that are making children different, causing them to under-achieve or, indeed, fail? What is in a common formula for those schools that are faced with serious challenges, which at times seem almost insurmountable? Will children who start out in life with horrendous disadvantages, such as broken homes, family upheaval, social disadvantage and other problems, be adequately accounted for by the new formula? It is critical, surely, that they are.

If economies have to be made, where will that happen? Term workers are all too often the victims of cutbacks. Their position must be ring-fenced, because they play a fundamental part, whether as classroom assistants or in other parts of the school, in ensuring that children receive personal attention. It is not clear what happens if substitute teachers are required. Will enforced economies mean that classes are doubled-up to make savings? The point I am making is that where reductions occur, soft targets must not be picked on, and the needs of children must not come second. Ideally, it would be much better to have no losers, but that is not possible, given all that must be done with the block grant.

It is to be welcomed that those schools qualifying for an increased budget will have access to it as soon as possible. That is critical if the reasons for inequality are to be addressed in the shortest possible time. We need to be clear about what is meant by relative need, and the principles of equality and targeting social need must apply to that definition. The delivery of the school curriculum must be clearly enhanced rather than diminished by changes in the funding formula, and the formula must underpin and reinforce the wider educational policy and objectives.

The success of this exercise will be judged by the degree of transparency that exists in the new policy. It is essential that it be logical, easy to administer and capable of being applied fairly. We need to be satisfied that children in every part of Northern Ireland, and in every kind of school, have an equal opportunity to achieve. Children who are disadvantaged through no fault of their own must have their needs ring-fenced so that the injustices that existed in the past are consigned to history. Is there sufficient scope to protect small rural schools in both primary and secondary sectors? How will the proposed changes fit into the challenge of regenerating the rural communities that are so important to life on this island?

I can assure the Minister that this is one document that will not gather dust. It will be scrutinised from cover to cover to ensure that the changes are in the best interests of the people who matter most; our children and their children's children.

3.00 pm

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom fáilte a chur roimh an

díospóireacht seo. De réir mo bharúla, is ábhar fiorthábhachtach é seo. Is é an rud atá faoi chaibidil againn ná an dóigh a leithroinneann an Roinn Oideachais airgead ar ár gcuid scoileanna.

I welcome the consultation. This subject has taken up a good deal of the Education Committee's time to date and will continue to do so in the coming weeks and months. Similar to Mr Dallat, I enjoyed Mr Sammy Wilson's contribution — he displayed tremendous ingenuity and imagination. I will never know how he managed to embroider Sinn Féin's electoral strategy west of the Bann on to this document. He also used phrases such as "jumping up and down" and "blowing gaskets". That terminology is perhaps more fitting to his behaviour than to that of those to whom he attributes it. He might deserve a gold star for his imagination, but there is room for improvement in his punctuality. He arrived late for an education debate today, not for the first time.

I welcome the reassurance that this is to be a genuine consultation exercise and that decisions have not yet been made. I also welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate. The way in which money is channelled to classrooms is a very important aspect of the education system. There is widespread concern among different schools that the seven different formulae used at present to determine budgets delegated to schools have led to discrepancies between board areas.

I agree with the Chairman of the Education Committee, Mr Kennedy, about asking the Minister to consider an extension to the consultation period. Schools, especially post-primary ones, are currently busy with final exam preparations. Thousands of pieces of coursework are being marked and parcelled away. Far from winding down, teachers are now on an upward curve of workload and stress. For many in education, the second half of June might be the first real opportunity to give this consultation document the serious thought that it merits. As one of the Education Committee members who asked for the deadline to be moved to the end of June, I would like the Minister to consider moving the deadline forward in the light of its delayed start. That point was adequately covered by Mr Kennedy.

I agree with the Minister that there is a need to standardise how delegated school budgets are calculated. That need for standardisation should not obscure the fact that we are dealing with a society riven with disadvantage. In particular, it is important to realise that disadvantage is not only due to the circumstances of a particular child and his or her parent's income. A child can also be disadvantaged by the area in which he or she lives. In a seminal piece of research carried out in Scotland in 1991 by Garner and Raudenbush entitled 'Neighbourhood Effects on Educational Attainment: A Multi-level Analysis', it was said that psychological studies have shown that some types of residential environments are associated with particular personality characteristics.

These predispose individuals to respond differently to education. The nature of the residential environment can facilitate or constrain interaction among individuals. Restricted contact with adults has been shown to influence young children's language development, and some young adults may be more susceptible to peer group pressures in such an environment.

There are other socio-economic factors in areas in which people live to suggest that there is a substantial variation in educational attainment between neighbourhoods. That is an important factor that should be added to the overall equation. The effect of area or neighbourhood deprivation is additional to the effect of individual and family background influences. When translated into employment prospects, that may be of real significance in determining the future life chances of young people. To put it simply, a child carries with him or her disadvantage from the area in which he or she lives. Two academics from Queen's University, Daly and Shuttleworth, confirmed this trend — where one lives is as important as who one is or what one's characteristics are. There is a compounding effect of disadvantage; this has an impact on a school in terms of the number of children there who suffer from social disadvantage.

Research has clearly established the link between socio-economic status and positive attitudes to schooling. Therefore if a group of 10 pupils includes three from disadvantaged backgrounds and seven from better-off backgrounds, it is likely that the attitudes of the seven will influence the three. The reverse is also true.

I suggest that in targeting social need in schools the degree of social need of the whole catchment area or school population, and not just of individual pupils, should be included as a factor.

I express caution about the inclusion of Key Stage 2 results in the calculation of TSN funding, particularly in the case of primary schools. There is a lack of standardisation, and it is financially unsound, because it channels funding to a school on the basis of the results of its outgoing pupils, not the needs of its intake. That is unfair, because it penalises those schools that achieve better results against all odds.

I welcome the fact that Mr Tommy Gallagher and my Colleague Mr Gerry McHugh emphasised rurality. Reference was made to schools with similar characteristics. School transport pressures are enormous in rural areas.

I would be interested to hear views on the premises factor and the grounds factor — the sports factor — to which some Members have referred. Similar to other Members, I very much welcome the proposals that lead to an increase in full-time early years education. Over the long haul it will be a wise investment and economy. It is obvious that that needs to be better co-ordinated and financed than previously.

I want to make a few disparate points now — disparate as opposed to desperate; there is an “i” in there as opposed to an “e”. I read an article recently in which a senior official from one of the teachers’ unions referred to a demographic time bomb of dwindling numbers in secondary schools. We have that problem at present with our primary schools. Is the Minister looking at that trend?

Another area, which is often referred to by educationalists, is the duplication of services in relation to the five education and library boards and the Department. There is a need to direct more money into the classroom, rather than top-slicing the money for administration. We are talking about a review of educational administration and an increase in the overall pot.

Ms Monica McWilliams asked a very sensible question in relation to the marginal increase in TSN money from 5% to 5.5%. How was that figure arrived at? The free school meals entitlement is as good a mechanism as any currently in existence for arriving at an analysis of deprivation. However, perhaps the incorporation of the neighbourhood effect into the calculations would further equalise opportunities for individuals presently suffering deprivation.

Finally, I raise a discordant note in relation to what some Members have said about support for Irish-medium education. It is only discordant for some Members, because I know that others support my view. I believe strongly that “a comparatively small factor” in the calculations should be the inclusion of support for Irish-medium schools and units. The Department proposes to bring this on to a consistent footing and to continue its inclusion in the future.

I record my party’s support, and I express disappointment and surprise that the pro-agreement Ulster Unionist Party is attempting to see this aspect eradicated from the formula calculation. It is as if the Good Friday Agreement and the bounden duty on the Minister and Ministers and on the Department and Departments to take resolute action to promote Irish-medium education did not exist. Quite clearly it does exist. There is plenty of room for support for catch-up on the part of Irish-medium education and other sectors where there has been underinvestment in the past. Go raibh maith agat.

Mrs Carson: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this motion. I should declare an interest as a former teacher, the principal of a rural primary school and a member of some boards of governors.

We all wish to see education money going to where it is needed and wanted — to the classrooms and the pupils, and not to administration. Money that is well spent in the classrooms will have results for future generations. Northern Ireland has a small population of only 1.7 million, but we have a plethora of administrative bodies. Has the time not come for the House to look at some consolidation? Do we really need them all? Could

savings not be made by reducing the duplication of administration and the plethora of education sectors?

The key principles listed on page 7 of the consultation document are laudable, but I am concerned with some of the wording. For example, in paragraph v.i at the first bullet point it says:

“schools should be funded according to relative need”.

Who is going to decide what is relative? At the second bullet point it says:

“unavoidable and significant additional expenditure”.

Who is going to deal with that? It seems a bit wavery. Then it says at the third bullet point that

“the formula should support schools in delivering the curriculum”.

If schools are inspected only every seven years or more, who knows which school is doing what or what curriculum is being delivered?

Some rural schools are under intense pressure from a falling enrolment, and I welcome the additional funding that is to be found to enable those schools to employ an extra teacher to enable principals to spend one day a week on management and administrative duties. I was never afforded that luxury.

I note that the pupil count will exclude nursery and special classes and Irish-medium units. Children in those schools have a higher financial rating. How encouraging to have an Irish-medium unit to boost funding, but what about an Ulster-Scots unit? Can rural schools in Antrim and Down have parity of treatment and an Ulster-Scots unit?

Continuing on the theme of equality, I cannot understand why Irish-language schools need preferential treatment. I read with great amusement that these schools have been given an extra £100 per head in a lump sum — £31,000, almost £32,000, per school — for administration and management. On page 105 of the consultation document it states that this extra £100 is to meet the cost of teacher time spent on preparing materials and delivering an extra subject at Key Stage 2. If equality is to prevail in schools, should extra money not also be made available for a European language? That too could be considered as an extra and vital subject, given our developing European links. That should be considered carefully.

One group of children is not being treated equally, and that is the children in some of the preparatory schools. They have hardly even been mentioned in the document, and they gained funding set at only 30% of the approved teaching costs. Their parents have made a choice, exactly the same choice that is given to parents who wish to have their children taught through the medium of Irish. Why is there no equality of treatment for those children whose parents have made their choice? That must also be looked at carefully.

Boards of governors have a great responsibility in the appointment of staff, and they have the added concern of ascertaining how new appointments and salaries can affect the school budgets. More research should be done into the possibility of removing teachers' salaries from the LMS. Boards of governors are unpaid and should not have to undertake problems of school finance that should be, or perhaps could be, better dealt with by a central administrative body.

Schools of similar size have great variations in the salaries paid to staff, and some schools have principals and vice-principals holding protected salaries, even though their enrolments have fallen. This is an unreasonable burden on school budgets and another reason for removing teachers' salaries from the LMS.

3.15 pm

In the chapter 'Funding Outcomes' such woolly terms as "assumptions", "reasonably accurate" and "may be considerably less" are used. These words are vague and could lead to abuse.

I urge all interested persons — parents, teachers, boards of governors, retired teachers, people with interests in children — to read the consultation in the interests of our children, and to try to ensure that all children have equal treatment with regard to school funding.

Mr O'Neill: Everybody is in the humour for declaring interests, so I had better declare mine. I sit on a board of governors, and I have been a teacher for many years.

I support the motion, and I welcome the opportunity to deal with this serious problem. It is not a new problem; it has been a source of longstanding concern for many involved in the profession, and others. As Members are aware, it is also an important and significant part of the Programme for Government, which set out to create a single funding formula with regard for equality and the New TSN.

However, who could disagree with an investigation into how available resources should be more equitably distributed? One of the outcomes of the document is that there will be an increase — and a considerable increase, in some cases — of funding for smaller schools, particularly rural primary schools. That emphasis by the Minister of Education and the Department is to be welcomed.

Members have listened to, watched and lived through too many instances in which local rural schools were closed down, thus causing great distress to the community. Once the school goes, that community begins to lose its identity — it is like taking the heart of a rural community. However, it is good to see that efforts are being made to ensure small schools' survival because those schools can provide a competent curriculum — that is particularly important, and that is where resources are so important.

However, if the corollary of that is to try to reduce funding in the secondary sector, which is already hard-pressed, I fear that educationalists in both sectors will be unhappy. Robbing Peter to pay Paul will not work and will not be accepted.

I also looked with some interest at the effects on the education and library boards when a reduction of £15 million was suggested in the higher options. I noticed that the Belfast Education and Library Board managed to save some money in the funding arrangements, but other boards will have to pay for that reduction. The South Eastern Education and Library Board will have to pay £1.5 million, and the other boards will have to pay roughly £3 million, £4 million and £5 million. The £15 million received from that will be used to help with some of the proposals. I wonder if that has been rationalised. When the proposals are being examined it is hoped that sufficient time is given to examining how the boards will deal with that reduction.

Do we wait to see how the review of local services pans out? My own preference is that we proceed now with funding and the establishment of principles rather than wait for the outcome of the review. Perhaps the outcome is relevant to boards and what will happen to them, but the significant point to be addressed is how they are to achieve that saving. The Minister referred to TSN's providing some assistance through the Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS) and other mechanisms. My fear is that the first thing to be cut will be the CASS provision that boards provide, which could result in redundancies. What will happen to substitute cover? The situation may arise in which a primary school head teacher cannot take a day away from school because substitute cover is unavailable.

Commonality of funding requires some detailed examination. Why should centrally held resources, which involve many schemes that schools welcome and readily participate in, be included in the general schools budget? Should that not come as an initiative from the Department? Does it not create an imbalance to have it included in the general schools budget? Perhaps separate funding is the answer.

We are told that the implementation of a common LMS formula will bring greater fairness, consistency and transparency to school funding. Members have already spoken about LMS, and I do not think I am alone in thinking that LMS is a con job carried out on educationalists and a secure basis on which to build a budgetary regime.

Several Members have already stated that on average, 80% of the schools' budget is spent on salaries. I agree with Ken Robinson's point, because my experience has been that the percentage is often 90% of the schools' budget. Some Members are not paying due regard to the awful situation that that can produce. As each year

passes and the age profile of the teaching staff increases, a significant economic scissors exercise is initiated. That cuts into the non-salary part of the budget to such an extent that head teachers carry an enormous burden trying to make ends meet and provide additional resources. The Department has given some support, but essentially it is not a good system for debasing a budgetary profile, and it must not be tolerated.

Management committees are faced with the possibility of making staff redundant to undo the scissors effect. And who will be made redundant? Experienced teachers, the most valuable resource, will be made redundant, because they earn the highest salaries. Is that fair to our profession? Is this what we want to do — remove the best teachers? More importantly, is it fair to our children to remove their best resource — professional, experienced teachers? That is what has happened. Nobody in the Chamber today can put their hand on their heart and say that that has not happened. I am sure that Members know of examples, and I can give them to you if you need them.

I hope that the inquiry into the local management of schools, which I understand is in tandem with this consultation, will ensure that this Thatcherite policy is got rid of. That policy was about trying to make schools more businesslike. We cannot make businesses out of our schools. We have learned that it cannot be done — mostly with regret. In any new proposals, the Department of Education should meet teaching costs in full.

As a former history teacher, I would like to be permitted to give the Minister and my good friend, Sammy Wilson, a brief history lesson in TSN. In the early 1990s, the former Department of Education for Northern Ireland set aside 5% of the schools' budget for social need. That was meant to ensure that schools with deprived children would receive extra funding. The money was then allocated on the basis of the number of children who were entitled to free school meals, which was the indicator that was used at the time.

The setting aside of only 5% was criticised in 1997 by the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee in its report 'Underachievement in Northern Ireland Secondary Schools'. It concluded that

"it is quite clear that the figure of 5% is simply based on previous expenditure."

There was no rationale; the figure was based only on previous expenditure.

TSN funding is money that should have been spent on educational projects, but in a new money scenario. In other words, it should not have been done in the same way as before.

The Committee looked at the identified needs of TSN in 1997.

"The 5% does not seem to have been arrived at by a process which recognised TSN as a priority."

That 5% was also criticised by the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights (SACHR), who agreed with the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee that the allocation of TSN was merely old money with a new name. SACHR said:

"a 5% top slicing does not begin to address the disparity between, for example, the notional 'costs' of a student from the highest and lowest social class, public spending on the former ...".

That is important, particularly for those interested in the private or preparatory school agenda. I repeat:

— "public spending on the former"

— that is, the higher —

"being about 64% higher than on their poorer counterpart."

That is some disparity. Do not challenge me on those statistics — challenge the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights.

The Minister's proposals are before us. He suggests raising the figure to 5.5%, and, as he indicated, that means an extra £4 million for schools with many disadvantaged children. Plainly, this does not constitute a significant skewing of resources towards those most in need, especially when one considers that the 5% never represented new money in the first place. I find this aspect of the document disappointing. The Minister needs to review the notional cost of educating children from poor and rich backgrounds and then make a realistic inroad towards equalising it.

It is clear that an extra £4 million will not do that.

3.30 pm

We heard comments about the number of disruptive children being on the increase. All the educational research that I ever came across linked disruption in the classroom with social disadvantage of one sort or another. There is an increasing need to provide resources to help deal with those problem children.

It is not all the responsibility of the Minister of Education. There is also a responsibility on the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide additional resources in many areas to help with disruptive children. The Minister will recall that the last time I spoke on this subject in the House, disruptive children were the problem that I was endeavouring to identify, but other people were talking about different kinds of political disruption. It is an issue that needs to be addressed. Under the heading of social need, a great deal could be done.

We should welcome this document as a first step, but we need to cautiously await the outcome of the consultation period with the individual schools. Only then will we get a real picture of how we should proceed, and from that we will get our recommendations.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am trying to squeeze in a couple more Members before the Minister responds.

Mr O'Neill: How very perceptive of you, Mr Deputy Speaker, to detect that I have just finished my speech.

Mrs I Robinson: I welcome the opportunity to speak about this document, and I have to declare an interest as I am also on a board of governors.

While it is laudable to desire a common formula, we must not blind ourselves to a number of crucial points. Too often since the Minister came to power we have seen wholesale discrimination in a number of areas. Education is now, in my opinion, the most discriminatory Department in Northern Ireland. There is a very real concern that this common formula is a mask to encourage yet more discrimination against the controlled sector.

Devising a new methodology for funding education is a bureaucrat's delight. If we read the spin, everyone is a winner. We heard the same thing when the student-powered unit of resources (SPURs) formula was introduced into higher education, although no one in the Department is capable of explaining why some colleges have been losing out.

First, any common formula must not simply be a matter of robbing Peter to pay Paul. If it is a matter of removing money from the secondary/grammar sector for the primary sector, that will not be acceptable. Any legal challenges that they might bring forth because of any losses would be right and proper.

Secondly, the primary sector has not been receiving its proper and legitimate share of the funding. There is no doubt that the primary sector will be the biggest gainer from this new formula. That will not, however, address the underinvestment that is only too readily apparent. No common formula will address that. The real question for the primary sector is what steps will be taken to deal with the underinvestment. The debate over a common formula must not be used as a foil to cover up this crucial issue.

Thirdly, no common formula will address the obvious gravity-train effect that some elements bring to some schools. If we take TSN, for example, in the form of free school meals, there is overwhelming evidence that there is a lower take-up in the controlled sector than in other sectors. As a result, controlled schools are losing out, because Protestants traditionally do not seek Government handouts. There is absolutely nothing in this document that will address that issue, nor any indication that either the Minister or his Department has any interest in dealing with it.

Fourthly, there is an imperative that per capita weighting actually reflects what it costs to deliver the core curriculum in the classroom. So far, that has not been reflected in primary funding. It cannot be overlooked in favour of the more popular add-ins that are so favoured by the Department, such as social deprivation. Those elements have been milked to good effect in some schools.

Finally, there is the obvious point that the single greatest gainer by far in every section is the grant-maintained integrated (GMI) school. Is it not amazing that that sector is the one favoured by the Minister? Is it not also amazing that the new common formula helps those that the Minister is biased towards? For example, if you take large primary schools with low free school meals (FSM) the grant maintained integrated school is a massive £100,000 better off. If you take large secondary schools with low FSM, some of the most efficient will be worse off, but the one that gains most is the GMI — by a massive £300,000. That tells us everything.

The long-term impact of this new proposal will be to compound the state that education is now in. Any common base that exists soon loses its commonality once you start to add in a whole host of other data. The result will be that those elements that attract extra funding will, in time, be used by schools to get extra funding. That will inevitably mean that schools that cannot use those elements are discriminated against. Therefore instead of being reversed, the current trend will be enhanced.

We are witnessing the impact of a policy for which one child is worth more than another. It is therefore in a school's interest to concentrate on those who are worth more financially than the rest. That is grossly unfair, yet it is the policy now favoured by the Minister.

While the debate on funding will be taken up by many, it is essential that all those matters are given exposure, otherwise we will have a result where only the favoured ideas get mentioned. I implore all those involved in education to study this document very carefully. The implications are far-reaching. Equally, I would expect the Department to be flexible if the time limit has to be extended to facilitate a full response.

Mr Beggs: I want to register an interest in this subject, first, as a parent of primary-school-age children, and secondly, as a parent-governor of my local primary school. As others have stated, there are severe pressures on the primary school sector. Many are concerned that they currently have an inadequate budget, and that needs to be addressed.

Of particular concern to me, as a member of the Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment Committee, is the large number of adults who have been through primary and secondary school but who still do not have basic educational skills. Some were failed at primary school; they struggled through the secondary school system, and eventually they came out without the education that we all would like them to have. It is important that these failings are picked up and addressed at the earliest possible level so that people's formative years in education are to their best advantage and to the best advantage of the entire community and the economy of Northern Ireland. Therefore I support additional funding for the primary school sector.

Another issue that I feel strongly about is equality. In this document we see the Irish language being set out for special treatment. That is not equality. That is creating inequality in our society. Current figures are proposing a sum of £100 per pupil to assist the development of the curriculum and an additional £25 per pupil. In a classroom of 30 pupils, that could mean an additional £3,750. The reality in existing primary schools is that they are running at a deficit or are on the breadline, through no fault of their own. They find that they are struggling to survive; they have no money whatsoever for the purchase of additional books and equipment. It is essential that this sort of thing does not happen, for it creates inequalities in society.

It is important that people have a choice in how and where they are educated. Let that be reflected in a fair system that is applied to everyone equally. Inequalities should be removed, not created.

In smaller schools in the primary school sector, and in the smaller rural schools, teaching salaries make up a vast proportion of the budget given over for local administration. However, through no fault of the school or the governors, as teachers move up the scale — through age, experience, additional training or points — their wages increase. As a result of a teacher's simply remaining at a school for a longer period, less of a budget is available for books and equipment. Surely that is wrong and needs to be addressed.

Mrs Carson asked about how we can improve the educational system in Northern Ireland, how we need to address the bureaucracy created over the years as well as the amount of money spent and the amount of duplication that occurs in the various structures developed. We have education and library boards, the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) and the CCMS. Do we really need such duplication of services? An integrated approach to managing all schools would be better as it would ensure that the maximum amount of funding reaches our pupils.

The money should be spent on our children so that they receive the maximum amount of funding and benefit during the formative years of their education, both at primary and secondary school. We should not, for political or other reasons, allow money to be wasted, duplicated or spent through bureaucratic structures, which result in a degree of social engineering and which inhibit integration in our society.

I endorse the concept of equality and a single system of ensuring equality of funding to our schools, but I do not see that in the report. There may be some good things in the report, but work still needs to be done. My colleagues in the Committee will continue to press those points so that a fair system of equality can develop in Northern Ireland.

The Minister of Education (Mr M McGuinness): A LeasCheann Comhairle, I apologise to Mr Beggs for leaving the Chamber during his speech.

I am grateful to all Members who contributed to the debate. It has been important and has served to reinforce the importance attached by the Assembly to the commonality of school funding. A large number of substantive matters were raised in the debate. Given the time constraints, I will deal with as many points as possible.

Mr Kennedy raised the issue of the consultation period. The deadline of 29 June effectively allows schools three months to respond, which is substantially in excess of the standard eight-week period for consultations. Briefing conferences are being held at the end of April in each board area to explain and clarify the proposals to schools and chairmen of boards of governors and to assist them in framing responses.

Response forms, allowing for tick-box responses and further written comments if desired, have been sent to all recipients of the document to facilitate matters. Four schools have already responded.

Those measures should help ensure that schools can meet the timescale. The school summer break dictates the end of June deadline, as does the need to allow sufficient time to consider the responses to consultation and to discuss any revised proposals with the Education Committee and the Executive before they are finalised. Adequate time must also be allowed for making the necessary changes to operational arrangements in the Department and the boards to ensure the smooth implementation of a common formula in April 2002.

3.45 pm

Schools are the key constituents. At a meeting of around 250 principals from the South Eastern Education Library Board area today no mention was made of the consultation period's being too short. The consultation period is manageable if we work at it.

Danny Kennedy, Barry McElduff, Joan Carson and some other Members raised the matter of the Irish-medium schools and units. I am satisfied that the proposals in the document are fair and equitable. Irish-medium schools and units have significant additional costs associated with their particular type of provision, and the formula must take them into account. The approach is in full accord with the principles under which the formula was developed that provide for funding according to relative need. Irish-medium schools and units do not have access to the same range of curriculum materials as other schools. At Key Stage 2, Irish-medium primary schools and units must teach English, so they carry an additional curricular requirement to English-medium schools. To fulfil this demand it is proposed that Irish-medium schools and units will receive additional help to meet the cost of teachers' time spent on developing

curriculum materials and delivering an additional subject at Key Stage 2.

Irish-medium units are small; they have an intake of around nine to 10 pupils a year. They operate as discrete units under the management arrangements of host English-medium schools. They face the same problems as small schools in that they must provide the full curriculum for pupils within the limited budget generated by their small enrolment. The help proposed for Irish-medium schools is along similar lines to that proposed for small schools. The help is, however, slightly less generous in recognition of the fact that the units operate under the management framework of host schools.

Monica McWilliams, Danny Kennedy, Tommy Gallagher, Billy Hutchinson, Sammy Wilson and Joan Carson raised the question of teachers' salaries. The problem of above-average salary costs is most evident in small schools — mainly primary schools. All LMS formulae contain a teacher's salary protection factor that helps to compensate schools for these extra costs. Above-average teaching costs are unavoidable in some schools. However, there is evidence that, in some cases, variations are due in part to the decisions of boards of governors in determining the structure of the schools through the awarding of responsibility points for teachers and increased salaries for principals and vice-principals. Removing teachers' salaries from the LMS would bring its future into question, as teacher costs comprise 80% of a school's budget. A centralised model for determining and allocating staff would be required, and flexibility to determine staffing at school level would be lost.

Mr Kennedy: Will the Minister give way?

Mr M McGuinness: I am told that, as Minister, I have only 20 minutes, but I will gladly give way.

Mr Kennedy: Does the Minister accept that if the document is to be truly consultative and issues are to be dealt with in a proper manner, he and his Department should leave themselves open to the suggestion that actual teacher costs rather than average teacher costs should be met? He seems to be dismissing that out of hand from the Dispatch Box at the very outset of the consultative process.

Mr M McGuinness: The document proposes an extension to the teacher's salary protection factor so that more schools are included; that will alleviate the problem for schools that are most affected. Views have been invited on all of these matters and on whether teachers' salaries should remain with the LMS. This is an opportunity for people to make an impact on the proposals that have been made, and it is vital that people contribute in a positive way. The opportunity for that is there.

Tommy Gallagher asked what is meant by similar funding for similar schools when all schools are different.

The formula allocates funding for those factors that significantly increase the need for expenditure in schools.

For example, the factors could be the number and age of pupils, the premises or educational and social needs. Similar schools would be those that share similar circumstances under these factors. Under the common formula such schools will receive similar funding.

Tommy Gallagher also raised the matter of the aggregated schools budget (ASB). Our current policy is to maximise the level of funding to the classroom. If the resources to be distributed by the common formula were to be derived from a simple summing of the current ASBs for the education and library boards, the grant-maintained integrated sector and the voluntary grammar sector, it would not achieve the key educational objective of maximising the delivery of resources to the classroom.

It would also be unfair to those education and library boards that have made the greatest efforts to increase delegation, as it would redistribute the additional funding they have made available across all boards. As a result, schools in those board areas that currently have high levels of delegation would lose funding, while those in board areas with lower levels of delegation would gain.

Therefore I intend to discuss with boards how to bring levels of delegation to a more consistently higher level. This will require a realignment of budgets within boards and may involve some hard decisions. If the level of funding in all boards were raised to the level of the highest funding board, the ASB would increase by around £15 million. This represents the high ASB option set out in the consultation document.

Under the high ASB option, 88% of all schools would gain — the nursery, primary, post-primary sectors, as well as school sectors of all management types. The high ASB option will benefit all parts of the education system and will deliver substantially more resources to the classroom. I will be working with the boards and our other education partners towards this outcome.

Gerry McHugh raised the issue of the condition of school buildings and energy costs. The data required to construct such an element in the premises factor is not available, although it may be provided by the schools estate database when it is operational. There is also the difficulty that the inclusion of such elements in the premises factor could actually serve as a disincentive to schools to maintain property or adopt energy efficient practices. However, we have sought the views of schools on this important issue, and we will consider it again when the schools estate database is fully operational.

Oliver Gibson, Eileen Bell, Billy Hutchinson and Sammy Wilson raised, in varying degrees, the whole issue of free school meals as a TSN indicator. There is extensive research, both local and international, which demonstrates a link between entitlement to free school meals and social disadvantage. The free-school-meals entitlement is a good measure of social disadvantage, and the research is readily available, easily updated and

effectively avoids the postcode-related problems associated with population census indicators such as the Robson index.

Research has also clearly demonstrated that children from socially disadvantaged circumstances are more likely to lack motivation to learn; they exhibit behavioural and attendance problems, have low educational attainment, leave school early, and become unemployed. Schools incur additional costs in meeting the needs of those pupils through pastoral care programmes, liaising with external agencies, additional teacher support, and so on. Therefore I am satisfied that free school meals should continue to be used as an indicator of social disadvantage and that schools should receive an element of funding to reflect the incidence of such pupils.

The proposals in the document are to include educational indicators — Key Stage 2 results — alongside entitlement to free school meals in a TSN indicator. That will direct TSN resources more accurately to schools with pupils in need. In particular, the revised indicator will target more effectively schools with pupils who are not socially disadvantaged but are, nevertheless, performing below the expected level for their age. That will address a long-standing criticism of the current TSN arrangements in the LMS and will be widely welcomed.

Oliver Gibson talked about responses from the boards. I am happy to copy responses from the boards — the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, the Governing Bodies Association, the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education, Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta — to the Education Committee and also to education associations and unions. I am happy to provide analyses of responses.

Mrs Eileen Bell asked about the targeting social need proposals in the document. Those proposals will pick up pupils who do not currently attract specific funding, including pupils who are not socially disadvantaged but are low achievers. Such pupils will attract funding under the revised special educational needs proposals in the TSN factor.

Transitional funding arrangements will be an integral part of the formula. The Department of Education will ensure that boards are allocated sufficient funding to meet transitional funding needs. Mrs Bell also spoke about the need for training. The introduction of the common formula has no implications for the role of boards of governors, and no specific training is required. There are mechanisms involving the boards and the Department for the training of governors in financial management, which will continue.

Mrs Eileen Bell and Ms Monica McWilliams raised the issue of age-weighted pupil units (AWPU) and the need for a regular review. I can confirm that the AWPU factor — and other factors in the formula — will be subject to regular review.

Mr Billy Hutchinson mentioned vandalism. The cost of vandalism is normally met through additional funding from the boards' contingency funds. I share the Member's concerns at the cost of vandalism and agree that those resources could be put to good use elsewhere in schools. Mr Hutchinson also referred to sport. There is a proposal for specific funding for sport, and the schools themselves will decide how to spend the money. That will give all pupils the opportunity to benefit from access to the sports curriculum.

Several Members were concerned that the consultation coincided with the post-primary and curriculum reviews. The common formula will have to take account of any changes arising from those reviews. The fact that schools will be funded on a common basis should assist in the implementation of any further changes that may arise from those reviews, as changes will be required to just one common formula, rather than to seven formulae, as at present.

Ms Monica McWilliams and Mrs Joan Carson raised the issue of a review of education administration. That can be taken forward properly only in the context of a wider review of local administration, and we have all heard much about that recently. The Executive are dealing with that issue, and, no doubt, that review will have implications not just for education, but for many other Departments.

Monica McWilliams asked about the involvement of Coopers & Lybrand. It was part of a wider process of identifying and analysing the key issues, and we were able to get access to consultants with extensive experience of school funding in England, Scotland, Wales and beyond. That was more cost-effective than having the Department of Education undertake the research in-house. Ms McWilliams also spoke about the views of teachers, which, of course, should be taken into account. The views of teachers and boards of governors are absolutely critical, and they will be carefully considered. As I said, briefing conferences are being held in each board area to explain the proposals to principals and chairs of boards of governors. One took place today, and it was very successful. Those conferences will help teachers to understand the proposals and make their responses.

Ms McWilliams also raised the issue of private finance initiative schools. With regard to recurrent funding under the local management of schools formula, there is no difference between a PFI school and one provided under traditional arrangements. Each type of school will have to meet expenditure on running costs — the PFI schools by means of a unitary payment, and others through meeting the cost of individual items. Both must meet that cost from their LMS allocation.

Mr Sammy Wilson asked why the LMS issue was brought to the House in this matter. We considered that it was important to give Members an early opportunity

to discuss such an important issue. Mr Wilson also asked why proposals were changed after a meeting with the Education Committee.

We were very anxious to meet with the Education Committee and to listen to its views. We were pleased to be able to take many of the views expressed by the Committee on board in the final consultation document.

4.00 pm

Billy Hutchinson and Sammy Wilson also raised the issue of the impact of all of that on the Belfast Education and Library Board if, for example, the aggregated schools budget were low, and we were dealing with the low model. I sometimes thought that Mr S Wilson was talking about that. My clear objective is to move towards the high ASB model, which is based on all boards moving to the highest level of funding. That highlights the need to increase the size of the ASB to ensure that as many schools and sectors as possible can win.

Sammy Wilson also raised a number of other issues about the Education Committee. He talked about giving more money to the maintained sector. Proposals are designed to meet educational need in all schools without fear or favour, regardless of the sector in which they may be located. The import of the proposals on the high or low ASB option is to move more resources into the controlled sector — around 2.3% — than into the maintained sector — 2.1%.

In terms of TSN changes, the change in the balance of funding between social deprivation and special education need (SEN) in the document, compared to the current position in the LMS formula, is to allocate more money under SEN and less under social deprivation. The proposals will, for the first time, direct funding to children performing below the expected level for their age and who are not disadvantaged, as well as those who are.

Ken Robinson mentioned the publications that were produced. The document was produced in Irish to meet the needs of Irish-medium schools. There are currently 10 grant-aided Irish-medium schools, nine of which are primary, one post-primary, and five Irish-medium units. There are currently no Ulster-Scots schools in the North, hence it was not considered necessary to produce the document in the Ulster-Scots language.

People should not be under any illusions about where I am coming from. I am only too willing, and I will be glad, if the demand is there, to give whatever possible support my Department can to people who are involved in Ulster-Scots and who wish to promote the language educationally. The document is also available in large print and on audio cassette on request. It can be accessed on the Department's Internet site.

Mr Ken Robinson also said that not enough is being spent on books. I secured £1.5 million last year for reading materials for primary schools. I secured £14.7 million

last year and £20.4 million this year that went directly to schools for whatever they chose to spend it on, including books. Of course, we will continue to seek additional funding for schools. That has always been my objective.

Mr Dallat asked from where the £15 million is coming, and whether it will mean cutbacks in the boards. The document envisages a sum of up to £15 million being added to delegated budgets. Under current arrangements, boards are allowed to reflect their own policies and priorities in determining their various budgets. That has led to variations in the level of school funding between boards. Commonality in delegated funding will also require greater commonality among boards and other areas of school funding. The means by which that realignment is to be implemented and the implications for each board will be the subject of further discussions between my Department and the boards over the next few months. Hard decisions may have to be taken, but it is vital that priority be given to directing funds to the classroom.

Mrs Carson raised the issue of funding for preparatory departments. Those schools have always been funded at a lower rate. Admission to a preparatory department is based on the ability of parents to pay the fees. The lower rate of grant reflects that feature.

The Member also raised the issue of the exclusion of pupils in Irish-medium and special units from the pupil count in relation to the small schools factor. That serves to put more money into the small schools, because the lower the pupil count, the greater the amount received under the small schools factor.

Mr O'Neill mentioned LMS. It is not intended that schools should run as a business, and the Assembly accepts that. The intention is that resources should be delegated to a lower level, to those with power to make local decisions. Research conducted by the University of Ulster in 1997 revealed that most school principals welcomed the freedom to determine their own priorities, and only a few wanted the LMS to be abolished. Mr O'Neill also talked about the £15 million reduction, and we have dealt with that matter.

At present, 5% of the total schools' recurrent budget is top-sliced to target social need, and I intend to increase that amount. Moreover, it is important to understand that that 5% under the LMS formula is only one element among a wide range of TSN-related programmes supported by my Department. These include the school support programme; the group 1 schools initiative; the special educational needs code of practice; education outside school; support for travellers and children with English as an additional language; and the targeting of pre-school education expansion programme.

With school budgets under continued pressure, the additional £4 million that is being put into TSN — which represents a 10% increase — is significant. I am committed to allocating more resources to target social

need if that is necessary, or if the Executive make additional resources available. I have not made a final decision about that or any of the other matters dealt with in the consultation document. I will listen carefully to any proposal on any of those matters.

In closing, a LeasCheann Comhairle, I commend the House on the quality of the debate. It demonstrates that locally elected politicians are capable of debating the issues that concern us in a rational and informed manner. The introduction of a common LMS funding formula for schools is about equity of funding, greater delegation of funding, and giving priority to the classroom. Above all, it is about helping to raise educational standards for all our children by ensuring that resources are directed where they are needed most — to the classroom. The proposals in the consultation document will achieve this.

I stress that I am willing to consider alternative suggestions or approaches. I encourage everyone to respond to the consultation document. This is a genuine consultation, and everyone's view will be carefully considered before final decisions are taken on a common funding formula. Go raibh maith agat.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the publication of the consultative document and the intention to introduce a common formula for funding schools.

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn — [*Madam Deputy Speaker*]

PROVISION OF MEDICAL AND HEALTH FACILITIES FOR THE MOURNE AREA

Mr McGrady: I appreciate the opportunity to address the issue of provision — or lack of provision — of an integrated medical and health facility in the Kilkeel and Mourne area.

The people of the Mournes have waited an unacceptably long time for the provision of a new integrated modern health facility to replace the old Mourne Hospital. That hospital was closed five years ago, in October 1996, by the then Minister of Health, Malcom Moss. Mr Moss stated that the hospital would be replaced by a

“comprehensive range of services”

and that the hospital would not close until such a package of measures was in place. A few months later the Southern Health Board, at one of its meetings, appointed — and I read from their minutes —

“a short life project team...to ensure the smooth transition from the current service pattern to that which the board wishes to purchase.”

That short-life team has now existed for five to six years.

So far, the services that were to be provided have been provided partially, in a scattered locality, and certainly not in a new integrated health facility as was envisaged. Those who followed the problem realised that procrastination had reigned on this issue in the Newry and Mourne Health & Social Services Trust, which presented various business cases to the Department of Health only to be told that further amendments would be required before the outline business case could be approved. That was in the context of the old Mourne Hospital's not being closed until all the new provisions were in place. So much for ministerial edicts. However, I hope to exclude the current Minister from such criticism.

(Madam Deputy Speaker [Ms Morrice] in the Chair)

The constituent parts of the business case for the integrated health facility in Kilkeel have also varied over the years. There is a long and difficult history to the provision of these facilities in a new-build, all-purpose facility. As far back as 1988, the old Mourne Hospital was threatened with closure. That was vociferously opposed by the local community, culminating in a very strong and representative campaign in the five-year period from 1991 to 1996. The ministerial death sentence was passed on 25 October 1996. That older committee did not survive that decision, not because of a lack of enthusiasm or

commitment, but because certain other extraneous legal matters brought it to an abrupt and unfortunate end.

Since then, the people of the Mournes have been without access to a proper integrated medical facility. The ministerial statement of 25 October 1996, which is the base from which I start, included provision for £700,000 in additional funding for community services. However, I have found it extremely difficult to identify where that £700,000 additional funding was spent on community services.

The Health Minister at that time also gave a commitment that

“the board will continue discussions with the interested parties on potential for a new integrated primary health care centre in Kilkeel and will invite interested parties to develop and submit proposals for the provision of nursing and specialised services for the elderly and the mentally infirm”.

The Minister, in the same letter, also stated that the trust

“can now proceed with the implementation of the package of services for the area without further delay”.

That was five years ago.

The Southern Health and Social Services Board continues to have discussions with the trust and the trust with the GPs and with the Department, yet we still have no sense of the original intent being implemented — of the integrated care centre.

During the campaign for the provision of the centre, many meetings were held. There were meetings with the Newry and Mourne Health & Social Services Trust, the Southern Health and Social Services Board and various Ministers of Health and Social Services. In fact, I cannot but reflect on the number of meetings, letters, and delegations with various Ministers — Richard Needham, Jeremy Hanley, the late Baroness Denton, Malcolm Moss, Tony Worthington, John McFall and George Howarth. They are all possessors of part of this history without any real delivery. I am hoping that that is the end of the Ministers who will not deliver on this issue.

During that whole campaign the minimum requirement was that which was agreed by the Department, the board, the trust, Newry and Mourne District Council, the community representatives and the public elected representatives.

I will rehearse the details briefly, because I want to compare them with the position today. The integrated proposal included the following: a 28-bed in-patient hospital in Kilkeel on a new site; access to 26 private nursing beds; the provision of 20 statutory nursing beds, which, presumably, were to be at Slieve Roe House or thereabouts; the provision of 30 day-care places at the same venue or elsewhere; the retention of the casualty unit, which was to be combined with the treatment room in the new facility; the retention of the health centre with out-patient services and other services such as chiropody and speech therapy; and an enhanced physio-

therapy unit with a brand new occupational therapy unit, including out-patient facilities. There was also a commitment to retain the ambulance station.

4.15 pm

All those services, apart from the last, were to be provided on a newly built integrated primary care facility. However, five years on, I do not see any sign of that happening. Where is the commitment, and where is the plan that was submitted by the trust? I know that it has submitted an outline business plan, and I am now aware of its contents. I want to measure the contents of that plan against the undertakings and agreements that were made about all those facilities. The proposals were also formally agreed with a delegation from Newry and Mourne District Council that I took to meet the Minister in February 1997.

I have wondered whether I should proceed with the Adjournment debate. Only last week, I convened a meeting with Kilkeel Community Association, Newry and Mourne Health and Social Services Trust and Newry and Mourne District Council to try to understand their positions. There have been so many changes to the proposals and in people's attitudes to them that I wanted to pin everything down carefully. Kilkeel Community Association recently made a valiant attempt to provide a neutral venue based on the same campus as the integrated primary care health clinic, which, in fact, could have been one of the anchor tenants.

The trust, the boards and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety are going ahead with the business case, which, I hope, will deliver the primary necessities that I listed. I also hope that a site will be made available to the Kilkeel Community Association to provide a venue for community activities on that site or adjacent to it. I hope that the negotiations will be successful and that the funding for both aspects will be taken into account.

Newry and Mourne Health and Social Services Trust submitted another revised outline business case to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety on 30 March 2001. I do not expect the Minister to comment on an outline business case that has been so recently submitted, but many other business cases were submitted before that. I would like to know the broad content of the outline business case and how it compares with the benchmarks that were laid down by the public representatives, the communities, the boards, the trust and the Department in October 1996.

The outline business plan is supported fully by the five general practitioners in the area. There was a difficulty in agreeing requirements with them, as these changed from time to time depending on whom one was talking to. The business plan also has the support of Mourne councillors.

The need for an integrated primary healthcare facility is crucially important to people in the Mourne area. That is especially the case when one considers that five years ago that community was promised such an accessible primary healthcare facility.

The community is the most important aspect. However, there is a huge influx of visitors to the Mourne area — up until now anyway. A quarter of a million people walk from peak to peak each year, if they are active. If they are not, they lie on the sunny beaches in south Down absorbing the “Costa del Sol” atmosphere of Ireland. They enjoy the highlands, woodlands, lakes and seaside. It is important for those facilities to be available if we are to have credibility as an area that takes care of its visitors.

The population of Newry and Mourne is projected to increase by 12%, which is the second highest population increase in Northern Ireland. That increase is forecast for the years 1998 to 2013. Although there are 15 years in which to achieve this, it is a very high population increase nonetheless. Those are not my figures; they are the official October 2000 statistics from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. We have a very healthy population in the Mournes as far as creating a new generation is concerned. The matter of add-on facilities over and above those envisaged five or six years ago must also be addressed.

Those things can only be addressed by good partnership and if there is a good outcome from the negotiations between the trust, the board, the Department and the Minister. I hope that that will be done very quickly and very well. I have dozens of quotes from dozens of letters from dozens of Ministers as far back as August 1997. However, one quote from the management executive was that

“significant progress could be made in developing what will undoubtedly be a first-class facility to support the local primary care services”.

We are at the negotiation stage once again, but I hope that in those negotiations the benchmarks laid down and agreed by all concerned some years ago will now be part of the outline business plan.

I do not know what is in the business plan. I hope that the Minister will tell us or make some reference to it today, because a decision is needed urgently. The people of the Mourne and Kilkeel area have, by this delay, earned priority for delivery of a primary healthcare facility because they have waited patiently for so long. It is a matter of great urgency, and for that reason the Minister and the Department should ensure that the capital funding required for the primary healthcare unit is made readily available. I hope that I will not hear that funding will be provided after a process of private financial inquiries. We all know that that is a dead end as far as hospital provision and care provision in Northern Ireland are concerned.

The people of Newry and Mourne have waited for a long time. They now have a business plan. I hope that the Minister will respond quickly and positively to it. I hope she will make the Department deliver the promises it gave to the people and make the money available to the trust and the board to enable those promises to be rapidly and fully undertaken.

I have no doubt that other Members, particularly those from the south Down area, will support that concept for the people there.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in this important debate and warmly congratulate and commend Mr McGrady for bringing it to the attention of the Assembly. Lest anyone question my right to participate, Members will be aware that I am a member of Newry and Mourne District Council and have an interest there. I also want to make representations on behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party. Ministerial business has, unfortunately, kept my party Colleague, Mr Nesbitt, from the House today. Nonetheless, he is mindful of the health needs in his constituency of South Down and in the Mourne area. I take a broader view of things in the Newry and Mourne council district.

The historical context has already been very well covered by Mr McGrady. Although Mourne Hospital was not in ideal shape, it at least provided local services to local people, and there was always an expectation that it would, at some stage, be upgraded. Based on the pledges and promises made by Ministers and others in control of health at that time, the expectation locally was that a new hospital or centre would be built to give proper and adequate healthcare. It is a matter of great regret that those promises were never kept and that no such hospital materialised.

I have considerable knowledge of the area. Newry and Mourne is strange in some ways. Once you go through the mountains, you go into new territory — politically, socially and, perhaps, in other ways too. It is largely rural, and it is far-flung, which is another important reason for having a hospital of some kind there. Considerable distances are involved, and the community is spread throughout small towns, hamlets and little villages in the coastal area. Minor roads are not in prime condition, although the roads of South Down are in a more satisfactory condition than those in my constituency of South Armagh. That, however, is a separate argument. In a far-flung rural area the important point is that hospital services and medical provision are essential. I certainly want to see such provision restored to Mourne.

Mr McGrady said that this area is a significant holiday destination. I am very happy to tell the House that only last week I used it as a resort. There was not much sun, but many of the great features we have come to expect were just as Mr McGrady said. To be able to cater for that increase in population at seasonal times as

well as for accidents, emergencies and people who become unwell or need medical treatment is another valid reason for provision in the Mourne area.

4.30 pm

I want to hear a clear, outlined commitment from the Minister that she will give sympathetic consideration to any request from the Newry and Mourne Trust to fund a hospital or medical facility in Mourne. That will right a very great wrong and make good promises that her predecessors from other Administrations gave but never brought to reality.

I am happy to add my support to Mr McGrady's motion.

Mr M Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I congratulate Mr McGrady for tabling this motion. In saying that, it needs to go further. It needs to go right across the board in relation to health and social services, taking in not only Kilkeel, but also Newry and Mourne and south Down. I welcome the business plan proposed by the Kilkeel Trust to the Department and hope that it takes that plan on board and also that it provides proper capital funding to help update the health service right across Newry and Mourne and south Down; that is badly needed in that area.

The Southern Health and Social Services Board need to fill the following posts in Daisy Hill Hospital immediately — a consultant surgeon to replace the one who left some months ago, a respiratory consultant and a new consultant in accident and emergency. Those posts will significantly strengthen the hospital's resources. While I welcome the acquisition of a new CT scanner by Daisy Hill Hospital and the appointment of an additional consultant radiologist, there is also the need to strengthen cardiology with a new consultant in that department. I wish to see the board strengthen the hospital in order to provide a first-class service to the people of Newry and Mourne.

I also want to see improved primary-care services. We need better cover for the whole of Newry and Mourne and the Down District Council area. The health board must review its arrangements and ensure that all GPs are properly involved in well-resourced out-of-hours services which provide first-class care to all our people. We need better community service, which is targeted to people's requirements that will support them in their homes. We need to ensure that money is invested in health and personal services.

A very small percentage of our wealth is spent on essential services. We must aim to increase that investment and make sure that our public services are of a high quality. The Executive need to support the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and make sure that she has sufficient resources to invest so that she and her Department can start to tackle the causes of ill health.

The opportunity for the development of an all-Ireland service must not be overlooked. Such a policy would provide something from which all could benefit, especially in Newry and Mourne where we are so close to the border. We have already seen the benefits of cross-border renal services. Similar benefits could be reaped right across the whole range of acute and primary care services. However, that would require proper integrated planning and a determination to cut through red tape and bureaucracy.

I want to see a new, properly equipped hospital in Downpatrick. Money must be found to provide that service, which is so desperately needed by people who are gutted about what has happened to their hospital. I am asking for a firm date on which the shape of those services will be made public, and a date on which money to build these services will be made available.

I want to highlight something that I feel very strongly about — the plight of the disabled in south Down and Newry and Mourne. A heavy burden of red tape is placed on their shoulders by inadequate procedures for applying for services to which they are entitled. The changes set up in November 2000 by the Housing Executive and the housing associations resulted in a unified housing selection scheme. The scheme awards points for housing. Social well-being assessments should have brought about important changes to disabled people and made their needs a priority.

This area is determined by the health and social services boards, but is it working effectively? In my opinion it is not. The scheme is too complex and needs continuous monitoring. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive's renovation grants scheme —

Mr Wells: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I do not like to interrupt a debate on such a serious issue, but I suspect that the Member has drifted somewhat from the future of primary care in Kilkeel and Mourne Hospital. I have been listening with interest, but this is not directly relevant to the matter being discussed.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I was trying to work out the geographical spread of the points that Mr Murphy was making. Will he please keep his comments to the subject of the Adjournment debate in hand.

Mr M Murphy: I am sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker. The matter under discussion is health service provision in Newry and Mourne, not specifically primary care in Newry and Mourne, and that is what I am speaking about.

Madam Deputy Speaker: We are not talking about Newry and Mourne in this Adjournment debate. The debate is on the provision of medical and health facilities in the Mourne area alone.

Mr M Murphy: I am sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker, but that applies to what I am dealing with — health and social services provision in the Mourne area. I am

speaking about south Down and Newry and Mourne. Mourne covers a big area. It is not specific to the Kilkeel area alone; it is a massive area, and the Member should be aware of that. He is, after all, a representative of that area.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Please continue.

Mr M Murphy: As I said, the area is determined by the health and social service boards, and I asked if it is working effectively. It is not. The scheme is too complex and needs continual monitoring. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive's renovation grant scheme recognises the needs of disabled people. It funds the adaptation of properties and offers a design service, grants, finance and advice to elderly and disabled people.

Article 52 of the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1992 on the approval of applications for certain facilities for the disabled is the most important provision. It provides assistance to people in four areas, namely, enabling access to and around the home; facilitating the preparation of food and cooking by a disabled occupant; improving the heating system or providing a suitable one; and making it easier for a person to use sources of heat, light and power in the house.

The grant is mandatory. The procedure laid down in the 1992 Order begins when the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) receives an enquiry from a disabled person. Red tape then comes into operation. Two NIHE officers deal with grants. The welfare officer responds to public sector enquiries, and the grants manager deals with private-sector applicants. The NIHE will then ask the local health trust's occupational therapy department to carry out an assessment of a disabled person's needs for adaptation.

Mr Wells: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am becoming increasingly concerned about the drift of the Member's contribution. Are we saying that we can raise any subject whatsoever under health and social services, provided that it affects somebody in the Mourne area? Are we specifically dealing with primary healthcare provision in the Mourne area? If we set that precedent this afternoon, can I do any amount of pontificating on any issue provided that it affects someone relevant to that debate?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The debate is not specifically on primary healthcare. This is in order.

Mr M Murphy: Go raibh maith agat. The assessment by the occupational therapist determines the length of time that a disabled person will have to wait to have work carried out. The recommendations will also determine whether adaptations are necessary. If the decision is not favourable, the disabled person must seek an independent assessor to review his or her case.

However, occupational therapists are charged under section 2(e) of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 to have regard to the provision of assistance

for that person in arranging adaptation work in the home, or the provision of any additional facilities designed to secure the person's greater safety, comfort or convenience — *[Interruption]*.

Mr McGrady: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am sorry to interrupt my Colleague. My explicit purpose in this debate was to ensure that a primary healthcare facility, a care centre in Kilkeel that was promised in 1996, was built. That is the subject of the debate. While the Member's comments would be legitimate in other debates, they are taking away from what I hoped would have been the focus — a ministerial reply on Kilkeel Hospital.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I accept that the point of order has been made. However, I stress that we are talking about the provision of medical and health facilities. That being the title of the Adjournment debate, it must be allowed to cover all areas that are considered to be medical and health facilities. You have specifically made the point concerning your reference in your opening remarks, but I will allow Mr Murphy to continue under the heading "medical facilities".

Mr Wells: I must support what Mr McGrady has said. Mr Mick Murphy has not even related what he has been talking about to any specific problem in the Mourne area. He is talking about a general social services problem that is experienced throughout the Province. Are we allowed to wander throughout the Province rather than deal specifically with an actual issue?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have already ruled on this subject. We are talking about the provision of medical and health facilities in the Mourne area.

4.45 pm

Mr M Murphy: Go raibh maith agat. That section of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 places a legal obligation for the safety of the disabled in their homes on the health authority in the area. After those procedures are carried out, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive receives positive recommendations from the occupational therapists. The grant inspector visits the dwelling to determine its fitness. The process for a means test begins when the dwelling is passed as fit for grant aid. However, before that is done, the Housing Executive needs proof of legal ownership of the dwelling. Once proof is given, the application forms for the preliminary means test are sent out.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Mr Murphy, you are straying into the area of grants and housing allocations. Keep as close to the subject of the debate as possible. There are others who want to speak.

Mr M Murphy: I understand what you are saying, Madam Deputy Speaker, but you must recognise that disabled people in the Newry and Mourne area and in south Down must go through a process involving the

Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Health Service to get these grants. Therefore the point that I am making is part and parcel of the proceedings.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have allowed you to make those points. There have been too many points of order, and I want the Member to continue as briefly as possible. I accept that it is perfectly appropriate for you to talk about health facilities, but the area of grants and housing is beyond the remit of the debate.

Mr M Murphy: You are not allowing me to continue with my prepared speech on health and social services in the Newry and Mourne area. I must change and move on. Therefore you must give me a bit of time.

I ask that the health and social services board takes into consideration — even though Members do not seem to want to — the process that disabled people in Newry and Mourne and in south Down must go through to get proper health facilities in their homes — *[Interruption]*.

I did not interrupt Mr McGrady, and I do not expect him to interrupt me. If he is not happy with what I have said, he can deal with it in his summing up.

Mr McGrady: The Minister sums up, not me.

Mr M Murphy: I stand corrected; the Minister will deal with it.

The Assembly must provide adequate funding for all elements of the system. We must meet the needs of those disabled people who wish to remain in their homes. Disabled people are not asking for special deals; they are demanding the right to equality and the quality of life to which they are entitled — and that the Assembly is required to provide — under the Good Friday Agreement. We have the means to streamline the bureaucracy into a straightforward working format. We must put it into action and get on with it. I have seen some of the bureaucracy working here today. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Wells: Madam Deputy Speaker, your generosity knows no bounds. How can I say that without getting myself into bother? You have allowed Mr Murphy's interpretation of the subject of the motion to stretch to its absolute limits. I hope that the next time that I am proposing an Adjournment motion that, Madam Deputy Speaker, you are in the Chair. I will be able to add some extraneous subjects that no doubt I would not normally be allowed to do. However, the subject, I believe, is writ narrow.

Mr M Murphy: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The point is not what Mr Wells believes; it is what the person under the health system is entitled to.

Mr Wells: The Adjournment motion is a very useful exercise. It allows Members to come to the House and to raise specific matters and issues of local concern in the presence of the Minister. The subject of the debate this afternoon is the stuff that Adjournment motions are made of. To some extent it devalues the whole process if

Members wander down “by-path meadow”. Therefore, I shall come directly to the subject of healthcare provision in the Mourne area, which is very much related to the lack of a proper integrated primary care facility in Kilkeel.

Kilkeel is an area that I have the privilege to represent. It is a wonderful place in many ways. Someone once said to me that Kilkeel men were not born, they were quarried. To some extent that explains their nature — they are rugged individuals who have made a living from fishing, quarrying and agriculture. Kilkeel is a unique community that has prospered over many years in a peripheral part of Northern Ireland. It has done very well for itself. It is a very proud community, but it is also very isolated. To get to Daisy Hill hospital, one must travel 20 miles along a road that is very inadequate in parts and that passes through Newry town, where there can be a bit of a bottleneck. If one considers that, one realises how difficult it is for people of the Mourne area to obtain primary healthcare.

If one travels in the other direction the nearest hospital is Downe Hospital, which, of course, has been very much under threat in recent years. Indeed with the closure of the Mourne Hospital and the potential loss of Downe Hospital, one was almost faced with a situation where one could draw a line from Newry to Dundonald and not one primary-care hospital would have been available to anyone living south of that line.

The people of the Mourne community feel very aggrieved by the decision to close their own hospital. It was closed in the face of promises that there would be a new unit provided. Mr McGrady said that those promises were not kept. That is why many people involved in the Downe Hospital campaign take a very jaundiced view of some of the promises that are being made to them.

If a fundamental mistake has been made — if you could call it that — it was the fact that Mourne Hospital was allowed to close before anything was arranged to replace it. In other words, the community groups should have said: “We will allow this hospital to close only when you have the alternative up and running.”

The Southern Health and Social Services Board is an organisation with which I have frequent contact. They are under enormous financial pressures. I regularly have meetings with Eric Bowyer and his team, and at times, I worry where the board is going to get sufficient resources to continue to provide primary health care and social services in south Down and south Armagh and the Newry and Mourne area. They constantly have problems with resourcing, and the only way that there will be any movement towards replacing the service that was lost in Kilkeel is if the Department provides capital funding. There is absolutely no way that the board can find the money in its own resources to replace the unit that has been lost. I hope that the Minister will not take the opportunity this afternoon to trot out those horrible

letters, PFI — private finance initiative. We have already seen that the private finance initiative does not work for primary healthcare in Northern Ireland. If this facility is going to be provided it has to be provided from departmental funds.

We cannot have the whole process delayed simply because we have to go through the sham of the private finance initiative. That is an expensive exercise that drains away much needed resources from the Health Service and proves what is obvious — it cannot be done. If it cannot be done on the scale of Downe Hospital, it certainly cannot be done in Mourne, which has a growing, vibrant and expanding community. Many new houses are being built in Kilkeel, but it is certain that there will never be the economies of scale to enable a PFI scheme to work there.

Rural hospitals are being considered under the Hayes review, but no matter what is decided, Kilkeel will remain out on a limb, too far away from the main sources of primary healthcare. Kilkeel was the part of south Down that was worst affected by the recent bad snowstorms. The whole area was entirely cut off for several days. It was not possible to drive, for instance, from Kilkeel to Newcastle; it was difficult to get past Killowen. That shows the isolated nature of the area and the need for adequate healthcare there.

We also have an influx of tourists, as Mr Kennedy mentioned. It does not look as though we are going to have a normal summer this year, but in a normal year Kilkeel can be a hub of activity, with tourists making their way to and from the Mournes. We also have the fishing industry, where serious injuries can readily occur because of its inherent dangers. There has been a proposal to remove the helicopter rescue service.

The people of Mourne rightly see themselves as being at the end of the queue when it comes to the provision of services. The promise to deliver a new integrated primary healthcare facility in Kilkeel has to be kept. The present buildings are well past their sell-by date; a new site has to be selected. If devolution is to mean anything in the Province it has to be accountable to local communities such as Kilkeel. It is absolutely essential that the Assembly honours the promises, even if they were made by previous Administrations that perhaps did not have the same political outlook as ourselves. Kilkeel deserves nothing less.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Two more Members wish to speak before the Minister will be asked to respond. I ask them to limit their statements to five minutes to give the Minister time to respond.

Mr O'Neill: I will try to abide by your ruling, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is a pity that we have lost so much time. However, what I wish to say can be said in a few minutes.

I compliment Eddie McGrady, who has been the Member of Parliament for South Down for some time.

He has fought a long and difficult campaign to try to restore the necessary health services to the Mourne area. As he outlined in his presentation, that has been a remorseless dogfight. I hope and add to his wish that our present Minister will not be yet another Minister along those lines.

This is an issue of clear neglect — the Health Service for the people of the area has been neglected. We want that completely restored. We require the installation of an integrated healthcare service. As Mr Wells has already outlined, the community is a unique and isolated one, with major fishing, agriculture and tourism industries. All three provide opportunities for risks to health. We are not talking about acute services. We are talking about ordinary services to provide for the greater proportion of accidents. The need to have that in the Mourne area is very clear.

The area also has a poor road infrastructure.

5.00 pm

I want to re-emphasise that, because Mr Kennedy must have had a glaze in his eyes when he was enjoying our tourist facilities. He must not have looked down at what he was travelling over. It is in a very poor state. All we need is a bit of inclement weather and many of the roads are difficult to pass. Accessibility is a serious problem.

I also represent the Members from South Down — they asked me to, and I have continued to do so — on the Donard Commissioning Group, which is a very successful commissioning group in the area. It covers the northern end of Mourne — the Annalong area. That has clearly indicated to me the need for support services in the Mourne area. Current and valued evidence is available as a result of focus groups studying local problems of healthcare and providing accurate and up-to-date information. That is available for examination if there is any doubt about identifying the need factor. I do not believe that there is — identifying need is not the problem. Making the financial commitment is the difficulty. I want to ensure that this is the last Minister who will have to deal with this problem and that she will leave us with a successful outcome.

Mr Bradley: I too pay tribute to Mr Eddie McGrady for bringing this Adjournment debate to the Chamber this evening. The great thing about the debate — although the Chamber is not packed — is that we are talking about all sections of the community. It goes right across all divides — from fishermen to farmers, and across differing religious and political beliefs. Everyone in the Mournes will be fully supportive of the comments made by the various Members so far.

We are speaking about let-down. In common with Mr Kennedy, I am a member of Newry and Mourne District Council. In 1996, we took the promises that were made

to us as being sincere. Prior to that we had a very intensive campaign, led by the Mourne councillors. It was supported by Mr McGrady and probably every other recognised Kilkeel-based group in the Mournes. They drove it along for the provision, but it did not come. We took the promises made in 1996 at face value. We thought that they were sincere. While I cannot say we were bought off because we got nothing, we believed that what was on offer would eventually happen.

Danny Kennedy, Eddie McGrady and then Jim Wells came in on a seasonal note — they were speaking about the summertime situation. Jim Wells touched on the winter problems — winter problems at sea and on the roads. This year in particular the place was closed off for almost seven days. The three roads into it were impassable. The only other place where that happened was in the Outer Hebrides, and I do not think that it was acceptable there. It is certainly unique.

The Minister is still comparatively new to the job and to this case in particular. She will not fail to recognise from the research available to her to date that the Mournes urgently need a Kilkeel-based integrated medical health centre. Basic research will show that. The Minister will learn that very quickly if her homework is properly done. I again thank Eddie McGrady for bringing the issue forward, and I hope that we have advanced the cause of the people of the Mournes.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms de Brún): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim mo bhuíochas leis an Uasal Mag Bhrádaigh as ceist thábhachtach seo soláthar sláinte agus chúram shóisialta do mhuintir cheantar Mhúirn a tharraingt anuas.

Tuigim go hiomlán na deacrachtaí atá ag muintir an cheantair, ag cuimhneamh ar an fhad atá le taisteal acu chun seirbhísí sláinte agus chun áiseanna cúraim shóisialta. Dearbhaím, áfach, go bhfuil mé tiomanta do chinntiú go bhfaigheann ár muintir uilig an cúram agus an chóireáil ardcháilíochta chéanna, cuma cá gcónaíonn siad.

I thank Mr McGrady for raising the important issue of the provision of health and social care for the people of the Mourne area. I fully appreciate the difficulties being faced by the people of the area, bearing in mind — as Members have stated — the distance that they have to travel to avail of many health and social care services and facilities. I assure Members that I am committed to ensuring that all of our people receive good quality care and treatment, regardless of where they live.

I know that the Southern Board and the Newry and Mourne Trust, which are responsible for commissioning and delivering services for the people of the Mourne area, have also clearly stated their commitment.

Mr McGrady will be aware that the provision of health and social care in Kilkeel and the Mournes has been

under discussion locally for a number of years. He has outlined many of the twists and turns in those discussions. Several consultation documents have been published by the Southern Board and by Newry and Mourne Trust, which have engaged with the local population. Those resulted in a number of recommendations for provision of services, and some of those have been put in place. They include an increase in the number of nursing home places in the Kilkeel area, the provision of a minor injuries clinic at Brooklands Nursing Home in Kilkeel and investment in a range of community services across a number of programmes of care.

One of the outstanding elements of the programme is the development of a primary healthcare centre in Kilkeel. Potentially, that will provide a more integrated service between the local GPs and Newry and Mourne Trust and will enhance co-operation between the various services. The trust has been working on a business case for the development of integrated care in Kilkeel for some time. That has been ongoing since before the Executive was established.

Several factors, including changing local circumstances and the failure of the parties involved to reach a timely consensus on what was required, have also contributed to the lengthy delay in the trust's bringing forward proposals for the Department's consideration. In recent months the Department has emphasised the need for the trust and local GPs to reach a consensus on the way forward, which has come about recently. The trust's business case for the development of a new primary care centre in Kilkeel involving the local GPs was finally received by the Department earlier this month. I can assure you that we take this very seriously.

The outline business case proposes to provide a new facility to deliver the range of services currently provided from the Kilkeel Health Centre and the professions allied to medicine (PAMS) and outpatient services now sited in the Mourne Hospital. Those include GPs, community nurses, health visitors, school nurses, speech therapy, psychotherapy, occupational therapy, podiatry, outpatient clinics, obstetrics, gynaecology, general surgery, general medicine, paediatrics, ophthalmology and psychiatry.

With regard to the funding for the business case, there are a number of cases for investment in health and personal social services. Newry and Mourne Trust has submitted a range of business cases to the Department — including this one — totalling £10 million. The level of resources available means that decisions on investment need to be based not only on merit, but also on priority. I cannot say today — and I am sure that Mr McGrady would not expect me to say today — what relative priority the new facility in Kilkeel will have.

The earlier versions of the business case, to which Mr McGrady referred, did not meet the guidelines that govern such investments. In addition, the proposed facility did

not then have the support of the local GPs. That has now been secured. The business case now envisages an investment of £1·65 million. That needs to be fully tested — no more and no less than any other investment involving public money.

With regard to the neutral venue, Newry and Mourne Trust now wants to use the site for the new health centre. As a result, action on disposal of the site has been suspended until the trust's proposals have been examined in detail. I am aware that, although the Kilkeel Community Association had hoped to acquire the site for the community centre, the trust is now working with Newry and Mourne District Council with a view to meeting the association to try to find an acceptable way forward for all parties. In taking the whole process forward, it is essential that all of the relevant players — Newry and Mourne Trust, the board, and the local GPs — work together to ensure a satisfactory outcome for the people of the Mourne area.

As for access, there are a number of ways in which that is being taken forward. Several reviews of services have been or are currently being undertaken through the capitation formula, for example, the ambulance service review and the acute hospitals review. There are incentive schemes for GPs to encourage practitioners to provide service in rural areas, but time does not permit me to give you the details of that.

In answer to Mr Mick Murphy's questions about the consultant posts in Daisy Hill Hospital, I can confirm that the necessary resources have been made available to fund those posts, and I also understand that the recruitment advertisements for all posts mentioned will appear in the local press this week.

Both the grant schemes and the housing selection schemes are matters for the Housing Executive. The trust is involved for consultation only on the necessity and appropriateness of the proposed works and on decisions as to referral for occupational therapy assessment.

For the North overall, I have identified an additional 20 occupational therapists in the coming financial year. I have also approved implementation of the recommendations contained in the preliminary report of the joint Housing Executive and Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety on the review of the housing adaptation service, which is designed to improve occupational therapy response times.

The primary care services are vital for the people of the Mourne area, and I understand that they are the first points of contact for most people who need help from the health and social services. As Members will know, we have just concluded a major consultation exercise about the future arrangements for primary care, and we are in the process of carrying out an analysis of responses to that. I am fully aware of the excellent initiatives developed by the Donard Commissioning Group and other primary care pilot schemes, and we will be encouraging the involvement of local communities and service users in the planning and development of services.

In conclusion, I am aware of the health and social care needs of the people of the Mournes, and I am keen to resolve the issue of providing a new primary healthcare centre for the people in Kilkeel. I can assure Members that the business case for the health centre will be taken forward as quickly as possible.

Adjourned at 5.12 pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Monday 30 April 2001

The Assembly met at noon (Mr Speaker in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

ASSEMBLY BUSINESS

Mr Maskey: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I was advised on Friday last by the Business Office that my question for oral answer today, No 7, to the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister has been ruled inadmissible under sub judice rules. Will you advise Members if the issue of sub judice was raised by the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister or by your office?

Mr Speaker: It may be unreasonable to expect the Business Office to keep itself fully aware of all legal cases on which a question might be put. On this occasion the question was forwarded in the usual way. We were advised by the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister that an appeal had been lodged and the question arose as to whether this rendered the matter sub judice. The Clerks looked at that question and at the relevant Standing Order. Standing Order 68(4)(a) states

“in the case of courts of law, when the verdict and sentence have been announced or judgement given, but resumed when notice of appeal is given until the appeal has been decided;”

In other words, the sub judice rule applies until a verdict has been announced or judgement given. However, once notice of appeal is given, the sub judice rule applies again.

I asked the Business Office to seek advice in writing from the Court of Appeal on whether that was now the case. We received a written note from the Court of Appeal to the effect that the appeals have been lodged and will shortly be listed for hearing. That means that until those appeals are dealt with, these matters fall under the sub judice rule again. As soon as judgement is given by the Court of Appeal, that will cease to be the case. However, if the right of appeal to the House of Lords is upheld, the sub judice rule will apply again until such time as the appeal is dealt with, when it will no longer apply. I trust that clarifies the matter.

Mr Maskey: On a further point of order, Mr Speaker. This is a matter of some importance to the House. I tabled the question because I am finding it virtually impossible to get a response from the Executive on this

matter. All of the civil servants were put out of the room the last time the Executive dealt with this matter so there was no independent record of what happened.

Taking the sub judice rule into account, how can Members establish what action was taken by the Executive when there were no officials present to record the minutes? Very shortly we will be dealing with the North/South Ministerial Council report from the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. If a Member were to ask a question about how the unlawful activity of David Trimble is impacting on the the work of the Council, will that be viewed as sub judice and, therefore, inadmissible?

Mr Speaker: It is not uncommon — although never having been a participant I do not know from first-hand experience — for Executives in various Governments to meet on occasion without officials being present. The opportunity to question Ministers directly is always there except when a matter falls under the sub judice rule. The period of time — and I have no idea what length it was — from the judgement having been given in the case to the point where an appeal was lodged was a window of opportunity for a question to be asked. I do not know whether it was a practical opportunity to engage in a question. Such a window of opportunity will appear again subsequent to an appeal, the ruling having been given.

There are not many precedents in this matter, because it is not particularly common for Ministers in a Government to take other Ministers to court. We have to operate from first principles, and the principle of sub judice applies. The fact that civil servants are not present in the meeting does not mean that questions cannot be responded to. Sometimes such meetings are not regarded as formal meetings. However, the context in which those individuals were meeting is entirely a matter for the Executive and not for me. The sub judice rule applies at this juncture in respect of the matter which has been taken to court in two cases which are now under appeal.

Mr Maskey: On a final point of order, Mr Speaker. This is relevant to the ability of a Member to raise any question of any Minister coming forward with a report on the North/South Ministerial Council. If I were to ask the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development a question about the negative impact of David Trimble's unlawful activity, for example, would that be ruled out of order?

Mr Speaker: I will have to consider that matter, because that was not the question that I had to consider at the time. The question I had to consider at that time was whether the specific question, which related directly to the appeal, was sub judice. I will take your question and think about it with regard to the business of Ministers at Council meetings. There is no problem with asking questions about that. However, I will need to give some consideration to the question relating to

whether there has been adverse consequence before giving a reply to the House.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. You said that Members had the opportunity to question Ministers at any time. Surely Ministers here have hidden behind what they call “confidentiality”. Therefore, if the matter is not in the public domain we have no opportunity, at any time, to question them.

Mr Speaker: As I have said on previous occasions — and the Member will know from other experience — the opportunity to ask questions of the Minister here or elsewhere is not a guarantee of an answer from a Minister.

I am simply stating the obvious. There are Question Times, and there are opportunities to ask questions. Of course, it is difficult to ask questions about things of which one does not know, but Members frequently get a hint of something which they are not “behind the door” in asking a question about.

FOYLE, CARLINGFORD AND IRISH LIGHTS COMMISSION

North/South Ministerial Council

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development that she wishes to make a statement on the North/South Ministerial Council sectoral meeting for the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights sector held on Friday 6 April in Dublin.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers): The fourth meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council for the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights sector took place on Friday 6 April in Dublin. Following nomination by the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, Mr Sam Foster and I represented Northern Ireland. Mr Frank Fahey TD, Minister of the Marine and Natural Resources, represented the Irish Government. The Executive Committee noted the papers for the Council meeting during the week commencing 2 April.

The meeting opened with updates from the chairman of the board of the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission (FCILC), Mr Peter Savage, and the chief executive of the Loughs Agency, Mr Derick Anderson. The chairman informed the Council of the contributions made by the agency and local angling clubs to curb the spread of foot-and-mouth disease. During the crisis the agency has not been issuing angling permits to fish in its waters and has curtailed its enforcement activities to boat patrols on the loughs and rivers. Agency staff have complied fully with disinfection procedures where they have had to address pollution or water quality issues. Anglers in the Foyle and Carlingford areas have been very co-operative and responsible in their attitudes during the crisis. I was very reassured by these remarks.

The chairman also advised us of a visit by a party of shellfishermen from the Foyle and Carlingford areas to Tralee and Clew Bays to observe the operation of shellfisheries there. This visit took place prior to the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease, and the shellfishermen were accompanied on the trip by members of the FCILC board’s shellfisheries subcommittee, representatives of the cross-border Aquaculture Initiative team and a number of Loughs Agency staff. The visit proved to be a very useful learning exercise and provided a good opportunity for a range of interests to begin the process of co-operation that will result in more productive and better managed shellfisheries in the Foyle and Carlingford areas in the long term. Further, he advised that the Loughs Agency’s regional office in Carlingford is now fully staffed and operational, and that a marine tourism officer has been appointed to begin work on drawing up a strategy on marine tourism for the Foyle and Carlingford areas.

The chief executive explained the further work undertaken by the agency — building on what was learnt from the trip to Tralee and Clew Bays — to ensure that all views on the development and management of shellfisheries are taken into account in setting up a regime that will lead to the development of a sustainable aquaculture industry in both loughs, and one that has the consensus of as many stakeholders as possible.

The chief executive also gave a report on fishing effort and the continued work in relation to poaching and pollution, and he further updated the meeting on plans concerning marine tourism. Although it is still early days, the agency is keen to develop a strategy that clearly defines its role, that sets the strategy firmly in the context of the various forms of fishing and that builds in support for the provision of the information, accommodation and services required to support and encourage fisheries-based tourism. It also aims to extend the strategy to cover other water-based tourist activities such as canoeing and mammal watching or birdwatching. I am, therefore, content that there is a heavy agenda of good work being progressed by the agency.

Following the updates, a presentation was made to the Council on the agency's detailed plans for selecting and appointing members to the advisory forum and focus groups which the Council agreed should be established at its meeting in November 2000. It is intended that the focus groups will represent the interests of a wide range of stakeholders in the loughs, including shellfishermen, nets-men, conservation interests and tourist representatives, to name but a few. The agency is keen to ensure that appointments to these bodies are made independently of the agency. To ensure this, independent consultants have been appointed to undertake the process of selection and appointment. The agency aims to have active groups by the end of this summer. The Council approved the agency's forwarding its draft equality scheme to the Equality Commission. I am satisfied that the agency has consulted widely in drawing up the scheme and that it has taken on board the outcome of this extensive consultation.

12.15 pm

The Council approved a proposal by the agency that a review of the grading and salary of field staff posts be undertaken as a matter of urgency. The agency has encountered difficulties in attracting and retaining such staff, due to unfavourable salary differentials between its posts and those of comparable organisations in the rest of the island of Ireland.

We also approved a proposal to defer an overall review of the staffing structure of the agency for six months to allow sufficient time for it to acquire the aquaculture licensing function and to develop its strategy on marine tourism. The Council approved the making of three sets of regulations. These were, first, regulations on salmon

carcass tagging to introduce a tagging and log book scheme for all salmon and sea trout over 50 cms. The introduction of the scheme will enhance conservation measures already in operation as well as provide the agency with more accurate information on catch data to facilitate better management of stocks in the areas. The Department of the Marine and Natural Resources introduced a similar scheme from 1 January 2001 for sectors other than the Foyle and Carlingford areas. I understand that the Fisheries Conservancy Board plans to introduce this scheme throughout the rest of Northern Ireland.

Secondly, regulations are being put in place to lift a ban on angling on a stretch of the River Foyle. The ban was introduced in 1999 to prevent illegal netting on a heavily poached stretch of the river and will be unnecessary when the tagging scheme comes in. This will extend the section closed to angling on the River Mourne to prevent excessive exploitation of salmon and sea trout in an area where there is a natural obstacle to migration.

Thirdly, the Council made regulations to extend the provision in relation to the close season in the Carlingford area — the periods when the waters are closed to angling to protect salmon and trout while spawning.

In addition, the Council was updated on the coming legislation to enhance the functions of the Loughs Agency of the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission (FCILC) in line with the North/South Co-operation (Implementation Bodies) (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 and on the transfer of functions of the Commissioners of Irish Lights to the body.

Finally, the Council agreed to meet again on 22 June 2001 and approved the joint communiqué, a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

I am making this report on behalf of Mr Foster and myself.

Mr J Wilson: I welcome the Minister's report and note and welcome the fact that the chairman informed the Council of the contributions that the agency and local angling clubs have made to curb the spread of foot-and-mouth disease. I know the Minister is aware that that co-operation has been freely given, not just within the Loughs Agency, but right across the Province.

I would like to bring the Minister back to her statement that agency staff have complied fully with disinfection procedures where they have had to address pollution or water quality issues. I seek her assurance that considerable attention is being paid to the run-off of disinfectant, because thousands of gallons of disinfectant are now pouring into our drains, and then into our streams and waterways. Before I am reminded that I cannot ask questions about the Province in general I want to focus on the Loughs Agency. The same concern is expressed right across the Province. Is the Minister keeping a focus on this issue, and are her staff co-operating with

other Departments — for example, the environmental protection section of the Environment and Heritage Service, which is an agency of the Department of the Environment?

Ms Rodgers: I can assure Mr Jim Wilson that I am very aware of the problem of run-off of disinfection or, indeed, anything else in the waters. I have been assured by the agency that it is taking all the necessary precautions on the foot-and-mouth disease situation. I imagine that because it is an agency whose main purpose is conservation and protection of the fishing environment, it will most certainly be taking precautions to ensure that nothing is done to damage the fish stocks.

The Chairperson of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee (Rev Dr Ian Paisley): The Minister will be aware that the members of the Agriculture Committee were concerned about the inconsistency in regard to lights and the fact that the South of Ireland's fishermen pay nothing, whereas our hard-pressed fishermen have to pay towards the upkeep of lights.

The Speaker mentioned that the Minister was going to deal with the matter of lights dues. Was the need for equality of opportunity for Northern Ireland fishermen discussed at the meeting? Fishermen in Northern Ireland should not have to pay for a service which fishermen in the South avail of free of charge.

Ms Rodgers: Dr Paisley will be aware that the payment of lights dues by fishermen in Northern Ireland is not a matter for the Government of the Republic. I commend the Government of the Republic for not asking their fishermen to pay the lights dues, and I should like our fishermen to be treated in the same way. However, we are governed by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions in Whitehall.

Dr Paisley might be aware that I wrote to the Minister to say that it is unfair that the fishermen should have to pay lights dues in Northern Ireland. In fact, I pointed out that fishermen in the Republic of Ireland were not required to pay those same dues. The response I received was not encouraging, so I wrote another letter to the Minister.

I have now been told that the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions is undertaking to review its policy on charging. I have asked the Department to ensure that the position of Northern Ireland fishermen is considered closely when this policy is being reviewed.

Dr Paisley will appreciate that at present this is a reserved matter of the UK Government. I will consider all the available options after the transfer of the functions from the Commissioners of Irish Lights to the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission, and we are attempting to develop that legislation at the moment.

Mr O'Neill: I welcome the Minister's statement, and I thank her for making an important reference to the

efforts of anglers in the Foyle and Carlingford areas to co-operate with restrictions during the foot-and-mouth disease crisis.

In the light of the important visit to the Tralee and Clew Bay shellfish farms, will the Minister ensure that the management of shellfish farms is stringently controlled, particularly in regard to pollution. It is well recognised that this constitutes a major threat to waters worldwide, and the Committee highlighted this as an issue of considerable concern in its recent report to the House.

Does the Minister agree that the three sets of regulations are a welcome addition to the existing measures for protecting our salmon and trout populations? As a Committee, we will, in due course, be making a formal report to the Assembly on the content of the regulations.

Ms Rodgers: I thank Mr O'Neill for his comments on the anglers whose contribution in the fight against foot-and-mouth disease is much appreciated. I met some anglers on Saturday during a visit to another area, and I was very aware of the difficulties being experienced by the angling clubs. They were nevertheless content that protection against foot-and-mouth disease has to be a priority, and I appreciate that.

The purpose of the legislation, which will be introduced as soon as possible, is to ensure that shellfish farms are properly managed and that all aspects of the operation are examined. I understand that the visit to Clew Bay was extremely informative and that the visitors learned a good deal about the management of those areas.

I have not taken a note of the next part of the question.

Mr O'Neill: Are these regulations a welcome addition to the measures for protecting our salmon and trout populations?

Ms Rodgers: Carcass tagging will be a very welcome means of protecting salmon. First, it will allow us to gain a clear picture and a database of the salmon stock. It will also be a helpful and effective way of preventing poaching of our salmon stocks. It will, therefore, be a very big advance.

Mr Maskey: I appreciate that the Minister's statement covers a wide range of issues such as foot-and-mouth disease, staffing matters, strategy and legislation. There is a pointer that says that some of this work has been outstanding for a number of months. Given the range of issues involved, will the Minister tell the House if she has taken any steps to ensure that there will be a full meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council to address these significant matters?

Ms Rodgers: Mr Speaker, I am not sure if that question relates to today's paper.

Mr Speaker: As the Minister knows, questions are on the statement that she has made.

Ms Rodgers: The Member will be aware that the SDLP supports full meetings of the North/South Ministerial Council. That has been our stated position. The Member will also be aware that the present embargo that has been placed — illegally, as I understand it — on Sinn Féin Members does not apply to my position on North/South Ministerial meetings in the field of agriculture. That is because, as a Nationalist Minister, I am always accompanied by a Unionist Minister. Therefore, it is not an issue in my own dealings with the North/South Ministerial Council. As some of the other issues are matters of judicial review, it would be unwise for me to say any more at this stage.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Agriculture Committee (Mr Savage): The Minister stated that the Loughs Agency is keen to develop a strategy for sustainable industry in aquaculture. Is there any limit or control on the extent to which these businesses can, or will be allowed to, grow?

Ms Rodgers: It is not the intention of the agency to curb the development of these industries. It wishes to encourage the development of the industry, but in a regulated way that will also enhance the conservation of fish stocks. There has to be a sustainable industry, and the purpose of the legislation is to ensure that. The industry will be limited only by the capacity of the loughs. We have to ensure that stocks are preserved.

Mr Bradley: I welcome particularly the announcement that

“a marine tourism officer has been appointed to begin work ... on marine tourism for the Foyle and Carlingford areas.”

Will the Minister advise us on the level of consultation that will be undertaken during the drafting of the strategy?

Ms Rodgers: With regard to the drafting of our strategy, the agency intends to consult fully with all stakeholders. It recently advertised an invitation to interested parties to make suggestions as to how the consultation process should be established and what arrangements would be entered into. The outcome of that exercise was that the agency now plans to establish an advisory forum and focus groups, which will involve representatives of all of the local fisheries industries, including the marine tourism industries.

The focus groups representing all the sectoral interests in that area will consult with their own people — for example, in the case of marine tourism they will consult their wider community on marine tourism issues — and that will then feed back into the consultation process. Therefore, there will be a wide and, I stress, independent consultation. The agency will retain an independent consultant to recruit the membership of the focus groups and the advisory forum. Therefore, it will be a fully independent process of consultation with all the interests and stakeholders involved.

12.30 pm

Mr Wells: Last week, when the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment made a similar statement on North/ South meetings, he assured me that the minutes of those meetings were relayed to the Committee. I immediately checked that, but there was no trace of that's happening.

I also asked the Chairman of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee whether his Committee is getting the minutes of the meetings that the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development attends. He assured me that that was not happening.

These bodies are making important decisions on the internal affairs of Northern Ireland, yet all we receive from them are the statements that the Ministers deliver to the House. On this occasion, the statement is quite detailed, but that is unusual. Normally, we receive a few terse statements saying that a meeting was held, decisions were made and some money was disbursed.

Can the Minister assure us that the minutes of those meetings are, indeed, being referred to the Committee? If they are not, why not?

Ms Rodgers: I assure Mr Wells that in everything I do and in all my dealings, whether in the North/South Ministerial Council or on issues specific to Northern Ireland, I have been open and accountable. I have never tried to hide anything, nor is it my intention to do so. All decisions made at these meetings are put into the public domain via a joint communiqué.

As the Member has clearly recognised, I have given a very full account of everything that was decided or discussed at the meeting. It is doubtful that the minutes will be any more enlightening, but I will certainly take the matter up. I assure the Member that he has nothing to fear and that I have nothing to hide.

The whole purpose of the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission is to enhance the capacity of both loughs for the benefit of people in both parts of Ireland, both in the development of tourism potential and of the industry itself.

Mr McHugh: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I also welcome the Minister's statement, particularly the detail that it goes into on the situation, and the large number of issues that have been addressed. It is incredible that the Minister feels that the ban on other ministerial Colleagues is not an issue for her — it certainly should be.

Mr Speaker: Order. I fail to see how the issue to which the Member has referred, and to which I referred in a ruling on sub judice earlier, is related to the Minister's statement.

Mr Molloy: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. You did not actually give a ruling on questions, in relation to another Minister asking questions —

Mr Speaker: Order. I referred to the fact that the Member is now asking a question that, by the very way that he asks it, indicates that it is nothing to do with that statement. These are questions on the statement — they are not general questions or questions on the generality of the Department. Members need to stick with the statement that the Minister has made. She has, in fact, already referred to precisely this issue.

Mr McHugh: I take your point, a Cheann Comhairle. My question relates to appointments to this particular body. It is not fully functioning, and, therefore, there are heavy costs in staffing, and so on. Can the Minister say something about that? It is not up and running because of legislation.

Are all measures being taken to allay the concerns of farmers in border areas about people entering lands via waterways, and the consequent fears of foot-and-mouth disease?

Ms Rodgers: To set the record straight, the Member's initial allegation concerns something that I did not actually say. He criticised me for saying something that I did not say. I do not want to reiterate my party's position or my position on the matter, because those are well known. I assume that the Member's question refers to appointments to the body itself rather than to the people who have been employed. Is Mr McHugh suggesting that it is not a good idea to have a North/South body for the Loughs Agency? We think that it is a very good idea, because it enables Ireland, North and South, to work together on a very important area. The body will allow us to develop the potential of Carlingford Lough and Lough Foyle together. I presume that the Member is not suggesting that the body is a bad idea.

We could take the view that when a body is set up, it should have everything in order at once. It is obvious that when you set up a new body, you must make arrangements to make it fully operative. The body could not be fully operative from day one, given that legislation must be passed and we have to go through a consultation process with the stakeholders. All of that is part of the work of establishing what I consider to be a very important body that will enhance the potential of the loughs in the North and the South.

Mr Speaker: Given that Members have referred to the matter raised by Mr McHugh on two or three occasions and that the House seems to want direct reference made to it, I will look into it further. I refer the House again to Standing Order 68, paragraph (2), which states that

"matters awaiting or under adjudication in a civil court should not be referred to:"

I will study the matter further, but until then a straightforward reading of the Standing Order simply suggests what it says: the matter should not be referred to in a motion, a debate or a question to a Minister, including a supplementary question.

Because the House has pressed me, my interim ruling must follow what the Standing Order appears to mean. I will take legal advice on the question. The ruling may not appeal to all Members, but I trust that I have clarified matters as best I can. I cannot take any further points of order on that matter now, but if Members have other points of order that relate to the issue, I will take them at the end of questions to the Minister on the statement.

Mrs Carson: I welcome the Minister's report, but I would like some clarification of the statement that

"a presentation was made to the Council on the agency's detailed plans for selecting and appointing members to the advisory forum and focus groups".

It goes on to say that independent consultants will oversee the appointments. How many groups will be formed? Will the groups be quangos? Could the Department, with advice from the Committees, do some of the work? How much will each group or forum cost?

Ms Rodgers: There will be one advisory forum and six focus groups. I cannot say how much those groups will cost, but I do not imagine that the cost will be very high. I assure Mrs Carson that it is very important that the Foyle and Carlingford Irish Lights Commission (FCILC) is in a position to consult with stakeholders and those who have an interest in the loughs. The legislation and regulations have not been in place before, and there are many people who have a legitimate interest in having their voices heard. It would be remiss of the agency if it were to ignore those people.

The best way to progress the legislation — since we are now going to have legislation to regulate the industry — is to give all these people their place, consult with them and ensure that they feel that they are part of the decision-making process. I do not see it as the setting up of a number of quangos; I would be surprised if it were a costly exercise.

Mr McGrady: I compliment the Minister, and her associate Minister, on this morning's report and the great work that she is doing generally in relation to foot-and-mouth disease. The report refers to the aquaculture of the lough shores, particularly of Carlingford Lough. The Minister met with the Carlingford Lough Shore and Land Owners Association. Its members outlined their concerns regarding the proliferation of aquaculture licences, particularly in areas where they have the ownership of the rights to the wrack. They think that there should at least be a moratorium on the issue of licences until the landowners' difficulties with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development are sorted out. Can the Minister accede to that, because it is important? Farming

diversification for these landowners could mean aquaculture involving their wrack rights on the lough shore. Can the Minister give further consideration to a moratorium on, or a suspension of, further aquaculture licences on our side of Carlingford Lough?

Ms Rodgers: I thank Mr McGrady for his initial remarks and his question. I met with interested parties, and Mr McGrady, on the issue of Carlingford Lough wrack rights. Individuals are claiming those rights, and they have provided evidence that is being examined by the Department's legal advisers. The legislation recognises the rights of individuals who have proven ownership of the right to collect wrack, and the issue is being progressed by the Department.

Mr Poots: It is notable that this is the third report within two weeks of an all-Ireland Council meeting that has been attended by the Ulster Unionist Party. The report mentions a proposal that

"a review of the grading and salary of field staff posts be undertaken as a matter of urgency."

The communiqué talks of the review of the Loughs Agency's staffing and structure being postponed for six months until January 2002. There would seem to be some confusion between the Minister's statement and the communiqué that was produced. What is the staffing situation? How many staff are currently in the field? How many are required? When will the review take place? Will it be in January, or will it be carried out urgently?

Ms Rodgers: I cannot give the actual staffing figures, but I will get them. I presume that the Member is talking about the overall number of staff that are employed by the agency.

Mr Poots: I am talking about the number of field staff.

Ms Rodgers: I do not have that figure to hand, but I will let the Member know. The review is of field officers only, so there is not a contradiction in the statement.

Mr Molloy: A Cheann Comhairle, I welcome the statement. It is useful to have these updates, particularly when some people do not have the opportunity to attend the meetings. However, it was a cheap shot from the Minister to respond to my Colleague Gerry McHugh without answering the question about the North/South Ministerial Council. The Minister will be aware that our party was instrumental in the putting together of all-Ireland structures. I need a clear answer from the Minister about the implementation of, and the legislation in relation to, these bodies to ensure that they are fully operational.

In case there is any doubt, I am talking about what is said in the statement. It is important at this time to get a clear line, because these cheap shots from the Minister about party politics are not in keeping with the statement. Does the Minister agree that the fact that SDLP Ministers continue to attend the North/South Ministerial Council

meetings gives the impression that everything is rosy in the North/South Ministerial Council when, in fact, people are being excluded from the meetings?

Mr Speaker: Order. I have ruled that that matter should not be referred to, and there was a quite clear attempt to find some way of slipping the matter in. I must advise the Minister that she should not respond to that part of the question.

12.45 pm

Ms Rodgers: I do not think that there was a question in that tirade — except in relation to answers that I had given as being "cheap shots". I answered the question that I was asked — *[Interruption]*.

Mr Molloy: I will repeat my question.

Mr Speaker: Order — *[Interruption]*.

Order. The Member will resume his seat.

Ministers are not required to answer questions; they are requested to do so. I referred to that matter in response to a question by Rev Dr Ian Paisley. I have also made it clear that points of order are not in order during questions to Ministers. However, I am happy to take points of order at the end of the period of questions to the Minister. This matter also has arisen on a number of occasions. The Member has put his question. The Minister does not consider the issue that Mr Molloy has raised to be part of the question. I cannot rule that the Minister must answer any particular aspect of the matter that the Member has raised.

Mr Molloy: Would you let me explain? The Minister said that she did not think there was a question. I was simply explaining that there were two questions, one of which was already asked by Mr McHugh.

Mr Speaker: I leave it to the Minister to respond as she wishes.

Ms Rodgers: It is to be regretted that Sinn Féin has turned a report on an important element of the North/South Ministerial Council into a political point-scoring exercise. I will respond to any questions that I feel are relevant to my brief and that relate to my statement.

Mr Hussey: Will the Minister confirm that, according to the statement, extra fishing accessibility is being awarded to those in the Foyle constituency while fishing accessibility in West Tyrone is actually being limited? That seems rather strange, given the circumstances that the Minister will find herself in. Can she explain the rationale of allowing the reopening of accessibility to fishing on the Foyle, which will in fact limit the availability of fish passing through to the rest of the Foyle system? I am thinking of the River Mourne particularly.

Can she tell me exactly to which part of the River Mourne the ban on angling is being extended? Can she comment on the continued intimidation and threats to

bailiffs in that area? Was that issue discussed at the North/South Ministerial Council meeting, and how is it being dealt with?

Ms Rodgers: The ban on angling on a stretch of the River Foyle was introduced in 1999 to prevent illegal netting from a heavily poached stretch of the river. It will be unnecessary when the tagging scheme is introduced.

The area closed to angling on the River Mourne has been extended to prevent excessive exploitation of salmon and sea trout in an area where there is a natural obstacle to migration. The purpose of these exercises is the conservation of the fish stock and the enhancement of the whole industry.

Mr Gibson: How will the carcass tagging of 20-inch salmon prevent the overnetting and illegal netting that have been so prevalent in parts of the Foyle, Derg and Mourne rivers?

Ms Rodgers: Salmon carcass tagging will be a more efficient and effective way of preventing illegal catching of salmon. Therefore, it will help prevent the illegal selling of salmon to hotels, for instance, because it will be difficult to sell a salmon unless it is tagged. If the salmon is not tagged, then it will have been poached. It will be much easier to keep track of salmon and ensure that people do not benefit from selling poached salmon — in the sense of being illegally caught, as opposed to being cooked. Also it can be done during the day by officials checking if the salmon being sold are tagged or not, rather than by policing the rivers during the night when most poaching takes place.

Mrs Nelis: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's statement and particularly the plan by the Loughs Agency to establish the advisory forum and focus groups. Will the Minister assure the House that all the stakeholders will be fully represented on these groups? This did not happen when the agency itself was appointed. There was a distinct lack of representation in respect of the fishing community.

Is the Minister satisfied that the process undertaken and the criteria used by independent consultants will be fully inclusive, and particularly of the fisheries industry in Lough Foyle? Will these bodies report to the North/South Ministerial Council? What costs will be incurred by employing consultants? Has there been any advance on the matter of the enabling legislation to allow the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission to operate fully?

Ms Rodgers: Go raibh maith agat. Níl a fhios agam ar mhaith leis an Teachta go dtabharfainn freagra i nGaedhilg nó i mBéarla.

Mrs Nelis: No.

Ms Rodgers: I was offering to answer in Irish, since the Member initiated her remarks in Irish. She does not want that, so I will proceed in English.

In relation to the focus groups — *[Interruption]*.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms Rodgers: As I have already stated, there will be a fully independent procedure to decide the membership of the focus groups. This will not be decided by me or by the bodies. It will be decided on an independent basis to ensure that they are independent of the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission itself. At the North/South Ministerial Council we had a full presentation on the process to be undertaken and the criteria to be used. I am entirely satisfied that it will be inclusive and that all stakeholders will be enabled to be involved in the consultation.

I cannot give a figure for the costs incurred by the consultants, but I will find out and let the Member know later.

We are proceeding with the enabling legislation, although there are some difficulties in the area of the appeals procedure. At the moment it allows for an aggrieved person to appeal a decision but not for a third party to do so. In other words, other people may object and have their objections overruled or not considered when making the decision. They do not have a right to appeal under our present legislation in the North, which could leave us open to a Human Rights Commission investigation.

A number of other issues are being looked at on both sides of the border, because the two jurisdictions need to bring the legislation forward together. A number of complicated issues still need to be ironed out, but I am hoping to have the legislation ready as soon as possible.

Mr Beggs: Before the establishment of the North/South bodies, visits to lighthouses such as Islandmagee lighthouse in my constituency required local youth groups to contact the Commissioners of Irish Lights in Dublin. Is there now a local contact number to enable people in Northern Ireland to contact the Irish Lights body without having to make international phone calls?

Secondly, the issue of shellfish was discussed. Will the Minister say if any concern was raised at the meeting about the number of bodies in Northern Ireland that are carrying out water quality tests, given the duplication and lack of responsibility that result? Finally, will the Minister say whether the discussions took place in everyone's first language or if Irish was used?

Ms Rodgers: In response to whether the business of the meeting was carried out in Irish or English, it was carried out in English, because a number of people there did not understand Irish. It would have been extremely rude to carry out business in that language since we did not have any interpreters. If interpreters had been present for the benefit of those who did not understand the language, I would have been happy to carry out the business in Irish. In the absence of interpreters, I could

not do that. Indeed, I would be very happy to carry out all the business that I do in this House in my language, which is Irish, if other people could understand me by putting on earphones.

Irish Lights' responsibilities have not yet been transferred to the body, because there are a number of difficulties in that area also.

Mr Beggs: What about the question on shellfish?

Ms Rodgers: What question was that? Mr Speaker, it would be preferable if Members would try to ask just one or two questions. It is very difficult to remember three or four.

Mr Speaker: I have often referred the House to the fact that this is an opportunity for Members to ask one question. When they ask more than one — and sometimes the questions have as many legs as a centipede — the Minister may choose to answer none, one or some of them, but may not necessarily be able to answer all of them, even if he or she wishes to. This is salutary. There is much talk about power sharing; perhaps question sharing with Members who do not have a question might be the way to deal with the matter.

PRODUCT LIABILITY (AMENDMENT) BILL

First Stage

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan): I beg leave to lay before the Assembly a Bill to amend Part II of the Consumer Protection (Northern Ireland) Order 1987.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

DEFECTIVE PREMISES (LANDLORD'S LIABILITY) BILL

Consideration Stage

Mr Speaker: No amendments have been tabled to the Bill, but the Chairperson of the Finance and Personnel Committee, Mr Molloy, has indicated that he wishes to speak on clause 3. I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to group the first two clauses and then deal with clause 3, clauses 4 to 6 and, finally, the long title.

Clauses 1 and 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3 (Tenancies to which this Act applies)

The Chairperson of the Finance and Personnel Committee (Mr Molloy): A Cheann Comhairle, go raibh maith agat. Before addressing the Committee's concerns about clause 3, I want to thank all those organisations that took the time to write to us and give us their views. I also thank the Minister and ask him to pass on our thanks to the Office of Law Reform, whose officials assisted the Committee during its detailed consideration of the clauses.

In giving evidence, the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health and the Housing Rights Service raised concerns about clause 3. Their concerns centred on the fact that the clause exempts landlords of registered and regulated tenancies from the main provisions of the Bill — that is, the additional liability otherwise provided for. During consultation with the Office of Law Reform, it emerged that the Department for Social Development has commenced a major review of the private rented sector with the aim of conducting a thorough analysis of the Rent (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 in relation to protected tenancies.

The Committee was told that the intention behind the review was to improve the state of the private rented sector.

1.00 pm

The Office of Law Reform told the Committee that the primary purpose of the Bill was to address the issue of liability in tort. It was designed to clarify and extend the liability that applies to landlords but could not focus on imposing repair obligations on the landlord. The Committee received evidence from the Law Reform Advisory Committee. It emerged that the Law Reform Advisory Committee had been influenced and persuaded by representations from the Housing Executive. In addition, it had concluded that owing to the low return that they receive from rental income, there would be a problem of equity should the extended liability provided for in the Bill be imposed on landlords of restricted and regulated tenancies.

The Law Reform Advisory Committee had not considered the broader issue of housing rights, nor was it

trying to improve the quality of housing stock. The focus of its consideration was restricted to the limits of liability in the event of an accident causing injury or damage. The Law Reform Advisory Committee had identified an anomaly between the Defective Premises Act 1972 in Great Britain and the Defective Premises (Northern Ireland) Order 1975 and had endeavoured to remedy that anomaly.

The Committee concluded that this Bill was not an appropriate vehicle for addressing shortcomings in the quality of properties in the private rented sector. Members noted the advice of the Assembly's legal adviser that while grants were available to landlords of restricted and regulated tenancies to undertake repairs, recent reductions in the scale of those grants meant that they were not sufficient to enable a meaningful level of refurbishment to be undertaken.

The Committee concluded that in the present circumstances it would not be appropriate to apply the additional liability envisaged by the Bill to such landlords. The Committee agreed, however, that this was an undesirable outcome to its consideration of the Bill. Members were deeply concerned that the tenants of restricted and regulated tenancies were disadvantaged in relation to the legal redress available to them should injury or damage occur as a result of defects in such properties. The Committee concluded that this situation was unsatisfactory in the longer term.

The Committee decided that its concerns about the exemptions in respect of liability afforded to landlords of restricted and regulated tenancies should be formally conveyed to the review of the private rented sector being undertaken by the Department for Social Development. The Committee further agreed that those concerns should be drawn to the attention of the Social Development Committee, and I have taken steps to do that. The Committee agreed that clause 3 should be recommended to the Assembly for approval. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Durkan: I agree with much of what the Member has said and thank him and the members of the Committee for Finance and Personnel for the scrutiny given to this Bill. The Committee has done a thorough job, and the useful working relationship that it has fashioned with my officials in the Office of Law Reform has been demonstrated. Law reform bills can be complex and technical, and I am grateful to Members for coming to grips with the legal niceties — and the not-so-niceties — of this Bill.

I agree that it is unsatisfactory that regulated and restricted tenancies are exempted from this limited extension of liability and recognise the difficulties that could have resulted if we had not acted in this way.

It is clear to all associated with the Bill that the current state of protected tenancies in this jurisdiction requires close scrutiny. Those living in such tenancies

face certain and distinct disadvantages in living conditions. Equally, and the Committee appreciates this point, landlords of such properties do not have entirely easy options. They cannot command reasonable rents, a fact clearly highlighted for those restricted landlords who, in many instances, are not entitled to a rent worth collecting. The system of grants, which may help to repair unfit properties, is, at best, unsatisfactory. There are little or no enforcement powers available at present. It is in this context that the exemption is standing as part of the Bill. If I felt that any of the above factors would mean that the extension of liability to such groups would not be onerous, I would have no hesitation in applying them.

Like the Chairman, I welcome the fact that the Department for Social Development proposes to review the private rented sector. The universal hope is that this review will bear fruit and lead to an improvement in the housing stock of such properties. However, we agree that this limited law reform measure, which will deal with the situation after an injury or damage occurring, is not the vehicle to bring about such desirable reform.

Clause 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 4 to 6 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Long title agreed to.

Mr Speaker: That concludes the Consideration Stage of the Defective Premises (Landlord's Liability) Bill. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

ADOPTION (INTERCOUNTRY ASPECTS) BILL

Consideration Stage

Mr Speaker: Members will have a copy of the Marshalled List of amendments. There is one amendment tabled and selected to clause 1, which will be considered in the usual way. I have also had indication that a Member wishes to speak about clause 9. I will take the amendment and clause 1; clauses 2 to 8; clause 9; clauses 10 to 16, and the long title of the Bill.

Clause 1 (Regulations giving effect to Convention)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms de Brún): Aithníodh an gá leis an leasú seo nuair a bhí an Bille faoi bhreithniú ag an Choiste, agus gabhaim mo bhuíochas leis an Chathaoirleach agus le baill an Choiste as a mbreithniú cúramach ar an Bhille.

Cuireann alt 1 den Bhille ar chumas na Roinne rialacháin a dhéanamh agus coireanna a chruthú maidir le sárú na rialachán sin. De réir mar a dréachtaíodh an Bille, tá an t-uasphionós is féidir a ghearradh i ndáil le coir a cruthaíodh faoi alt 1 (príosúntacht trí mhí nó fineáil nach mó ná leibhéal a cúig, nó an dá chuid) ag teacht lena chomhfhóráil san Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Bill 1999 i Sasana, in Albain agus sa Bhreatain Bheag.

Dar leis an Choiste gur coir an t-uastéarma príosúntachta a ardú go sé mhí le gurbh ionann é agus an t-uastéarma don choir in alt 12, sin é páiste a thabhairt isteach sa tír i gcoinne na rialachán. Chrothomódh an leasú ailt 1 agus 12 sa Bhille.

Ní athraíonn an leasú cuspóirí polasaí an Bhille.

I beg to move amendment 1: In page 1, line 14 leave out “three” and insert “six”. — *[Ms de Brún]*

The need for this amendment was identified during the Committee’s consideration of the Bill. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Chairperson and members of the Committee for their careful consideration of the Bill. Clause 1 establishes powers for the Department to make regulations and to create offences for contravening those regulations.

As the clause is currently drafted, the maximum penalty that may be imposed in relation to an offence — three months imprisonment or a fine not exceeding level 5, or both — is consistent with the equivalent provision in the Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Act 1999 in England, Scotland and Wales. In the Committee’s view, the maximum term of imprisonment should be six months, the same as for the offence under clause 12 of bringing a child into the country in contravention of the regulations. The amendment would create consistency between clauses 1 and 12. The amendment does not reflect any change in the policy aims of the Bill. Molaim an leasú.

The Chairperson of the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee (Dr Hendron): I support the amendment. The issue was raised during our deliberations at the Committee Stage, and the need for an amendment was agreed. Committee members are grateful to the Minister for agreeing to take forward the amendment. It will ensure consistency with regard to the terms of imprisonment for the offences covered by clause 1 and clause 12 of the Bill.

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety did not undertake consultation on the specific issues covered by the Bill, and, therefore, the Committee decided that it would undertake a consultation exercise on the policy aims. Twenty-four groups from the statutory and voluntary sectors responded to the exercise, and the vast majority welcomed the proposed legislation.

The Committee is satisfied that the Bill ensures that the best interests of children are paramount. It brings greater uniformity and standardisation to the processes, places existing arrangements on a statutory basis and introduces two new offences. It will now be unlawful for anyone other than an approved adoption agency to assess the suitability of prospective adopters of children from overseas or to bring a child into this country without certain conditions being satisfied.

Some respondents raised other important issues, and I would like to cover those briefly today. Some of them expressed concern about the lack of uniformity on the part of health and social services trusts with regard to charging for assessments of persons who apply to adopt children from overseas. Committee members were concerned that different trusts had different practices and agreed on the need for equality and uniformity across Northern Ireland. The Committee raised that issue with the Minister and welcomes the Minister’s intention to issue guidance to the trusts regarding charging for assessments in order to ensure consistency.

As a result of the consultation exercise, it also came to the attention of the Committee that children adopted and brought into Northern Ireland through the intercountry adoption process do not appear to be entitled to a post-arrival health check. That procedure should be completed in the child’s country of origin as part of the entry clearance procedures. However, Committee members agreed that a full health check on arrival in Northern Ireland should be mandatory so that any illnesses can be treated and managed properly.

The matter was also raised with the Minister, and the Committee welcomed the Minister’s positive response that it is her intention to consider, with the Department of Health in England, whether mandatory health checks should be introduced as an additional safeguard for children adopted from overseas.

Finally, I would like to highlight the Committee’s concern at the case of the twin girls adopted, as it were,

in the United States and brought into the United Kingdom. It seems that, despite the stipulation in the Bill that assessments must be carried out by a registered adoption agency, all loopholes may not have been covered. Therefore, we welcome the assurance from the Minister that if, as a result of ongoing discussions with Whitehall officials, new primary or secondary legislation is found to be necessary, every effort will be made to bring it to the Northern Ireland Assembly as soon as possible.

I am sure that Members will agree with the Committee that the Bill should go ahead, allowing the positive aspects to come into force, rather than await the outcome of those discussions. The Committee will return to the matters still under consideration in due course in order to ensure a satisfactory resolution.

Mr Ford: I wish to make a couple of brief points. I welcome the fact that the Minister has introduced the amendment, which, as Members can see, is somewhat similar to one that I sought to put down. She beat me to it by a few minutes.

1.15 pm

As has been highlighted by the Minister, amendment 1 is necessary for internal consistency in the Bill. It is also necessary because of the suggestion that a maximum sentence of three months would have been regarded as relatively light in certain circles. The majority of those who might be tempted to flout the law would be couples who find themselves in trying and difficult circumstances. I am not suggesting that Members should be seeking maximum penalties of imprisonment in those circumstances. However, it is essential that a higher penalty be installed for instances where there is a suggestion that anybody is organising such arrangements for more than one family or is trafficking in babies.

Dr Hendron mentioned consistency on charges between trusts. That is an equality issue. If I may digress, I welcome the action that the Minister took last week to redress the differences that existed in different areas of Northern Ireland regarding fertility treatment. The Minister will need to be seen to be taking action to ensure that trusts are given — and adhere to — sufficiently strong guidance so that she will not face the same equality challenge over the issue of charging adoption fees.

I have no doubt that she will take account of those points, just as she took account of the question I raised last week — even though I did not get the chance to ask it. I urge the House to support amendment 1 and the Bill.

Ms de Brún: I have written to the Chairperson of the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee about charging for assessments in relation to intercountry adoptions. I share the Committee's view that there should be uniformity between trusts in their approach to that matter. It would not necessarily be appropriate to take statutory powers in the Bill to prescribe the level of

charges. However, I understand the Committee's concern and that of those who have raised the matter this morning. As I indicated to Dr Hendron, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety will be issuing guidance on charging to ensure that it is carried out on a uniform and consistent basis.

I agree that a mandatory health check would be an additional safeguard. However, those people who are adopting children from overseas are advised to contact their GP to make arrangements for a comprehensive health check of the child as soon as possible. From that viewpoint I am not convinced that it is necessary to make health checks mandatory. The Department expects those parents adopting a child from abroad to have regard for the health of the child.

In preparing for the implementation of the new legislation the Health Department will be issuing extensive guidance over a wide range of matters. That guidance will address the need for adoptive parents to ensure that they approach their GP to arrange a comprehensive health check of the child as soon as is convenient.

In respect of the restriction on advertising contained in the Adoption and Children Bill the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety is monitoring the position with a view to introducing an equivalent provision here as soon as possible.

Amendment 1 agreed to.

Clause 1, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 2 to 8 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 9 (Six months residence required for certain intercountry adoptions)

Mr Shannon: I would like some clarification on clause 9. Some of my constituents have indicated that it can take up to four years to bring a child through the intercountry adoption agency. Paragraph 32 of the explanatory and financial memorandum on the Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Bill states that

"the child is required to have had his home with the prospective adopters for a period of at least six months before an adoption order may be made."

How can that happen when some people have told me that it can take up to four years for an adoption to take place, whether it be from the Crimea, Romania or Brazil? Will the Minister tell the House if a difference has been made between the adoption agency and individuals who have pursued the adoption under their own steam and through the process?

It is important that adoption agencies and individuals have the same timescale for adoption.

Ms de Brún: The idea is that a period of six months would apply to those cases where the placement of the child was made by an adoption agency. In cases where

the arrangements were not made by an adoption agency, the current provisions concerning the period before an adoption order may be made will remain at 12 months.

I did not catch part of the Member's question. If I have not answered his question I will try again.

Mr Shannon: My constituents have told me that it can take four years to adopt. I cannot understand clause 9. The explanatory memorandum states that

"the child is required to have had his home with the prospective adopters for a period of at least six months before an adoption order may be made."

I am trying to clarify how six months is the issue when people have told me that it takes four years.

Ms de Brún: The child must be in place regardless of the operational question of the time taken. In my view that is separate from the fact that the child must be there for six months. I am still not sure if I have answered the Member's question.

Mr Shannon: If it states in the legislation that a child must be in the adopter's house for six months, how can we equate that with someone who wants to adopt a child? For example, two suitable adopters in Northern Ireland have told me that it takes four years to adopt a baby from the Crimea. How can they get around this process? How can they fit into the six-months category?

Ms de Brún: Mr Shannon is not seeking clarification on the legislation but on a totally separate matter which is outside the remit of what we are dealing with today. With regard to the legislation, the period of six months which is being sought is to allow those responsible to be satisfied about the welfare of the child. It is to allow them to assess the suitability of the persons having care of the child and to make whatever additional enquiries may be necessary overseas concerning the circumstances of the adoption or how the child came into the care of the prospective adopters. The other matters are not ones for today.

Mr Speaker: I must remind Members, as the Minister has done, that when considering legislation it is the legislation itself that we have to consider.

Clause 9 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 10 to 16 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedules ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Long title agreed to.

Mr Speaker: The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

The sitting was suspended at 1.22 pm.

On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Mr Speaker: Question number 4, in the name of Mr Ivan Davis, has been withdrawn. Question number 7, in the name of Mr Alex Maskey, has been ruled inadmissible under Standing Order 68, on the grounds of sub judice. Question number 13, in the name of Mr Roy Beggs, has been transferred to the Minister of Finance and Personnel, and Mr Beggs will receive a written answer.

I remind the House about the question of sub judice. This matter was raised this morning, and I took the view that, under Standing Order 68, any reference to a matter before the court, or indeed a matter set down for appeal, was sub judice. The matter before the court is the lawfulness or otherwise of the particular decision, and that is what falls under sub judice under Standing Order 68. Therefore, under the terms of the Standing Order, it is inadmissible in any questions, including supplementary questions — or, indeed, Ministerial replies — to make reference to the question before the court. I make that point at this stage in the hope — not I trust, a vain one — that that will conclude the matter for the rest of the day.

Public Appointments

1. **Mrs Carson** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to give an assessment on transparency in public appointments following the publication of the Fourth Annual Report on Public Appointments. (AQO 1346/00)

The Deputy First Minister (Mr Mallon): The procedures for public appointments are drawn up by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. They emphasise the need for appointments to be governed by the overriding principle of selection based on merit, the inclusion of an independent element in the selection process, openness and transparency in the appointments procedure and information to be published about appointments made. All Northern Ireland Departments are required to make appointments to their public bodies based on merit and in accordance with the Commissioner's guidance. The involvement of independent assessors in the process should provide a guarantee of the objective implementation of the Commissioner's code and is intended to provide the public with assurance that the process is transparent and fair.

Mrs Carson: The Fourth Annual Report on Public Appointments states that there are 2,300 public appointments on a total of 117 bodies. Does the Minister agree that this is an excessive number under devolution, especially when the total funding that these bodies administer is taken into account? Many quangos have been made redundant by the responsibilities of the new Government Departments and Assembly Committees.

For example, is the Training and Employment Agency board, with 12 members and salaries totalling £70,335, really necessary? It has a remit that could now be overseen by the relevant Committee and Department. Three members were recently appointed, so it is obvious that the Department wishes to continue with the quango. Will the Minister investigate the situation, with a view to an immediate reorganisation and review to reduce the number of quangos?

The Deputy First Minister: I take the Member's point. She will, of course, be aware that Ministers are responsible for public appointments in the remit of their Departments. The role of non-departmental public bodies is a matter that will be considered as part of the review of public administration. The First Minister and I will write to the Member with details of the budgets of non-departmental public bodies.

I agree with the thrust of the Member's question. Given the type of structures that have been created politically since the Good Friday Agreement, there is duplication of effort by the large number of public bodies.

Mrs Courtney: Does the Minister accept that underrepresentation of some sectors still remains an issue? Will he make a statement about the appointment of a commissioner, and does he agree that the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister should make this appointment?

The Deputy First Minister: It is accepted that members of public bodies in Northern Ireland should be more representative of the social and cultural mix of the communities which they serve and that members should be drawn from a broad range of backgrounds and experience. Appointments, of course, depend on the range and calibre of people who put themselves forward for selection. We consider it important to encourage a wide range of people to apply for public appointments. Action has been taken to address underrepresentation, and this includes the wide circulation of a six-monthly list of forthcoming vacancies on public bodies; more varied use of the media advertising of public appointment opportunities; and reviewing the job specification for each public appointment to ensure that the criteria do not discriminate against any group.

Application forms are also being revised to make them less off-putting, especially to women and under-represented groups and to enable greater account to be taken of the merits of non-traditional career patterns.

I agree that the appointment of a commissioner should fall to the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister rather than to the Secretary of State as at present. We will therefore make a Prerogative Order shortly which will confer the power of appointment to the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister.

As part of a wider review of the public appointments policy we will also consider whether to appoint a separate commissioner for Northern Ireland. In the interim, however, we have agreed to extend the period of appointment of Dame Rennie Fritchie, who also acts as Commissioner in Britain, and that will last until 28 February 2002.

Mr S Wilson: Does the Deputy First Minister agree that to enhance transparency in public appointments clear criteria should be published, one of which should be that appointees have no terrorist convictions? In the light of the boast of terrorist involvement this weekend by the Minister of Education, will the Deputy First Minister say whether the First Minister has indicated to him that his party will be joining the DUP in calling for the resignation of the Minister of Education?

The Deputy First Minister: The Member raises a matter which relates to an elected appointment under the d'Hondt system — it is not a public appointment. In relation to public appointments the criteria are there and have, by and large, been fulfilled. As I pointed out in answer to a previous question, things such as the structures under which we operate are changing, and the need for many quangos has receded.

Executive Office in Brussels (Cost)

2. **Mr Poots** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to detail the final cost of setting up the Executive office in Brussels.

(AQO 1333/00)

The First Minister (Mr Trimble): The current estimate is £299,000. The final cost will depend on exchange rates at the time when payment is made. The work of fitting out the office should be completed by the end of May.

Mr Poots: What was the initial estimated cost for this job, and what process was undertaken to obtain prices for the work? What is the difference between the initial and the current estimates?

The First Minister: The initial estimate was not a fully worked out costing. The present costing reflects the price of converting open-floor space into office accommodation. The original estimate was much lower than the present one. I regret that I do not have the relevant figure before me at the moment, but I shall inform the Member in writing.

Mr Byrne: Although the Executive Office in Brussels will represent the Executive as a whole, does the First Minister accept that key sectors such as finance, agriculture and industry need to develop specific issues with the European institutions? How will these interests be catered for?

The First Minister: We have established an inter-departmental group chaired by the junior Ministers whose function it is in the first instance to consider the priorities of the Office. In that way we hope to ensure that the Office will reflect the interests of the Administration across all the Departments.

Community Relations Council

3. **Mr Ford** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to explain the delay in appointing eight representatives to the Community Relations Council.
(AQO 1323/00)

The Deputy First Minister: I refer the Member to our written response of 2 April to question 2173/00. The making of appointments was initially hindered by the suspension of the Assembly between 11 February and 29 May 2000. More recently, the Department initiated a triannual evaluation of the Community Relations Council. We also announced in the Programme for Government our intention to carry out a major review of community relations policies. In these circumstances it was decided that it would not be appropriate to make further appointments to the Council before we had an opportunity to consider the outcome of the evaluation and the policy review.

I assure the House that we remain fully committed to tackling the divisions that remain in our society. We will, by means of the review, and the subsequent strategy, ensure that we have effective policies in place to do that.

Mr Ford: I thank the Minister for that response, but it leaves me a little baffled. I understand that the suspension of this Assembly in the early part of last year prevented the making of appointments. However, in a written answer which I should have received on 16 March, but did not receive until 2 April, the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister told me that interviews took place on 7 and 21 February and, in their response to me on 19 February, they indicated that appointments would be made soon. The interviews took place on 7 and 21 February 2000, but I received my response on 19 February 2001.

It appears that the three-month suspension of the Assembly managed to delay matters for an entire year. I cannot understand how the First Minister could have failed to make any appointment if, as they state, community relations policy is a priority for this Executive. Is this failure to appoint staff to such a vital community relations body for over a year to be taken as a suggestion that we

believe in the conspiracy theory of politics of this nature, rather than the cock-up theory?

The Deputy First Minister: I assure the Member that a conspiracy theory was the furthest thing from our minds. I accept that there was a delay in informing those who had been interviewed of their position. We have written to those people, explained the position, and we have apologised for that delay. We have also instructed officials to review procedures for handling such matters to ensure that similar situations do not arise in the future. But the question still remains: would it have been better to go ahead and make appointments prior to the review and the assessment of the community relations policy? Alternatively, would it have been better to await the review and make the appointments on the basis of what might be a re-evaluation of policy and operation?

2.45 pm

Mr Kennedy: I am sure that the Minister agrees that the issue of community relations is a crucial one. Is it his view that the current aims of the Community Relations Council remain appropriate?

The Deputy First Minister: I believe that the broad general aims are appropriate. The Community Relations Council has operated under very difficult circumstances through many difficult years. However, its priorities, needs and requirements change as other factors change in our society. Unfortunately, one thing has not yet changed, and that is the attitude of those in our society who do not regard community relations as important. The hon Member and I have seen examples of it quite recently in our constituency. We must make the North of Ireland a better place, and the more we can improve the policy of the Community Relations Council, the better it will get.

British/Irish Council: Environment Sectoral Meeting

5. **Mr McGrady** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to outline the topics that were discussed at the last British-Irish Council sectoral meeting on environment and to make a statement.
(AQO 1326/00)

The Deputy First Minister: The last British-Irish Council sectoral meeting on the environment was held in London on 2 October 2000. Following that meeting, the Minister of the Environment made a statement to the Assembly on 6 November 2000. I refer the Member to that statement and to the communiqué issued after the meeting, a copy of which is held in the Assembly Library.

The environment sectoral meeting discussed a wide range of priority areas suggested by its members. Ministers agreed that the initial work should concentrate on three issues. The first was radioactive waste from the Sellafield

site. The Irish Government and the Isle of Man authorities agreed to lead in the preparation of a paper for the next sectoral meeting. Secondly, the British Government took the lead on the topic of the impact of climate change. The third issue was waste management, on which the Scottish Executive agreed to prepare a paper about initiatives being pursued in Scotland.

Mr McGrady: The Minister will note that since that meeting, President Bush has said that the United States of America no longer subscribes to the principles in the Kyoto protocol on environment and climate change. Can the Minister assure the House that the Executive will continue to play a full part in implementing the principles contained in the Kyoto protocol and also those of the Hague summit of November 2000? These measures in respect of environment and climate change and global warming could well be developed through the mechanisms of the British-Irish Council. Though this is a small community, it is important that we give voice to our concern on these matters.

The Deputy First Minister: I agree that we must play our full role. I also believe that we can do that through the mechanism and structure of the British-Irish Council. It was very disappointing that agreement was not reached in the Hague. When talks resume in Bonn in July, new efforts will be made to reach a deal that will pave the way for the ratification and entry into force of the Kyoto protocol by 2002. All EU members, as well as people in other countries around the world, remain committed to implementing that protocol. The Executive are fully committed to contributing to the satisfaction of the Kyoto obligation, and we will pursue that at every opportunity, not least through the British-Irish Council.

Programme for Government: Northern Ireland Bureau Washington DC

6. **Mr Fee** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to detail what progress has been made on the Programme for Government commitments concerning the Northern Ireland Bureau in Washington DC.
(AQO 1353/00)

The First Minister: A number of steps have been undertaken in order to meet our commitments in respect of the Northern Ireland Bureau. Engaging an additional member of staff at middle management level has strengthened the bureau's resources. We are examining ways to develop a strong working relationship with relevant branches of the United States Administration and Congress.

In that context, we will be reviewing the functions of the bureau, its structure and its relationship with other bodies promoting Northern Ireland in the United States. The objective will be to ensure that a positive image of Northern Ireland is projected in the United States to maximum effect.

Mr Fee: In the last few years since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, the passage of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and the adoption of the Programme for Government there have been fundamental changes in the way in which Northern Ireland is governed. Can the First Minister give us some indication of how the Northern Ireland Bureau in Washington will reflect those fundamental changes, the new relationships with the Irish Government and the devolved Administrations in Britain?

The First Minister: The Member is right to say that the context within which the Northern Ireland Bureau operates has changed significantly. We are undertaking a number of steps which we hope will develop its role further. There has already been an increase in staff. An additional member of staff has been recruited to act as public relations manager. The bureau now acts as a representative of this Administration and is already developing good contacts with key people on Capitol Hill and in the Bush Administration. We plan to review the structure of the bureau and its relationship with other bodies in promoting Northern Ireland in the USA.

It is also anticipated that the bureau will move from its present location in the Embassy to more central premises in downtown Washington sometime in the summer. However, the staff at the Northern Ireland Bureau will continue to be accredited to the Embassy in order to retain diplomatic status.

Mr Beggs: Does the First Minister agree that there would be advantages in creating synergy between an IDB office in, or beside, the Northern Ireland Bureau in Washington? Is he aware that the IDB office — with operational responsibility for the political centre of gravity in North America — is based in Boston? Is he also aware that the IDB's North American budget is approximately 10 times that which is being proposed for the bureau?

The First Minister: There is a great deal in what the Member is saying. The IDB locations and budgets reflect the particular task of the Industrial Development Board and its objectives with regard to interfacing with United States industry. The Northern Ireland Bureau is preparing a strategy paper on the options available, including the specific matter of possible co-location of an IDB office and a tourist office with the bureau. The decision will, of course, be taken by Ministers here.

Mr Dodds: With regard to the work of the bureau and the promotion of the best interests of Northern Ireland, does the Minister not think that the work of that bureau in the United States is undermined by having, as part of his Administration, someone who has admitted that he was second in command of the IRA in Londonderry? Will he take steps to remove that gentleman from office?

Mr Speaker: Order. I have made it clear in the past that I do not make my judgements on the basis of newspaper reports. I draw that to Members' attention in

view of the rulings on parliamentary convention, of which the Member will be aware.

Mr C Wilson: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I do not take points of order during questions to Ministers. I will take it at the end.

The First Minister: As I have pointed out in reply to other questions, the object of the bureau is to represent the best interests of Northern Ireland. I am sure that the bureau will do so, despite the fact that it will be hampered by the rather hypocritical attitude to participation in the Executive adopted by the party the Member represents. As to — *[Interruption]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

The First Minister: As to his coat-trailing comments, I refer the Member to what I said on that subject in the very first speech I made in this Assembly on 1 July 1998. He should go and read it.

Mr Speaker: Order. Members frequently remark on the limited number of questions that it is possible to get through at Question Time. It is made all the more limited if there is disorder in the Chamber.

Mr Neeson: I welcome the fact that the First Minister has recognised the important role that the Northern Ireland Bureau has played over the years. Can he indicate when the changes are going to take place? Also, can he clarify what the role of the bureau will be in the future, as that is a problem at the moment?

The First Minister: The bureau's focus in the past tended to be on economic issues. With the new Administration here, we see the bureau as reflecting the interests of the Administration as a whole. Consequently, it is looking at its strategy and the way in which it is going to work.

As I said in reply to other questions, it hopes to relocate in the summer, but that will depend on circumstances and events there.

As to the issues that the bureau will be pursuing, I am sure that there will still be a very strong emphasis on economic matters, given the ongoing interest in doing business with the US and the very substantial US investment in Northern Ireland. However, we can work closely with the US Administration on other specific areas such as education, and we are anxious to do so.

Invitation to the President of the United States

8. **Ms Armitage** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister if, during the recent visit to Washington DC, an invitation was extended to the President of the United States to visit Northern Ireland to join in the celebrations of the Battle of the Boyne.

(AQO 1319/00)

The First Minister: However attractive the Twelfth of July celebrations might be, the President will have many demands on his time during his first year in office. Consequently, no invitation has yet been extended to the President to visit Northern Ireland, although we hope that he is able to visit at some time during his term in office.

Ms Armitage: Do you agree that when our politicians arrive in America they seem quite comfortable in celebrating St Patrick's Day surrounded by everything green — green faces, green leprechauns and green flags? Is this due to the change of climate or the influence of the President?

If President Bush agreed to attend the Battle of the Boyne celebrations, do you think that his presence would have the same effect here? Could the President contribute to the achievement of civil rights and equality for all, including the right to walk home from a church service in July? Do you think that it would be good for tourism, and can you envisage the marketing of the Twelfth of July celebrations as a major tourist attraction in America?

Mr Speaker: I remind the Member that when she refers to "you", she refers to the Speaker. I shall, however, assume that the question is put to the House and to the First Minister.

Ms Armitage: I am sorry, Mr Speaker.

The First Minister: You, Mr Speaker, would, no doubt, be able to give an enthusiastic response to the Member's question. A number of points could be made in response. The Member's points in regard to parity of esteem were very well made, and I hope that Members across the House appreciated them. It would be nice to see what is, in many respects, the largest folk festival in western Europe operate as something to be enjoyed by everyone — as a tourist attraction it could be thus enjoyed.

However, I take issue with one of the Member's initial comments. St Patrick's contribution should be seen as something that benefits all sections of the community. In that context, it was very nice to see the Democratic Unionist Party represented in the White House along with all the other parties.

Mr Speaker: Order. Members in the bottom corner should give their Colleague an opportunity to put his question.

Mr Hilditch: Having witnessed a fair degree of discrimination against the Orange Order, including the decision to exclude the institution from the Civic Forum, can the First and the Deputy First Minister indicate how they intend to celebrate the 311th anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne? This is particularly relevant when one considers that the concept of civil and religious liberties was a direct result of the outcome of that battle.

On what basis did Mr Mallon, as the Deputy First Minister, decide not to meet Portadown Orangemen?

Can the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister assure us that no further concessions will be made to Sinn Féin/IRA terrorist-fronted residents' groups during the forthcoming celebrations?

The First Minister: I would be very glad if parade-related issues were the responsibility of this House and of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, but at present those decisions lie with other bodies. Both myself and the Deputy First Minister have, on a number of occasions, made clear our several positions and views on the operation of that body, and I will not repeat them now. As to what one does on a public holiday, most Members will find their own way of taking advantage of this time.

Promoting Social Inclusion

9. **Ms Hanna** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to provide details of plans for the implementation of existing promoting social inclusion reports. (AQO 1356/00)

The Deputy First Minister: There are currently two reports promoting social inclusion — one on travellers and the other on teenage pregnancy. The working group report on travellers was issued to voluntary, statutory and other organisations for consultation in December.

Separate arrangements are being made for focus consultations with travellers. After consultation, all the recommendations and the views that have been expressed will be considered, and a report on the way forward will be published. The report by the working group on teenage pregnancy, entitled 'Myths and Reality', was issued for consultation on 7 November 2000. Consultation ended on 31 March, and the comments that were received are being evaluated by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

3.00 pm

Ms Hanna: Can the Deputy First Minister tell me when the reports will be finalised? Is there a timescale? I appreciate that he has given that information for 'Myths and Reality', but is there a timescale for the report on travellers?

The Deputy First Minister: The Member is right. The Programme for Government commits us to consult during 2001. Future priorities must be tackled by promoting the social inclusion element of New TSN. On 4 May 2001, we will initiate public consultation on future priorities. A document will be issued, and the consultation period will end in August. The Executive will use the outcome of the consultation to determine what the next priorities should be, and we will announce new cross-departmental priorities in November.

European Cohesion Forum

10. **Mr Dallat** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister if an invitation to participate in the European Cohesion Forum has been received.

(AQO 1355/00)

The First Minister: An invitation has been received from the European Commission to attend the forum that will be held in Brussels in May to discuss the Second Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion in the European Union. Northern Ireland has been allocated eight places at the forum. That reflects the importance to Northern Ireland of European cohesion policies and, in particular, the contribution to the structural funds and peace programmes that have been made over the last few years. The wide range of Northern Ireland interests in the second cohesion report will be reflected by the number of Departments that will be represented at the forum. However, the level of representation is yet to be determined.

Mr Speaker: The Member will not be able to ask a supplementary question because the time is up.

Mr Dallat: Mr Speaker, I am very happy with the comprehensive answer that I received.

Mr C Wilson: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. This is really a supplementary point to the one raised by Mr Dodds. I think you said that it would be unwise to work on reports in a newspaper about Mr McGuinness's participation in the IRA. I just wanted to remind the First Minister that he gave us a much better assessment when he said that with the exception of — *[Interruption]*.

Mr Speaker: Order. That was not a point of order. The Member was taking advantage. I stand by my view that you cannot believe half of the lies that you read in the newspapers but that you can believe at least half of the truth that you read in them. I do not think that there was a point of order to answer.

CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Safe Spectator Facilities

Mr Speaker: Question five, in the name of Mr Gibson, has been transferred to the Office of the First and Deputy First Ministers.

1. **Mr Fee** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the progress being made to promote safe spectator facilities at major sporting venues across Northern Ireland. (AQO 1358/00)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McGimpsey): Excellent progress is being made, under the safe sportsground scheme, on improving the health and safety aspects of spectator facilities at our major

sportsgrounds. Work is underway at 23 venues. Thirteen are soccer venues, nine are GAA venues and one is a rugby venue. Expenditure of around £2 million was made by the end of the 2000/01 financial year. Awards have been allocated for improvement work on a further 11 venues — eight soccer venues and three GAA venues. Work on those will start as soon as possible.

Mr Fee: Can the Minister confirm that, over the 1990s, the premier facilities for each sport were identified by representatives of those sports and that work has been carried out for rugby at Ravenhill, for hockey at Blaris, for soccer at Windsor Park and for hurling at Casement Park. Will he confirm that the only major project that has yet to be started is for Gaelic football at the athletic grounds in Armagh? Will the Minister take a personal interest in that project so that major Gaelic sporting matches can return to Armagh city?

Mr McGimpsey: The Executive and the Assembly found the money for a safe sports ground scheme because they recognised the glaring need in football, gaelic and rugby grounds. It would have taken over £20 million to bring the various stadiums up to the standard recommended by the Taylor report. The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure has made a start, but there is still much to be done.

Northern Ireland experienced a serious shortfall during direct rule. For example, we did not get any football trust money for soccer grounds, because there was no one here arguing for it. All the money went to England, Scotland and Wales — Northern Ireland got nothing. That is one of the reasons why the Executive and the Assembly have taken the matter forward.

I have been in discussion with representatives of the GAA, not specifically about Armagh, but about various grounds, and I will take on board what the Member said. I realise that there is a need at Armagh; there is also a need at Casement Park and at a number of other grounds.

Mr Boyd: In the light of the ticket fiasco in relation to the forthcoming Irish Cup final between Linfield and Glentoran, does the Minister agree that there should be an investigation into why crowd restrictions have been imposed by the Irish Football Association (IFA) when health and safety officials have stated publicly that they have not proposed such restrictions?

Mr McGimpsey: The Irish Cup final next Saturday is specifically a matter for the IFA. I understand that the IFA advised, and had been in discussion with, the health and safety executive of Belfast City Council. The IFA proposed a ticket limit of 10,800, evenly divided between the two teams, and Belfast City Council's health and safety department agreed with that. However, I understand that officials from Belfast City Council who visited Windsor Park on 27 April agreed that there was potential for some increase in the number of tickets available. There was also a suggestion — opposed by the clubs — that

there would be an even bigger increase if the kick-off were at 11 o'clock. It is a matter for the IFA in discussions with Belfast City Council. There is to be another meeting tomorrow, and we will know more then.

On the matter of inquiries, the IFA is the responsible governing body. How it runs its business is a matter for it. I can, however, refer to the soccer strategy for Northern Ireland that I have undertaken and which is ongoing. A number of issues have come to the fore through those discussions, and I have no doubt that the issues of the IFA, Windsor Park and ticketing will be discussed.

Mr Shannon: Can the Minister tell us what funding will be available to promote safer spectator facilities at sporting venues such as first division football clubs to bring them up to an acceptable standard? Will the Minister join me in congratulating Ards Football Club on winning the first division championship and getting into the premier league? Does he recognise that the club will need some funding and assistance in relation to that?

Mr McGimpsey: As has been detailed on a number of occasions in the House, there is a grand total of £5.3 million available over three years: £3 million in year one — of which £2 million has been spent; £1.5 million in year two and, currently, a projected £800,000 for year three. The Department does not know how much money, if any, will be coming from the football foundation. That is the amount available, and the Sports Council for Northern Ireland is administering the expenditure in conjunction with representatives of the various sports, health and safety personnel and the RUC.

I am delighted to see that Ards Football Club has been promoted back to the premier division. As a category A club, Ards will be eligible to bid, along with all of the other clubs, for the available funding.

Visitor Amenities

2. **Mr McGrady** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline what provision is being made for the additional promotion of visitor amenities.

(AQO 1327/00)

Mr McGimpsey: There is no universally accepted definition of a visitor amenity, but what definitions there are show that such amenities cover some areas that are outside the responsibility of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. However, the Department is currently looking at developing a workable definition of visitor amenities that will enable it to specify and plan its responsibilities in the context of a heritage policy and strategy for Northern Ireland.

I am conscious of the important contribution that visitor amenities make to the economy of Northern Ireland, and

my Department's corporate strategy recognises the need to promote them.

We have committed ourselves to the key task of designing and implementing a strategy for the development of visitor amenities. I will be examining the scope for their promotion and development in the context of the recently completed local museum and heritage review which I expect to receive shortly.

Mr McGrady: I understand that a joint bid by the Minister's Department and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has been made for European funding under the cultural tourism initiative. How will this funding benefit the promotion of centres? Perhaps I could address the Minister's lack of definition by highlighting the St Patrick's Heritage Centre as an example of such an amenity. How can funding be directed, and how will it be applied to support the promotion of such centres as tourist attractions?

Mr McGimpsey: I concur that the St Patrick's Centre — which, as Mr McGrady knows, I have visited — is a very impressive recent addition to the visitor amenity estate. "Visitor amenity" is the term used to define any service or facility that is used by, or exists for the benefit of visitors. A position paper on visitor amenities was commissioned in June 2000, and a study from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, which compiled an inventory of visitor amenities attractions, was published in May 2000. There are over 400 facilities covering six categories. They are owned by a variety of Departments, local councils or private owners.

We need to develop an agreed strategy in the context of a broad partnership. When we work out what we want to do, the European funding will, it is to be hoped, allow us to implement that strategy. The Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee is also examining the possibility of cultural tourism. All those elements feed into one another and provide what I have no doubt will be a very important adjunct to our tourism potential.

Mr Beggs: Does the Minister agree that Carrickfergus Castle fulfils many of the criteria that he has talked about, as it is a facility which will attract visitors to Northern Ireland, and promote further visits? The castle has a long history associated with the political establishment of Northern Ireland. In fact, in the early days, Carrickfergus was the capital of Northern Ireland. Can the Minister ensure that Carrickfergus Castle will be considered for any European funding?

Mr McGimpsey: I have already mentioned that there are over 400 facilities, covering six categories. One of the categories will be historical buildings and monuments, and Carrickfergus Castle is a very important historic building. It represents one of the key parts of our visitor amenities estate. It is also owned and managed by the Department of the Environment's Environment and Heritage Service. That indicates the need for partnership

— it is not simply for the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure to determine how Carrickfergus Castle should be promoted and what extra facilities it requires. It is a question of partnership and, therefore, of cohesion among all the owners and managers, and that means creating an agreed strategy. At present we are actively working on this strategy, and it will be informed by the local museums and heritage review.

Angling (Concessions)

3. **Ms Lewsley** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether there are concessions for the following people who wish to become involved in the sport of angling (a) the disabled; (b) pensioners; (c) the young and (d) the unemployed. (AQO 1338/00)

Mr McGimpsey: I am responsible for approving licence fees submitted by the Fisheries Conservancy Board but not those set by the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission. There are no concessionary licence rates for disabled people, pensioners or the unemployed living within the Fisheries Conservancy Board's area. Young people under 18 years of age do not require a licence to fish. The Fisheries (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2001 amended the board's by-law making powers to enable the board to introduce concessionary licences for particular classes of persons, if it so wishes.

It is for the board to consider whether and when to introduce concessionary licence fees. However, as I indicated in my evidence to the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee during the passage of the Fisheries (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2001, I believe very strongly in the arguments for concessions for disabled anglers. Accordingly, I have provided additional moneys this year to help offset any loss the board may incur should it decide to introduce concessionary fees for people with disabilities.

3.15 pm

In addition, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure issues permits to allow anglers to fish in the public angling estate. Disabled anglers benefit from concessionary permit rates, and young people under eighteen years of age can also fish for game fish in the Department's waters at a reduced rate without a coarse fishing permit. There are no permit concessions for pensioners or the unemployed.

Ms Lewsley: I welcome the initiatives the Minister has mentioned. Are there any plans for future initiatives, particularly for pensioners and the unemployed? Will there be any initiatives from the Minister's Department on disabled access to some of the other fishing areas where there is currently no access?

Mr McGimpsey: With regard to the disabled, being able to access the waters is one of the key factors. Many

of the waters in the angling estate are accessible to disabled anglers. Those are listed in the Department's 2001 angling guide. It is a matter for ongoing consideration, and we continually bid for moneys when appropriate at each round. One of the key areas that we are looking to bid for is in the provision of accessibility to waters for those suffering a disability.

As far as permits are concerned, I must make the point that they are already discounted by roughly 50%. There is a 50% discount on a standard permit. The current cost of the permit — £53 per year — is roughly half of what it takes to run the public angling estate. Much has been done, but I fear that, under the current financial conditions, I do not have the latitude to make any further reductions.

Centrally Located Public Swimming Pool

4. **Mr Bradley** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to undertake a feasibility study with a view to providing a centrally located 50m public swimming pool in Northern Ireland. (AQO 1336/00)

Mr McGimpsey: Responsibility for leisure provision lies with district councils. Each district council has a statutory obligation under article 10 of the Recreation and Youth Service (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 to secure provision of adequate facilities for recreational, social, physical and cultural activities for its area.

In addition to provision made at district council level, plans are well advanced for a Northern Ireland institute of sport at the Jordanstown campus of the University of Ulster, which is being developed as part of the network of United Kingdom sports institutes. Subject to costings and a detailed appraisal, the aspiration is to provide a 50m eight-lane competition pool with adequate spectator provision as an integral part of the sports institute at the Jordanstown site.

Mr Bradley: In my oral question, I specifically referred to the central location for a 50m pool. This is a follow-on to a request made by Newry and Mourne councillor, Pat Toner, in 1999 and taken up again recently by council. He highlighted that approximately three million people live within the Newry/Warrenpoint catchment area. Given the fact that there are a total of sixteen 50m pools in England and Scotland and that 50m pools in Loughborough, Swansea and Stirling have been successful in obtaining lottery funding, will the Minister undertake to have his Department meet with the National Lottery to seek its support for the provision of a 50m pool in Northern Ireland?

Mr McGimpsey: I repeat that it is planned to have a 50m pool as part of the new United Kingdom network sports institute at Jordanstown. There has been widespread consultation throughout with Swim Ireland. As I am sure you are aware, swimming is an all-Ireland sport

and is organised on an all-Ireland basis. There is a 50m pool currently under construction in Limerick, and another one is planned at Abbotstown in Dublin.

Northern Ireland is, therefore, an ideal location. Our aim is to provide, as part of the UK Sports Institute, a centre for world-class training and support services. It is felt that our talented athletes would be best served by the establishment of an institute in conjunction with the University of Ulster at Jordanstown.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Sílim go gcaithfidh bheith iontach cúramach céillí maidir le cúrsaí airgid agus áiseanna spóirt ar fud na hÉireann.

I am aware of the need to avoid unnecessary duplication of public spending on sports facilities in Ireland. I welcome the Minister's comments on developments at Limerick, Abbotstown and Jordanstown. Will the Minister enter into formal discussions with his ministerial Colleague in the rest of Ireland, Dr Jim McDaid, to try to ensure that citizens and sportsmen in the Six Counties can make full use of Stadium Ireland should it come about?

Mr McGimpsey: I am not aware of the current state of play in regard to that stadium. I am more concerned with proposals for a new stadium in Northern Ireland. The Sports Council for Northern Ireland has the overall responsibility for developing each sport. In conjunction with the UK Sports Institute, it has determined the way forward for such developments as the new institute for sporting excellence at Jordanstown.

Mr Close: Lisburn Borough Council closely considered the possibility of providing a 50m pool when it was planning its new leisure complex. I am sure that the Minister would agree that that complex is the best, not just in Northern Ireland, but throughout the UK. One of our concerns about the provision of a 50m pool was the ongoing revenue costs of such a facility.

We considered that while there are many grants available for the capital cost of the provision of the facility, it would be grossly unfair to lumber a local authority with such massive revenue costs. I suggest that the Minister, in his deliberations of this issue, closely considers the impact of the revenue costs on any local authority.

Mr McGimpsey: I agree with Mr Close's very important point. Grants are available for capital provision, but it is the ongoing revenue costs which often cause the difficulties. It is also a matter which, for example, Belfast City Council has considered in the past. The cost of managing and running a 50m pool was considered to be prohibitive, not just by Lisburn Borough Council but by other councils. Newry and Mourne District Council has had a long-term aspiration to provide a 50m pool, but I do not believe that it has any immediate plans. Therefore, I agree with Mr Close that revenue consequences often

determine whether provision is possible. It would be difficult to cover the running costs of a 50m pool unless, for example, it were built as part of the UK Sports Institute campus at Jordanstown.

Arts Sector Cultural Quarter

6. **Mrs Courtney** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail what grants are available to those who are working within the arts sector to achieve a cultural quarter as detailed in the Programme for Government. (AQO 1350/00)

10. **Mr Maskey** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail what progress has been made in respect of the Programme for Government commitment to establish, by June 2001, a forum to co-ordinate and promote the cultural quarter concept of designated areas for locating cultural activity with a view to creating synergy and co-operation. (AQO 1361/00)

Mr McGimpsey: With the Speaker's permission, I will answer questions 6 and 10 together. There is no specific grant programme in the arts sector for the development of cultural quarters generally. However, the Laganside Corporation in Belfast is making funding available for the development of the cultural dimension of the city's Cathedral Quarter managed workspace initiative.

The Programme for Government provides for the establishment before June 2001 of a forum to co-ordinate and promote the cultural, arts and leisure dimension of the cultural quarter concept. My Department is developing this plan through a working group, chaired by my permanent secretary, which is considering local strategies for culture, arts and leisure. The working group is developing draft guidance on local strategies including the promotion of the cultural quarter concept at local levels throughout Northern Ireland. This will be presented to a forum, which has been provisionally arranged for 22 May 2001.

Mrs Courtney: The Minister might be aware that at present there are advanced plans to create such a quarter in Derry — the Cathedral Quarter adjacent to St Columb's Cathedral in the Diamond. His reply will come as a disappointment to those people, but I welcome his comments on the forum which is to make a response by June 2002. I look forward to that.

Mr McGimpsey: The cultural quarter concept will be readily adaptable, not simply to Belfast. I am aware that Londonderry has a very strong tradition of cultural development. An important infrastructure is also developing; the Playhouse Theatre, the Nerve Centre, the Verbal Arts Centre and the new theatre are some examples. There is also a new theatre at Ebrington. A very strong case can be made for the City of Derry, and my Department will be happy to discuss any matters with the corporation that Mrs Courtney or others may wish to propose.

Dr Adamson: Will the Minister detail what grants will be made available to those who are working in the arts sector to promote exchanges with cultural quarters in other countries such as the proposed Nashville visual arts project?

Mr McGimpsey: I am not aware that any funding is specifically set aside for exchanges between cultural quarters. However, the Arts Council is the funding body for arts, and it can address such applications. If Dr Adamson speaks to me afterwards we can work out a way forward, but I am not clear which cultural quarters he is considering. No funding immediately springs to mind.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease

7. **Mr Ford** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the steps he is taking within his Department to contain the threat of foot-and-mouth disease. (AQO 1324/00)

Mr McGimpsey: Unfortunately, since my previous reply to Mr Ford on this matter on 20 March 2001, the foot-and-mouth situation has worsened. My Department continues to be represented on the interdepartmental co-ordinating group under Ms Rodger's chairmanship. That group has met 15 times since the beginning of March and continues to play a key role in ensuring a consistent and cross-departmental approach to the problem. My first response to the crisis was to close the public angling estate and to call for the postponement or cancellation of sporting and other events that might risk spreading the virus. Before Easter, the Executive agreed revised guidelines which focused attention on the fortress-farm approach but allowed other pursuits and events to return to near-normality. I have been impressed and grateful that so many organisers have acted responsibly in abiding by those guidelines.

Mr Ford: I join the Minister in recognising the responsible attitude shown by many people in the way that they have conducted normal business — or amended normal business — because of this outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease. Current guidelines from his Colleague, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, suggest that complacency is still the greatest threat. What is the Minister doing to ensure that anglers and others are not becoming complacent three weeks after the last outbreaks while the threat still exists?

Mr McGimpsey: I am conscious that I do not want to stray into the responsibilities of my Colleague, Ms Rodgers. The Executive and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development have driven awareness forward, emphasising the importance of fortress farming and stressing that this is not simply a matter that affects farmers. It affects everyone. We should ensure that complacency is not creeping in. That is why we took measures in relation to the public angling estate. We closed it initially, but there has now been a limited

re-opening. We are constantly keeping those areas under review. The interdepartmental group has met on 15 occasions, and a number of special Executive Committee meetings have also been held to monitor the situation and to reinforce the fact that we are all involved in fortress farming. The important thing to do is to eradicate the disease.

Northern Ireland Football Teams Supporters Clubs

8. **Mr Hussey** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to make representation to the Irish Football Association (IFA) to establish an official co-ordinated network of Northern Ireland football team supporters clubs. (AQO 1314/00)

Mr McGimpsey: The IFA already recognises the need to have an official, co-ordinated approach to Northern Ireland football team supporters. The IFA regards the amalgamation of official Northern Ireland supporters clubs as the potential umbrella for genuine national team supporters clubs. The IFA and the amalgamation of official Northern Ireland supporters clubs are continuing to work in partnership to affiliate clubs that are not currently represented by this group.

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

3.30 pm

Mr Hussey: I welcome the Minister's response. I am sure he agrees that such a move, when it comes to fruition, will greatly help to curtail the problems that the IFA has had, on occasion, at international matches. In conclusion and to avail myself of the same leeway as that allowed to Mr Shannon, I invite the Minister, if he wishes, to attend the Irish Junior Cup Final between Dergview and Irvinestown, to be played in Ballinamallard.

Mr McGimpsey: I thank Mr Hussey for his invitation to the Junior Cup Final in Ballinamallard. I am not aware if I have an official invitation yet, but I look forward to receiving one. If the diary is free, I will certainly look forward to seeing him there.

The amalgamation of the Northern Ireland football supporters' clubs will give a very important focus for supporters of the Northern Ireland team. It will ensure that constantly and continually we have growing and thriving support as well as a welcoming, family-friendly atmosphere at internationals at home and abroad.

Rivers

9. **Mr Poots** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline his Department's role in ensuring rivers are free from debris. (AQO 1334/00)

Mr McGimpsey: My Department's statutory responsibilities are essentially limited to a duty of care on its

properties — we must take reasonable measures to prevent danger to the public or damage to property. For inland waterways this applies to those sections of the abandoned Lagan navigation, Coalisland canal and Upper Bann navigation, which remain in Government ownership.

Specifically, in relation to the Lagan towpath between Belfast and Lisburn, which is owned and maintained by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, my Department makes an annual financial contribution to Lagan Valley Regional Park costs for wardens to provide a litter clearance service. In general, my Department takes every available opportunity to liaise with other statutory authorities to encourage debris-free rivers, particularly where angling tourism is involved.

Mr Poots: Does the Minister accept that rivers full of polythene bags and other household debris are not acceptable to either tourists or anglers? Will he endeavour, along with the other statutory agencies, to ensure that mechanisms are put in place so that rivers are cleaned on a regular basis, not on a very occasional basis?

Mr McGimpsey: Initially, I must point out that responsibility for removing debris from watercourses lies with the landowner concerned. The Department is involved only where it is the landowner — for example, through the Lagan Valley Regional Park, on the towpath alone. The Rivers Agency has powers to remove debris from designated watercourses, but not for visual reasons — only for flow streams. It is primarily for the Environment and Heritage Service of the Department of the Environment to take action against river pollution. One must always look to the landowner. He is responsible for the river that runs through his land. He is responsible for the removal of debris.

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before I call Mr Fee, I advise Members that question 3 has been withdrawn

Foot-and-Mouth Disease (Newry and Mourne Area)

1. **Mr Fee** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what assessment she has made of the impact of foot-and-mouth disease on rural communities, particularly in Newry and Mourne, and to make a statement. (AQO 1359/00)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers): My officials began making assessments of the possible impact of foot-and-mouth disease on the agrifood sector in Northern Ireland in the wake of the discovery of the first case in England, based on a range of scenarios — from a few confirmed cases in Northern

Ireland to a much more widespread outbreak. If the disease is contained at its current level of four confirmed cases, and exports can resume relatively quickly, the Northern Ireland agrifood industry overall is not likely to incur significant damage and could even gain slightly by being able to sell in markets closed to the rest of the UK. However, some individual farmers and other businesses will be adversely affected, even in this optimistic scenario.

If the disease were to escalate here, the impact could be extremely serious with an estimated cost to the agrifood sector from a prolonged and widespread outbreak potentially rising to over £120 million over a 12-month period. Until the most recent cases in Counties Tyrone and Antrim, our assessment that the impact of the disease on the community in Newry and Mourne was marginally greater than in the rest of Northern Ireland, with restrictions on livestock movement and a ban on meat and dairy exports lasting approximately three weeks longer than elsewhere. Unfortunately, the most recent cases mean that the whole of Northern Ireland is now on the same footing as Newry and Mourne.

Mr Fee: The Minister has been to the forefront of efforts to combat the crisis every day for months. However, I ask her to consider again the arrangements that are in place, particularly in areas such as Newry and Mourne, which have been under restriction for the longest time. Will the Minister formalise a welfare slaughter scheme? Does she recognise that the requirement to pay the costs of private veterinary practitioners is causing hurt, pain and anger? Because of the restrictions, some farmers have livestock that they simply cannot sell and from which they can make no income. In south Armagh, one livestock sale has lost a turnover of £2 million compared to the same period last year. What will the Minister do about such cases?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Mr Fee of the ruling that the Speaker made this morning. Members may ask several questions, but the Minister may choose to answer only one.

Ms Rodgers: I thank the Member for his opening remarks. I shall deal with the question about welfare, which is a pressing issue. As the Member is aware, we have already run a scheme for pigs for those caught up in one of the movement restrictions associated with the outbreak in south Armagh. Evidence of the need for another one is emerging. However, I must be satisfied that such a scheme is justified on animal welfare grounds, as opposed to purely commercial grounds. I will run a scheme if it is justified. I am considering the issue, and I know that there is concern about it.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has reduced the amounts that are paid. Pigs now attract a maximum of £50 per animal in welfare culls, and £30 per sow. Those prices are considerably less than the original prices. The reasons behind those reductions will

also apply in Northern Ireland. In extreme welfare situations, a scheme may be necessary, but I need to assess whether it would be used for welfare or commercial reasons. I will come to a decision shortly.

Mr Armstrong: When will the Minister be able to announce that farm-to-farm sales may recommence, as we have had no more cases of foot-and-mouth disease? I understand that there must be a period of 30 days following the last case before there can be any relaxation.

We all appreciate the fact that farmers can move cattle and pigs to abattoirs. However, it is not possible to move weaned calves to pasture for welfare reasons. I am sure that the Minister knows that there is no movement of cull sows. I welcome the movement of over-30-months cattle to Glenavy. When might such movements take place?

Ms Rodgers: I shall deal with the question on farm-to-farm sales. It is a major issue, and it has been raised with me by public representatives and by individuals. The Member will be aware that I must balance finely the need to be careful that we do not spread the disease — the virus is still present among the sheep flock — with the need to alleviate the plight of farmers. I recognise that some farmers are in a difficult situation because the markets are closed, and there are no farm-to-farm sales either.

I am keeping the situation under review. Every day that I come into the Department, I ask for an update on the situation, including advice from the vets on whether further movements are possible. However, whatever I do, my priority is not to risk a further outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease. Therefore I am aware of it; I am sympathetic to it, and I will keep it under review.

Mr M Murphy: Will the Minister tell the House when the markets are likely to be reopened? Farmers need a proper pricing of their stock.

Ms Rodgers: The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development closed the markets originally. They are now being closed under an EU Directive. I am not in a position to give a date for reopening, because this is a matter for the European Commission. I know that it is a problem. Apart from the problem that mart closures create for farmers, it also creates a huge problem for the marts themselves in that they may be put out of business.

I suspect that there will be other easements before the reopening of marts takes place, because that will mean that cattle, sheep and other animals will be mixing together. I have to say — off the top of my head and without veterinary advice on the matter — that reopening will be well down the line.

Decommissioning Scheme for Fishermen

2. **Mr McGrady** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline when she will make

an announcement on a decommissioning scheme for fishermen and to make a statement.

(AQO 1328/00)

Ms Rodgers: The pursuit of a fishing vessel decommissioning scheme is a high priority, and work is continuing on its development. When I met with the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee recently, we discussed a draft scheme based on a tendering system by vessel owners for the disposal of their fishing vessels. The eligibility requirements would include that the vessel must be at least 12 m long; it must have fished at least 75 days in each of the preceeding two years, and it must be at least 10 years old. Bids would be ranked according to vessel capacity units multiplied by the number of days at sea.

Based on the bids received, the Department would set separate strike prices for vessels considered to be mainly targeting white fish and nephrops. Successful applicants would receive a grant based on the strike price when their vessel was decommissioned.

The Agriculture and Rural Development Committee has made some comments, which I wish to consider. Nevertheless, I intend to announce a scheme as soon as I obtain legal clearance.

Mr McGrady: I thank the Minister for her reply, and I hope that the decommissioning scheme — a conservation measure — is implemented as quickly as possible. Against the backcloth of the terrible problem suffered by the farming community, the other conservation measure adopted by the common fisheries policy has gone unnoticed. Today is the last day of the six weeks of inactivity that the white fish fleet in Northern Ireland has suffered. Will the Minister consider the parallel situation between compensating farmers and other businesses in respect of Government-imposed restrictions and applying the same principle of effective Government — in the light of EU-imposed restrictions — to the white fish fleet industry, which has not been able to leave port for the past six weeks and has had no income?

Ms Rodgers: The positions are not comparable. Some fishing has taken place outside the restricted areas; the boats have not been tied up. The situation is not the same, because fishermen hunt a wild quarry and can continue to do so even though they are restricted — until tomorrow, as the Member rightly says — from fishing for cod in certain areas of the Irish Sea and the North Channel.

Farmers whose livestock has been compulsorily slaughtered are compensated for the capital value of their animals and not for the consequential loss. As Members will be aware, I am finalising a decommissioning scheme for fishing vessels that will compensate fishermen for their assets in the form of fishing vessels and associated licences. However, I have no plans to offer consequential compensation to the fishing industry.

In other words, a farmer who loses all his cattle has been deprived of the means of an income. Compensation is payable, because the Department has put him out of business for the time being. If a fishing vessel is decommissioned and the fisherman is put out of business, he would be compensated for that. However, as in the case of farmers, the fisherman would not be paid for consequential loss.

Mr Shannon: Can the Minister give any indication of the number of fishermen who wish to take up the decommissioning scheme? Will the Minister pursue the repayment of grants given for boats in the past from those who are decommissioning? Will the Minister agree that it is very important that only a certain element of decommissioning should take place so that the core part of the industry and its business can be retained?

3.45 pm

Ms Rodgers: It is impossible to say how many fishermen will apply until the decommissioning scheme is up and running. I can tell you that £5 million has been allocated for it, but I will have to wait until we get bids.

The acoustics on that side of the Chamber are very bad. I could not hear the second part of the question.

Mr Shannon: The second part of the question was about grants. I understand that those who qualify for decommissioning have to pay back part of the grant that they received for their boats over the years. I am quite concerned about that, and I would like some clarification on the matter. Does the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development intend to ask for all that money, or part of it, to be paid back when the boat is decommissioned? It may leave those who have decommissioned with very little money.

Ms Rodgers: I do not have any discretion with regard to paying back grants. Those are the regulations. One grant was paid to maintain a fishing vessel or to keep a fisherman in business, and the other will be paid to allow him to go out of business. It is not possible to give him the grant to decommission his vessel and at the same time to allow him to retain a grant intended to keep him in business.

Loughs Agency

4. **Mr Maskey** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline what work her Department is engaged in with the Government in the Republic of Ireland to ensure the Loughs Agency meets the objectives set for it by the North/South Ministerial Council.

(AQO 1360/00)

Ms Rodgers: The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development regularly engages with its co-sponsoring Department in the South, the Department of the Marine and Natural Resources, on matters relating to the Foyle,

Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission. The Departments are currently bringing forward parallel legislation to extend the functions of the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission in line with the North/South Co-operation (Implementation Bodies) (Northern Ireland) Order 1999. This legislation will provide the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission with powers to licence and to develop aquaculture in the Foyle and Carlingford areas.

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development also works closely with the Department of the Marine and Natural Resources on various operational matters relating to the Loughs Agency of the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission. The Departments ensure that the agency has sufficient funding and staff to enable it to carry out its functions effectively. My Department also engages with its co-sponsoring Department in the South on various Loughs Agency policy matters. I refer the Member to my earlier statement on the North/South Ministerial Council meeting on the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission which took place in Dublin on 6 April 2001.

Mr Maskey: I would like to have a clearer understanding of when the enabling legislation will be laid. In the light of the statement this morning it seems that many issues are outstanding. When will the enabling legislation be in place?

Ms Rodgers: I am very anxious to proceed with the legislation as soon as possible. There are some outstanding issues which my officials and the Dublin officials are attempting to resolve. Northern Ireland needs an appeals procedure to match that in the South. At present our appeals procedure allows an appeal from the aggrieved person who has been refused a licence. It does not allow an appeal from a third party who objected to the licence and whose objection was then rejected. We are looking at that part of the legislation and trying to resolve that. If you were to take a judicial review, complications would also arise due to the fact that the two different jurisdictions are involved in a North/South body. The answer to the Member's question is that I am anxious to proceed as soon as possible and will do so as soon as these issues are resolved.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease (Farmers' Losses)

5. Mr Ford asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline her policy on compensation for losses sustained by farmers and rural businesses as a result of foot-and-mouth disease. (AQO 1322/00)

Ms Rodgers: Compensation is paid to owners of animals that have been affected by the disease, have been in contact with affected animals or have been exposed to the infection. It can also be paid for a limited range of materials — such as carcasses, fodder or feeding stock — that have been directly implicated as a disease risk. At the request of the Executive, the Office of the

First Minister and the Deputy First Minister has set up an interdepartmental group to examine the economic impact of the foot-and-mouth crisis in Northern Ireland. This group, which will report to the Executive, is considering what practical measures might be feasible and appropriate to support those sectors affected by the foot-and-mouth outbreak, taking account of local circumstances.

Mr Ford: I thank the Minister for her response and her ongoing work in dealing with foot-and-mouth disease, but I specifically ask her to look in greater detail at the issue of consequential loss. Take, for example, the case of livestock marts. They are not closed because they have no customers but because of an edict issued by the Minister herself and subsequently backed by Brussels. Farm businesses, which have been encouraged to diversify by the Minister's Department, are further examples. Their suffering is, in some senses, even worse than that of traditional farms on their own. If it is possible for the Scottish and Welsh Executives to take some action on consequential compensation, is it not also possible for it to happen here?

Ms Rodgers: I am aware — as, I am sure, are the Members — that consequential loss is a very difficult issue. Pinpointing the assistance necessary for the different sectors and areas is extremely difficult. GB and the Republic of Ireland are likewise facing a tough time in defining where any support might be given.

There is a hierarchy of need that has to be addressed. There are businesses, such as the marts, which have been totally closed down. There are businesses that have not been closed down but that have suffered greatly with a substantial loss of income. There are resource implications in any decision, and it would be a matter for the Department of Finance and Personnel to make an assessment and come to a view on what would be possible. That is why the Executive are looking at the issue of consequential loss.

I am very much aware of the issues raised by Mr Ford, particularly in the area of rural development, where people have been getting businesses off the ground. It is an extremely difficult area to deal with, and I can only say that the Executive are looking at several options. I will not go through them all now, but we have considered areas such as rates, small firm loan guarantees and revenue. I am sure that those were covered earlier by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.

Mr Gibson: My question fits somewhere into the "hierarchy of need" that the Minister mentioned. Does the Minister have any plans to give financial aid to farmers whose breeding stock has had to be slaughtered as a result of the ban on movement and sales?

Ms Rodgers: That question comes into the area of consequential loss. I recognise that this is an extremely difficult situation for farmers whose breeding stock has been slaughtered. My departmental advisers have been in touch

with all the farmers whose stock has been culled and are advising them on how the situation should be tackled. In relation to consequential compensation, however, I am afraid that my answer has to remain the same as before, except to say that advice will be available to farmers on finance and on how to get their businesses up and going again.

Mr McHugh: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. In relation to consequential loss, farmers have so far taken severe losses, and they are now expected to pay vets for visits so that their livestock can be moved from their premises for grazing. I am unsure whether that is being paid for in Britain or whether farmers here are being asked to pay for that separately. It is a consequential cost, so I ask the Minister whether that can be taken into account and farmers given compensation for that loss.

Ms Rodgers: I am aware that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) has decided to shoulder some of the burden of the veterinary certification costs involved in issuing movement licences. This is not happening in relation to all licences, but I am seeking clarification on that matter. I will look urgently at providing a similar facility in Northern Ireland, but that has public expenditure implications, and I need to be sure that it is justified and affordable. This will take time, and in the meantime, farmers are responsible for paying for any veterinary certification that they require.

This is a difficult situation, not just for the farming community, but for many other sectors. There is a price tag and, unfortunately, we do not have a bottomless pit of money. I sympathise and understand that the situation is difficult for farmers. Allowing some movement was an easement for the farmers, but now I have the problem of paying for the licences.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease (Rate Relief for Businesses)

6. **Mr Close** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail discussions she has had with the Minister of Finance and Personnel regarding rate relief for businesses that have suffered consequential losses as a result of foot-and-mouth disease. (AQO 1321/00)

Ms Rodgers: I have raised the issue of rate relief with the Minister of Finance and Personnel. I understand that any changes to the existing rating system would require primary legislation, and that would take some time to achieve.

Mr Close: I thank the Minister for that brief reply. I understand that a rate deferment scheme has been considered and discussed by the interdepartmental co-ordinating group. Can the Minister give more information to the House on that? In talking about consequential loss and the width to which it extends, even into the industrial sector, does she accept the broad principle that there is a need for a hardship package for Northern Ireland and that it should be paid for from the contingency fund?

Ms Rodgers: The response to the Member's question is a matter for the Minister of Finance and Personnel, not for myself. I agree with what has been said about the hardship being suffered and about the contingency fund. We will be making a very strong case for the contingency fund to be used. At a meeting some time ago in Downing Street with the Prime Minister I flagged up the point that it will be very difficult for the Northern Ireland block to cope with all of the expenditure that is arising. I am sure that the Minister of Finance and Personnel, the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister will also be making a strong case on our behalf for the contingency fund to be used.

Mr Poots: The Minister said earlier that the European Union had banned the livestock marts from carrying out their business. Has the Minister contacted the European Union to ask it to support consequential compensation for the livestock marts?

Ms Rodgers: I have not been in touch with the European Union on that specific issue. I hope that the European Union will be making a contribution towards some of our expenditure. However, in relation to contacting the European Commission, the Member will be aware that, as Northern Ireland is not a member state, any contact would be a national matter and would be dealt with by the UK Minister.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease (“Fortress Island” Approach)

7. **Ms Gildernew** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail what action can be taken to develop a “fortress island” approach to preventing the spread of foot-and-mouth disease from Great Britain or elsewhere in future. (AQO 1341/00)

Ms Rodgers: I recognise that tackling foot-and-mouth disease is an all-island issue, and that is why I have had frequent discussions with Joe Walsh, both through the North/South Ministerial Council and bilaterally. There is also constant liaison at official level. Any attempt to develop such an approach must obviously focus on the points of entry from GB, where the disease is rampant.

We have controls in place at all ports and airports, and these arrangements are kept under constant review. We have vehicle disinfectant facilities at all ports, and these have been upgraded by installing mechanical facilities to increase the efficiency of the operations. We also have facilities available at all ports and airports for misting people with disinfectant. People have been advised of the existence of those facilities and their availability for use on a voluntary basis.

4.00 pm.

I restate my strongly held view that the front line of defence lies with the farmers themselves. We can do whatever is possible at Government level, but each

farmer in Northern Ireland has a personal responsibility to act to protect his or her own farm and thereby contribute to the overall objective of beating the disease.

Ms Gildernew: I thank the Minister for her answer. Given the nature of this disease, the fact that it can be carried by birds and wildlife and that our rivers and lakes cross the border, could more be done by looking at an all-Ireland policy on animal health? Should more work have been done with Joe Walsh, and should the Minister not have taken more advice from officials in Dublin rather than those in London?

Ms Rodgers: I assure Ms Gildernew that I do not take advice from London or Dublin. I take advice from my officials in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. On the issue of an animal health strategy, I inform Ms Gildernew that as early as November of last year, at a North/South Ministerial Council with Joe Walsh, we decided to begin the process of bringing forward a joint animal health strategy for the island of Ireland. Our officials have been working on that fortuitously, because the foot-and-mouth crisis has shown that this is an all-Ireland issue, as the Member pointed out. Bugs and viruses do not recognise borders, and streams and mountains cross the border. The fact that we recognised that some months before we were faced with this problem indicates that we were thinking along the right lines even before the crisis erupted.

Mr Savage: There is a matter of concern. Prior to the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease a number of farmers were wiped out by brucellosis in their livestock. There seems to be disparity between the amount of money that they got in compensation for their cattle and the compensation being paid to farmers whose animals have been slaughtered because of foot-and-mouth disease. This is a very big problem. When both sets of farmers are allowed to restock, they will all be competing, but not on a level playing field, given the differences in compensation.

Ms Rodgers: The compensation for brucellosis and for foot-and-mouth disease has always been the same. That is the market value, as assessed by our valuers, and a farmer who is not happy with the valuation that is offered has a right to independent valuation. That has always been the position. Many farmers have gone for independent valuation, and I am aware of one case, at least, in which the independent valuation was lower than ours.

ASSEMBLY COMMISSION

Assembly Use of Fair Trade Goods

1. **Mr Ford** asked the Assembly Commission what plans there are for increasing the range of fair trade goods used in the Assembly. (AQO 1325/00)

Mr Wells: The Assembly Commission and the Catering and Functions Committee have been actively exploring ways of promoting fair trade goods in the Assembly. We have been working closely with War on Want, which is the leading fair trade campaigner in Northern Ireland. The Commission has also recently re-let the catering contract that commits Mount Charles to purchase fair trade goods where possible. Mount Charles has already been successful in sourcing fair trade sugar and coffee and will, it is to be hoped, be able to purchase fair trade tea in the near future.

Members may be aware that a very successful photocall was held in the Great Hall to promote the fair trade campaign. It involved members of the Commission, the Catering and Functions Committee, representatives from War on Want, Mount Charles and the Tear Fund group from Queen's University.

War on Want has been invited to provide an exhibition in Parliament Buildings, commencing today, to promote the fair trade principles among Members and staff. It is being held at the east staircase on the first floor and will provide Members with an opportunity to view the range of products available and learn more about the fair trade concept.

Mr Ford: I applaud the actions of the Commission and Mount Charles in promoting fair trade so far. Mr Wells referred to the exhibition, which I trust Members will visit during the course of its time here.

As fair trade is clearly the policy of the Assembly Commission, is it right that such an exhibition should be tucked away in a rarely-visited corner of the building? Would it not be better if, tomorrow, it were relocated either in the Great Hall or in the canteen, where it would be seen by more people, and help spread the message that the Commission believes in?

Mr Wells: The Member is absolutely correct — the Commission, as individuals, and as a body, are committed to the principles of fair trade. At its meeting on 23 October 2000 the Assembly Commission agreed that the first floor area of the east staircase could be used for exhibitions lasting up to two weeks. The designated areas provide sufficient space for a variety of different types of exhibitions without compromising the efficient functioning of the building.

Mr Ford will be aware that there are many demands on space in the building. The Commission has decided that this is the best area for exhibitions. Other events and have taken place there, and organisations have had very successful exhibitions.

Assembly (Recruitment of Staff)

2. **Mr C Murphy** asked the Assembly Commission to detail what methodology has been put in place for

weighing up Civil Service experience and non-Civil Service experience (for example academic, research, policy, political activity) to ensure equality in the recruitment of staff to the Assembly Secretariat. (AQO 1344/00)

Mr Wells: The Assembly Commission — in taking forward what is a very substantial recruitment programme — has adopted the principle of selection on merit on the basis of fair and open competition. That principle is being applied to all Assembly recruitment competitions, and adherence to the principle maintains the integrity of the Assembly and cultivates an environment where applicants for Assembly posts will be confident that they will be treated fairly and equally.

All job requirements for Assembly posts are set and clearly defined by the selection panel before jobs are advertised. Application forms are designed to seek only information relevant to the assessment of candidates against the criteria specified for the job.

In determining the job requirements of each post to be advertised, the assessment panel does not — and I repeat — does not consider how potential applicants have gained the requirements being sought. Only those applicants who fully meet the stipulated job requirements are deemed eligible for participation in the recruitment competition.

I assure the Member that the requirements stipulated for all publicly advertised Assembly posts, be they academic qualifications, periods of relevant experience, or both, are entirely job-related and considered essential for the job.

All members of the selection panel — including members of the Assembly Commission, who, on a number of occasions, have been on selection panels themselves — have received criteria-based interviewing and equal opportunities training. Selection panels comprise male and female representatives from more than one community background.

Mr C Murphy: My remarks are not in any way intended to be a slight on Civil Service or current Assembly staff. However, does the Assembly Commission agree that, in order to deliver the new beginning that the Belfast Agreement heralds, it should encourage applicants from as wide a range of people as possible to ensure that it is not just people with a Civil Service background who are working in this Building?

To have a broad approach and to enhance the new beginning that we are trying to create, it would benefit the Assembly staff and the Secretariat if we could draw people from as wide a variety of backgrounds as possible. Recruitment and interviewing measures should not, therefore, be seen as skewed to those who have a Civil Service background.

Mr Wells: That is exactly what the Commission has achieved. Over half of the 98 staff appointed have been non-civil servants. Only 46 have been civil servants.

Fifty-one per cent of applicants were Protestants, 43% were Catholics; 51% were female, and 49% were male. Those figures are very representative of the travel-to-work area for the Building, and I am confident that the Assembly Commission has carried out its duties and selection in a very fair and even-handed manner.

Assembly (Recruitment of Staff): Proportion of Civil Servants

3. **Ms Gildernew** asked the Assembly Commission to detail (a) the number of civil servants who have been successful in external competition for appointment to the Assembly Secretariat and (b) what proportion of all recruitment to the Assembly Secretariat has come from the Civil Service. (AQO 1362/00)

Mr Wells: Forty-six civil servants have been successful in obtaining appointments to the Assembly secretariat following external competition. To date, 47% of those recruited to the Assembly through external competition have been civil servants.

Ms Gildernew: In the light of the previous question from my Colleague, Mr Conor Murphy, I would like an assurance that openness and accountability are the key themes in recruitment. Are those people who are seconded from other parts of the Civil Service treated with parity when employed in the Assembly secretariat?

Mr Wells: I can give an assurance that the Assembly Commission has been entirely fair in all its dealings in the appointment of staff. All our positions are advertised in the three local newspapers, the 'Irish News', the 'News Letter' and the 'Belfast Telegraph'. When the Commission deems it to be necessary, we also advertise in papers that circulate in the rest of the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic. We are confident, having analysed statistics on those who are applying, that we are attracting applications from the widest possible section of society.

We have also been successful in attracting 53% of applicants from outside the Civil Service. That percentage includes people who have worked for district councils, the Housing Executive and other statutory agencies. I can give a personal assurance, as well as an assurance on behalf of the Commission, that we have been scrupulously fair in our implementation of the fair employment guidelines in all recruitment activities since the Assembly was founded.

Mr Beggs: There is a lot of benefit to be had from bringing in skills from areas outside the Civil Service, such as the public sector and other local government agencies. However, does the Commission agree that if it excludes civil servants with relevant experience, it will be in breach of equality legislation?

Mr Wells: That is a fundamental point. If we said that we would not accept applications from civil servants,

we would be in contravention of all of the relevant legislation. Obviously, civil servants are attracted to posts in the Assembly, because they can seek secondment from their Northern Ireland Civil Service Departments and return if they wish. That is clearly one of the reasons why so many civil servants have applied. However, having applied, they are treated in exactly the same way as any other applicants. The figures show that, despite the attraction of secondment, over half of the — very good — staff that we have appointed have come from outside the Civil Service. If the view that there is a bias in favour of civil servants is inherent in this question, the statistics show that that is not the case.

Mr Deputy Speaker: There are no further questions to the Assembly Commission.

CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER BILL

First Stage

Mr Beggs: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Do you consider it in order for a private Member's Bill calling for a children's commissioner to be discussed while the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister and the Committee of the Centre are carrying out consultation processes on the appointment of a children's commissioner? Will you refer the matter to the Business Committee and the Committee on Procedures for investigation?

Mr Deputy Speaker: That is a matter for the Business Committee to decide, and I will ask it to discuss that at the meeting tomorrow.

4.15 pm

Ms Morrice: I beg leave to lay before the Assembly a Bill [NIA 14/00] to provide for the establishment of a children's commissioner to promote the rights and interests of children in Northern Ireland; to make provision for the powers and duties of the commissioner; and for related purposes.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Bill will be put on the list of pending business until a date for its Second Stage has been determined.

(Mr Deputy Speaker [Sir John Gorman] in the Chair)

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn — *[Mr Deputy Speaker]*

CONSERVATION ON THE BLACK MOUNTAIN

Mr Adams: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh an seans labhairt ar cheist phráinneach chaomhnú an tSléibhe Dhuibh in iarthar Bhéal Feirste. Tá súil agam go n-inseoidh an tAire dúinn i ndiaidh na díospóireachta seo go bhfuil rún aige deireadh a chur le cairéalacht cloch ansin. Tá an Sliabh Dubh agus cnoic Bhéal Feirste an-tábhachtach do mhuintir Bhéal Feirste.

Tá Béal Feirste suite idir abhantrach an Lagáin ar thaobh amháin agus cnoic Ard Mhic Neasca ar an taobh eile. Tá cnoic Bhéal Feirste ina slabhra ó chnoc Colin go cnoc Carnmoney, agus tá an Sliabh Dubh ina nasc thábhachtach sa slabhra sin.

Bheirim cuireadh anois don Aire siúil liom ar an Sliabh Dubh go bhfeiceann sé dó féin na gáibéil agus na beanna a dhéanann suas an cairéal.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss the urgent need to conserve the Black Mountain. It is essential that the Assembly support the preservation of the Black Mountain and the Belfast hills. I invite the Minister of the Environment, Mr Foster, to visit the Black Mountain with me to see, at first hand, the gaping chasm and sheer cliffs that make up the quarry, and to understand why it is vital that his Department takes the necessary steps to end quarrying. I intend, in due course, to invite the Environment Committee to examine the important issue. I hope that today's discussion will be informative and signal a beginning of the end for quarrying on the Black Mountain and real moves towards preserving the Belfast hills.

The Black Mountain and the Belfast hills are central to the identity of Belfast. In common with many Irish cities, Belfast is changing. With that change it is losing its uniqueness. New developments which are central to regeneration are replacing older landmarks; Belfast risks losing its character. What remains unique to the city is its magnificent setting — a city rising up from the Lagan basin, and framed by the Belfast and Holywood hills. The Belfast hills form a chain stretching from Colin Mountain to Carnmoney Hill, and the Black Mountain is a vital link in that chain. These hills have watched Belfast grow. They have acted as a meeting place for the United Irishmen; the British Army occupied them; they have witnessed all our history. They have acted as a playground for generations, and they should be the common property of all our people.

The hills are a legacy that we have inherited, and it is our responsibility to conserve them for our children. That was recognised by the Planning Service as long ago as 1945 when, in planning proposals for the Belfast area, it recommended the preservation of the hills. Similar aspirations have been voiced in every subsequent Belfast planning document. However, the aspirations of the documents have never been fully realised. Developments are encroaching on to the hills, and significant quarrying is encouraged on the Black Mountain. Therefore, there is a need to implement legislation to end the quarrying and to save the hills.

Sinn Féin and I both welcome the establishment of the Belfast Hills Trust. We have called consistently for the setting up of a regional park across all the Belfast hills. Such a park, based on legislation, and fully funded, would be the best way of securing the long-term future of our hills.

Every year 500,000 tonnes of stone are removed from the Black Mountain. Two thousand five hundred tonnes are removed every day. Last year, the Minister stated that there was at least 20 years' worth of stone extraction left on the mountain. This projection comes after 12 years of quarrying. By the end of the timescale allowed in the planning permission, in 32 years at least 16 million tonnes will have been extracted.

Fuair muid na cnoic seo mar oidhreacht nádúrtha an dúchais, agus tá freagracht orainn anois iad a chaomhnú dár gcuid páistí.

I wonder, as do many other people who live close to the mountain, if there will be a mountain there at all in twenty years' time. I ask the Minister if this would be allowed to happen to any other landmark in any other constituency. Would the Minister allow the full-scale draining of the Fermanagh loughs, the destruction of the Giant's Causeway or the demolition of Navan Fort?

As well as the destruction of the mountain, local communities have to endure 25 large trucks making return journeys every day to and from the quarry. That is 50 journeys through a community with the highest level of road traffic accidents in the Six Counties. There are also reports of increased pollution, with dust blowing off the quarry into neighbouring communities.

To add insult to this the construction industry itself, which is the market for quarried stone, can use recycled aggregate. The industry is not dependent on stone quarry from the Black Mountain. While all this goes on, Belfast is losing a vital piece of our environmental heritage and gaining increased pollution and heavy traffic, borne, in the main, by the people of west Belfast.

The small number of jobs created on the site is not sustainable. Some day the stone will be gone, and with it the jobs. However, the number of jobs lost could be matched and added to by way of restoration work,

conservation, education and tourism on the mountain. A single project by the community of the upper Springfield could create 45 jobs on the site immediately.

In March of this year, the Minister informed my office that the Department is taking no steps to end quarrying on the Black Mountain. This approach is short-sighted and wrong and undermines the current consultation on the Belfast metropolitan area plan. I am concerned that this plan will join the growing list of planning documents that have failed to safeguard the Black Mountain and the Belfast hills.

Ba chóir don Aire a bheartú ar cé acu ba mhaith leis bheith freagrach as an Sliabh Dubh a shábháil nó bheith ina fhear ar scrios a neamart é.

We need to move conservation from aspiration to action. We need the Department to implement legislation to conserve the Belfast hills. We need an immediate end to the quarrying, and we need to begin work to redress the damage done. Of course, there will be a cost for all this. However, the cost is justified, as it will save a valued asset for future generations.

The Minister and the Department have the ability to devise measures to safeguard the Black Mountain and the Belfast hills. As I said in Irish, he needs to decide if he will be remembered as the man who saved the Black Mountain or as someone who made a mountain into a molehill.

I urge the Minister to direct his Department to investigate ways to end the quarrying and to send a signal out today that he will act as a guardian of the environment.

In closing, let me bring you back to Navan Fort. In 1986, it too was threatened by quarrying. The then British Minister, Richard Needham, moved to save the site by invoking article 22 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1972, to overrule public inquiry commission findings concerning an application to extend quarrying at that site.

Ba mhaith liom an tAire ordú a thabhairt dá Roinn dóigh a fhiosrú le deireadh a chur leis an chairéalacht agus a chruthú go ndéanfaidh sé beart mar choimirceoir na timpeallachta.

As I am sure the Minister is a fair man, I ask him to come with me to the site to see for himself the damage that is being done. I ask him to use his power to save the Black Mountain and the Belfast hills, on behalf of the people of Belfast and this island. Go raibh míle maith agaih.

Dr Adamson: Go raibh maith agat, a Leas Cheann Comhairle. Sadly, in our time, the Black Mountain area has come to be considered as perhaps the last resting place of several of the disappeared. The Black Mountain and the Belfast hills were anciently the borderline between the Dálaradia people and the ancient British Cruthin kingdom of Dálaradia. The historical and cultural legacy

of Dálaradia, a legacy that belongs in equal measure to both our communities — for in essence they are the same community — was very much the product of a close interrelationship between all the peoples of the British Isles, using the term “British” in its most ancient form and sense.

Such an interrelationship is particularly evident in Dál Riada’s rich literary output, a fact also noted by Seamus Heaney in the introduction to his translation of ‘Buile Suibhne’, when he said

“It is possible ... 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.”

Despite the exclusiveness with which many of our community have defensively surrounded their respective traditions of Britishness and Irishness, I take great encouragement from the efforts being made at the grassroots to explore the commonality of our historical and cultural heritage.

In particular I note the work undertaken by the Farset Youth and Community Project, which lies beneath the Black Mountain in the Upper Springfield Road area, and with which I have had a long association. Farset continues to involve young people from both sides of the divide in an exploration of their shared inheritance — the sacrifice at the Battle of the Somme, the story of the Titanic, the idealism of United Irishman, Jemmy Hope, the European dimension bequeathed to us by Columbanus, the preservation of Ulster Gaelic and Ulster Scots and many other equally significant facets.

Farset is appropriately sited on the Upper Springfield Road to explore this inheritance, not simply because the citizens of Belfast are the predominant inheritors of ancient Dálaradia and the Black Mountain interface, but because its location provides ample evidence of the continuity to which I have referred.

Within the project’s catchment area flows the River Farset from which the project, and Belfast, takes its name. Close to the river once stood an old church, mentioned in a document of 1306 as the “Ecclesia Alba”, or White Church. The place name for this old church, An tSeanchill, was first documented in the seventeenth century and has been anglicised as Shankill. The old church has long since gone, but as Richard S J Clarke has noted

“Its graveyard continued to be used for burial for succeeding generations, maintaining a tradition established perhaps a thousand years earlier.”

When Alderman Hugh Smyth was Mayor of Belfast, I had the great privilege of accompanying him to the National Museum in Dublin to see three fragments from a ninth-century crozier found in the graveyard. These are perhaps the oldest fragments of a crozier ever found in the vicinity of the north of Ireland. Along with a bullaun stone also found in the graveyard and now mounted near to the door of the adjoining St Matthew’s

Church, we have evidence of pre-Norman ecclesiastical activity in Belfast.

Equally significant, the medieval parish of Shankill not only embraced the Falls as one of its native divisions but was also directly linked to the monastery at Bangor. A church document of 1615 lists the chapel of Cromoge, located within the parish of Shankill, as one of the six altarges or parochial chapels, belonging to the monastery of Bangor, where oblations might be presented and dues paid.

Tragically for all of us, to many people the words “Shankill” and “Falls” are now synonymous with a deep-rooted communal division, which some claim is unbridgeable. Just as both districts were once embraced in one parish, it is my earnest hope that a proper evaluation of our historical and cultural inheritance will reveal the full extent to which that inheritance has also been a shared one.

4.30 pm

I am sad to report that the Farset International Hostel, formulated by Mr Jackie Hewitt of Farset, does not seem to be going ahead. That is a great loss, not only to the people of west Belfast but to the whole of Belfast and Northern Ireland. Something like that would have been a great adjunct to the development of the Black Mountain and the Belfast hills. I agree that this is an extremely important area.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Dr Adamson. I was afraid that you were straying a little bit, especially when you got to my constituency in Bangor, but I see the connection.

Mr Attwood: Both Mr Gerry Adams and Dr Ian Adamson have powerfully outlined the cultural, environmental and wider appeal and relevance of the Black Mountain to the citizens of Belfast and beyond. People, when they come to Belfast, often comment on the Belfast hills — Castlereagh, Cavehill and the Black Mountain. Given the natural asset that we enjoy, there is no more compelling environmental argument than to try to save the Black Mountain from further ravages. Both Ian Adamson and Gerry Adams would agree that, while we may articulate a view on the Floor of the Chamber today, it is the Aidan Creans, the Terry Enrightes, the Tim Duffys and the late Eileen Fultons who have been in the vanguard in trying to enhance the natural environment, particularly in west Belfast, whether it is Colin Glen, the Black Mountain or the Bog Meadows.

The Minister’s Department should be mindful of other developments on the natural landscape in west Belfast when it comes to directing funds and resources and developing a strategic approach to building the environment in west Belfast. A group is to be set up in the next 10 days to enhance the Colin Glen area and the Glen River’s contribution to the environment of west Belfast. When that cross-community and cross-environmental

group makes proposals, I trust that the Department and the Minister will hear what people say with regard to enhancing the environment in west Belfast.

Similarly, in the near future, the Environment and Heritage Service will publish a response to the Northern Ireland landscape character assessment series in which it talks about landscape character and the protection of the environment in Northern Ireland in general. I urge the Minister to respond positively to those recommendations.

This debate is primarily about the Black Mountain, and I want to ask the Minister about that. I have several questions. There are increasing concerns about the future of the Black Mountain and the future intentions of the quarry owners themselves. Gerry Adams correctly pointed out that the quarry owners recently indicated that there are 20 years' worth of basalt reserves yet to be quarried in the Black Mountain. I heard in 1992, when the then Minister of the Environment, Richard Needham, said that it was his understanding that at that time there were 20 years' worth of quarrying reserves. Mr Needham's civil servants at that time did not agree with the Minister. They indicated that there were only between eight and 15 years' reserves. Ten years later we are told — formally and on the record — that there are at least 20 years' reserves. The Minister confirmed that in a written answer to me in January 2000, when he indicated that the quarry operator, at present rates of extraction, understands that he has sufficient reserves to carry operations forward for at least 20 years.

If that were the only fact, it might be understandable. However, the plot thickens. Since then, the permanent secretary and the Minister have been asked for an assessment of the remaining mineral reserves in the quarry — an assessment that the quarry owners were undertaking. In September 2000, the Minister confirmed in writing that

“White Mountain Quarries Ltd has confirmed that its assessment of the remaining mineral reserves of the quarry is now almost complete, and it hopes to be in a position to let the Department have information on this within the next few weeks.”

That was in September 2000. In January 2001, the Minister again wrote to me, apologising for not replying sooner. He said that his officials had had difficulty in contacting White Mountain Quarries. He added that the company was not prepared to release the information requested, as they regarded it as commercially sensitive. In 1992, the Government and the quarry owners said that they had at least 20 years' worth of reserves. In 2000, the quarry owners said that they had at least that. However, in 2001 the quarry owners are not prepared to release the information requested by the Government, as they regard it as commercially sensitive.

The people of west Belfast — especially those that I named earlier — ask a simple question. How is it that an assessment made 10 years ago stated that there were 20

years' worth of reserves? How is it that a similar assessment was made last year, and how is it that this year that company is no longer prepared to share what it says is commercially sensitive information?

This also raises a wider issue about who governs the North. A large quarry is having an immense environmental impact on west Belfast — all of it adverse. How is it that a private company that is granted planning permission by the state is not prepared to share information with the Government and the wider community that it was prepared to share earlier? Legitimate questions are being asked about the long-term prospects of the quarry. Is it not the case that — far from 20 years' worth — there are 30, 40 or more years' worth of reserves? In that context, Members can understand the concern about the long-term consequences for the mountain.

In responding to environmental need, not just in west Belfast and the Black Mountain — I also mentioned the Colin Glen proposals — it is also time for the Government to assert control over what White Mountain Quarries is doing, not just in respect of quarry reserves, where there is ambiguity, uncertainty and concern, but also in ensuring that the 19 conditions laid down when the quarry originally got planning permission in the early 1980s are strictly and fully enforced. The experience of 10 years ago was that planning conditions were routinely not enforced in respect of this quarry, particularly those relating to landscaping, planting of trees, the removal of plant from the front of the mountain and the damage to the top of the mountain.

I agree with Gerry Adams that the Government should assert authority over what is happening in the Black Mountain. Unless there is clarity about how many years' worth of reserves there is and how many more years of destruction there will be, the Social Development Committee would be advised to follow the model adopted by the Regional Development Committee in respect of the Port of Belfast and initiate a formal inquiry into what has happened to the Black Mountain over the last 20 years.

The purpose of that inquiry would be to mitigate the adverse impact of the quarrying to date; to further protect and develop the mountain as a civic amenity; to consider the closure of quarrying operations on the mountain as a matter of urgency; to review the history of planning enforcement conditions and how the situation has developed generally; to determine such other action as is deemed necessary, including moving the quarry to a more environmentally suitable site; and to explore European funding mechanisms to have the quarry closed down.

The Minister should respond, or be seen to respond, to those concerns, on which he has been on notice over the last year. If he does not, it is the intention of the SDLP and, I am sure, other parties to prevail upon the Social Development Committee to initiate an inquiry

into how the situation arose and to call people to account for what has happened.

Mr J Kelly: Go raibh maith agat, a leasCheann Comhairle. I support my Colleague Mr Adams's motion, which is timely and appropriate. I was going to say, tongue in cheek, that Dr Adamson stole all my lines. You are quite right, leasCheann Comhairle, when you say that he used poetic licence, but the Black Mountain is a very poetic place for Belfast people in particular and, I am sure, for those who come from beyond Belfast.

It has a special place in the lives of the people in Belfast, particularly those in west Belfast. For those of us who grew up in Belfast 60 years ago, a day out was on Cavehill or the Black Mountain. It is a place that has been well versed in song — the McPeakes sang about it in their song 'Belfast'. The words include "coming home to your Black Mountain, Cavehill and River Lagan". The Black Mountain is as much a part of Belfast as the River Lagan, Cavehill and the city hall. It is something special to the lives of people of Belfast.

As Belfast grew industrially and expanded socially, people had nowhere to escape to but to Cavehill or the Black Mountain. As Mr Adams said, all the industrialisation and quarrying over the years — uncontrolled quarrying, let me say — has despoiled and left an unsightly mark. I am sure that the Minister — a Fermanagh man, proud of the lakes and countryside of Fermanagh — would not want to see an amenity like the Black Mountain's being further despoiled for the sake of profit or more industrialisation. The Minister should remember that Belfast needs an attraction — it needs its Black Mountain. You can stand practically anywhere in Belfast and see it. You can see why it was called the Black Mountain. It has an image of darkness and beauty and a special appeal for the people of Belfast and beyond. We have the green Glens of Antrim, and I ask the Minister to ensure we have the Black Mountain for Belfast.

Dr Hendron: I congratulate Mr Adams for bringing this most important motion to the Assembly. Not in recent times, but certainly over many years, I have been involved in this subject. I had many meetings with Ministers going away back — Richard Needham's name has come up several times.

I put myself in the same bracket as Mr J Kelly, when it comes to my childhood. From Bellevue, and I am not talking about the zoo, across the upper Shankill and upper Springfield, the hills of Belfast are a place of great beauty and culture, steeped in the history of people of both traditions.

4.45 pm

I recall asking Richard Needham to go onto the mountainside, which he did. He arrived in a helicopter. I remember his expressing great anger about the situation — some people might wonder whether it was genuine.

He had a background in quarrying. The real sin here was not committed by him or by his people at that time, but long before that, when planning permission was given. I do not recall the name of the owner of White Mountain then — it was not the present owners. Planning permission was given to dig that quarry, and that was wrong from every point of view. It was morally wrong and wrong in terms of all people from both traditions.

Other things happened at that time, and I suppose there is no point in our going back in time and pointing fingers. Close to the mountains is the Monagh bypass, which is really a motorway. If you asked people or senior civil servants today why the Monagh bypass suddenly stopped at the mountainside — that is going back some years ago — many people would say that it is just as well, because the mountains are still there. However, there were plans to build a motorway cutting right through there and to save the hills all around it. That would have been a place of great beauty. I do not make the argument for motorways; I simply say that decisions were taken to build a motorway, and then all of a sudden it was stopped. It is difficult to find out precisely why that happened.

As Alex Attwood said, there was an inquiry in respect of the hills, but I have found it difficult, during my time as MP for West Belfast, to find out details of that original inquiry, which was buried. I did get some details, but they were not very helpful. I recall speaking on several occasions about this issue to the then Secretary of State, Sir Patrick Mayhew. He spoke once about the beauty of the Belfast hills from upper Springfield right across the upper Shankill, and he totally agreed with me that something could be done with the Belfast hills for the sake of the people.

It is important to remember that we are talking about west Belfast, north Belfast, Lagan Valley, south Antrim, all of Belfast; in fact, it is Northern Ireland that we are talking about. The hills are truly beautiful in terms of our cultural history, bird life and animal life. All the important points have already been made — my Colleague Alex Attwood covered the main ones. Where do we go from here? This is a shared inheritance, belonging to all of us. I believe that at one stage the Northern Ireland Office was toying with the idea of doing something about it. I think that they were considering whether it would be a good thing to do from a political standpoint, in terms of peace between two traditions. They were toying with it, but it never went any further than that.

Many organisations have been involved with the preservation of the mountainside, and Mr Attwood mentioned some of the people — Aidan Crean and Terry Enwright are very much to the fore in this. However, we are now concerned about the mental and physical health of all our people and about their environment.

The Minister is a very fair person, and I would like him to go to the mountainside some time with an MP, or

with any of us — it does not matter with whom he goes; it is important that he goes — and that he and his people make an assessment, not just of west Belfast, but of all of the hills, and consider in what way they could be used for the good of all people.

I understand that to buy off White Mountain Quarries Ltd would cost a substantial amount of money, because planning permission was given to them — although very wrongfully given — and apparently to undo that would be very expensive. I made the point earlier that what could be done was being considered, and one of the ideas was to buy the mountain back for the people over a number of years using the funds that went to Making Belfast Work (MBW) — but not on a direct payment, because there is not enough money for that.

This is a devolved Assembly; it is about the health, welfare and environment of our people. I support the shared inheritance that has been spoken of. There should be an inquiry. The Assembly and the Executive should give whatever support is necessary — financial or legislative — to give the mountainside back to the people of Northern Ireland.

Ms Lewsley: Gerry Adams put forward the motion with the focus on his constituents in West Belfast. However, the Black Mountain impinges on at least two other constituencies — East Antrim, and my constituency, Lagan Valley. My constituents are as worried about the destruction of the Black Mountain as are the people in West Belfast.

There are several key facts relating to conservation on the Black Mountain; some have already been mentioned. There has been quarrying with planning permission since the early 1980s. Overhead photographs and the profile of the mountain show the enormous environmental destruction that has occurred over that time. Taking into account the destruction that has happened in the last 20 years, how much more will occur in the next 20 years or more? As Gerry Adams and others mentioned, there are indications that at least 20 years' worth of reserves could still be gouged out of the mountain.

There are concerns that the Department of the Environment has not properly monitored the situation. There is evidence that the original planning conditions imposed in the 1980s were not monitored or enforced. In the 1990s the then Minister, Richard Needham, was required to intervene in order that the planning conditions could be introduced. Those included the need to plant trees in the front of the mountain to shield the site and to blend it in with the surrounding environment.

The community is rightly concerned that the original planning conditions have not been observed or enforced. To rectify the situation it is essential that the Assembly investigate how quarrying can be terminated. The Assembly must ensure that there is a maximum environmental

restoration of the mountain and that there is adequate restoration of trees and plants in the area.

The Department of the Environment can take immediate action by adopting a comprehensive road cleansing policy in the area, and it could confirm that the optimum wheel-washing facilities are on site.

I acknowledge that there are employment repercussions. I ask the Minister if it would not be possible to relocate another basalt quarry and retain these jobs there. This matter should be referred to the Social Development Committee, and I support my Colleagues' request for an inquiry.

Mr Adams: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Gabh mo leithscéal, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Dúirt mo chara John Ó Ceallaigh, nuair a bhí sé ag caint, gurbh é clann McPeake a cheol an t-amhrán 'Béal Feirste'; ach ba é Barnbrack a cheol an t-amhrán sin.

For the historical record my friend, John Kelly, credited the McPeake family with the song 'Belfast'; it was, in fact, Barnbrack.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am grateful that the Member clarified that.

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Foster): I welcome the debate for many reasons, none more than it gives me the opportunity to provide explanations. I am a conservationist, and I do not want to despoil any territory anywhere. Mr Adams referred to beauty spots in the Province such as Lough Erne. We are all proud of the Province, but we must not allow ourselves to become too sanctimonious.

The countryside has been pockmarked for 30 years by terrorist activity. It is to be regretted that we did not receive united condemnation of that fact at the time. We hope to rectify the utter destruction in our land. I want to assure everyone that I wish to conserve rather than to choose one area against another.

Although the title given to this Adjournment debate is "Conservation on the Black Mountain", it will be helpful if I begin my response by considering the Black Mountain in the context of the Belfast hills. Just before Easter I announced the publication by the Department of the Environment of the Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment 2000. On that occasion in Parliament Buildings I drew attention to the Belfast hills as being one of our most prominent and well-known landscape features and mentioned how they provided a magnificent backcloth to the city of Belfast. The report stated

"The basalt cliffs are a striking landmark ... They have a wild, brutal, untamed character which contrasts with the familiar bustle of the city below."

The Department of the Environment recognises the importance of the Belfast hills, not only in providing a landscape setting for the north and west of the city, but

also as a recreational resource of immense potential for all the people of Belfast and the visitors to Northern Ireland. I also recognise that many difficulties and challenges must be overcome if this potential is to be realised — not least the fact that the majority of land in the Belfast hills is privately owned farm land. The genuine concerns that landowners and farmers have regarding trespassing, vandalism and damage to property have to be addressed if we are to win the confidence of this important section of the local community.

I am conscious that pressure for Government action to protect the Belfast hills has been building for years. The zoning of the hills area as a regional park was proposed in the mid-1990s as a means of providing protection, public access and enjoyment. However, there was strong local opposition to this concept for the reasons that I have stated.

Pressure for action continued, and in 1998 a feasibility study on the Belfast hills was commissioned at the then Minister's request by the Department's Environment and Heritage Service on behalf of a consortium including the four local authorities for the hills and the charity Bryson House. This study identified continued lack of support, particularly from land owners, for the establishment of a regional park. Also it was felt that insufficient land was in public ownership to make the concept viable. The study instead recommended the setting up of a Belfast hills trust to provide a practical and integrated management mechanism for a smaller operational area of the hills running from the city limits to the back of the hills overlooking Belfast, Lisburn and Newtownabbey. This recommendation received widespread public support and much less opposition from local residents.

In 2000 the Department of the Environment established a working group which employed consultants to prepare a business plan for the proposed Belfast hills trust. The draft plan is now complete, but it is still awaiting final approval from some members of the working group. It will be presented shortly to potential funders in support of the case for the establishment of a Belfast hills trust.

The Black Mountain is seen as an important part of the Belfast hills. It has particular importance because of its visual prominence on the skyline and its closeness to a large population. I am fairly confident in saying that a strategic plan for its wide use would be a high priority for a hills trust. Such a trust would also be well placed to feed ideas and information on the sustainable management of the Belfast hills into the Belfast metropolitan area (BMA) plan process. The BMA plan will set out Government policy on development in the Belfast hills, including the Black Mountain. It will consider in detail the recreational potential of this area and how the Belfast hills should be protected and managed. I referred earlier to the challenge of reconciling the needs of farming with the aspirations of those who wish to use the hills for recreation. There are other legitimate activities taking

place in the Belfast hills such as the quarry which has been referred to on the Black Mountain.

There is a long history of quarrying on the Black Mountain, dating back to the mid-nineteenth century. Growth for most of this period was intermittent, but it took off rapidly during the 1980s. In 1978 the Department of the Environment received a planning application from the current operators to develop 127 acres of the mountain area for quarrying and ancillary use. The application was approved in July 1979.

Further applications were received in the mid-1980s and granted in 1988.

5.00 pm

I have no hesitation in accepting the invitation to visit the Black Mountain and the quarry area. My diary secretary will be in contact to organise that.

I cannot answer for all the Administrations that were here before me. I have been asked once or twice when the quarry will close. Dates have been suggested, but all I can say is that it will happen when the reserves are exhausted. It will depend on the production processes of the operator and will be dictated by demand, not by the Department of the Environment.

I am asked why the Department does not close the quarry. The Department could initiate discontinuance action under article 39 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991. That, however, might involve significant compensation to the operators. The Department would also have to justify taking action against that quarrying operation and not against others.

I have been asked whether the Department will grant further permission on the site. Any application would have to be considered on its merits and against prevailing plans and policies. It would be improper for me to say in this forum how my Department might assess any application.

Through the planning process, my Department has imposed strict limits on the extent of quarrying. Those restrictions were reinforced by the 1985 planning application, which contained a proposal to forfeit part of the area approved for extraction in 1979, for the purpose of preserving the skyline. I assure Members that my Department closely monitors those area limits, and they have now been reached. In that context, the visual appearance of the quarry should not now change significantly. However, the quarry can be deepened, within the limits imposed. That will have limited — if any — visual impact from outside the quarry.

I have read in the press that it is in my power to stop quarrying on Black Mountain at a stroke: that is not so. I am sure that there will be relief that I do not possess such draconian powers. I have the power to discontinue planning permissions, but exercising that power involves a lengthy process, with no cast-iron guarantee of success. If successful, my Department would also have to pay

significant compensation to the quarry owners for the closure of their business, and, ultimately, that bill would have to be met by the taxpayer. The operators have valid planning permission to quarry on the Black Mountain, subject to conditions and until reserves have been exhausted. My Department has no powers to dictate deadlines for completing those operations. There are 250 quarrying operations throughout the Province. Do we want to make life difficult for those quarries as well? They are a necessary contribution to the economy of our Province.

I emphasise that my Department has imposed stringent conditions on planning permissions to protect, as far as possible, the visual amenity of the Black Mountain. Through that process and through discussion with the quarry owner, significant tidying-up and landscaping work has been undertaken along the southern edge of the quarry, above the Upper Springfield Road. The improvements include the relocation of quarry stockpiles and waste tips, the grading and seeding of frontage embank-

ments and the planting of trees and shrubs. As a result, a considerable visual improvement has been achieved.

My Department is also responsible for the control of dust emissions from quarries through the Industrial Pollution Control (Northern Ireland) Order 1997. I acknowledge that the operations of the Black Mountain quarry may, from time to time, cause dust and noise. I emphasise, however, that the quarry is regularly inspected by the Environment and Heritage Service to ensure that its operators are doing everything in their power to prevent dust and are meeting the conditions set out in the authorisation under the Order. Additionally, all complaints about dust are investigated within 24 hours of receipt.

The Department is committed to conserving and enhancing the environmental qualities of the Belfast hills, including the Black Mountain. I cannot turn the clock back to a pre-industrial Belfast, but I will use the powers and opportunities that I have to work for a better environment for local residents and visitors alike.

Adjourned at 5.04 pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 1 May 2001

The Assembly met at 10.30 am (Madam Deputy Speaker [Ms Morrice] in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

RELIEF FOR BUSINESSES AFFECTED BY FOOT-AND-MOUTH DISEASE

The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Mr Molloy): Go raibh maith agat, LeasCheann Comhairle. I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel, the Executive and the Chancellor of the Exchequer to respond to the current crisis resulting from the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease by introducing a hardship relief package to reflect the fall in incomes being experienced, not only by farm-related businesses but also by businesses in the tourist industry.

First, I will explain the basis of the motion. The motion came about after a joint meeting of the Committees for Finance and Personnel and Enterprise, Trade and Investment. I welcome the cross-departmental Committee approach to the matter and hope that we will receive a cross-departmental response. It is important that we achieve joined-up Government on this issue.

The motion reflects a recognition of the major crisis in Northern Ireland as a result of foot-and-mouth disease. The two Committees have agreed to sponsor the motion, but I am speaking on a personal basis as a Member of the Assembly, not as the Chairperson of the Finance and Personnel Committee. I have had no direction from the Committee. My comments are my own recollections of the matter.

The motion calls on the Minister, the Executive and the Chancellor of the Exchequer to respond to the crisis by introducing a hardship relief package to reflect the fall in incomes. The crisis hit —

Mr Kennedy: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The motion is clearly in the name of the Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel. The Member now says that he is not speaking as Chairperson but rather on a personal basis. Either the Order Paper is wrong or something else is wrong. Will you give a ruling?

Madam Deputy Speaker: The Member is moving the motion on behalf of the Committee of Finance and

Personnel, and, in that capacity, he is moving the motion as Chairperson of that Committee.

Mr Kennedy: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I thought I heard the Member say that he did not have the permission of his Committee to speak as Chairperson. It is not an agreed response, and he is, therefore, putting forward his own personal view.

It is important to clarify to the House whether Mr Molloy's remarks are supported by the weight of his Committee, or whether he is merely expressing his personal view.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I would be grateful, Mr Molloy, if you would clarify that point before continuing.

Mr Molloy: A LeasCheann Chomhairle, I will explain my position in an attempt to avoid any problems later. I am proposing the motion as Chairperson of the Committee. I have the endorsement of both Committees. Having first proposed the motion, I went on to speak in my own capacity.

The motion calls for the Minister, the Executive and the Chancellor of the Exchequer to respond to the crisis by introducing a hardship relief package to reflect the fall in incomes. This crisis hit the farming community, particularly farmers, who have suffered severe hardship. We are all linked to that community, and the economy is strongly based on agriculture, therefore every aspect of life, particularly business life, is affected by this crisis. Farmers whose flocks have been destroyed have been compensated for their animals, but they have not been reimbursed to cover restocking and loss of income. They have nothing to sell at the end of the year, no ground to rent, and ground rents to pay. They face an uncertain future which, because of that uncertainty, the banks do not want to hear about.

All farmers are affected by the crisis, but they cannot get compensation to alleviate a number of those losses. For instance, sheep on common grazing ground cannot be turned out on that ground. Where should those sheep graze at present? Farmers do not know whether to sow fertilizer for future grazing — if they sow it but then cannot use the land, how are they to be compensated for that loss?

Culled sows cannot be exported to Germany at present, with the result that there is a build-up of stock on farms, thus leading to excessive bills for feed. Even if a farmer is eventually able to sell those animals, he will not have benefited from this delay. A mechanism is needed by which those animals can be culled and taken off the farms, thereby reducing the cost of keeping those animals alive.

These are the questions that farmers have been asking. These problems need to be responded to through a package. Farmers are also suffering the knock-on effects of the closure of the countryside. I do not refer solely to the closure of country walks, but to farm marts, which in

some cases have been closed by the Department for ten weeks. These closures have been reinforced by the European Union. Marts are gaining no turnover because farmers are banned from using the facilities. The income of one mart has been reduced to 15% of an average year's profit. There are no cattle or sheep sales, and no land lettings for those marts. The fact that people are unable to enter farms means that income cannot be generated from other sources, yet they still have to pay rates and other bills.

Over the last few years, farmers have been advised to diversify their activity by starting up farm businesses. I received a letter from the owners of a saddlery business, which has lost its normal turnover of £75,000 to £80,000 a year. This loss is a result of the cancellation of horse shows throughout Ireland and the restriction of other means by which the business can be carried out.

They are depending on the countryside and shows being opened up. Michael Meacher's scheme for small firm loans does not affect them; they cannot access those loans. These people have no security; on paper they have no future, so the banks do not want to know.

School trips and tours to the countryside have all been cancelled. Various sections of the tourism industry have been closed down, so coach companies are operating about one third of their previous business. Open farms —

Mr C Wilson: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is increasingly difficult for Members of this House to listen to the concern expressed by Mr Molloy and his Colleagues for the farming community. One considers vivid pictures of ladies having to guard their husbands and tractors as he and his Colleagues sought to murder them and put them out of business — to take their lives, never mind their livelihoods. It is nothing short of a disgrace.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. As regards points of order, I will ask the Member to make reference to the Standing Order he invokes. Please continue, Mr Molloy.

Mr Molloy: Thank you, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Open farms have been closed down completely, therefore no income has been earned from them. Farm shops are closed. While they may have had a good start to the year, machinery businesses have now found that hire-purchase companies and lease companies are refusing to grant leases. That is because businesses have no money, no prospects of money coming in and, again, no security. Banks do not want to lend money, and in some quarters the farm businesses that are selling machinery and supplies to the industry have been closed down.

While hotels and bed-and-breakfast accommodation are still open and still have to pay their bills, they do not make any income, because tourists are not arriving in the numbers which had been expected. Tourist areas like the Glens and the Sperrins have been affected dramatically

in that way. For these businesses, costs continue, but no income is being made.

Even in urban areas, shops have been affected. Farmers were part of that trade; they supported business and shops in small towns, but now they do not have the income. Business is affected, because farmers do not know where their future lies.

I certainly do not purport to have all the answers to this. However, I am sure that we will throw out many ideas in today's debate. First, we must recognise that this is not just a crisis on the farm; this problem has a wider aspect to it. Our economy is based around agriculture, and while many full-time farmers derive their income totally from farming, many others are part-time farmers and in various jobs. They need farm business so as to support their families. They also need the support of the broader community.

We need to stimulate a cross-departmental response. It is for that reason that the motion calls for the Executive to produce a package which will actually respond to this catastrophe.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer must put that package of finances together. If we try to do it out of the grant under the Barnett formula, then it simply will not happen, as that grant will not provide sufficient funds. We need the Chancellor to open up the war chest and ensure that it is used now in a very productive way to alleviate the emergency in the farming and rural community. If we try to do it ourselves within the Barnett formula, we will extend the problem rather than alleviate it.

Social welfare is one area in which an immediate response can be initiated. In that respect, we need to take into account the prices for farmers but not the land that the farmers live on. In the past, farmland, machinery and assets were all taken into account before people were deemed entitled to benefit. In the circumstances, I hope that the Department for Social Development can actually set that aside for now and deal with this in a flexible and considered way. It must be taken into account that farmers are in crisis and do not normally go looking for social benefit. There is real fear in their community that they may be forced to sell their land, machinery and plant if they apply for benefits.

10.45 am

Rates rebate is one of the options that may come up in the package — a means of dealing with the crisis right away. If we use accelerated passage in the way that we have done for certain finance legislation, I am sure that there would be cross-community support to ensure that that happened quickly. Farmers are in a crisis. They have no money coming in, but the rate bills still come. It is not good enough to defer payment for three months. They will still have to pay the full bills over nine or ten

months. Deferring payment will not help farmers or farm businesses, who will be forced to pay a high rate. We need to take into account the fact that there has been a reduction in income and turnover when calculating the rates and not deal with them as before.

The best way of alleviating the problem would be to give a direct grant. The Exchequer could put a direct-grant package together, payable to businesses across the spectrum that have lost income because of the crisis. They would have to provide proof that loss had been incurred, and their accounts could be used for this.

There should be a regeneration grant for farm businesses that are trying to restock and get going again to ensure that they will be able to do this. Farm businesses are affected in the same way as other businesses. The IDB and other agencies put packages together to try to attract businesses. Here we have businesses that are already part of the economy, and it is important to help them rebuild. They will, after all, be rebuilding the economy.

I urge the Minister and the Executive to put pressure on the Chancellor of the Exchequer to put such a financial package together. Others may have ideas about what to include in that package, but we need to recognise the urgency of this. It needs to happen right away. The situation cannot be allowed to linger, because the farming community will go under as a result of this crisis. It needs to be dealt with now.

I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Given the large number of Members wishing to contribute to the debate, and the time available, I ask Members to restrict their contributions to five minutes.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Sir Reg Empey): Since we last addressed this issue the full extent of the hardship is beginning to emerge in surprising places. My office is currently dealing with between 40 and 50 cases of a variety of businesses that are suffering significant degrees of distress. The most obvious and urgent impact is primarily on the tourism industry. However, difficulties are also emerging in many consequential businesses. For example, the cancellation of agricultural shows has affected the suppliers of cups and rosettes and others who service these events. They have suddenly found their incomes completely obliterated. People who sell farm requisites such as barbed-wire fencing are also finding a sudden drop or cessation in their turnovers. The most obvious difficulties are in the tourism sector, where it is clear in many cases that there have been overall reductions. In other cases businesses have flatlined completely due to their proximity to agricultural land or a fishing estate.

As Members know, my Department has initiated, through the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, a recovery plan for tourism. This was an initial reaction to try to

show that tourist facilities are open for business, provided people follow the guidelines set out by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. This reaction has taken place throughout the United Kingdom and in the Republic of Ireland as well. We see in today's press that the Republic is also gearing up for similar types of activity.

Some local authorities and others are trying to fill the gap left by the cancellation of many major events. Attempts are being made in Coleraine to put a package together to compensate for the loss of the North West 200, which is the most obvious and serious cancellation. I support that. It is the right thing to do. Activities of that nature, provided they are focused on trying to get bed-nights and entertainment for local people, are to be welcomed.

We are naturally focusing on consequential compensation, which is understandable in the circumstances. It could be of assistance to many businesses. The major solution to this problem is not compensation — it is to get our visitors back. That is the main objective that we must set ourselves. Only when we get our visitors back will we be able to help those businesses in a meaningful and long-term way.

Our tourism throughput and revenue grew last year by approximately 11%. That followed a series of years during which growth was enjoyed. A significant amount of investment has been made by companies, bed-and-breakfast proprietors and chalet owners at the behest of, and with the assistance of, the Government.

It must be remembered that we have been appealing for farm diversification for years. People have heeded that advice and have diversified, in many cases, into resource-based and natural-based tourism and rural development, and public funds have been directed to assist that.

Mr Gibson: Over £200 million was spent in west Tyrone on rural development, creating just over 200 farm diversification schemes. Those schemes, because of their dependence on agriculture, are now under threat. I support the Minister's point.

Sir Reg Empey: I am grateful for the Member's intervention. He has taken a keen interest in these matters.

We should not focus on compensation alone in this debate. The key issue is the long-term sustenance of businesses that will be achieved only when we get our visitors back.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee (Mr Neeson): I was very impressed by the positive approach taken last week by the two Committees, as a result of which we are able to debate this realistic motion. Farming has been the focus of much of the attention in recent weeks, but given the Committee's remit on tourism, I will deal with that.

The Committee met with the Northern Ireland Hotels Federation. The current forecast is of a 30% reduction in bookings for this season. The Chairperson will give

other statistics. This crisis affects both urban and rural hotels. The federation was lobbying for VAT relief, but that will provide only short-term cash-flow relief. The more important matter, about which it has spoken to the Minister of Finance and Personnel, is rates relief.

I welcome the meeting that the Minister had last week with his tourism Colleagues from other parts of the United Kingdom. It is important that we act together as far as possible on this. I take on board the point that more people must be encouraged to visit our shores, and we will respond to that.

I want to emphasise the plight of the horse racing industry in Northern Ireland. I met with the officials of the Down Royal racecourse. They have not held a race meeting since last November, and this has led to job losses and financial difficulties. I hope that the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development can provide some relief for them.

I appeal to the Executive to clarify the criteria for the return of horse racing to Northern Ireland. Will it be the case — as it was in the Republic of Ireland — that horse racing could recommence 30 days after the last outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease? We need clarification on that issue soon or there will be huge problems for the future of horse racing in Northern Ireland.

I was approached recently by coach operators throughout the Province. Many of them would normally be transporting schoolchildren to various events. However, this is not happening. They have no income but still have to pay for the maintenance of their buses. Some of them are very concerned about the attitude of the financial institutions in Northern Ireland towards the problems that they are facing. I plead with the Assembly for the Executive Committee, or another Assembly body, to meet with the banks in Northern Ireland to see whether something can be done to deal with the current crisis.

There have been substantial lay-offs in several areas of various industries that have been hit by the foot-and-mouth crisis. It would be helpful if we made a case to put to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. We should be quantifying the number of job losses that are taking place. This is important if we want to move forward on the issue.

Ms Lewsley: I do not need to tell Members that foot-and-mouth disease is a common enemy and that every person in Northern Ireland has been affected in some way. The ordinary person in the street has been affected as well as those who work in farming and tourism. It is important now for everyone to stand shoulder to shoulder to combat the disastrous effect it has had on our economy.

This is the first crisis that we have faced as a new, devolved Government, and the way that we handle this matter will set a precedent for the way that we will deal with any future crises. The harsh reality is that no one knows, or can accurately predict, the long-term impact

of foot-and-mouth disease or the outcome of the disaster. The real scale of the problem for the farming and tourism industries could be colossal, and it will have a ripple effect on a large number of businesses.

We must acknowledge that this is not only an economic issue — it is also an equality issue, and we must address it as such. One of the main problems is that we do not have a hardship fund here, and there is an immediate need to establish one as soon as possible. However, decisions such as how much money should be diverted into such a fund, and where that money should be diverted from, must be made sooner rather than later.

We do not want a knee-jerk reaction. We must be realistic, because we cannot wave a magic wand and hope that the problem will go away. There may be some short and medium-term remedies, but we have to look at the overall picture and study the long-term effects of foot-and-mouth disease on the community and the economy as a whole.

11.00 am

I am advocating prudence and foresight to ensure that Members try to deal with the issue as efficiently and effectively as possible. It is essential that the Assembly examine the cost implications of any scheme carefully, and it is important that there be solid cross-party support for the Executive's developing an approach that meets the needs of those who are affected by the crisis. At the same time, the existing pressures in the various Departments must also be addressed.

All options must be clearly laid out, and they must be costed and realistic. Any approaches must clearly show how the Assembly intends to meet the cost implications across the board. Will the Assembly direct unallocated funds, or can it use end of year flexibility to meet the needs? These questions must be carefully considered and answered. The Assembly must also have a solution that will use any consequential funds from the Treasury as well as existing schemes in the various budgets that reach out to those most deeply affected.

Members must pull together to combat the hardship that has been caused by the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease and make hard decisions on how to finance it. Every Department must examine its budget to see what options are available. I have every confidence that with careful consideration all Members can contribute to the alleviation of the crisis.

The Chairperson of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee (Rev Dr Ian Paisley): Last Friday the Agriculture Committee met a deputation from the Northern Ireland Livestock Auctioneers' Association. Twenty-four firms were represented who operate 30 livestock marts. They were led by the chairperson of the association. The marts have been closed down by law; they are not like any other part of the sad saga that is

going on. They are not legally allowed to operate, so their losses cannot be described as consequential; their losses are a result of the law. I am not arguing that the law is not good or right. The auctioneers all agreed that this had to be done. The marts could not continue to operate as if nothing had happened — they had to close. However, the law closed them down, as a result of which the auctioneers went completely, totally and absolutely out of business. They voiced real concern about the fact that their colleagues in Scotland, whom they had met a couple of days before, had been told that £13.5 million has been set aside by the Scottish Parliament to deal with the foot-and-mouth crisis there.

Whether the Department's actions in closing the marts were legal may be tested in the courts because of compensation claims. However, that is not what the Committee was discussing or that the auctioneers were advocating. The auctioneers need to get back in business as soon as they can. The losses caused to the marts are immediate and directly related to the movement ban and the closures. The chairperson of the association estimated that £1 million of income has been lost during what is normally the busiest and most profitable time of the year. However the marts still have to pay rates. The Committee heard of a bill of £36,600 for two marts. In some cases the marts must pay rent to local councils; they also have overdrafts to service and insurance bills to pay, and the list goes on and on. The marts have had to lay off some 400 full-and part-time staff, some of whom will be permanently lost to them. Redundancies are resulting in further costs to the marts.

The auctioneers are in dire financial straits, and members of the Agriculture Committee agree that they should be compensated. Members also shared the auctioneers' concerns about the future of their sector, because their work comes from the stock market of the industry.

That is where prices are set; that is where the market can be examined and prices given in a competitive way. If that is taken away, there will no competitiveness left.

If the markets are closed it will strike a blow and sever an artery in the local community. In many places where the local mart was closed down there was devastation in the community — particularly in the business community of the town or village concerned.

Mr McHugh: Go raibh maith agat A LeasCheann Comhairle.

I welcome the opportunity given by the two Committees to debate this issue and to ask the Government to provide a relief package for all concerned. There are many people, across all areas, who are very severely affected by foot-and-mouth outbreaks. Many sectors are involved — some more than others. Entire businesses are affected, and there is a question mark over whether those businesses will have a future at all. That has to be taken into account.

Consequential losses are much more severe in some cases than in others. In particular, some people, including farmers and those who are involved with farming, have moved towards tourism as a way of increasing their income. That means of income has now been taken from them because of the foot-and-mouth situation. Some compensation should be given to those people. In particular, compensation should be given to businesses that have been almost completely closed, almost forced to close — in many instances, businesses have not been forced to close completely because they would have had to receive compensation.

The marts are a case in point. They were forced to close. They had no choice. They were not advised, as others were, and therefore they need particular compensation for their losses. They are still being asked to pay rates and cover costs, and they will be asked to increase the amount of measures to be put in place before they can reopen. That may mean that for some of the marts, particularly the smaller ones, it will not be economical to reopen. That will be a severe consequence of foot-and-mouth disease for many small communities.

Most marts, like cattle, are west of the Bann, so the impact of the foot-and-mouth crisis is greater there. Those farmers have been unable to sell their stock. They do not finish beef and, therefore, are not in a position to sell their stock directly to meat plants. Those farmers have not had an income for a very long time — since the crisis began — and they still do not know when they will be able to sell stock and get an income. What has been done with regard to farmers' welfare and telling them how they can find other ways of earning an income in the meantime? A package to deal with those matters needs to be put in place, as well as some sort of compensation.

One of the things that has emerged from the crisis is the general public's focus on farming and the countryside. Members of the public have given particular sympathy to farmers, both here and in Britain. They have had to look at the industry as they have never done before. It seems that what was happening in farming before the crisis began was of little consequence to those outside the industry. The crisis has had an impact on those sectors that are outside the farmgate, and people have had to listen and take note. They should take a greater interest in the quality of the food they eat and the future of the farming industry and also in what can be done to alleviate this problem and prevent it from happening again.

There are people involved in the food sector, in producing and processing food, who have lost severely as well, people, for instance, in the pork and bacon business who exported across the border. They were closed down at the beginning of this outbreak. They have been put totally out of business and may well not be able to start up again. I know of a number in the Fermanagh area, in Tyrone and in some of the border counties. Those

people have suffered severely and have had no one to whom they can voice their concerns. They need to be looked at in particular by the IDB or anyone else who can possibly help them, because they are going to have severe difficulties in expanding their businesses.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Butchers have also lost business, although one did say that his income had increased in recent months because people were somewhat afraid of the packages coming from further afield and the supermarkets.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr McHugh: Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Speaker: I am afraid that the Member's time is up.

Mr McClarty: I support the motion. Over recent weeks, my Colleagues and I have highlighted with varying degrees of expertise and authority the dire consequences of foot- and-mouth disease on our farming, tourism and hospitality industries. We all know — indeed society at large is only too well aware — of the pervading consequences of the crisis for our entire economy.

With that said, I am sure that most of us here have been relatively fortunate and have had limited, if any, first-hand exposure to the detrimental effects of this virus. It is often from theoretical knowledge that we speak, and not from experience. That is why it is imperative that we all now get alongside those who have suffered during recent weeks, those who have suffered financial loss, hardship or even ruin, and those who, through no fault of their own, face economic, not to mention psychological, depression.

Many people — farmers, hoteliers, those in the tourism industry and small business proprietors — are experiencing very real pessimism. There are too many people in the doldrums of economic insecurity. That is why the time is right to show those who have been affected by foot-and-mouth disease that we support them in their hour of need. We are fortunate that with a devolved Administration we can do just that. We must all show solidarity with the people of this country who have been, and continue to be, affected.

It would be a tangible and beneficial gesture to give affected businesses financial relief measures. While such measures would be for discussion at the Executive and at central Government level and could include business rates relief, I strongly advocate that action be taken sooner rather than later. While a financial package of relief would not be a panacea for the mounting financial problems of the past two months, it would, at the very least, provide a financial kick-start to many affected businesses.

I support a compensation package that will be swift to emerge, cutting in its effectiveness and non-cumbersome in its delivery. I have spoken to many people from the farming community in my constituency of East London-

derry and to many in the tourism and hospitality sectors who were relying on the financial boost provided by a successful North West 200. These people have very real and immediate insecurities.

They, I and all those who have made sacrifices, big and small, can only view with horror and disgust the few, the greedy, the defrauders, the cheats and the liars who have put self first and their fellow citizens and neighbours last by flouting the law with illegal animal movements, fraudulent claims and lies. They are the guilty — guilty of dishonest practice. They have jeopardised the livelihoods of so many others. They deserve to be hounded by the law and condemned by every single person who has chosen the responsible course of action, frequently at personal inconvenience, financial loss or, indeed, ruin. Let us not forget those who are the heroes and those who are the villains of the foot-and-mouth crisis.

11.15 am

As the motion says, if there is to be a hardship relief package, let us not focus solely on those who have the wherewithal to make media headlines, but also on those who are quietly suffering and who might be anticipating a period of despair.

In conclusion, many voices are singing for financial assistance during this time of economic hardship. Each voice is worthy of being listened to — and must be listened to. We have a responsibility not only to hear the parts, but to realise the gravity of the tune they sing and to respond accordingly. I support the motion.

Mr O'Neill: I too support the motion. The severe hardships of the agriculture industry — and farmers in particular — have already been well amplified. Against this background, many have reduced incomes, and many have no income. Those problems have occurred with increasing regularity.

As I am sure Members well remember, sheep farmers in my area have already endured serious hardship as a result of the ban on grazing in the Silent Valley catchment area. Can you imagine the hardship that those men and their families are now suffering? There is injustice in the fact that the infection was not actually caused by sheep but by infrastructural deficiency, despite attempts by departmental officials to cover this up. What has happened to all these people's requests for compensation?

I am also struck by the position of the tourist and leisure industry. I am reminded of the great hardships they experienced over the last 30 years and their resilience and endurance when their businesses — which were often based in their own homes — were declared to be economic targets, attacked and often destroyed. They have had to battle against an increasingly bleak situation and negative publicity. Yet, in the Newcastle and Castlewells area, which I represent — often described as the "jewel in the crown" of Northern Ireland's tourist

industry — some seaside hotels have, in the past, been forced to let their staff take summer holidays. This was because the hotel staff were so successful in mastering the conferencing trade that they could only take leave during the summer. Despite all those hardships, they succeeded. Those establishments now tell me that their business, in this present crisis, is being reduced by up to 70% in some weeks of operational business. There is a particular need to provide support for those people.

In my area — which, as I said, is a tourism area — there are many pony-trekking and horse riding centres. I can cite one example, which is very familiar to me, of a man who has worked for the last 30 years to build up his business. He now has 40 ponies for trekking, but he has not gained one shilling of income since the outbreak of this crisis. If anyone in the House knows what it costs to keep one horse for one week, he should have some idea of the plight of someone who has had to try to keep 40 horses for the last six or seven weeks without any income. Some people will have reduced income; some of the farmers who have suffered will even get compensation, but people in this type of situation receive no support — there is no hope. He will soon have to sell off everything and close the business after 30 years of hard work. If that is not a clear example of the need for consequential financial support to sustain such people, I do not know what is.

The responsibility to provide that falls on the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I know that our Minister of Finance and Personnel will make strong representations to ensure that we get the package of financial support that we need, and I was heartened to hear the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment correctly identify the support that we need to ensure that our businesses regain confidence.

Mr Paisley Jnr: During the Easter recess, we were recalled to debate an issue that Members on the opposite side of the House said was not essential. However, they were able to turn out then and pack those Benches. It is a pity that the presence on those Benches today does not reflect the urgency of this issue.

We face a crisis. It is important that the Government demonstrate today that they will get a grip on that crisis and demonstrate that they have a way forward for the entire economy. In the early part of the crisis, policy was marked by confusion. One day it appeared that Northern Ireland was closed for business; the next the Executive launched a multi-million pound tourism initiative. The following day, a huge tourist event was cancelled, but events in other parts of Antrim were able to proceed. Nothing was done to stop a rave at Nutts Corner that attracted about 15,000 people. It is essential that such confusion be addressed.

The confusion was not just in Northern Ireland; there was confusion in the Isle of Man, England, Scotland and Wales. There has been no long-term planning for a

disaster such as foot-and-mouth disease. The United States of America runs a foot-and-mouth disaster plan every year, and that disaster plan has proved successful; they have not had foot-and-mouth disease since 1926 or 1927. Our Government have been found wanting in their disaster planning. I hope that they will put a disaster planning strategy in place.

Members will agree with what Reg Empey said this morning. In the medium and long term, we must get visitors back to Northern Ireland. We must, however, ask the question that was raised by his statement: when the visitors come back — next year or later this year — will we have the facilities to cater for them? Many people feel that the problems that have affected the tourism industry and the catering trade could be long-term ones. It is up to the Government to produce a proper package of measures that will help us get over the crisis.

The cancellation of the North West 200 has cost north Antrim and east Londonderry about £6 million. If such an event were to have taken place in Belfast but had been cancelled, the loss — adjusted accordingly — would have been £50 million. Belfast could not sustain that financial loss, and my region should not be asked to sustain its loss without adequate compensation.

The information supplied in the first few days of the crisis was disappointing. Red tape still impedes many businesses. We must ensure that we ease the pressure on tourism and retail businesses in the most drastically affected areas. A regulated impact unit should make a snapshot study of what is happening, and the Government should implement the findings of that study. I hope that the Minister will consider that.

Shops, restaurants, hostels, hotels, and bed-and-breakfast businesses cannot see any light at the end of the tunnel. The Government must throw them something to show that there is going to be light at the end of the tunnel. A massive tourism and business drive must be initiated, and I welcome some measures that have been taken. I hope that the Government address the insurance premiums which these businesses have to pay, additional rates relief and other imaginative programmes to help businesses get out of the problems they face.

In conclusion, we need stopgap compensation for regions already hit by the consequences of foot-and-mouth disease. My region in Moyle depends on seasonal employment. That has gone for good this year, and what is the Government going to put in its place?

Ms Gildernew: I thank the Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel and the Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment for bringing this motion to the House. This is the first time that the Assembly has debated the debilitating effect of foot-and-mouth disease on the community.

Coming from a farming background, I am acutely aware of how badly foot-and-mouth disease has affected us all. While the damage to tourism has been severe, the fact that the people who live and work here all year have much less money to spend on a daily basis has resulted in downturns in spending in shops, pubs and restaurants. Indeed, it has often been said that when the farmers are doing badly, we are all worse off. Their spending power is critical to the economy on this island.

The fact that a rates rebate has not been made available to businesses is a major mistake. While a three-month stay of execution will give temporary relief, it will only put an additional burden on businesses, as the same rates will still have to be paid, albeit later. Businesses should have been given a discount on their rates, which would help them keep their heads above water — not a cosmetic exercise, which will have no real benefit.

Mr M Murphy: Gabh mo leithscéal. Will the Member give way? While the country has been focused on the farming industry —

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has only five minutes, which must include the time that an intervention takes.

Mr M Murphy: While the country has been focusing on the farmers' plight, and rightly so, many other businesses face closure and hardship due to this unfortunate outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease. I know of one business in my constituency, the East Coast Adventure Centre, which has lost business in excess of £30,000 a month, has had to lay off staff and is facing the prospect of closure.

Ms Gildernew: I thank my Colleague for his intervention. Many businesses are probably going to go under this year because of the impact of foot-and-mouth disease on their revenue.

We need to be imaginative about how we tackle the increase in job losses, which are an additional blow to the rural community in Fermanagh and Tyrone. An average farm income is usually supplemented by a wage from an outside source. However, with so many jobs lost in the textile industry and food production, this source of revenue is lost also. A county like Fermanagh, which has had to rely on tourism and agriculture for the vast majority of its economic revenue, has felt the effect of foot-and-mouth disease twice as much as any other county in Ireland. In general, the rural community has responded well to the needs of the farming community. Organisations like the GAA have been extremely responsible and patient as they wait for the disease to diminish.

A hardship package is a necessity to alleviate the prospect of financial ruin for many people. A joined-up approach from all agencies, especially from the Minister of Finance and Personnel and the British Chancellor of the Exchequer, is required to support the farming community, the tourist industry and the rural economy. Measures like organic farming, for example, will need

to be supported financially to increase confidence in the products provided. We must do all in our power to help the farmers — the backbone of the rural economy — to get back on their feet.

I support the motion. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Armstrong: I speak on this motion with a heavy heart and the utmost sympathy for farmers and their families, who have bore the brunt of this foot-and-mouth disease, and for the effect it has on wider industry in our Province.

We must now take stock of our farmers' plight and the knock-on effect in associated agri-food operations.

The farming industry has yet again been hit by a crisis; this time it is foot-and-mouth disease. It is important that Members be informed about how the disease came about. The first case of foot-and-mouth disease in the United Kingdom came at the beginning of February. Sheep were imported to be slaughtered, but they were not slaughtered. We must find out how those sheep found their way on to unsuspecting farms. Had the handling of those sheep been carried out properly, Northern Ireland would have fared a great deal better. Prevention is better than cure.

11.30 am

To date, four cases of foot-and-mouth disease have been confirmed. In what way has the epidemic impacted on Northern Ireland? If Northern Ireland is to legislate properly in respect of the disease, we must first give an accurate assessment of its effects. As a representative of Mid Ulster I have had first-hand experience of the effects of the desperate disease. Two of Northern Ireland's cases to date have occurred in Mid Ulster.

Just as the economy of our Province was beginning to pick up in the wake of BSE, foot-and-mouth disease hit the industry. I would be failing my constituents if I did not tell the House of the suffering of the wider rural community. Social events have been cancelled, fewer meals have been eaten in hotels, and forest parks are shut. Those are just a few examples. Sporting fixtures had to be cancelled Province-wide, and the burning of cattle has done nothing to attract visitors to Northern Ireland. However, we find ourselves in an emergency, and it is the Assembly's duty to lead. The Assembly must provide whatever help it can to those worst hit by foot-and-mouth disease.

Compensation has rightly been awarded to those farmers who have seen their livelihoods destroyed by the disease. But what of the wider rural industries affected by the disease in our Province? Are they forgotten victims? Rural tourism has also been adversely affected in our Province as a result of the disease.

Farmhouse and bed-and-breakfast accommodation is at a complete standstill. Boat and coach hire companies have been decimated by cancellations. Major inter-

national events, including the Balmoral Show and the North West 200, have been cancelled. Tourism is worth over £350 million to the Northern Ireland economy, and it employs 38,500 people. The Northern Ireland Tourist Board has warned of a £2 million loss due to foot-and-mouth disease. The entire tourism infrastructure is threatened, and the effects of that will be felt across the economy of Northern Ireland.

The EU has closed all auction marts, but livestock marts are still paying rates. Their rates should be frozen until auction marts are back in business. We need to ensure that those auction marts are still operational when the threat of foot-and-mouth disease has passed.

I appeal to the Ministers of Finance and Personnel and Agriculture and Rural Development to get their heads together. They must provide the best package they can muster to help all affected industries — especially the wider rural industries — in this time of dire need. The Province is on its knees after the BSE crisis, which clobbered farmers with disaster. Allow me also make a plea to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to complete all outstanding payments of premium even if it means some element of derogation from Europe. I support the motion.

Mrs Courtney: I support the motion. Since mid-February nightly reports on our televisions have shown the results of the foot-and-mouth disease on the farming community, and the scarring of the countryside with burial pits and burning pyres. That has had a devastating effect on the farming industry and on those businesses that are countryside-dependent. As the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development said last week, compensation is unfortunately limited to those who have had livestock slaughtered or feeding-stuff seized.

The Government's current position is that there is no provision or precedent for consequential compensation. That also applies to livestock markets. Last week Ulster's premier rural showpiece, the Balmoral Show, was called off with an estimated loss of £5 million. That cancellation of a three-day event that attracts more than 60,000 people each year was a severe blow.

Businesses other than the farming industry are also affected. The cancellation of major events such as the North West 200 will have a negative impact on the local economy and cause hardship for many businesses.

In an article last week the chairman of the Institute of Directors (IoD), Eric Bell, said that the IoD had surveyed UK members at the beginning of April. Thirty-five per cent of them responded that their businesses had been affected. These include small businesses from farm suppliers to bed-and-breakfast establishments. They are all counting the cost. Compensation has, quite rightly, come to farmers who have lost herds. A rates deferral scheme is operating, and small firm loan guarantee schemes have been amended and extended. The Office

of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister is considering what compensation schemes are required and how they may be administered.

The £1 million marketing-based tourism recovery plan is crucial to future visitor numbers. Recently the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee met with the Northern Ireland Hotels Federation, which gave some stark statistics. Losses in tourism are running at three times those of agriculture, with a forecasted loss of over £8 billion for 2001. Business is down by 50%. Hotels across the country have had a flood of cancellations. Hospitality and tourism employs 35,000 people across Northern Ireland, with 30,500 employed directly in hotels. These people are now being laid off. The industry is worth £350 million to the Northern Ireland economy. The Northern Ireland Hotels Federation pressed the Committee for urgent assistance with business viability and a marketing strategy to rebuild tourism.

Recently hoteliers in Derry and the north-west told me that bookings are down dramatically, some by up to 75%. Hotels have cut prices, but it is becoming difficult to survive as conferences are being cancelled. Easter was particularly quiet with only one third of rooms occupied. When prices are cut, it is very difficult to get them back to a more normal rate. Hotels are also affected in other ways; limited supplies for menus mean higher retail prices. All in all it is becoming more difficult to operate. The knock-on effect is considerable. Every facet of our economy is being affected. A broad range of support measures, such as payment deferrals and rebates for VAT, rates and other taxes, as well as compensation for lost earnings, and interest-free loans is needed.

I call on all Departments in the Executive and the Chancellor of the Exchequer to ensure that any assistance is not dogged by red tape and delay. Swift help is needed if Northern Ireland is to recover from the foot-and-mouth crisis and tackle the longer term issues which will determine our future prosperity. There was an article in last night's 'Belfast Telegraph' on a survey carried out by PricewaterhouseCoopers. It gave a loss of £200 million as being the best-case scenario for Northern Ireland. In the same paper a guest house owner had written a letter saying that he is almost visitor-free due to the foot-and-mouth crisis. These are the grim effects. We need a relief package to prevent Northern Ireland's becoming an economic desert. I support the motion.

Mr Poots: This is an issue of great concern. Many people would say that tourism in my constituency of Lagan Valley has not been badly affected, but that is not the case. Lagan Valley has the largest horse-racing festival in Northern Ireland; the second largest motorcycle race — the Ulster Grand Prix; the largest cinema complex; and the top leisure swimming pool complex in the United Kingdom. Last year 25,000 tourists used the tourist information centre in Hillsborough village.

A recent report from Sir Reg Empey showed that some £9 million was spent by tourists in Lagan Valley over the last year. Tourism is a major business in our community in spite of the fact that the constituency does not have seaside venues, unlike the constituencies of other Members who have spoken. Local businesses are suffering the effects, and many are complaining that their trade is down. While many businesses can absorb a loss of trade even for a sustained period, others are not in such a position. Business is very poor for those who have bed- and-breakfast establishments, especially those who offer farmhouse accommodation.

I also have to mention coach operators. They are not getting the business, because people do not want to go on tourist trips around the Province. Many of the locations that they would like to visit are closed. Coach operators are being severely hit by the current foot-and-mouth-disease crisis. The Executive and the relevant Ministers have to look closely at this issue. They have to do something to compensate those people for their losses.

I also ask that specific reference be made to livestock marts, which are a separate case in that they have been instructed by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to cease trading. That decision has been backed up by the European Commission. In my opinion, this creates a legal question for the Minister of Finance and Personnel, given that mart owners still have to pay rates. Something is wrong if one Government body says that an individual is not allowed to carry out his business, but another charges him a business rate.

We have a Government which talks a good deal about fair treatment and which has equality policies. We also hear a good deal about joined-up government — let us see this happen. Let the Minister of Finance and Personnel get together with the Minister of Agriculture to deal with this issue. Five hundred people are employed in the livestock marts. My concern is that many marts will not reopen their doors when the foot-and-mouth crisis is over. Today in Northern Ireland sheep farmers receive for their lambs about half the price received by farmers in the Republic of Ireland. Clearly, that is because in Northern Ireland there are only four meat plants where lambs can be killed. The trade which we would normally have had with the Irish Republic has gone.

If the livestock marts are not open when Northern Ireland gets back to business, the farmers will suffer further, because the meat plants will have the monopoly on the sheep trade, just as they have dominated the meat trade for the last five years since BSE emerged. It is essential that we give these people the support that they need to see through this crisis. We need to be there when it is over, because it will have a major effect on the entire agriculture community.

I ask the Minister to take particular note of that, but also to examine the situation of coach operators and those

who offer bed-and-breakfast accommodation. They have been hardest hit by the foot-and-mouth crisis. Farmers have been badly affected, but although I am from a farming background, I must say that the tourist industry and the livestock marts have been worst hit. It is imperative that the Minister look at these issues and give these people the support they need.

Mrs Carson: I am pleased to speak in strong support of the motion. The outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease has been another crippling blow to the farming community, which is still reeling from the consequences of BSE. Those consequences reach into every part of our daily lives and into all parts of the Province's economy. Several Members mentioned the plight of farmers and the unique problems of the cattle marts. There are several marts in my constituency, and something must be done directly to help them.

Today, however, we ask the Minister of Finance and Personnel to respond to the crisis outside the immediate farming community by providing a financial package to alleviate hardship suffered by these farm-related businesses and the tourist trade.

In all parts of my constituency, but particularly in Fermanagh, tourism has been extremely hard hit by cancellations of bed-and-breakfast accommodation, hire cruisers and all associated amenities. Thankfully, the fishing waters have now reopened, and a slow trickle of tourists is returning. The overall loss to the tourist trade, however, has been grievous. Everything possible must be done to encourage visitors to return. We saw interviews with some American tourists who had weird ideas about the effect of foot-and-mouth disease on humans. Publicity must be spread further afield to counter such ideas.

When the Minister considers his financial aid package, I ask him to look outside the immediate area of tourism and to take account of those with ancillary businesses. I speak of specialist shops where there has been a drastic drop in sales of fishing tackle and accoutrements and outdoor clothing. Souvenir shops — even coffee shops — have all lost income. The list is endless.

11.45 am

I ask the Minister to encompass businesses outside the immediate perceived tourist areas when looking at relief packages. As some other Members have pointed out, tourism reaches right across Northern Ireland. I have been told of one business in south Tyrone that has tackle and tack for sale for outdoor pursuits. It has had a huge drop in income — up to 80%. These business people are the backbone of Northern Ireland, and I hope they will not be excluded from any forthcoming relief package.

I support the motion.

Mr Gallagher: I too support the motion. We have heard of the serious drop in business experienced right across Northern Ireland. That is especially true in border

areas. In the constituency where I live a significant level of business is cross-border. Fermanagh and South Tyrone is a constituency which has many border crossing points to counties such as Monaghan, Cavan, Leitrim and Donegal, so for many businesses a significant proportion of trade is cross-border, and many traders there are experiencing serious difficulties.

Mrs Carson referred to the situation for those who operate self-catering enterprises or run guest houses or hotels or hire cruisers. There is a strong case for a greater response from the Government in view of the difficulties.

Food processing is another sector where difficulties are great. That is due to the restrictions imposed by the Government on the southern side of the border. I spoke to a food processor today who has already lost £50,000 worth of business and has had to allow three of his employees to go. I spoke to a butcher about a week ago, and he told me that 95% of his business was cross-border.

I support the idea of assistance for the traders in difficulties. A number have submitted plans for assistance to bodies such as the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and LEDU and are asking "What now?" about them. Are those agencies taking account of the different and difficult circumstances that have obtained since those plans were submitted? I urge agencies such as LEDU to be more proactive and have a greater presence in the areas that are experiencing the greatest difficulties. I see no reason why LEDU and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board should not, temporarily at least, open offices closer to the problem. Their presence there would act as an important link between local businesses and the Government Departments.

I refer to Government Departments in the North and South. If there were a local presence which liaised with the Government agencies, it would reassure and restore confidence to those affected by the situations I have described. LEDU, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and the Training and Employment Agency should be more proactive in providing advice and assistance, and this should be dealt with urgently.

Mr Shannon: I support the motion. I want to talk more the tourism aspect. According to the figures we received, the cost of the crisis to the economy is approximately £200 million. When this cost is looked at in the context of the whole Province, it gives us an idea of how much everyone has to lose.

PriceWaterhouseCoopers carried out an extensive study into the impact of the crisis on the agriculture and tourism sectors. The problem is that the agriculture industry, when it did not have problems, diversified into the tourism sector. We now have a double whammy, because tourism has also been affected by foot-and-mouth disease. The crisis is now affecting every aspect of the agriculture economy, not just those directly involved in agriculture, but others who suffer the ripple effect of foot-and-mouth disease.

The report also suggested that the figure quoted might reflect a best-case scenario. It stated that the eventual cost to the economy could rise beyond £200 million. If every high-profile, crowd-pulling, sporting, recreational and cultural event continues to be affected, and subsequently cancelled, the cost to the economy will spiral. Every constituency will feel the pinch.

In my constituency of Strangford, as with most other constituencies, we have a very strong rural community whose livelihoods depend on agriculture and the diversified field of tourism. There is an incredible fear among many people in agriculture and other sectors, because they do not know where their next pay cheque is coming from. Our farming industry is already on its knees, and it seems to be suffering one blow after another. Farmers are extremely vulnerable, and they need to do everything they can to protect their livelihoods. The crisis is now rippling through to other sectors in a virus-like way, spreading anxiety throughout the economy.

Outside agriculture, the tourist industry, which represents 8% of the local economy, is now experiencing the very same slump as has been reported on the mainland. The crisis on the mainland is more widely publicised through its greater PR and bigger headlines. The closure of numerous public attractions, including such National Trust properties as Mount Stewart, and the cancellation of big events have caused the demand for accommodation literally to disappear.

As a result, for those farmers who diversified into tourism, for example those who set up bed-and-breakfast accommodation, the market has dried up. The tourism industry in the Kingdom of Down, which covers four council areas, is worth between £7 million and £8 million annually, and services such as bed-and-breakfast establishments face a worrying and uncertain future. The number of bed-nights has slumped to an all-time low. To compound their problems, tourist organisations face VAT demands which they are simply unable to meet. I understand that HM Customs and Excise has made some concessions by offering help to farmers and those involved in tourism. Despite this, however, it is impossible fully to compensate their loss.

To illustrate the plight of some of those involved in tourism, a local newspaper reported that a guest-house owner who had been in business for more than 40 years and his colleagues in the same sector had been left almost visitor-free by the foot-and-mouth crisis. They fear for the future of the industry. How much worse could it get for these people? They can make their livings only during the six months of spring and summer, and their profits have to take them through the winter and early spring. Those people have appealed to the Tourist Board, the Executive and the Assembly to intervene and help them. The sympathy we feel towards the farmers and the agriculture sector should extend to the tourism industry, as it is also in difficulty.

The same story applies across the Province, not just in the Strangford area. It is very worrying to watch the infrastructure that our positive angle on tourism has built up over the years dissolve in front of our eyes.

This also has an impact on the retail sector with regard to goods produced for outdoor and country pursuits. As a consequence, from next week, firms in Newtownards that make outdoor socks for walking in the countryside will be working a three-day week.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member's time is up.

Mr Savage: There is often public misunderstanding of the issues involved in farming. This is probably due to the fact that the bulk of the population are now urban dwellers. Nowhere is this misunderstanding more apparent than with regard to the question of compensation paid to farmers in the wake of the foot-and-mouth crisis.

The public needs to understand that compensation for the market value of an animal is only the beginning. Along with buildings and land, animals are the main asset of the farmer, but animals are an active asset which in normal times generate income. A farmer's work in rearing and feeding animals represents what we would call "value added" in business terms. That is a concept the wider public will understand.

A farmer's income is derived from the value he adds to the animals through feeding and nurture and a small element of profit in addition. That profit was already eroded before the foot-and-mouth crisis. It is a profit margin which, in the wake of recent crises such as BSE, has already turned into a loss for many farmers.

The key point is that the farmer needs to be compensated, not only for the market value of the animals he has lost, but also for loss of the income he could reasonably have expected to earn from those animals in normal circumstances. This must also be part of the equation.

Furthermore, it is not simply those farmers whose herds suffered an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease who are affected. Nor is it just those whose land adjoins farms where outbreaks have occurred and have had their animals culled. The foot-and-mouth outbreak has caused a collapse of normal market conditions everywhere. All farmers have been affected, not to mention the dependent industries and related businesses such as tourism. My Chairperson and many other Members have mentioned that the livestock marts have been instructed to close by Government officials. Machinery dealers and all industries associated with the agriculture industry are affected. As our Colleague across the Chamber said, the horse industry is practically at a standstill. Top racehorses who have come over here to be covered by stallions cannot get back from the stud farm to their own farm. The entire farming community has suffered losses consequential to the economic displacement caused by this epidemic.

At the Agriculture Committee on Wednesday 18 April, the Minister said that such consequential loss would be infinite and that it would create huge problems. That may well be true. I agree with the Minister that in normal circumstances the Northern Ireland block grant could not handle it, but these are not normal circumstances.

One of the most important consequences of the present crisis was revealed in a survey in 'Farming Life'. According to that study, one third of the farmers affected by foot-and-mouth disease have decided to sell up or to leave the industry.

Clearly, this is crucial. The unprecedented economic dislocation experienced since the first outbreak necessitates immediate and urgent consideration to be given to an early retirement scheme which I have outlined before in this Chamber. Only a scheme of this dimension can handle the inevitable restructuring of farming. People, including the Government, are only beginning to appreciate the size of the agriculture industry. We heard how tourism and interrelated industries in Northern Ireland have been affected. I am glad to see that the Minister of Finance and Personnel is here today. The situation affecting the agriculture industry is so serious that there will need to be an imaginative response which marks a real departure from the past. We have witnessed the last generation of farmers who are prepared to work for nothing.

12.00

I have had meetings with the Minister, and the Department is fully aware of the problems. It realises that only a radical response from the Government will do. I hope that this compensation package —

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member's time is up.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):

I thank the Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel and the Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment for affording the Assembly the opportunity to have this debate. We have had a serious and important debate on the implications of the foot-and-mouth disease, the threat that it represents to our entire agriculture sector and individual farm businesses, as well as the wider consequential damage to other sectors, not least — but not only — the tourism sector.

The Executive have been alert to all the dangers posed by foot-and-mouth disease since its outbreak across the water. We know now that we are witnessing the worst outbreak of the disease in Britain for a generation. The Executive were aware of all the risks from the beginning. We have moved decisively — and with all possible speed — to protect our vital interests in agriculture and, in turn, to try to contend with the difficulties posed for the wider economy. We have a clear strategy for trying to achieve this objective.

The first priority has been, and will continue to be, effective action to contain outbreaks and to eradicate the disease. In this way alone will we be able to recover the disease-free status that our farmers need. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has been at the forefront of this effort. I pay tribute to the outstanding leadership shown by Bríd Rodgers, who has worked ceaselessly throughout this crisis. In a subsequent motion today, she will have a further opportunity to update the Assembly on the current position, and she may address many of the serious issues that have been raised by Members in this debate.

I stress that the fight against foot-and-mouth disease is the responsibility of all Government Departments. The Executive have made it clear that the work on containment and eradication that has been led by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development will be supported by additional personnel and resources drawn from across the public sector as necessary. I pay tribute to the support and co-operation of all Ministers and their Departments in meeting those additional personnel needs. The Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister has a role in trying to co-ordinate cross-Executive efforts to try to reinforce the hard work of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

The second prong of the strategy has been to get markets moving again, to take effective measures to restore confidence in the tourism sector and to try to attract visitors back to the region. Central to this effort, as we heard, has been the work on the new tourism strategy that was launched on 5 April by the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Sir Reg Empey.

As Sir Reg Empey explained, the strategy injects an additional £1 million in tourism. It will support promotions in the US, Canada, Europe and Scotland. The money will also be used to provide for more locally centred initiatives, including trade and media receptions.

Renewed efforts will be made within the island of Ireland through television, radio and press to raise awareness of the excellent holidays that we offer. As Sir Reg Empey emphasised, the most important thing we can do for the long-term benefit of tourism is bring the visitors back. Customers are the best answer to the problem.

The Executive are well aware that the effects of foot-and-mouth disease do not stop at the farmgate. There is a wider adverse economic impact from the disease and from the measures that have been needed to tackle it.

The Executive have set up a task force led by the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to monitor the wider consequences of the outbreak. It will also consider what feasible and practicable measures would be appropriate to support those sectors most affected, taking account of local circumstances. That group has links to the rural task force in Great Britain to ensure that

Northern Ireland benefits from any initiatives that are taken in Great Britain.

Steps have already been taken to help businesses adversely affected. Customs and Excise and the Inland Revenue are working together and taking a sympathetic approach to deferring payment of tax for businesses suffering financial problems as a result of foot-and-mouth disease. No interest will be charged for any period of deferral. In addition, all possible steps are being taken to speed up VAT repayments to farmers to aid their significant cash-flow difficulties.

Further aid is available through the Department of Trade and Industry's small firms loan guarantee scheme, which has been specially extended to help businesses affected.

I announced on 15 March that the Rates Collection Agency would enter into agreements with any business facing hardship because of foot-and-mouth disease to defer rates payments for up to three months. That help has been put in place very quickly and is assisting a number of hard-pressed cases.

I take issue with the suggestion that any of the deferment schemes — rates, VAT or others — are mere cosmetic exercises. They are measures that we have been able to take within available discretion. Given the limit to other measures, those measures should be recognised as welcome initiatives.

These measures provide a breathing space for businesses adversely affected by foot-and-mouth disease. However, the Executive have also been acting over the past weeks to ensure that more is done and that more measures are taken to give effective relief in cases of hardship.

The Executive's general approach to hardship relief is guided by the principle, reflected by many Members today, that businesses here should be supported in as beneficial a way as businesses in Great Britain. The picture there is changing, and there are variations in the approach taken in different areas across the water. Members are also aware that the legislative framework available to us is different in both character and detail from that in Great Britain.

We cannot simply introduce the same rate relief scheme as has been introduced in Britain, because the statutory basis for operating such a scheme does not exist in Northern Ireland. I know that it has been suggested that we could get the statutory basis if we legislated by means of accelerated passage. Notwithstanding the possibility of accelerated passage, our legislative regime is not the same as Great Britain's, given the implications of the equality duty and the need to go through the full period of consultation. Any rate relief scheme that we introduce on that legislative basis would require secondary legislation as well as primary legislation, therefore it could not be achieved as readily as some Members might want it to be or assume that it could be.

On 12 April, the Executive remitted the Department of Finance and Personnel, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to make proposals for a scheme of a similar nature and with an effect similar to Great Britain's scheme. Those Departments are working on a range of options which will be considered by the Executive as a matter of urgency. When decisions have been made, the details will be announced as soon as possible. The work that is being done by the three Departments will be presented to the Executive by the task force, chaired by the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, which is dealing with the economic issues created by foot-and-mouth disease.

Mr Wells: Is there to be a form of rates moratorium or a general consequential loss package? In my constituency, there are businesses that are about to go to the wall but who pay very low rates — some are run from home. Some of these businesses face hundreds of thousands of pounds of loss. Is the package that the Minister proposes simply a way of reducing the rate burden, or is it a wider consequential loss package that will identify the top 20% to 30% of affected businesses and provide compensation for the huge losses that they have incurred?

Mr Durkan: I refer the Member to my earlier point that we have concentrated on as many people as this debate has made reference to. We have tried to ensure that the benefits that we make available to businesses in Northern Ireland are comparable to those extended to affected businesses across the water. Many Members have referred to questions about rates, therefore that is the matter that I have been addressing.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: Does the Minister know anything about the £13.5 million that the Scottish Parliament has set aside for a compensation package?

Mr Durkan: Different measures and criteria are being employed by the devolved Administrations in Scotland and Wales as well as the different councils in England. We are aware of different amounts of money that have been announced as part of packages and schemes. We are putting forward a case to the Treasury based on our need for additional resources to help us alleviate the effects and consequences of foot-and-mouth disease. The funds are to be used not only to alleviate the consequential difficulties faced by different businesses, but to cover the considerable costs of contending with the disease. We are continuing to put pressure on the Treasury to ensure that we receive a full and fair share of the moneys that are made available from the contingency reserve.

12.15 pm

The Department has had contact with the Treasury. On the basis of that, we are confident that any scheme developed here which has similar effects and delivers similar benefits to those that are being run across the water will be the subject of a read-across of extra money

to us. That does not mean that we will be paid the full cost of any scheme that is adopted. I therefore ask Members to be realistic in that regard. The Assembly cannot come up with any scheme, at any cost, and automatically get the money from the Treasury. Many Members have made the point that more resources are needed from the Treasury. In reality, while Members can agree that the Treasury should listen to that case, there is no guarantee that it will.

In those circumstances and within the limits of what is available to us, we must explore how best we can assist the cases of hardship, and that is what the Department is trying to do. In his opening remarks, the Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel said that the money should not be coming out of the block grant. Many Members have said that that case should be made to the Treasury. We could face circumstances where little addition is made to our existing block grant for these needs. There is no guarantee that the Department of Finance and Personnel and the First and Deputy First Ministers' representations to the Treasury will deliver as much as Members would like. In that instance the Department must decide how it can fund the measures we want to implement to mitigate the effects of this emergency on businesses. We will not be able to compensate for all of the trading difficulties and losses that different business sectors are suffering. We can try to mitigate the effects as they impact on particular sectors and localities. Therefore we are looking at options aimed at doing that. Obviously, as Sir Reg Empey indicated, the Executive are trying to look at other means of assistance that can be given to businesses by way of support and information.

Allow me to answer points that were made at the end of the debate. This issue is not just about the amount of money that might be made available; it is also about the way in which services and support are provided across the range of public sector agencies.

Particular reference was made to the livestock marts. Many Members stressed that the livestock marts are a case apart, because, effectively, they are closed by order of law. That is a factor that the Executive are sensitive to, and, as Minister of Finance and Personnel, I am alert to. The Executive will be considering it fully.

I recognise the severe effect of foot-and-mouth disease on the entire economy and on the agriculture and tourism sectors in particular. Both sectors are central to our present and future economic strength. We cannot afford a major downturn. Members have cited the figure from PricewaterhouseCoopers of £200 million that appeared in the newspapers. While that includes the effects of other factors such as the downturn in trends in the world economy, as well as foot-and-mouth disease, the Executive recognise that we must respond as effectively as we can. However, we must take account of the statutory limitations that prevented us from taking those steps that some people wanted us to take before now. We must also realise that if our efforts with the Treasury do not deliver the

additional moneys we want, we may face financial limitations.

I want to make sure that the concerns that have been reflected in this debate are fully reflected by the Executive when we consider the sort of measures and package to be put together. It is very useful that the debate has coincided with the Executive's considerations. The mandate that we received predated this motion. The Executive's considerations are not being prompted by the motion, but they will be assisted and enlightened by the useful points that have been made.

The Chairperson of the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee (Mr P Doherty): Go raibh maith agat a Cheann Comhairle. I support the motion.

First, I would like to reflect the views of the Chairperson of the Finance and Personnel Committee, Mr Francie Molloy, and the Deputy Chairperson of the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee, Mr Sean Neeson. They praised the joint-Committee and cross-party approach to the motion and said that it was an effective way to move on the severe hardship that is being felt throughout the Six Counties.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Sir Reg Empey made a very pertinent point in his submission. He said that the focus was on getting visitors back and getting the industry back on its feet. He also said that last year there was an 11% growth in the industry. I commend his efforts last week when he met his counterparts in Scotland, Wales and England to try to get the tourist industry back on its feet.

The motion focuses on the immediate need for a hardship relief package. This is not only an issue for the business industry but for farm-related businesses too. The financial burden of a hardship relief package must lie with the Chancellor of the Exchequer. However, the Minister of Finance and Personnel, and the Executive collectively, must request such a package of him.

Mr Francie Molloy said that the crisis is not confined to the farms — it is much more widespread. He said that we must regenerate grants for farm businesses beyond the farmgate.

Mr Sean Neeson spoke of a 30% reduction in bookings in hotels for this season and of the need for clarification of the criteria that will be used in the horse racing industry when it returns to normal.

The Minister spoke of the need to bring the industry back to growth, of his efforts to do so — there was an 11% growth last year — and of the need, which has been ongoing for a number of years, to diversify beyond farming itself and into tourism.

Ms Lewsley spoke of the overall, long-term picture and of how we must carefully consider the allocation of funds.

Rev Ian Paisley focused on the facts that, by law, marts are closed down, that the Scottish parliament has set aside £3.5 million pounds to deal with these losses and that the marts have already laid off 400 full-time and part-time staff.

Gerry McHugh focused on farmers west of the Bann, on how they have had no income since the foot-and-mouth outbreak started and on how they cannot sell their animals.

David McClarty spoke of the need to provide financial relief measures sooner rather than later.

Eamon O'Neill mentioned horse riding and pony-trekking and highlighted the case of one person who has 40 ponies to look after, with absolutely no income. He said that the burden must fall on the Prime Minister and the Chancellor.

Ian Paisley Jnr spoke of the need for a disaster plan and for the Executive to focus on bringing such a strategy forward. Michelle Gildernew felt that it was a major mistake that only a rates rebate was being given; she felt that much greater relief was needed and that there should be a discount.

Billy Armstrong mentioned the effect on the 38,000 people who are employed in tourism. Annie Courtney spoke about compensation's being limited to those whose livestock had been culled or whose feedstuff had been taken, and she mentioned that tourism was suffering at a ratio of three to one when compared to farming — an issue that needs to be dealt with.

Edwin Poots focused on bed-and-breakfast establishments and farm bed-and-breakfast establishments in particular. He made the point that sheep farmers here are receiving half the compensation that such farmers are receiving in the South. Joan Carson spoke of the need for publicity to feature the fact that we are open for tourism and to explain the real effects of foot-and-mouth disease, as opposed to the phoney ones on which some media commentators, particularly in America, have been focusing.

Tommy Gallagher spoke about the food processing industry; the loss of £50,000 in some businesses; a case where staff had been laid off; and the ongoing effect on the industry. Jim Shannon spoke about cutbacks in stocks and the fact that many companies were going on a three-day week — something that needs to be alleviated.

George Savage referred to the knock-on effects beyond the farmgate on machinery dealers and all businesses associated with farming. He pointed out that the block grant was simply not enough. Mark Durkan made a number of points, perhaps too many to enumerate. He did say that the Executive were working on measures for hardship relief, that all Departments were involved and that they were putting a case for a fair share of the contingency reserve. Earlier today I spoke with the Minister of Education, who informed me that fishing and tackle shops were also experiencing severe cutbacks.

On April 3, the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee interviewed the Northern Ireland Hotels Federation. We had 44 pages of evidence dealing with its plight. I will read an extract to highlight that. Mr F Mooney said

“Since the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in Ireland many hotels, particularly city hotels, have experienced a dramatic downturn in the number of conferences ... being booked. The city hotels seemed to be bearing the brunt of cancellations in the initial period. As the tourism season unfolds for tourist-based properties, the industry is forecasting the possibility of a 30% reduction in bookings. The ability to maintain the present quorum of people employed in the industry has yet to be finally assessed. However, many people are indicating that to get them through the current season they are looking at either reducing working hours from 40 to 30 hours or reducing their staff complement by 10% or 15%.

We have come through a period of preparation for business in Northern Ireland. We have invested in training our staff and in improving our product, and at present we are in a very vulnerable state. If we cannot manage the revenue streams coming in, the cost centres must be looked at. Some of the cost centres are at the rateable valuation of the properties, PAYE, VAT et cetera. Those are some of the tax burdens that, with help, we can alleviate over the next six months.

I sit on a number of committees that represent industry in both the North and the South. The picture in the South is no better. Even though it is a developed tourism destination, the message that has been given to people thinking of holidaying in Ireland is ‘Not this year — come back and think about Europe next year’. For long-haul destinations in particular the hotel industry is forecasting a 50% reduction in bookings. It is forecasting that June, July and August will be very poorly affected. The tour operators who are running niche market activities such as fishing, golfing et cetera are all very badly affected.

We are learning” —

12.30 pm

Mr Speaker: Order. I am afraid that the Member’s time and the time for the debate is up.

Mr P Doherty: I would like to conclude by calling on the Chancellor of the Exchequer to introduce a hardship relief package and to ensure that the tourist industry is protected.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel, the Executive and the Chancellor of the Exchequer to respond to the current crisis resulting from the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease by introducing a hardship relief package to reflect the fall in incomes being experienced, not only by farm-related businesses but also by businesses in the tourist industry.

The sitting was suspended at 12.32 pm.

On resuming (Madam Deputy Speaker [Ms Morrice] in the Chair —

2.00 pm

FOOT-AND-MOUTH DISEASE

The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development (Rev Dr Ian Paisley): Madam Deputy Speaker, will you indicate the timing of this debate?

Madam Deputy Speaker: We have two hours for this debate. The time for contributions will depend on your opening statement.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: I beg to move

That this Assembly acknowledges the sacrifices made by, and hardship caused to, farmers, their families and the wider rural community in responding to the Executive’s policies and guidance regarding foot-and-mouth disease, and calls on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and her Executive colleagues to act to alleviate these difficulties as quickly and imaginatively as possible.

Mr Savage, the Deputy Chairperson of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee, will reply to this debate.

While the statements made by the Minister to the Assembly on Monday mornings are very welcome, they offer only a limited opportunity for questions, and we felt that such a crucial issue should be the subject of a full-scale debate — bearing in mind the debate this morning.

Throughout this crisis the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development has met with the Minister each week. The one exception was when we took a written update to hear the most up-to-date position on the foot-and-mouth outbreaks and to express our constituencies’ views on the Minister’s handling of the crisis. During these meetings a wide variety of topics were discussed, and it was clear that Members wished to see tight controls in place, both to keep any further infection from entering Northern Ireland and to ensure that the virus was contained. At times Members have questioned the Minister’s policies — not to indulge in political point-scoring but in a genuine attempt to understand the issues — to ensure that constituencies’ concerns are aired and to provide a focus of accountability to the public. That is part of the role of a departmental Statutory Committee.

Members have also shared the Minister’s anger at those who have brought this plague upon Northern Ireland. I do not wish to concentrate this debate on a denunciation of those involved, because the general public has already denounced them. I trust that they will soon be brought before the courts and receive severe sentences. My Committee and I want to see relief for the many

innocents who are suffering severely. Throughout the Committee's deliberations there has, quite understandably, been an emphasis on the needs of the farmers. Members have called for action on regionalisation, direct compensation for slaughtered animals, swift and uninterrupted payment of subsidies to farmers and consideration of the seasonal realities being faced by farmers with regard to feeding and moving livestock. All members of the Committee have received distressing telephone calls and letters and have been met by deputations of people who are really suffering.

I will give the Minister a summary of the most pressing matters that have been put to the Committee. Movement licences do not apply to many farms, especially beef and sheep farms where the sheep are on the fields and cattle cannot be let out. On welfare grounds, we need an urgent solution — when I say urgent, I mean it with all my heart and soul. Farmers could be sued for not treating their animals according to proper welfare standards, but they have no other option, because they cannot get them out into the fields. That is an urgent matter, and I trust that the Minister will make a response on that today.

Many farmers have had no income for the last nine weeks. Farm-to-farm sales must be started immediately. Subsidy payments must be speeded up; delays in payment are unacceptable, particularly in this crisis. The IACS forms are impossible to complete, as farmers cannot say whether they will be able — or allowed — to rent land or purchase livestock. I trust that the Minister will take that on board. Rather than adding further costs to the farmer, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development should meet veterinary costs associated with animal movement licences. The Minister has suggested the end of August as the end of the timetable for registration. That is unacceptable. Stores of milk products are building up. We need to resume lamb sales to France, and blood tests should be a priority. That is a summary of what farmers are saying to us.

The Committee has begun to consider the lessons that we must learn for farming policy and has already made recommendations to the Department's vision group, including the registration of livestock dealers and the introduction of electronic tagging for better traceability. I have corresponded with the Minister, sending her details provided by an expert in foot-and-mouth disease, who says that it is a great disappointment that in the United Kingdom — including this part — there is no central strategy for dealing with a foot-and-mouth outbreak. That lack of preparation has left us trusting to luck for the prevention of a major foot-and-mouth outbreak. It is also in sharp contrast to the attitude of foot-and-mouth disease-free countries.

The USA has not had an outbreak since 1929 — why is that? In the last decade, the US Government have run three foot-and-mouth control exercises, involving the Department of Agriculture, the army and the civil defence

forces. The whole country was alerted to what could happen, and there was a strategy to deal with it. Unfortunately, we had nothing of that kind.

The Committee has also acknowledged the suffering in other sectors. The food processing industry, livestock marts, the tourist and hospitality industry and event organisers are among those who received specific mention. The Committee has ensured that the difficulties faced by those sectors were also referred to the Minister, and she has heard from members of the Committee about the effect on those sectors. In passing, I will mention the livestock marts, about which I spoke at some length in a previous debate. They are a special case, and I have referred it to the Minister. She knows my position — and that of others — on the matter.

I hope that there will be news to alleviate the great fears about the complete closure of that sector of the industry. We heard in the previous debate today that there is to be a hardship relief package to take account of falling incomes. However, we must also look beyond this. Through this motion, the Deputy Chairperson and I hope that Members who have rural interests at heart will make constructive suggestions on how to bring about the long march towards the recovery of farming and the whole rural economy. We also need a constructive response from the Minister. Rural communities are looking to the Minister and to this Assembly for signs that their way of life will not be lost and that hope for the future remains.

We are interested in the buying-out scheme that has been launched by the Dutch Government under which surpluses that have built up as a result of foot-and-mouth disease can be taken up. Could a similar scheme be operated in Northern Ireland so that the Government could take over these animals?

I would also like to mention to the Minister that in the Report of the Committee of Inquiry on Foot-and-Mouth Disease 1968, Part Two, it is stated that

“Burial of carcasses is preferable to burning. When burning is unavoidable there is as yet no better means than making a pyre than with coal and wood”

Is it the view of the Minister's Department that burial is preferable to burning? Would she like to comment on that?

This is a time of crisis for us, especially because our economy, unlike the economy of Scotland, Wales or England, is an agricultural economy. If farming does well, the country does well. If farming goes down, the country goes down. If farming fails, the country fails, and so we have a responsibility to see that this industry does not go down, that it is not lost to us, that there is a future for the young people who want to engage in it and that there is a comfortable retirement for those who have borne the burden and the heat of the day. It is a difficult time and a time of crisis, but mountains are made to be climbed up

and over. We have to face this mountain, and by the help of Almighty God I believe that we will get over the top of this peak.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I call Mr James Leslie.

Mr Leslie: Madam Deputy Speaker, you have not stated a time limit for speeches.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Mr Leslie, for pointing out my omission. Given the number of Members who have asked to speak and the amount of time available, I must ask Members to restrict their contributions to five minutes.

Mr Leslie: I wish that I had not asked.

Mr Bradley: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Who recommends the allotted time for speeches and who may deliver them? This is probably the most important debate to take place in this Chamber since the Assembly's inception. To restrict the length of Members' speeches to five minutes and to limit the debate to two hours is to ignore the real problem that exists.

Madam Deputy Speaker: As Members know, the Business Committee sets the debating time for each motion, and the Speaker, depending on the number of names that come forward, divides up that time accordingly. My aim is obviously to facilitate as many Members as possible, because there is great demand from Members to speak on this motion. The Business Committee has restricted the length of the debate to two hours, and this is why Members' speeches must be limited to five minutes.

2.15 pm

Mr McCartney: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Northern Ireland public is becoming increasingly and acutely aware that, as Mr Bradley said, major issues are being given a very miserly length of time for discussion by this Assembly, which sits two days a week and which is now on short time. I believe that on some occasions we are now starting at 12 o'clock instead of at 10.30 am. On behalf of the House, it should be brought to the attention of the Business Committee that it is not good enough.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That was going to be my suggestion. That issue should be brought up by the Member's representative on the Business Committee.

Mr McCartney: It is being brought up constantly.

Madam Deputy Speaker: We cannot waste time on this.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I delivered my speech as quickly as possible. I do not want people to go out and say that Ian Paisley hogged the time.

Mr Leslie: I will use my four and a half minutes to address the future rather than dwell on the current problems, which have been well outlined by Dr Paisley and which

I trust the Minister is acutely aware of. When we know how long the markets will remain closed, we will know what the cost of the crisis will be to the producing farmer. It is hard to quantify now.

However, it is clear that farm-related businesses have suffered an immediate and severe impact. Depending on when a reasonably priced market returns to Northern Ireland, it may turn out that farm-related businesses suffer more than those farmers whose stock is unaffected by the disease. It should be borne in mind that immediately before the Cushendall and Ardboe outbreaks, lamb prices were quite strong.

Looking ahead, it seems that the message is the same as it has been every time that Members have looked at this issue in the Chamber — production in the farming sector must fall. Current production levels are not sustainable by the markets to which they are being taken. The likelihood, therefore, is that the amount of land in production will fall and the number of farmers farming that land will fall as it was doing prior to the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease. My Colleague, Mr Savage, will talk about the farmers' retirement scheme in that context.

It is difficult to see how significant changes can take place without a complete review of the common agricultural policy (CAP). I am relieved to see that Germany has started to come around to our point of view on this matter. That might change the balance of power in negotiations.

If one looked at Northern Ireland's land and climate and asked what type of farming should be carried out, the shape of the industry would be different to the one that exists, which is heavily influenced by the incentives provided by subsidies. There is a considerable belt of countryside in Northern Ireland where the warm, wet climate is ideal for the nursery stage of the horticulture industry in which Northern Ireland is scarcely engaged at present.

New Zealand abolished subsidies and as a consequence discovered that a great deal of the product that it had been producing had not been making the best use of the land and climate. That took 10 to 15 years to emerge. There are lessons there for Northern Ireland.

In that marginal land — and I reflect on my own constituency of North Antrim, with its north coast and the Glens of Antrim — it is essential that any future plans involve an integrated approach between the planning authority and rural development. I would like to see planning policy favouring farm diversification at the expense of irrelevant and damaging development. Sometimes that relationship is misunderstood.

In England it is virtually impossible to get planning permission to build a new dwelling in the countryside. That is why farm conversions are so popular. When one goes to the highlands of Scotland one will see scarcely any new buildings. The Scots are preserving the

integrity of the landscape, because that is the amenity that attracts the visitors. If we permit widespread development along the coastline, we will cut the farmer off at the knees, because he might wish to enter the bed-and-breakfast industry by converting buildings for accommodation use.

In reality, that is more expensive than new build. Developers can completely overdevelop our coastline, and they are detracting from its aesthetic attraction. If we are not careful we will cut out the opportunity for diversification before we are able to consider it properly. I continually draw this matter to the attention of the Minister of the Environment. Finally, there are good prospects for farm-based enterprises, but the prospects are less good for farming-based enterprises.

Mr Bradley: I support the motion. By the end of the debate I hope that the ongoing additions to the financial problems of our farmers as a result of foot-and-mouth disease will have been highlighted to maximum effect. I hope that we will get the necessary attention needed to resolve the crisis being experienced by this sector of rural society. The motion calls on the Executive to play its part in the compensatory programme that, I hope, will be advanced as a result of our deliberations.

I wish to direct my opening remarks to the Minister for Social Development and the role that his Department has to play in providing part of the solution that is needed urgently. Following the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease and the related financial problems that came in its wake, the build-up of hardship has brought a new and wider dimension to the stress being experienced in farming households. The financial problems have now escalated into those of social need.

The problems being experienced in recent months on our farms due to lack of working capital have now been overtaken by the lack of ready cash needed to put bread and butter on the table and for making essential everyday purchases. The outdoor cash crisis on the farm has now entered the family home. It has become a major issue, and the Social Security Agency has an immediate and significant role to play. I was encouraged to read the agency's commitment in its declared objectives in the 'Strategic and Business Plan for 2001-04'. The agency's main aim is written in large bold print in the centre of page 11. The agency aims to give

"The RIGHT support to. The RIGHT people at. The RIGHT time. EVERY TIME."

It goes without saying that farmers fit into that category perfectly. Therefore, I call on the Minister for Social Development to put together a team of advisers immediately who will visit farming families in difficulties and advise them about the level of help on offer from the Department. Traditionally, farmers have had little or no contact with social security offices. Many of them would not even know where the nearest local office is, or the role that it plays towards those in need.

On page 39 of the 'Strategic and Business Plan' — in the section on service standards — the agency offers to provide at least one telephone number to deal with related enquiries to its offices. I suggest that a helpline for farmers — if one does not already exist — might be worth consideration.

It is difficult for those who are removed from the current problems on our farm holdings to comprehend fully the stress in the family home when the farmgate is closed and when the doors are locked for the night. The absence of ready cash is impossible for those who do not have the problem to understand fully. In normal times it was no problem to provide money for children's school trips, and there was always money available to respond to a "top-up" call from a student son or daughter who was living away from home, or for prescriptions to meet the family's medical requisites. In other words there was always a "roughness", as they say in the country, to meet the foreseen and unforeseen needs of the day. It is to be regretted that those days are gone, and it is the Government's duty to step in to bridge the gap until the current agri-financial crisis is resolved.

I apologise for the repetition of this issue following the questions and answers yesterday during questions to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and this morning's debate and questions by other Members. However, the foot-and-mouth outbreak is very relevant to the motion. First, the ever-increasing financial difficulties faced by our livestock marts have arisen directly because of the initial closure ban following the foot-and-mouth outbreaks, which was firmed up by an EU Directive. Nobody can challenge these understandable bans, but by the same token nobody can say that the enforced closures were other than as a direct result of the foot-and-mouth outbreaks. I contend that compensatory claims cannot, and should not, be fitted into the consequential loss category. The Minister of Finance and Personnel said that he would address this issue.

I suggest a pro-rata reduction on the rates bill matched to the open and closed days of the marts. Perhaps the banks could also play a part by putting a freeze on interest charges. Secondly, the Executive should, if necessary, seek assistance from the Chancellor of the Exchequer to finance the cost of the private veterinary licences required by farmers prior to moving livestock. There is absolutely no way in which a farmer should be charged for complying with this directive or for co-operating with it as required.

My third point is not directly related to a foot-and-mouth compensation package. It is, more or less, a gentle reminder to the Executive that the many problems which existed before the foot-and-mouth crisis are still there and should not get lost in the commotion. I am concerned, for example, that the County Down fishermen, the potato growers or the Silent Valley sheep farmers might feel that their problems are being forgotten about

during this problematic period. I seek assurances from the Executive on their behalf.

In conclusion, my opinion is that the greatest problems for the cash-strapped industry is the difficulty of getting the true situation fully appreciated and the need for greater communications from the powers that be.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The time is up.

Mr McHugh: Go raibh maith agat, a Leas-CheannChomairle. I too must complain about being confined to five minutes. The Business Committee should have allocated three hours to this debate. It has allowed three hours for debates on lesser subjects.

I welcome the opportunity to speak on this issue, but we can barely touch on the subject because of the time limit. We can try to get only a few points across, and I resent that. We must ask why we are in this situation. That is more important than targeting particular groups or individuals who are perceived to be to blame for bringing the problem into the country. The problem is a result of the push by multinational companies and others for low prices. That issue is not local; it is a global one. We have to grapple and deal with it. Do we want people outside this country to produce the food we eat, or do we want it produced here where there are proper traceability systems? Do we rely on multinationals to bring in our food from wherever with minimal labelling? Members should go to the shops and try to read from the labels where the food comes from. It is impossible. I have looked — and not only in this country. This relates to the push for profit and global control of food and everything else by large conglomerates.

Tesco made a great noise about its £1 billion profit and how well it managed its position in the face of farmers who have made absolutely no profit in the last few years. While Tesco would say in its defence that its profit was not only from food, that is what brings people into its supermarkets. It relies largely on that. In looking at what it can do to leave us with a base industry, it has a part to play in the current situation and in the future. It can have quality raw material here, instead of working with ever larger outfits and turning to other countries which neither have nor intend to have traceability.

I disagree with the opinion that farms should become smaller. Compared to those in Brazil, for example, they are already small. I quote from the 'Farmers Journal'

"Is our insistence on keeping food prices artificially low as bad for the entire country as it is for the future of family farms? What is the effect on our health and the fabric of Irish society of the ever more intensive farming methods that are necessary to keep prices low enough to please the supermarkets?"

That is the opinion of someone in the catering industry. We have to grasp the nettle and decide what type of food production we want. Do we want quality food, or do we want to put up with what we have had? In the years to

come, do we want more outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease, more instances of BSE? We are at that point.

What policy failure of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development allowed the current foot-and-mouth outbreak to move from Britain to the island of Ireland? What policy failure of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) allowed the situation to arise in England, Scotland and Wales?

2.30 pm

MAFF had an opportunity two years ago to install a state-of-the-art computer system which could trace and tackle foot-and-mouth disease. It was an idea from New Zealand inspired by the concept of stopping the disease before it became an outbreak. The computer system was not installed, and the money was put elsewhere. GB farm organisations are saying that — it is not something I am dreaming up. That is where the blame lies. MAFF therefore needs to compensate us. It is for the British Government to look into the matter, deal with it and pay for the consequential losses. Government policy failure at top level is the reason for our present predicament.

Mr Ford: I shall endeavour to follow the Chairperson's lead and keep my comments brief. I do not intend to repeat all that has been said so far, but I must refer to the issue raised by the Committee Chairperson — the matter of the livestock traders, the Northern Ireland Livestock Auctioneers' Association — who have been closed down by Government order and who have yet to receive any compensation.

As Mr Leslie has already hinted, some of the greatest losses are not being suffered on ordinary farms. With the price for milk there is enough suffering on farms that are relatively closed and away from the current disease outbreak. There are particular problems for those who have engaged in farm diversification activities and who have followed the advice given by the Department of Agriculture over the years. In some senses they are now suffering and would have been in a better situation if they had not taken that advice but had confined themselves to the ordinary pattern of farming. Most farm diversification involves a close interaction with people off the farms, whether it is a farm shop bringing people onto the farm; the provision of bed-and-breakfast accommodation, perhaps through the conversion of redundant buildings; or provision of other visitor facilities such as an open farm, pony-trekking or even quad bike driving. All these activities involve bringing people onto the farm and create greater difficulties than if the farmer had confined himself to traditional farming activities.

It seems illogical that those who are suffering most are those who have followed the advice from the Department and have invested in alternative enterprises in order to maintain farm income and keep younger members of the family employed in the countryside. They have perhaps gone to the bank and borrowed heavily. In some cases,

however, they have not even needed to do that to be in difficulties. Those people have done what they have been asked to do — provided employment and enhanced the rural infrastructure. They are keeping people in the countryside and keeping shops, facilities and schools open, and yet they are the ones who now face the greatest threat and the potential of closure.

Farming activities have maintained some level of income, although not what they should, especially for those whose cattle go over-30 months, those who are presently trying to sell sheep in Northern Ireland or those who are faced with the commodity price of milk. It is ironic that it is those who have sought to diversify, to be progressive and to provide job opportunities who are faced with these problems. That is why there must be a case for consequential compensation, and it must be answered by Ministers responsible to the Assembly.

At the end of the debate I have no doubt that the Minister will tell us that she and the Minister of Finance and Personnel have limited funds available. That is correct, and that is why we must support any pressure applied by the Executive to the Chancellor of the Exchequer who has his billions stockpiled for his pre-election boom, whenever he chooses to bring that about. Compensation for the foot-and-mouth outbreak will be a small share of what he made from selling mobile phone licences over the last 12 months.

There must also be a case for saying that we need to examine what is available in our budgets. I forget how many times between Christmas and the end of March the Minister of Finance and Personnel announced that he had found an extra few million pounds in his back pocket. There must be a case for looking at the priorities of the Executive and the money that needs to be made available to keep essential rural businesses in operation. It is my understanding that there have been some moves in that direction in Wales and Scotland — even in advance of movement from the UK Chancellor. If it is good enough for Wales and Scotland, it ought to be good enough for us as well. It is not acceptable that we sit and do nothing.

Finally, on the issue of welfare movements, the Minister has told us of the need for stringency. I fully accept that. However, we seem to be stuck in a dichotomy. A few months ago we were not stringent enough on those who traded in cattle and sheep, on those who brought sheep from across the water and moved them around, through mart after mart, within a few days. Now we are being excessively stringent on ordinary farmers who do not own every inch of the road along which they wish to move cattle. I ask the Minister to look at whether we are not being too stringent.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The time is up.

Mr Douglas: This has been the most disastrous period for agriculture and the wider rural community in my memory. It even surpasses the BSE problem. It has been

made worse by the fact that the farmers were beginning to see a light at the end of the BSE tunnel. When a scourge like this hits the agriculture industry it does not hit farmers only; it also causes suffering for all the reliant industries that supply the farming community.

As has been stated, one of the casualties of the crisis which has seen its income wiped out overnight is the livestock option business and its employees. To date, there is no means by which to provide compensation for this sector, but financial help is needed urgently. The livestock market is important to Northern Ireland. When we have no livestock market it gives cash-hungry meat plants the opportunity to increase their prices. They enjoy a harvest and increase their profits. This will continue until the markets are re-opened. I urge the Minister to do something immediately, and in any way possible, for these businesses in the livestock industry that are most important to farming.

Many farmers and their wives have diversified into bed-and-breakfast accommodation and other businesses, as they were encouraged to do. Now they find that their income is nil. People in bed-and-breakfast businesses are suffering the most, as people have been discouraged from visiting rural areas.

There is also a need for farmers to be able to move stock in a sensible and progressive way. Our first priority is to beat the disease, but we must also allow movement to ensure that we do not cause greater hardship than we alleviate. By allowing monitored movement we can keep as much control as possible over the potential spread of this disease. When controls are tightened to draconian levels, as they are at present, we see more illegal movements, with the consequential loss of traceability.

Many Members have highlighted the general problems faced, and I will not labour these points. However, the one area that needs to be explored more than any other is the movement of livestock — and even dead stock — into this country. The initial problem, as we all know, was caused by the improper control of imported sheep. This is something that must be properly controlled and monitored. We must ensure that any animals, especially those that are imported live, go only to the places allowed by their permits. Veterinary staff must ensure that this is what happens, so ensuring proper traceability.

Furthermore, we must have proper checks on animals coming into the country, so as to prevent, as far as humanly possible, health problems multiplying in our herds and flocks. Many animal health problems appear to have begun when proper border controls in Europe — and closer to home — were relaxed as part of closer European integration. The controls must be tightened once again in order to protect our industry. If we do not do it, no one else will.

We must also ensure that imported food meets the standards that apply to our own producers. Food should

not be imported from countries where foot-and-mouth disease is endemic in the animal population, when we are making such strenuous efforts to eradicate it from our own animals.

Illegal imports must be stopped immediately. Reports of rotting meat in suitcases and blood leaking from baggage at Heathrow airport show only some of the diseased meat and products coming into the country illegally. The Minister should tell Nick Brown in no uncertain terms that we must not be made the whipping boys of the world as far as imports are concerned.

The Department is to be commended on the work already undertaken, but the Minister should help prevent the spread of many farm diseases by considering simple measures, such as the reintroduction of grant-aiding and planting stock-proof hedging with appropriate fencing. I support the motion.

Mr McCartney: Much has been said about the immediate problems facing the farming industry as a result of foot-and-mouth disease. Everyone acknowledges that both the BSE crisis and foot-and-mouth disease were largely the product of central Government's incompetence.

Dr Paisley highlighted the preventative measures taken in the United States and other countries to prepare for a possible outbreak. Nothing of the kind took place in the United Kingdom. When the outbreak first occurred, it was suggested that the priority of the Government was their electoral position, rather than a speedy and effective programme for dealing with the disease.

I want to talk about the long-term effects of this particular crisis on the farming industry in Northern Ireland. There are those in the United Kingdom who look on this outbreak as a mixed blessing. They see it as accelerating the EU policy that the UK, including Northern Ireland, is not to be designated as a food-producing area for Europe.

The extension eastwards of the EU will include countries like Hungary and Poland, large proportions of whose gross domestic products (GDP) are devoted to agriculture. Why should we bother producing food in the United Kingdom when it can be produced much more cheaply in other areas that will come into the EU?

There has been a policy to suggest that people should not be concerned about that, because farming products represent less than 1% of GDP. Foot-and-mouth disease has just accelerated a process that was already in the pipeline. Farmers in Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom will be converted into custodians of the countryside, while food is produced more cheaply in other parts of the EU.

Now and in the recent past, the farming industry has benefited from subsidies and from some aspects of the common agricultural policy. People have been obsessed, to a degree, with exports. As agriculture forms a very large part of Northern Ireland's GDP, that was under-

standable, but is it not a short-term attitude to take when the strategic aim of the EU is not to include the UK as one of its major food-producing areas?

There are already political and other commentators writing in United Kingdom newspapers and asking why we should be excited about farming. What is the difference between the farmers and the miners? The miners, like the farmers at that time, were responsible for producing a relatively minor proportion of the GDP. We could buy coal more cheaply from Poland, the USA, South Africa and other places. They question why it should be any different for farming, given that food can be bought more cheaply from other places. Why should the farmers not fall into line with the programme designed for the United Kingdom within the EU? Under this programme, the UK is seen as a centre for tourism, entertainment and service industries but not for farming. That is why the farmer, in the future, is to be the custodian of the countryside.

2.45 pm

The farming industry should look very carefully at the behaviour of central Government. The central Government do not care very much about how farming in Northern Ireland is affected because, although farming in Northern Ireland accounts for 6% of the GDP, it creates less than 1% in the UK. Although we are most acutely affected by the incompetence of central Government, the issue is not one that wrings the withers of many people on the mainland. It is important that our Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has a clear and unique programme for defending farming in Northern Ireland, because our industry is distinctly different from farming in any other part of the UK. Farming in Northern Ireland requires very special and effective treatment, if it is to be protected.

Rev Dr William McCrea: Rural Ulster is at the point of despair. Ulster farming is going through another crisis on top of BSE, the Agivey fire that decimated the pig industry and the various regulations imposed by the European Union. Only Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK rigorously and vigorously apply those regulations to farming, while the rest of Europe just seems to toddle along. They make the regulations, but, of course, they also break them. Northern Ireland sticks to those regulations.

There is a wide range of farming problems with major financial implications for the farming community. Workable solutions need to be found, and each solution has a financial implication. However, the finances available to the Chancellor of the Exchequer are very healthy, and a wise use of the multi-billion pound surplus that was announced recently by the Treasury will help the UK to recover from this calamity. Of course, that will happen only if the Treasury has the will to do it.

The short-term future of the industry depends on the eradication of foot-and-mouth disease. However, the

medium-and long-term future of the industry will be assured only by the provision of a massive financial investment package for the defence of the industry. Consumers need to support local produce, and the proper labelling of Northern Ireland produce will help that. A fair price for the farmers' products would help, since there seems to be a large discrepancy between the amount paid to the farmer after his hard labour and the price paid by the housewife when she goes to the supermarket.

This morning, Dr Paisley mentioned the difficulties faced by the livestock markets. The Government ordered the closure of those markets, and staff had to be laid off. I have been sent copies of some of the rates bills that are still arriving on the premises, despite the fact that the doors of the businesses from which rates payment is being sought have been shut in accordance with the Government's order. What steps is the Minister of Finance and Personnel going to take to guide these businessmen, and what relief are they really going to get?

This morning I listened to the Minister's winding-up speech in which he told us about the problems with passing primary and secondary legislation. He said that there is no statutory basis for introducing the type of rates relief scheme that is being asked for and that there are difficulties with accelerated passage. I say to the Minister that where there is a will, there is a way. The sooner the Minister starts the programme, the sooner that help will become a reality to those who need it. Has the Minister of Finance and Personnel responded to the concerns that have been expressed about rates rises, some of which he and his Colleagues unfairly hiked?

Because they were ordered to close, will the rate demands for the premises be deferred until it is known for how long the premises will remain closed? The owners are paying rates, and they are getting demands for insurance. The Minister of Agriculture is holding up her hands to show that she does not know, and I accept that. However, the Minister can pass this question on to the Minister of Finance and Personnel.

Veterinary costs for animal movement licences should be the responsibility of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. There is no use in saying that it is everyone's responsibility to beat the crisis when the debt-ridden farmers have no room to manoeuvre. I have consistently asked why there seems to be a different disinfecting policy at the border with the Irish Republic. Those travelling south are vigorously searched and go through a rigorous disinfectant process, but those coming from the South drive on into Northern Ireland.

Farmers who have had their stock wiped out by BSE and the cull are left with a considerable amount of costly meal worth several thousand pounds, but no account has been taken of that for compensation purposes. Those same farmers must lay off their workers. They are faced with the obligation to make redundancy payments, but

they are told that they will not receive any compensation for this.

Other problems are also being faced. Pigs are overweight, because they have been kept on the farms. Nevertheless, when farmers take the pigs to the factory they will not get payment for the extra weight after the pigs come up to the specific demand weight, and, therefore, the farmers need compensation. The same applies to the animals that have been kept on farms for over 30 months and must be culled. There is a £200 differential. I would have expected a longer debate to get some answers to the problems that are faced by my constituents.

Mr Armstrong: The issue is of grave concern to many people. It is important to inform people of how the disease came to the Province. The sheep were imported to be slaughtered but were not. Questions must be asked about how the sheep found their way to unsuspecting farms. If the handling of the sheep had been properly carried out and the papers that accompanied the animals checked off at their proper destination, I believe that the sheep would have been slaughtered at an abattoir, and Northern Ireland would not be in the situation that it is in today. We cannot relax our health standards — prevention is better than cure.

There have been four cases of the disease in the Province to date. What way has the episode impacted on Northern Ireland? If we are to legislate properly to control the disease, we must first make an accurate assessment of its effects. I have first-hand experience of them; two of the cases occurred in the Coagh area of my constituency of Mid Ulster. They are within several miles of my own farm, and it is still in a 10km zone.

Farmers in that area are in a state of shock over their loss of livelihood. Does anyone care? The days are long; farmers have no stock to feed or tend and no financial income. UK farmers are also in a state of bewilderment. Farmers now represent the largest occupational suicide group in Britain. Farmers do not benefit from a 35-hour week, nor do they have a minimum wage. Industry has long been deprived of protective legislation but not of red tape and bureaucracy. Farmers have been exploited at the gain of the supermarkets. Everybody likes exotic fruit from faraway places, but is health not more important? There is an old saying, "If you have your health, you are a millionaire". It is time we got our priorities right.

The personnel involved with farms and farm-associated enterprises are nervous wrecks; social events have been cancelled; fewer meals are being eaten in hotels; forest parks are closed; province-wide sporting fixtures have been cancelled; and the burning of cattle has done nothing to attract visitors. As Assembly Members we have a duty to give leadership during the crisis. We must provide whatever help we can to those worst affected by the situation. Compensation has been rightly awarded to those farmers who have seen their livelihood destroyed by the

disease. What about the forgotten victims? What about the farmer who has sold all of his cattle to the abattoirs and the meat plants? He then finds that he cannot restock, because there are no livestock markets. Farmers need auction markets, and such markets are more hygienic than a lot of the places where farm sales are taking place.

What is to happen to my neighbouring farmer who has had all his animals culled and is left with a meal bill of over £5,000? Meal bills must be paid. Who will pay them? Will this farmer get compensation? I do not think so. According to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development officials, no scheme exists to compensate farmers indirectly hit by foot-and-mouth disease. I call on central Government to provide a package to assist those people who have lost earnings from all types of farm business because of foot-and-mouth disease.

Thankfully, to date, the disease has been rapidly contained. The use of disinfectant mats, the spraying of vehicles and general caution have helped to do that. We need practical solutions to deal with the crisis. I want to see a change in the present policy concerning the movement of animals. I recognise the need for caution, but I also see the importance of getting animals out to pasture as soon as possible. I would support disease-free animals being moved to disease-free areas thirty days after the last outbreak.

The EU has closed all auction markets. That is a big problem. We need auction markets, and they should be reopened. There is only one way to achieve that, and that is for us to have a disease-free area. When that happens, auction markets will again open.

Serious animal welfare problems can be seen already, so we need to introduce an animal welfare movement scheme to alleviate this problem. Farmers are the stewards of the land, and Northern Ireland farmers are among the best in the world. The sooner the agriculture industry is revived, the better it will be for all dependent industries. I look forward to the day that the industry thrives again and the Province as a whole is better off.

Mr Dallat: I agree that the Executive have an important role to play in addressing the problems of farming and rural communities, as they have in all aspects of life. I am pleased that this fact is acknowledged in the motion from the Chairperson of the Agriculture Committee, Rev Ian Paisley. It would be nice if the two DUP Ministers would join their Colleagues on the Executive and help to deal with the problem. In time, perhaps they will.

The families directly affected by foot-and-mouth disease are a special case, and while they will receive compensation for their losses, it is freely accepted that the fall-out from such losses of stock, built up over many years, will have an impact for years to come. It has been suggested that some farmers may never recover, and had we still been living under direct rule, that would have been the

case. However, with our Assembly we can do something, and the public expects us to.

Farmers need compensation for their loss of earnings. However, there must be a holistic approach to the economic needs of the rural community. There must be massive reinvestment, structured not simply to make up for the effects of foot-and-mouth disease but to regenerate the entire countryside.

It is often said that when the farming community catches a cold, the rural community gets flu. How much worse it is then when there is an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease. It is at times like this that we begin to realise just how dependent our economy is on the farming community. The ripple effect is quite startling.

Foot-and-mouth disease has had a profound effect on mainstream tourism, as Sir Reg Empey and others have pointed out. However, very little has been said about the downturn in rural tourism. Rural tourism is fundamental to the economic regeneration of many communities and plays an increasing part in rural diversification. With the fall-off in visitors from abroad and the closure of visitor centres, forest parks and angling and equestrian centres, rural tourism has come to a virtual standstill. Shops in small towns, already reeling from the uncontrolled development of out-of-town shopping centres cannot afford to go through the economic slump that has been caused as a result of the foot-and-mouth epidemic. They are facing serious cash-flow problems.

It is only at a time like this that we realise just how many people are involved in a wide range of industries in rural communities dependent, to some degree, on farming. There are many cogs in the economic wheel, and they are all inter-dependent. Many of them have already been referred to, so I will not repeat what has been already said, but I support the pleas for help. Nothing good can come out of the foot-and-mouth outbreak other than perhaps a realisation that farming is much more important to the economic well-being of the community than has been previously thought.

3.00 pm

We have heard often today of the interdependence of different segments of our economy. That is welcome. Out of this crisis there may come some good. For too long, we have not fully appreciated just how much we depend on each other. I have no doubt that the Executive will address that problem and do everything possible to obtain additional resources from Britain and from Europe. As time passes, the economy will recover. The farming ship can be refloated, provided everyone is rising on the tide of recovery together.

Perhaps the Agriculture Committee has not spent enough time discussing rural development per se, and that has been a mistake. We can now move forward with

greater maturity and a sense of just how important the whole rural community is. Let us never forget that.

It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the sterling work done by the Minister of Agriculture and her staff. Indeed, most people have behaved with honour and integrity during this crisis. I have to say with regret, however, that the scurrilous claim made by Rev Dr William McCrea — that animals affected by foot-and-mouth might be buried on the farm of the Donnelly family at Ardboe — was nothing short of an absolute scandal, for which he has still to apologise. Others also tried to make political capital out of this disaster, but surely that was the worst example. I hope that the Minister will have something to say about that. Let us hope that the Executive will support the Minister fully in the demands that she will be required to make for additional resources. I believe that they will do their best, and they have my support. I support the motion.

Mr J Kelly: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter. The social effects of foot-and-mouth disease on the farming community can be compared to those of the industrial revolution on England and other parts, because people who were farming prior to the foot-and-mouth outbreak will not be farming again. The social effect that that will have on those communities cannot be quantified at this time.

As Bob McCartney said, the bureaucrats in Brussels and elsewhere will be quite comfortable with the plight that the farming community finds itself in. They could not have legislated for the farming community in the way that this disease has. To them, foot-and-mouth disease, in decimating the farming community, particularly in this part of Ireland, takes a thorn out of their side. Those farmers who want to come back to farming will be coming back on Brussels' terms, and not on the criteria of local needs and local economic circumstances.

Many will be quite comfortable with the tragedy facing the farming community. I regret that we do not have the time that we should to debate this critical and tragic circumstance. We do not have much time to address all the issues that have been raised with us at local level. We do not have the opportunity to expand on the full effects that this is going to have on the lives of people in the farming community. I will touch on just a few elements.

The value of animals and the compensation being paid to farmers look good. People are talking about someone's getting £1 million. However, let us look at the replacement value of sheep and cattle. They are going to become a very scarce commodity in big demand. We all know the economic consequences of a scarce commodity and a high demand: the price of livestock will be driven up. Those who are paid £90 to £135 compensation for ewes

today will not be able to replace them at that price. The same applies to cattle.

What about those farmers who have lost their dairy herds and do not have their creamery cheque coming in every week? If they want to re-engage in dairy farming, they will have to wait a long time for another creamery cheque. Indeed, they will have to wait a long time to be able to replace the herds that they have lost due to the foot-and-mouth plague.

There is also the question raised by some in the farming community of the delay in payments. In addition, there is the question of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety requiring some farmers to produce evidence of their earnings over the last 15 months. This compares unfavourably with the package for farmers in the rest of Ireland who lost their animals because of foot-and-mouth disease.

There are also concerns about the slaughter of healthy animals. However, we cannot discuss all these issues in the short time that is available to us. People in Moyle — an area that has the highest unemployment rate in the North of Ireland — have no means of earning a livelihood other than farming. They have earned their livelihood through farming for generations and are now unemployed with nowhere else to go for employment. They are suffering grievously. Compassion and charity ought to be extended to those in the farming community who are suffering rather than the concept of a witch-hunt.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Berry: I support the motion, and I congratulate those responsible for bringing this very important motion to the Chamber today. This is one of the most important issues that have been debated in this Chamber since its establishment. Many farmers, as the wording of the motion reflects, have sacrificed much and are facing great hardship at this difficult time.

Boyd Douglas, my Colleague representing East Londonderry, focused on the issue that I was going to focus on in this debate — that of imported animals. As Members, and the Minister, will be aware, I represent the area where the foot-and-mouth outbreak first commenced in this country — the area of Meigh. There are many deep concerns in the south Armagh area, especially about the illegal movement of sheep and the money that has been wasted in past years because of that illegal movement. I want to know from the Minister what the Department and the Executive intend to do about the subsidy collectors. I do not call these people who have been wasting public money for years "farmers"; I call them "subsidy collectors". They have been acting illegally in south Armagh and across the country for years. What does the Department intend to do about these people?

What measures does the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development have in place to deal with the

issue of smuggling? This is an issue that the Public Accounts Committee is going to have to zoom in on closely, because money is being wasted. All the farmers in south Armagh are not carrying out this activity. I stress that. There are many decent farmers in south Armagh, from both sides of the community, who have been affected. The ridiculous behaviour and illegal activities of some people have put the brakes on this Province — not only on the agriculture industry but also on tourism and businesses across the country.

There are many questions that must be asked today. Indeed, they have already been asked by many Members. There were concerns in the Newry Divisional Veterinary Office in the middle of March that the numbers of sheep that were claimed for did not match the number of sheep that were being culled. I want the Minister to tell us exactly the number of sheep premium claims measured against the actual number of sheep culled. That is an issue that must be cleared up and that the Minister must address.

I am not saying that the Minister has been turning a blind eye to this, because she has been very critical of people who have been acting illegally in the south Armagh area. There have been concerns in that area since the cull commenced. A veterinary officer removed members of the grants and subsidy inspection unit in the Newry area from the cull site.

Mr J Kelly: On a point of order, a *leasCheann Comhairle*. The motion states

“That this Assembly acknowledges the sacrifice made by, and hardship caused to, farmers, their families and the wider rural community in responding to the Executive’s policies and guidance regarding foot-and-mouth disease”.

I do not see how Mr Berry’s contribution is adding to the debate.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Members should keep to the motion.

Mr Berry: Hardship and stress have been caused by the illegal movement of sheep and the people in south Armagh that Sinn Féin/IRA are very close to. That is what I am addressing. There is anxiety in south Armagh and across the country because foot-and-mouth disease has entered the Province. It is because of the Republican movement in south Armagh that there is this anxiety — *[Interruption]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The motion asks for action to alleviate the difficulties as quickly and imaginatively as possible. Will the Member keep to this point?

Mr Berry: I will continue with the points that I am raising, because they are very important. If the Department is not addressing these issues and if we, as Assembly Members, are not allowed to raise these serious issues that have occurred in south Armagh, then the last one

leaving this Building can turn out the lights. There are serious issues here that must be addressed.

A veterinary officer removed the grants and subsidy division staff from the cull site in Newry, because fraud was being overlooked. Grants and subsidy division staff were inspecting vehicles that were going through and were finding inaccuracies and discrepancies in that smuggling was taking place in those vehicles. One individual was confronted on 2 April, and he was removed from the cull site—*[Interruption]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr J Kelly: On a point of order, a *leasCheann Comhairle*. There is no one running away from the debate. The Member has all the devices available to him in a private Member’s motion or any other motion —*[Interruption]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. During some of the contributions a number of Members have gone beyond the motion. I have given a wide berth, because there are so many other issues involved. I ask the Member to stay within the motion.

Mr Poots: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is clear that farmers are in a position of hardship and are experiencing problems because individuals broke the law. There are prosecutions in place—*[Interruption]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. My ruling is to stay with the motion as it stands and focus on the alleviation of the problems.

Mr Berry: Public money has been wasted. We want to know what the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Executive intend to do about the issue of smuggling. The Sinn Féin/IRA spokesperson is annoyed because the truth is hurting.

Mr Kennedy: I pay tribute to the Chairperson, the Deputy Chairperson and the members of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee for bringing the matter to the Assembly. I also add my tribute to the Minister and her officials and the various organisations involved at the sharp end of this crisis for the work that they are undertaking on behalf of everyone. It is unfortunate that we have so little time.

There is an historical context that others have mentioned. There were outbreaks in 1967 and 1865. I indulge the Minister and refer her to one of the minor prophets in the Old Testament, Joel, who had much that is strangely relevant to say on this issue. I invite the Minister to look at that. The Chairperson of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee will no doubt be aware of it already.

3.15 pm

I want to deal with the practical problems arising from this plague, its outbreak and spread, the containment measures that are being brought forward and the ongoing measures against it. The impact of this disease on the

rural economy and the Northern Ireland economy in general has been profound, and in this morning's debate we heard of many of the problems being experienced by those who are affected by the consequential losses. All farmers and associated businesses expect and need the assistance of the Ministers, Executive and Members of this Assembly to lessen the impact and to give valuable help.

Like other Members, I welcome the easing of the restrictions announced recently by the Minister in relation to the movement of livestock. I join in the call of other Members for the Minister to confirm that private veterinary fees will be met in full either by her Department, by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food or by the Treasury in London. Having spoken to many constituents and farmers affected by this plague, I know it is a very big issue, and I hope that the Minister will address it when she speaks later. I impress upon the Minister the need to ensure that urgently required measures of assistance are not impeded by red tape and that urgent consideration be given to the plight of those affected in all sectors.

I draw the Minister's particular attention and concern to the plight of the livestock marts and to the precarious position of their owners, operators and employees. We will look to the Minister today for an announcement of assistance to that particular sector.

I also impress upon the Minister the need for a multi-agency approach to this crisis. Helpline numbers and the various necessary contacts that will be available to deal with the social dimension of this particular crisis should be made known to the general public either by public advertisement or by media campaign. I hope that the Minister will be in a position to announce a major co-ordinated plan as part of the response to this crisis.

Time does not permit me to say much more except that everyone in Northern Ireland accepts the need for urgent help to be given to the agriculture industry.

Mr McGrady: Although some of us are city-based, all of us in this Assembly represent rural constituencies; indeed our whole ethos is based on the rural community. We know that the impact of foot-and-mouth disease will be felt not just this year but for many years to come in both the farming industry and its auxiliary industries.

I have no doubt that given the opportunity and appropriate assistance, our farming community is resilient enough to overcome this fresh disaster and re-establish itself as a primary industry in Northern Ireland with its products hailed throughout the world for their health and quality.

The motion asks the Executive to alleviate the difficulties of the farming community quickly and imaginatively. Members must confine themselves to that. It is tempting to look forward to what may happen in the future, but we are talking about what can happen today.

I represent a rural community, both highland and lowland, and on a day-to-day basis I see the trauma and difficulties faced by the farming community. It is up to the Assembly to give that community its total support. We must address two matters — regulation and finance. On the day-to-day basis of regulation, most farms — particularly the sheep farms on the highlands and the cattle housed over winter — have exhausted their winter fodder and the immediate grazing fodder that they were on before movements were restricted.

The Executive must not slavishly follow everything that happens in Great Britain. As the motion says, the Executive must be imaginative in how they approach these issues. Farms in Northern Ireland are different from those in Great Britain. Our farms are small and contiguous, but in many cases their fields are scattered. You do not get that in large parts of England. Therefore, the issue of movement is vital. Farmers are now destroying the land that was intended to provide fodder for the ensuing winter by overgrazing it — if destroying is the right word. There is an immediate projection of difficulty there.

In the few minutes allowed to me I can only highlight a couple of the things that we need to do. The intervention board — both here and in Great Britain — needs to extend its scope to compensate for the immediate welfare cull, and that should be done as soon as possible. Any assistance to the cash flow of farmers must be of immediate importance. Dr Paisley mentioned the rapid payment of premiums, and all other available and lawful subsidies should be paid on an urgent basis.

It is also important that a livestock welfare disposal scheme — as exists in England, Scotland and Wales — be established here. The scheme in Great Britain applies only to restricted areas. All of Northern Ireland is a restricted area at present, so this scheme could apply to the whole of Northern Ireland.

Many Members have mentioned the veterinary fees incurred in obtaining movement licences. There are many farms in my area that have bits and pieces of land and scattered fields. If those farmers were to fulfil their total movement they would be paying six, seven or eight times the fee of £30, depending on how many dispersed fields they have. It is important that something be done to alleviate that.

The financial cost of the disaster is not the greatest issue; there is also an emotive issue. Farmers resent having to pay for the implementation of regulations that were imposed on them on top of the other difficulties. The use of serology testing, particularly in sheep, may enable movements to be expanded. The farming community will need some pump-priming in the immediate future to tide it over the summer and into the winter feed.

I congratulate the Minister on her sterling work to date.

Mr Wells: The debate has covered almost every issue around foot-and-mouth disease. Rather than repeat many of the points, I will ask the Minister to address four areas of real concern to farmers, particularly in south Down.

Is the Minister in a position to make any announcement about the payment of vet bills? I feel sorry for vets in rural areas. They are worked off their feet, but the last thing that farmers need is to find that they have to pay bills for inspections before animals can be moved. I understand that there is provision elsewhere for these to be paid by the Department. It would be a gesture of goodwill to the farming community if the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development were to pick up the bills, as it is no fault of the farmers that they are incurring these expenses.

Secondly, when will movements of sheep be permitted? In many parts of south Down the relaxation of the rules which were announced last week to enabled cattle to be moved is not producing any benefits for two reasons. First, in many cases a farmer only has sheep. Secondly, it is proving almost impossible for farmers to find land that does not have sheep grazing on it or has not been grazed by sheep in the past 14 days. This morning I received a telephone call from a very concerned farmer saying that he has searched everywhere but cannot find any land which has not had sheep grazing on it recently or does not have sheep just across the ditch. When will that ban be relaxed?

I would like the Minister to address something that was suggested to me by the Rathfriland Farmers Co-Operative Society Limited. At present farmers are being forced to take small numbers of lambs to meat plants in Londonderry and Coleraine. One farmer had to drive to Coleraine with only eight lambs in his trailer. That almost wipes out any possible profit on the transaction, given the very low prices that farmers are getting for lambs. The Rathfriland Co-Op suggested — and this is a very good idea — that marts should be used as central points to which farmers could bring their lambs. A large trailer containing up to 300 lambs could then be taken to Londonderry for the lambs to be processed. That would be a way of getting the marts back into some form of activity. It would also be a way of alleviating the problem of the meat plant in Lurgan that is taking very small numbers of lambs. Farmers from Rathfriland and Kilkeel are driving over 100 miles to sell small numbers of livestock, which is totally uneconomical.

Finally — and this is directly related to foot-and-mouth disease, Madam Deputy Speaker — what has happened to the proposal for compensation for the sheep grazing ban in the inner Mournes? It has reached a complete stop because of foot-and-mouth disease. I fully understand that the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has been preoccupied with this vital issue, but farmers in the Mournes have subsidy application forms which must be filled in by the middle of this month.

However, no decision has been made on discussions between the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Minister for Regional Development on what will be done to compensate those farmers or at least enable them to put the lambs that they regularly graze in the inner Mournes onto their farms. If the Minister comes to some conclusion that will enable hard-pressed farmers to include that land on their claim forms, she will help them greatly.

South Down is one of the most badly affected areas because of the nature of farming. Some farmers are one step away from bankruptcy. I have heard some of the most appalling stories from farmers over the last few weeks. I have had to put some of them in touch with charitable foundations in England, and they have had to ring up and plead for money to pay the most basic of household bills such as the telephone bill or the heating oil bill.

Unless we do something positive to help farmers out of this difficult situation, which is absolutely no fault of their own, I will be really fearful about the future of many of those small units which were practically on their knees before this crisis ever arose. They are facing a dreadful prospect. If a survey were carried out in Northern Ireland, the results would be the same as those in England. Many farmers see this as the straw that will break the camel's back. The situation is desperate, and they are looking to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to do something to alleviate it.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers): I am indebted to Dr Paisley for tabling the motion today and to all the Members who spoke to it and demonstrated their commitment to the rural community.

Since taking up my post as Agriculture Minister I have been deeply impressed by the resilience of our farmers who seem to have suffered one body blow after another over the last few years. It has been my privilege to meet with many groups of farmers in many different circumstances, and I have never failed to be impressed by their fortitude and courtesy.

3.30 pm

Today's motion recognises

"...the sacrifices made by, and hardship caused to, farmers [and] their families."

Nobody, inside or outside Northern Ireland, or in this Chamber today would disagree with that description of what the Northern Ireland farmers have had to contend with. Foot-and-mouth disease is merely the latest in a long line of what I have called "body blows". An outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease is a terrible thing at the best of times, but this time it has come on top of BSE, a very strong pound — with all that that entails in relation to foreign competition — and a succession of animal health problems and food scares. The foot-and-mouth

disease situation is therefore all the more difficult to deal with.

As the motion recognises, the problems go beyond the farmer or the farmgate. I am acutely conscious of the impact of recent events, not just on the farmers but on the wider community. That problem is the responsibility of other Ministers and the Executive collectively, and it was addressed in this morning's debate. For that reason I must confine my remarks to the impact of foot-and-mouth disease on the agriculture industry alone.

It is important to remember that today we are discussing the impact of foot-and-mouth disease, rather than the cumulative financial effects of all the crises I mentioned. The farm incomes of most Northern Ireland farmers are currently very depressed, but that is mainly the result of factors other than foot-and-mouth disease.

There are two classes of loss arising from foot-and-mouth disease. One relates to livestock which my Department has caused to be slaughtered as a disease-control measure. The position on that is clear — the Department pays the full market value of such animals. The problem arises with the second category — consequential loss. This can include anything from, at one end of the spectrum, the loss of a farmer's income while the farm is depopulated to, at the other end, the loss of schoolchildren's deposits paid for school trips to the country which have had to be cancelled. Specific issues affect the livestock marts which have now been closed for many weeks, first at the behest of the Government and, subsequently, at that of the European Union. The situation of these marts represents a particular problem.

As I have said on numerous occasions in this Assembly, the financial repercussions of meeting the costs of consequential losses would be enormous. Even if the Government make just a slight move in that direction, we will come under immense pressure to go the whole way. For that reason it is not current UK Government policy to pay compensation for consequential losses. If that changes, however, Members can rest assured that I will press for the necessary additional funding to be made available to Northern Ireland to allow us to make similar payments.

The other constraint on me, as Minister of Agriculture, is the need to comply with EU law on the provision of cash aid to farmers. I have to obtain EU state aids approval before I grant any cash aid to Northern Ireland farmers. Obtaining that approval takes time, and all the evidence suggests that Brussels requires considerable convincing that such aid is justified and that it does not distort the market. As Agriculture Minister, I find that my freedom to act quickly and imaginatively is therefore perhaps more narrow than some Members might imagine.

Time does not permit me to reply to all the detailed points made in the debate, and I apologise in advance. I will, however, try to cover as many as possible. Dr

Paisley made many points about the impact of the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease, and with hindsight I agree with many of them. He referred to the livestock marts, and, as I have already said, I have particular sympathy for their owners. I will do what I can to help them. I understand that the Minister of Finance and Personnel referred to this matter in this morning's debate.

As far as movement controls are concerned, I cannot promise an early further easing of controls, since my priority is the prevention of disease. The earlier easements of movement restrictions were abused, and the foot-and-mouth virus has now spread to the sheep flock. My primary objective is to eradicate the disease. Farmers must decide which option is preferable — total easement of movement with the risk of spreading the disease, or to wait until we are sure we are on top of it. I would, however, urge people with particular and extreme welfare problems to contact their local divisional veterinary office.

With regard to payments, I can tell the Assembly that the Department's published payment targets are being met, but we are trying to speed up payments. As for the Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS) payments, we are pursuing with the Commission an extension of the period during which farmers can make amendments to their IACS applications — including land changes — without penalties.

I intend to raise the issue of regionalisation with the European Commission at the earliest opportunity. We have to realise that we have no chance of regionalisation before the blood testing has been completed, given the distribution of the foot-and-mouth disease outbreaks. I will progress the matter when the time and conditions are right. I referred to August as a possible date for resumption in response to a question in the Committee. I was simply saying that it could be as late as August — I was not saying that it would be August. If possible, resumption will take place earlier. We have to go through a series of blood testing and so on, which is not an overnight matter. It will take weeks, and we have to be free for 30 days from any other outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease.

As to the issue of the burning of carcasses versus burial, I am guided by the advice of my Chief Veterinary Officer and also have to take account of environmental concerns which sometimes prevent the burial of carcasses.

Dr Paisley and other Members also referred to the costs of issuing movement permits by private veterinary practitioners. I have taken note of these comments and will be reconsidering the position in relation to those fees.

The foot-and-mouth disease outbreak in Northern Ireland has already taught us a great deal. Those of us who had any doubt have now seen the value of a devolved Administration. The situation has taught us that our controls on livestock movements were not as tight as we had imagined. Above all, we have learned

that unscrupulous people are prepared to sacrifice the livelihood of farmers, both north and south of the border, on the altar of a quick and dirty profit for themselves.

Mr McHugh and others referred to the alleged failure by the Department to deal with illegal activities. The Department has not been remiss in any way in following up these matters. All reports of illegal activity are being investigated with the utmost rigour. I can assure the Assembly that any of our officials who see any suspicion of illegal activity at the ports act on it and have in the past acted on it. This is one issue which was publicly aired in an erroneous manner this morning. We have had success in dealing with this matter.

Mr Dallat referred to the carcasses which were buried on Mr Donnelly's farm at Ardboe and the allegations made by Rev William McCrea. I deeply regret the additional distress caused to the Donnelly family by those public comments. I can now confirm that, following exhumation of those carcasses, I am totally satisfied that this was a routine case of disposal of fallen animals, and I wish the matter to be publicly known. This happens in the normal course of events on every farm. Tests were carried out at Pirbright on samples from those animals, and they have proved negative for foot-and-mouth disease.

I take the point made by Mr Robert McCartney about the review of the common agricultural policy. I regret the fact that Mr McCartney, having made his contribution, left the Chamber without listening to the rest of the debate or awaiting my reply to his comments, which were directed at the UK Government more than to the Northern Ireland Administration. Perhaps he forgot which House he was in.

There is a danger of the agriculture industry in Northern Ireland's being overlooked. Mr McCartney will recognise the important role to be played by our devolved Administration and by the North/South Ministerial Council in the development of a common approach. This will take account of the priorities shared by all of us on this island with regard to the agriculture industry, which is of such importance to us.

Mr Berry made remarks about the south Armagh cull. I deeply resent the implication that our veterinary division in Newry is turning a blind eye to fraud. On behalf of those people I want to make that clear.

Mr Berry: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Rodgers: I will not give way. I have only 20 minutes, and I want to finish everything I have to say.

It is a serious allegation, and I resent the implication. Mr Berry may well be misinformed about some of the issues he raised. Mr Wells made a few points, and I have already dealt with the issue of the private veterinary practitioners. He also raised the issue of marts as gathering points. I am aware that the Republic is looking at this issue, but I am not sure if it has taken action on it

yet. I will look at every possibility. I see that Mr Wells is not here either.

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

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: He is at a meeting of the Commission.

Ms Rodgers: I will look at all possibilities for easing the plight of the farming community. However, I have to take into consideration my priority, which is to ensure that the disease does not spread, and I will take veterinary advice on that. I have heard what Mr Wells said and I will take note of it, bearing in mind that I also have to take veterinary advice on the risk of spreading the disease.

Undoubtedly other lessons will emerge before we are finished. However, I will do what I can to deal with those issues in the weeks to come. I intend to introduce measures, based on what has happened, to prevent further outbreaks of the disease in Northern Ireland. I intend to introduce legislation to ban the feeding of swill to pigs, given that this was at the root of the present crisis.

I will also impose a movement standstill on livestock to prevent animals being traded and moved within 30 days of their last move. It is clear that the movement of sheep from one place to another within a few days has had a serious impact on the present situation. It has made it difficult to find the source of outbreaks and to predict where future outbreaks might occur.

It is clear that the lack of proper identification of sheep was a major contribution to the irregular trading that led to the foot-and-mouth outbreaks here. Accordingly, I will be setting up a regime requiring the individual identification of sheep and pigs. This will have major implications for the industry and my Department. The financial implications will need to be addressed, but I am determined to proceed with this.

I will also seek to amend the current penalties in our animal health legislation to provide meaningful deterrents against illegal activities. I will, where necessary, bring our legislation into line with the changes recently announced in the Republic of Ireland. Finally, I will be strengthening my Department's anti-fraud efforts.

None of these measures will help farmers in the immediate financial sense. There may even be some short-term inconvenience for them. However, in the long term, these measures will help to ensure that our chances of importing a disease like foot-and-mouth-disease will be very much reduced in the future. That can only be in the best financial interest of the farming industry in the long term.

I appreciate what has been a constructive debate. I appreciate the clear concern for the farming industry that exists throughout the Assembly and the community at this time. I would like to put on record my appreciation of the manner in which Members from different parties have acted in the best interests of the industry. They

have, on the whole, refused to get into party political points scoring. I say "on the whole" because there is an exception to every rule. However, I deeply appreciate the cross-party support that I have been given.

3.45 pm

The farming community also appreciates it. Our common interests have been much more important than the things that divide us and will continue to divide us because we come from different experiences, points of view, aspirations and allegiances. This is a hugely important issue for Northern Ireland, regardless of the political divide.

The manner in which the Members of the Assembly have been able to work constructively together, often despite deep political differences, is an example of the importance of the work that we are doing. I hope that it will strengthen our resolve to continue to work for the benefit of the people in Northern Ireland.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee (Mr Savage): The fact that we are debating a major agriculture motion for the second time in one day is evidence of the seriousness with which the Assembly has taken the plight of agriculture. It is important to put on the record that the Assembly identifies, and is seen to be identifying, with the suffering of the farming community.

The Assembly must record its thanks to the farming community for the massive efforts that it has made to support the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Assembly in the measures that have been taken to stem the advance of foot-and-mouth disease. Its adherence to fortress farming has been difficult, but it has shown, once again, a great sense of public responsibility by acting with fortitude and courage after so many reverses in the past decade.

Regardless of political standpoint, the few selfish farmers who moved animals illegally for personal gain are traitors to all communities on this island. Those farmers are far from typical and stand out because farmers, as a whole, have been exemplary citizens who have acted courageously and responsibly.

I thank the hundreds of people who have contacted the Department and my office. I am glad that we have been able to serve them in many different ways and resolve the difficulties for many.

I place on record my thanks to the staff of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and, in particular, to the staff of the Minister's private office who have worked tirelessly and in close co-operation with us. They are always ready to answer the many queries that we pass on to them daily and to seek practical solutions to many difficult problems.

I acknowledge the workers who have manned the disinfectant sprayers day and night. They are the unsung heroes of this crisis. I also thank the Minister for

coming, week by week, to the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee to report to us on the latest developments. She has personally kept in close contact with us throughout this crisis.

To ease restrictions on farmers, the Minister has spoken of the constant reviewing of matters while not risking further outbreaks of the disease. The Assembly expects nothing less of the Minister and the Department. Assuming that she has a range of available measures, the Minister should publish a possible timetable for the easing of the restrictions provided there are no further outbreaks. Such a timetable would give hope, offer farmers the prospect of light at the end of this dark tunnel and encourage them to maintain the practices that should, in turn, enable her to ease the restrictions.

Livestock marts have experienced difficulty through being closed for over nine weeks with no income. The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development forecast yesterday that the reopening of marts will take place a long way down the line. She also said that the marts were now being closed down in accordance with an EU Directive. I trust that, given the importance of marts to rural Northern Ireland, she will not sit back and allow Brussels to dictate to us on that issue, but that they will work tirelessly to secure their reopening at the earliest appropriate stage.

This is one example of a time when imaginative solutions must be found. The Minister must come up with ideas, and if the Minister will say that the Committee would welcome ideas, I have no doubt that Members will make many suggestions. We would be willing to make suggestions, as we have done many times in the past, and I am sure that the Minister could respond to them. I am pleased that the Minister is willing to listen, but she must not hide behind words. It is up to her Department to come up with the solutions, and that is why she has a large organisation behind her and the Executive authority to implement decisions.

This morning I said that the crisis demands an imaginative solution, and I make no apology for reiterating what needs to be said. Papering over the cracks will not do — something far more radical is called for. That is why I agree with my fellow Members that a compensation package that is not just adequate but generous must be worked out. The package must take account of the capital value of the farmers' losses, their loss of income and the consequential loss of income by others in the wider rural community. The compensation package must also cover related industries such as tourism.

However, I would like to go much further. As recently as last week, a 'Farmers Weekly' survey indicated that a third of farmers affected by foot-and-mouth disease want to leave farming. As the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Mr Nick Brown, said in 'The Daily Telegraph' on Saturday

“Frankly, I am not surprised. For many farmers the foot-and-mouth disease has been the last blow. It is a natural point to think about an alternative future.”

The Minister went on to reveal that he

“is also considering introducing an early retirement package for farmers hit by the foot-and-mouth crisis.”

That measure runs along similar lines to those proposed by my own party, and I think that this is an ideal time to bring it into place.

I am a member of the Committee of the Regions, and at a meeting that I attended recently in Europe, many countries signalled their intention to introduce a similar scheme. Many expressed a direct interest in the issue, because Europe experiences the very same problems as we do. The scheme would allow older farmers to retire with dignity, a lump sum and a pension, while enabling young blood, with new ideas, to enter farming. This is the scale of the response that is needed to tackle this latest farming crisis. That alone would allow the farmers to receive what they are owed — an organised restructuring of farming with the support of the Government.

We must not allow farming to descend into a free trade free-for-all, because that would result in decent men and women being thrown on to the scrap heap. We want to restructure farming in a constructive and forthright manner. We want the farmers to keep the money that is tied up in the farms, and we want to make sure that the banks do not take the best part of that money. We owe the farmers more than that, and every right-thinking person would agree. We must forge partnerships with all the relevant Departments and signal strong Government interest in an early retirement scheme. The time for action is now. Many imaginative ideas about the future of farming have been given to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF). It was mentioned earlier that farmers are to become the custodians of the countryside — countryside managers who would be paid for the first time to enforce Europe standards on landscape, environmental schemes, stockbreeding and countryside management.

At the moment 80% of the countryside is managed by 4% of farmers. As we heard from the Department of Agriculture, farmers will also be encouraged to go into organic farming. In the future, farming here must be more and more about quality and the pursuit of high-value niche markets in sophisticated, rich marketplaces to meet the low cost and low overhead threat from the East European countries that will soon join the European Union.

We must move forward. It is plain that Northern Ireland needs a new 10-year national strategy for agriculture so that farmers have, for the first time, a real sense of where they are going. We also need to know where the Government are going. If these elements are put in place, agriculture will rise once again.

The Minister referred to the introduction of new rules on standstill of animals and the individual identification of livestock. I hope that livestock marts will be able to play a part in that. Another thing that I picked up from the Minister’s statement was the anti-fraud issue. I do not think that there is a Member here who would disagree with the measures that the Minister is attempting to take. I thank the Minister for her contribution. Almost 20 Members took part in the debate today, and I thank them also. It has been the sincere desire of every Member here to try to alleviate the problems facing the agriculture industry in Northern Ireland and to get it back onto a sure and firm footing.

Mr Berry: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I request that you refer today’s Hansard to the Speaker because I intend to make a personal statement to refute — and I emphasise the word “refute” — the comments that the Minister of Agriculture made about me in her speech.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That is acceptable.

Mr McHugh: The Minister referred to me as having raised a point about the illegal movement of livestock. I do not support the illegal movement of livestock, and I did not mention it in my speech.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly acknowledges the sacrifices made by, and hardship caused to, farmers, their families and the wider rural community in responding to the Executive’s policies and guidance regarding foot-and-mouth disease, and calls on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and her Executive Colleagues to act to alleviate these difficulties as quickly and imaginatively as possible.

SECOND REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE FOR ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mr P Doherty): I beg to move

That this Assembly approves the Second Report of the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee on its inquiry into the 'Strategy 2010' Report (2/00R) and calls on the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to implement the recommendations of the Committee at the earliest opportunity.

A LeasCheann Comhairle. As Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, I have the task of presenting its report to the Assembly. Perhaps it would be helpful to Members if I outline the background to it. The 'Strategy 2010' report was published by the Department in March 1999. After its publication a number of economists and others voiced serious concerns about it.

4.00 pm

One example of the criticisms made at the time would be those concerning the consultation process. It was because of the concerns raised about 'Strategy 2010' that our Committee, in January, decided that it should be the subject of our first major inquiry.

The terms of reference were

"To examine the current recommendations detailed in the *Strategy 2010* report;

To ascertain the extent to which a number of these recommendations have already been implemented or initiated;

To examine the original objectives for the Economic Development Strategy Review to determine if they were sufficiently wide ranging and to ascertain whether they have been achieved;

To examine recent critiques of the report by economic commentators and relevant organisations and assess the validity of any criticism of the report;

To examine alternative proposals to the *Strategy 2010* report; and

To report to the Assembly making recommendations to the Department and/or others on actions which would improve on the recommendations made in the report and make a positive contribution to the economy in Northern Ireland."

When we set out on the inquiry we did not anticipate the magnitude of the task that we had taken on. This has been a lengthy and wide-ranging inquiry. The Committee received written submissions from 58 organisations and individuals. We held 45 oral evidence sessions, which covered a wide range of bodies including the Department, the public sector, trade unions, business associations, district councils, education and community groups. Three of the oral evidence sessions were held outside Parliament Buildings at Queen's University, Moyle District Council and Strabane District Council. The Committee was almost overwhelmed by the volume and the quality of the evidence received.

We wish to place on record our extreme gratitude to all of those who submitted oral and written evidence. The evidence helped inform, to a large extent, the many important recommendations we make in our report.

One of the major criticisms of 'Strategy 2010' related to the consultation process. There was a distinct lack of a structured process in which constructive comments could have been made and taken account of. The lack of consultation led to confusion about the status of the 'Strategy 2010' report. People did not know whether it was an implementation document or a first draft to be modified in the light of debate. The Committee feels that the 'Strategy 2010' report should have been prepared in a context in which it was clearly intended for open discussion by groups representing all areas of society.

In any major strategic initiative the policy maker should only proceed to implementation stage after the most exhaustive consultation has taken place. The Committee believes it has now rectified the flaws in the consultation process, given the many public evidence sessions we held.

There were other criticisms of the report. These included the fact that there were too many unconstructed and unprioritised recommendations — 62 in all. It was also said that there was a lack of any attempt to link the recommendations to the targets and that there were targets missing in the report — for example, on productivity growth, public sector research and development and tourism. There were criticisms of a lack of any economic modelling which would have enabled baseline forecasts to be prepared and of a lack of any analysis of past, or current, economic development policies.

The Committee debated whether 'Strategy 2010' should be completely revised and redrafted.

However, we recognised the urgency of the economic challenges and considered that any further delay was not an option. The most appropriate policies should be adopted now and should be widely understood.

The Committee made 39 recommendations. These were made in the context of globalisation. Perhaps at this point I should say a word about globalisation. The Committee recognised that any economic development strategy needs to ensure that we are able to compete in a rapidly changing and global economy. We have seen how globalisation has led to a dramatic increase in the economic performance of the Southern economy.

The key to this transformation was the creation of the initial conditions that are attractive to international capital in terms of stable labour costs, financial incentives, sound economic, political and legal structures and peace. However, there is also a negative side to globalisation. It leads to an increase in inequality, not only between countries but also within them. With the outsourcing of low-skilled manufacturing to developing countries, inequality tends

to go hand in hand with globalisation. That does not mean that it is either acceptable or desirable. The challenge for us all is to consider how we can reap the benefits of globalisation, while also ensuring that poverty and inequality are not increased.

It was in this context that the Committee addressed the specific set of problems facing the economy and made the many important recommendations in this report. I should make it clear that the recommendations are not a substitute for those made in the 'Strategy 2010' report itself. They are, in our view, the most appropriate to help tackle the challenges and opportunities presented in an increasingly global economy.

I will now turn to some of the important recommendations that we made in the report. We made two general recommendations — two key steps that are essential for the successful development of an economic development strategy. The first is to enhance greatly the role of the present Economic Development Forum. It should be responsible for the implementation of 'Strategy 2010' and for prioritising the recommendations. Its representation should be broadened, and it should include representatives from all relevant Government Departments, the higher and further education sector, district councils and a much greater representation from the voluntary and community sector. Its actions should be clear and transparent, and it should report on a regular basis to our Committee.

The second key step involves the establishment of a partnership structure. A truly inclusive partnership is essential to any successful economic growth. If policies are not supported by a sense of shared ownership, they lead to the social exclusion of those whom they leave behind. We have recommended that the issues of partnership should encompass four aspects: social inclusion, equality, social partnership and transnational and international partnership.

The Committee then made 37 detailed recommendations, which were grouped under five key themes: public sector and industrial development policy instruments, partnership and cohesion; the economic infrastructure; patterns of sectoral development; and the information infrastructure.

On public sector issues, the Committee was concerned about the number of issues that were outside the control of the Assembly, but which were having a serious impact on businesses and the economy, such as the low rate of corporation tax in the South, the higher road fuel duty in the North, the proposed aggregates tax and the currency differentials with the South. The Barnett formula should be reviewed. There needs to be a much fairer system of determining the North's block grant from the Treasury to help alleviate the impact of these disadvantages.

The disadvantages that I have just listed would be considerably eased if the Assembly were to have control over its own fiscal policy. We must consider the advant-

ages and disadvantages of having fiscal flexibility and how such power could and should be used to create new and essential financial initiatives.

Banks need to take on a greater role in encouraging local enterprise and should provide a clear, open and transparent charging structure. The creative industries sector should be granted a tax exemption to help accelerate the enormous potential for growth in that sector. Small businesses should be assisted by a system of loans guaranteed by the Government, similar to the scheme operated by the US Small Business Administration. There are enormous opportunities for industry through the green industrial revolution. More focused research and development strategies are needed to support the development of new technology industries designed to enhance environmental protection and reduce global warming.

The issue of a single development agency was raised by many of the organisations giving evidence. We support the establishment of a single development agency and have given a detailed response to the Minister on his consultation paper. A copy of that response is included in our report. We were encouraged that the Minister took on board many of the points made by the Committee during the consultation exercise. The Committee will, of course, be working with the Minister and also closely scrutinising the legislation which is required to set up the new body.

The Committee made a number of other recommendations relating to fiscal and financial measures, including tax rules, the single European currency, selective financial assistance, innovation, design, marketing and export, regional disparities and clean, green production.

In relation to partnership and cohesion, it is important that any sense of exclusion from the growth process be minimised for those whom the process does not touch at all, or touches only lightly. We have made a number of recommendations which will help to minimise any sense of social exclusion. First, unemployment is clearly still a major problem, and this point was made by a number of groups. The Committee believes that detailed studies are needed to examine why rates of long-term unemployment are substantially higher here than in Britain. The Committee was impressed by the success of the Fast Track to IT scheme in the South, which addresses the IT skills shortages while also creating opportunities for the long-term unemployed. We urge the Department to consider such a scheme.

Social responsibility incentives are needed to encourage greater social responsibility in business and industry with regard to their employment practices, their contribution to the local community and the environment and their approach to trade with newly industrialised and developing countries. Vulnerable groups require greater support for specialised training packages so that groups such as the

disabled and ethnic minorities can have greater access to job skills and employment. There must be an increased focus on the recruitment and promotion of women in the work place, including targeted training for women, work place crèche facilities, increased access to job-share positions and greater use of family-friendly and flexible working hours.

The Committee made other recommendations relating to partnership and cohesion, including poverty, studies on the social economy, economic interaction with the South of Ireland, stronger links with Europe, support for the social economy and local economic development.

On economic infrastructure, improvements to that infrastructure, which includes physical infrastructure, physical capital and human capital, are central to improving the productivity growth rate and, in turn, securing a better standard of living.

There are serious deficiencies in the transport infrastructure. We need a massive injection of funding over the next 10 years in order to develop a world-class transport infrastructure in all regions.

4.15 pm

There is a need for greater linkage between the further education sector and industry so that students can be better prepared for the knowledge-based economy. There also needs to be greater support for in-house training, particularly in sectors such as textiles, which are vulnerable to change. At secondary level, more needs to be done to improve the employability of students, particularly through career guidance, improved links with business and industry, a greater recognition of vocational studies and greater use of work placement in industry.

The Committee also made a number of other recommendations relating to economic infrastructure, including a strategic approach to transport policy and the commercialisation of new technologies.

The economic base has to change fundamentally if we are to compete more effectively in global markets and exploit the substantial benefits that could flow from closer integration with the southern economy in particular. We are currently too dependent on industries that produce low-quality, low-tech goods and have low levels of productivity. Foreign investment has a role to play, but it is more important to build strong, dynamic, indigenous industries. Studies should be carried out on how the economy can be transformed from one based on the manufacture of traditional low-value goods to one based on high-tech, high-value goods that will maximise the skills built up in the traditional sectors such as textiles and shipbuilding.

Policies should not only focus on manufacturing. There is an enormous potential for growth in the tourism sector. 'Strategy 2010' did not give sufficient emphasis to this sector. The new tourism strategic development

plan needs to address the key issues in sectors such as hospitality training, marketing and recruitment challenges. Grants and financial incentives should be used to encourage the development of a market-focused approach.

The Committee made a number of other recommendations relating to patterns of sectoral development, including small-and medium-sized businesses, the local service sector and the bed-and-breakfast sector.

The challenge is for the economy to develop quickly the type of information infrastructure that one would expect to find in a modern economy. Databases need to be prepared that will allow comparisons with other countries and regions in Europe. These databases will then enable economists to develop models that can be used to explore the effects of different policy scenarios.

The Committee made other recommendations relating to information infrastructure, including data sources, a research agenda and an independent research group. The Committee accepts that responsibility for the delivery of the many recommendations in the report does not fall solely to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. Other Departments have a role to play — not least the Department of Further and Higher Education, Training and Employment. The Committee believes that an expanded Economic Development Forum, chaired by the Minister and comprising representatives from all the relevant Government Departments, should be responsible for the implementation of the recommendations.

As Chairperson, I pay tribute to the hard work of my Committee Colleagues in bringing forward our report. I also thank the dedicated and hardworking staff who serviced the Committee. They were a great help and support to us. I commend the report to the Assembly and invite Members to support the motion.

Mr Deputy Speaker: A substantial number of Members want to contribute. For that reason, Members should limit their speeches to approximately eight minutes.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mr Neeson): I want to thank our Committee Clerk, Cathie White, and her staff for their help in the compilation of this report. I also thank the Committee members. We are probably one of the hardest-working Committees of the Assembly; our commitment was such that we even met during the recess last summer.

It is ironic that as we are having this debate, demonstrations are taking place in cities around the world against globalisation. Northern Ireland is now part of the global economy, and it is against that background that our report on 'Strategy 2010' should be viewed.

'Strategy 2010' is not an end in itself, but rather a means to an end. It is not written on tablets of stone, and it can be improved upon as the situation and the environment change. Our Committee carried out an extensive

investigation involving many wide-ranging interests from all quarters of Northern Ireland. Perhaps we facilitated the wide-ranging consultation that should have been part of the process when the original document was being formulated.

The report impinges on most of the Government Departments, and that is clear evidence of how this Assembly is now creating joined-up Government. I am very pleased by the public reaction to the publication of our report, which has come from many diverse areas. There are nearly 40 recommendations in the report, but I want to concentrate on the fiscal environment as well as on the needs of small businesses.

While 'Strategy 2010' has recommended that Northern Ireland should have a special rate of corporation tax in order to compete with the Republic of Ireland, the Committee has serious doubts about the feasibility of that. Members will be aware of my very strong wish that the Assembly should have tax-varying powers. However, the Committee believes that at this stage of the devolution process it is essential that Northern Ireland establish the extent to which it has control over fiscal policy and how that control may be used to create new and essential financial incentives. Throughout our consultations, the continual cry from the business community was for tax incentives in order to encourage new inward investment.

The Committee further believes that a much fairer system of determining Northern Ireland's block grant is needed in order to help alleviate the impact on the economy of certain fiscal disadvantages. Coincidentally, when the Committee visited its counterpart in the National Assembly for Wales, we heard a similar plea. In fact, the Committee has now concluded that the Barnett formula, which determines Northern Ireland's block grant from the Treasury, should be reviewed. However, Members should also be mindful of recent statements by the Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, about regional funding.

It will be an uphill battle, but this Assembly is only too aware of the serious underfunding of public services during the years of direct rule. The Committee, therefore, recommends that a joint delegation of Members from the Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Finance and Personnel Committees should meet the Chancellor of the Exchequer. One has only to look at the debate that we had this morning on the foot-and-mouth crisis to see how two Committees of this Assembly can co-operate to deal with a very important issue. The Barnett issue is one on which we can work together.

With regard to the small business sector, I reiterate the Committee's support for the creation of the single development agency. The Chairman has already outlined that there is a separate annex in our report relating to that. However, Members must realise that small businesses

form the backbone of the Northern Ireland economy and will continue to do so.

Last August the cross-party trade group visited North America with the Minister, Sir Reg Empey, and we were impressed by the operation of the Small Business Administration in the United States. Small businesses in the United States benefit from loans guaranteed and operated by the Government. The diverse range of businesses which benefit was noticeable, and I am pleased to say that there is a very low rate of default in the repayment of the loans.

Equally important to myself and to the other Committee members is the fact that that scheme encouraged many women into business. Indeed, the majority of uptakes were by women. In Northern Ireland there are not only problems for women becoming involved in business but also for their becoming involved in politics. Anything that the Assembly can do to encourage women into business should be taken on board.

The Committee recommends that the new industrial development agency adopt a highly selective policy to foster an enterprise culture throughout Northern Ireland. It is hoped that that will be addressed when the new agency is established.

I am also pleased with the Minister's commitment to local economic development. At the recent seminar in Dunadry, representatives from local government were equally impressed by that commitment to ensure that there is a role for local economic development in Northern Ireland. The report is a constructive and positive effort to ensure that Northern Ireland can benefit from the economic opportunities that are out there. I support the motion.

Mr McClarty: This is an important debate, and it is to be regretted that relatively few Members have stayed to take part in, or listen to, it. The Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee's inquiry into 'Strategy 2010' has been in-depth and far-reaching. The Committee has consulted widely and sought views on all aspects of economic development. The Committee's commitment in reaching this stage is unquestionable, with evidence-taking sessions being held during the 2000 summer recess. Many written and oral submissions have been noted, and useful and valid points have been welcomed.

The Committee members recognise the importance of tourism to the economy of Northern Ireland; it is nothing short of vital. There is a wide acceptance that there is now huge potential in this sphere, but much still needs to be done and to be achieved if Northern Ireland is to grasp fully the tourist opportunities that await.

Paragraph 3.20 on page 24 of volume 1 of the Committee's report states that

"Evidence from service sector groups (hotels and tourism) suggested that their problems had been largely neglected".

That is something to be regretted, and it is hoped that the Committee's inquiry has redressed that perceived imbalance.

It is of paramount importance that the problems faced by Northern Ireland's tourism industry over recent years be overturned with a new vision of opportunity, high standards, excellence and delivery.

On the evidence that has been gathered from the tourism sector groups, the consensus appears to be that the island should be marketed as a whole. Tourists from North America or other far-flung regions of the world are less attuned to the fact that this island comprises two jurisdictions. It is therefore imperative that, in the first instance, we attract as many people as possible to the island. This can be achieved by flying tourists into Aldergrove, Shannon or Dublin. It then becomes incumbent on the Northern Ireland Tourist Board to sell the Northern Ireland product to the many and varied visitors.

4.30 pm

Northern Ireland has a unique product. The Province has a distinct advantage over the Republic of Ireland, because it boasts the single most recognisable feature on this island — the Giants Causeway.

In volume one of the report on the 'Strategy 2010' inquiry, recommendation 32 states

"The Committee recommends that the tourism sector should be encouraged and supported with grants and financial incentives in developing a market-focused approach. This approach should centre on the establishment of a brand image for Northern Ireland and should encourage demand for shoulder and off-peak seasons."

The establishment of a brand image is vital to the creation of a strong and successful tourism industry. Further to recommendation 31, the tourism sector should address key issues such as hospitality training and recruitment challenges. We all know that world tourism is a highly competitive market. We cannot offer a product which is basked in sunshine — if only every day in this Province were like today. It is therefore all the more vital that we offer a very market-focused approach that meets the necessity of shoulder and off-peak vacation opportunities. In this respect, events tourism is the way forward. We need only consider the success of such events as the North West 200, the Black Bush Golf Tournament and the Milk Cup soccer tournament. Running alongside all of this is the important, and often undervalued, necessity of high standards.

If we are to compete successfully in a world market-place, we must pay great attention to the need to deliver a product that is on a par with any major tourist destination in the world. When we attract people to Northern Ireland we want them to return, and we want them to spread the word to others. This will happen only if they are impressed with what is being offered and with the standards and product-delivery mentality of those who operate in the industry.

The Committee recommended a massive injection of funding over the next 10 years to develop the transport infrastructure in all regions of Northern Ireland. This goes hand in hand with the development of tourism. There is a need for fast, safe and efficient public transport. The need for good infrastructure and communications networks can not be emphasised enough in our battle to enhance tourism. The connection speaks for itself.

Finally, as the world becomes increasingly smaller to the extent that far-off parts of the world are now becoming commonplace destinations for the avid traveller, we must do everything possible to make it easy for people from those far-flung destinations to visit Northern Ireland. There is a need not only to market our product on new and distant shores, but to provide the means for people to get here. That means constantly keeping an eye on potential new air routes and destinations. What I have suggested, and the recommendations made by the Committee's inquiry, are common sense, visionary proposals for the betterment of Northern Ireland in the years ahead. I urge the House to support the motion.

Dr McDonnell: Much of the ground has been covered, but I will elaborate on issues which require further emphasis, filling in the gaps in earlier speeches. It cannot be emphasised enough how extensive this investigation was and how much detail we went into.

It was more than 12 months in gestation. The Chairperson of the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee mentioned earlier that we had 58 written and 45 verbal submissions. I began with some scepticism and concerns that consultation on 'Strategy 2010' was perhaps, as many people thought, too narrow. Over the course of the lengthy inquiry, however, it became obvious that, while there were some shortcomings in the preparation and the consultation, it was one of the most valuable documents I had seen. I could not help but draw the conclusion that it was a major milestone in the process of readjusting and reorientating our economy towards the twenty-first century.

That reorientation has taken place in extremely difficult circumstances. The Chairperson earlier referred to globalisation. Globalisation has been the name of the game in the last 10 years, if not the last 15. The whole world has changed and become a village. We can no longer operate in isolation, as we could perhaps have done in the past with the grants, the protection, the shelter and the subsidies. Businesses developed in such circumstances will ultimately be swept away in the globalised economy of the twenty-first century.

We recognise that in that environment Northern Ireland must be able to create an economy that will enable it to change rapidly in rapidly changing circumstances. Financial capital relentlessly follows opportunity and ruthlessly seeks out niches where it might create wealth, develop itself and return a profit. It does not hold much sentiment. In

those circumstances we must be able to compete with, but equally to balance, the ruthlessness of capitalism as it seeks its opportunities. Some countries have done very well in this, and in our report we mentioned particularly South Korea and the Irish Republic. They have managed to create human capital to take advantage of the financial capital which was moving around the world and suck it in.

Financial capital does seek very solid quality and quantity of human capital and other capital stocks, such as infrastructure, in which to root itself. However, quite often as it does this, a “winner takes all” situation develops and inequality becomes the norm — not just between countries but in them. We can see this at home west of the Bann and in the Greater Belfast region, which has special advantages in contexts such as telecommunications, while places like Strabane may not. Equally, in Southern Ireland the Greater Dublin region is prospering and has the “Celtic tiger” by the tail, but perhaps places west of the Shannon do not see things in the same context. Recently I was able to look at northern Virginia, which has almost become a new San José, while southern Virginia is still impoverished and follows the traditions of the old south.

In the context of globalisation, it is vital that we ask ourselves what roles our Government, Executive and Ministers should play in the economy to enable us to reap the best benefits for our people. Our report justified my view that the quality of Government intervention is much more important than the quantity. In other words, the Government should effectively steer the ship without necessarily firing all the furnaces or shovelling all the coal.

Others have mentioned the fiscal situation. We need to create the correct financial climate in order to attract inward investment. We have to make the appropriate choices, and our public sector needs to have the right attitude and sense of purpose. We have moved far beyond nineteenth and twentieth century circumstances and into the twenty-first century, in which everything is about partnerships. It is about people bringing different parts of the equation to the table and everyone’s being better off. The Committee’s view is that it is important for there to be a partnership between the “gainers” and the “losers”. The last thing that we want in our small community is to have one section which is well off while another — those not in a position to benefit from the advantages that change has brought — loses out. We have to create a situation in which social sensitivity exists.

Recommendation 9 mentioned innovation, which I cannot emphasise strongly enough. Our businesses do not spend enough on innovation compared with those of other countries. Whether it be the textile industry or others, we are too slow off the mark, and perhaps that is the lesson to be learnt from the partial demise of our textile industry. We still have a major opportunity to obtain business and employment in which we are producing quality for niche markets.

Others have dealt with the single development agency, and I commend the Minister for his efforts in that direction. I must emphasise that it was the view of most of my Colleagues in the Committee that the single development agency must — *[Interruption]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask you to draw your comments to a close.

Dr McDonnell: It must not simply be recycled bureaucracy from the twentieth century. We are in the twenty-first century, and the agency has to have the teeth and claws to dig in at every opportunity. I would like to speak on, had I the opportunity, other issues such as equality and fairness. I could touch on the whole economic infrastructure for regional development. We must penetrate new technology and use that technology to create highly-paid jobs. The Minister has been an apostle of that ideal for a long time.

Mr Carrick: I would acknowledge the work of the Committee in producing the second report, and I appreciate the opportunity for debate on the economy. It is more than two years since the ‘Strategy 2010’ report was produced. We have implemented some of the recommendations; some are under review; some are awaiting action. It is difficult to know the original document’s current status. However, no work would be complete without linking the ‘Strategy 2010’ report to the transportation issue and to the regional strategic framework (RSF) document. It is imperative that all three are dovetailed and that we have a cohesive strategy. We need to devise or identify a mechanism to deliver such a strategy in the context of globalisation of the economy.

4.45 pm

The debate is useful, and there are some issues confronting us. Reference has already been made to the challenge of getting this right — a challenge facing all of us in the Assembly. Many of the people we represent are waiting for leadership and guidance and for the vital decisions to be made so that they can improve their quality of life and have job security and stability.

The need for links between education and business is outlined in recommendations 26 and 27 of the report. The original ‘Strategy 2010’ document identified that a clearer focus is needed for the further and higher education sector in the provision of vocational training. In the higher education sector we have a clear academic route and some research and development, which is invaluable in supporting the economy. However, we need to have vocational training as the primary focus in our further education sector, as identified in ‘Strategy 2010’. This is something that we still have to work on. We have made some progress, but there is still much more to be done. As the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment is not here, the question of the current position on this issue will have to be left hanging.

There is also the issue of the current system of career guidance, which I believe is vital in guiding young people and students on their future employment pathway. A review has been initiated, and an interim report was due in January. I stand to be corrected, but I cannot recall ever having seen that report. What is the present position of that report? If it has not been produced, when will it be available?

Links between education and business are vital throughout all levels of education even into training programmes. We must aim at providing a seamless programme so that there will be no dislocation in the education and training aspect of preparing people for work. There must also be a clear understanding that education and training must be geared towards the skill demands of industry. Some steps have been taken to bring that about, but more work must be done.

In my constituency of Upper Bann and in Craigavon, in particular, only one inward investment project was located in the borough of Craigavon in the period of the Northern Ireland Single Programming Document (SPD) 1994 to 1999. There is a danger that our TSN status might unwittingly deter some inward investment.

Areas such as this should not be disadvantaged or deprived of inward investment because of their position in TSN league tables. There is a further danger in that a rigorous implementation of TSN policies could affect adversely the economic growth of areas such as Craigavon. Setbacks to traditional industries such as textiles, in which jobs have been lost, could be encountered and a serious increase in unemployment could result. We should be careful that, in trying to bring about the equality issues and opportunities that we all support, the pendulum does not swing too far, causing a problem where hitherto there was none.

If local businesses are to prosper, they must have a level playing field and be provided with natural gas. The main urban areas in Upper Bann are Craigavon and Banbridge; however, it is not only those areas that will benefit. There will be a sub-regional benefit for the whole south-east area of the Province.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As a number of Members have withdrawn from the debate, I can expand speaking time to 10 minutes. I apologise for not informing you sooner, Mr Carrick, but I would have been able to make the revision earlier had the Whips informed me that some Members had withdrawn their names.

Ms Morrice: I commend the report. I thank the Committee Clerk, the support staff, researchers and advisers for their patience, diligence and very sterling work. I also thank the groups that gave written and oral presentations. Their input was absolutely invaluable to our consultation process. I thank the Chairperson, the Deputy Chairperson and the members of the Committee for making our deliberations interesting and very enjoyable.

It was no easy task. The territory covered by economic policy is massive. If social issues are also included — as they were — the task is nothing short of gigantic. It covers almost every Government Department from transport and health to education, culture and leisure. Very few Departments escape the umbrella of economic development.

The most important message that I want to come out of the Committee report is that economic development can never operate as a stand-alone policy. Economic and social development must always go hand in hand. The wealth of a nation should not be measured by gross national product alone. Other indices mentioned by the Chairperson such as long-term unemployment, child poverty, inequality and deprivation should also be used to measure growth so that we can never again fall into that terrible trap of widening the gap between the haves and the have-nots. The success of this region must be measured as much by its quality of life as by its quantity of production.

The second message that I would like to give involves the culture that surrounds economic development. Very few Members would disagree that a fear-of-failure mentality has crippled our ability to move forward fast and has condemned us to playing second fiddle to all other industrial regions of the world. Countries as far away as South Korea, which Dr McDonnell mentioned, or as close as our nearest neighbour, the Republic, are shining examples of how it can be done. However, we must be prepared to take risks.

The aim must be to achieve a socially and geographically balanced approach to economic development, while learning and growing through increased co-operation and interaction with our closest neighbours at home, in Europe and further afield. Where do we begin? This report, as Mr Neeson said, provides a starting point by making recommendations that give the go-ahead for a thoroughly modern approach to the change that is taking place in the global economy. That change will overtake us if we do not act now and act fast. All we need is the combined wisdom of our Executive and the newly inclusive Economic Development Forum, which was one of our recommendations, to start weaving the parts together to drive Northern Ireland plc full steam ahead.

As Mr Carrick said, many people are waiting for guidance and leadership from us. It might, therefore, be useful at this stage to offer a few helpful hints on what we in the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition believe are the most important recommendations to come from this report, the recommendations that would, if implemented, help to push the buttons to get us to where we want to be. I will not give the points in any order of preference.

First, I would like to consider the issue of quality of life. We should begin by directing our modern industrial

development to those areas that can contribute to the well-being of society here and on the global scale. I am referring to the promotion of clean, green technologies and life and health technologies. It has been said many times that we have a highly educated population, so why should our research hospitals and our universities not be the first to discover a cure for cancer or foot-and-mouth disease? Why can our old established industries like Harland and Wolff not pioneer the irreversible move into new and renewable energy sources in the area of offshore wind? Tourism should also be touched on. Work is already being done on this, and I commend that, but more needs to be on branding and the other issues that Mr McClarty raised.

Secondly, I want to look at the beauty, the value and the fun of innovation, design and creativity. Why can our reputation as the world's leading textile manufacturer not be channelled into the high-value fashion market? Irish linen is getting there in spite of us, but it needs our help.

What about advertising, film making, television production, dance, music and sport? Those are all areas where we have huge creative, artistic and sporting talent, but they have succeeded with little or no help from us. Is it not time that we turned our attention to our talent instead of always believing that success can be bought only with a plane ticket? I am talking about our young people going abroad to find success elsewhere or investors coming in because they offer more than our local industry. I am not knocking inward investment — it is valuable — but we must start looking at the wealth of what we have here.

5.00 pm

What about our young people? Our education system attempts to teach them to pass exams but gives them no knowledge or skills relevant to business or enterprise culture. A researcher in that area, Brian Cummins said

"Those who engage in policy implementation, including school education, must accept that they cannot remain as spectators of change but realise the valuable contribution that enterprise education can play in addressing current and future needs".

Further education establishments and schools at secondary and primary level are all willing and ready to play their part; we must give them a chance.

Another important area of change that was mentioned by the Chairperson of the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee relates to the increasing number of women in the workplace, the need to accommodate that and the changing family circumstances that that implies.

I mentioned change, and one area that we can no longer ignore is the single European currency. Whatever our stance on the issue, we must begin to look seriously at and prepare for any detrimental effects of the arrival of the single currency on our doorstep on 1 January. That

applies not only to our trade with these partners but also to inward investment.

Finally, the promotion of business that treats its workforce with respect, provides opportunity for all, particularly the most marginalised, and makes a contribution to its community is a vital ingredient in the new modern, socially responsible culture. The value of the social economy and the non-governmental organisation sector must not be underestimated. The report gives the go-ahead for these things to happen. All we need now is the vision, imagination and confidence to make it all happen and to take the risk.

Dr Birnie: I congratulate the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee on the product of considerable work. In a sense a careful and politically led consideration of 'Strategy 2010' has, in fact, been long overdue. 'Strategy 2010' described itself as having some of the characteristics of a draft that, in due course, would be recommended to what was to be a new devolved level of Government in Northern Ireland. It is sad that circumstances, during the course of 1999 and 2000, meant that some bits of the strategy have had to, perforce, be implemented, or implemented in part, ahead of having a democratic debate through the politicians on what the strategy should actually include. The Committee has now — this is very welcome — begun the work of making economic policy more accountable.

The report rightly goes through a wide range of factors that are considered to be possible causes of a regions' rate of economic growth. As Chairperson of the Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment Committee, could I also add that that Committee hopes, in due course and in some detail, to report on the contribution of so-called human capital, particularly training, and the availability of skilled labour and the contribution of that to economic development. Therefore there will be, in a sense, a dovetailing with the recent report.

'Strategy 2010' was certainly noble in its intent, but it was clearly characterised by a number of problems, some of which have been well summarised here today. Paragraph 9 in the executive summary of the report outlines the difficulties.

Let me highlight just one of those difficulties — and here I will draw on my professional experience from before I entered the realm of elected politics. 'Strategy 2010' was conceived as a regional economic development study, but it was constructed without serious consultation with economic experts or economists from outside what was then the Department of Economic Development. That is a rather strange way of going about devising an economic strategy. It is like the Admiralty designing a new battleship or aircraft carrier without making any reference to naval architects.

Of course, a strategy should not be an exercise in creating an abstract economic thesis. In some ways, perhaps, the

over-theoretical sophistication of some economists partly explains why nobody wants to talk to them. However, ideally, the strategy should have been somewhat informed by sound economic analysis. In its process of construction there was not a wide enough and sufficiently well structured consultation process — as the Deputy Chairperson of the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee has already said.

Since I have limited time, I will not simply list the many recommendations in the report that I am in complete agreement with. Rather, I shall highlight three areas where there is room for differing nuances and emphases.

First, in paragraph 11 of the executive summary there is a recommendation for a much-expanded role for the Economic Development Forum. Over recent years there has been a tremendous multiplication of forums in Northern Ireland, particularly in the business field that we are considering today. However, the economy's most urgent need is for entrepreneurs and managers to start, build and expand companies that provide the products and services that the world wants. Action is needed, not simply more talking.

I would have thought that we could have been confident that a combination of the Committee, the Civic Forum and the business and trade union representatives on the Northern Ireland Economic Council, alongside the Minister and the Executive as a whole, would be sufficient to provide democratic accountability and/or sectional representation in the devising and implementation of policy.

My second point relates to the review of fiscal incentives — recommendations 1, 3 and 7, for example. I am glad that a review has taken place. There will obviously be differing views, some of which are contained in the various volumes of evidence, on the desirability of a Southern-style system of very low rates of corporate profit taxation. There is clear evidence of the need to rebalance state support to companies away from grant assistance to physical capital and toward “softer” assets such as research and development, management, consultancy and design.

Moreover, there is now little doubt — and evidence of this was presented to the Committee — that during the direct rule period, industrial policy often had the perverse consequence of subsidising and, therefore, encouraging corporate inefficiency. Taking industrial grants — from IDB, LEDU and so on — as a percentage of company profits or of value added, Northern Ireland for many years had the dubious distinction of being the most grant-dependent region in Europe, west of the former Communist bloc.

Recommendation 37 of the report relates to the Northern Ireland Economic Council. I entirely endorse the sentiment regarding the importance of economic research that is provided somewhat at arm's length from the general administrative and Government machine. I have a slight,

albeit non-financial interest here, since that is an area that I used to work in about 12 years ago.

I am less sure of the recommendation that is contained in the Committee's report to add a regional and economic forecasting role to the Northern Ireland Economic Council, as economic forecasts have been carried out since the late 1980s by the separate research body, the Northern Ireland Economic Research Centre.

The issue of independent economic advice to the Government, and by implication to us as Assembly Members, is the subject of an ongoing review. I am a little concerned that the report might be seen to be prejudging some aspects of the results of that review, although I entirely endorse the underlying theme of the value of and need to maintain independent sources of strategic economic analysis and good sources of independent statistics.

Notwithstanding those three points of qualification, I welcome this report in the round. It is a good start to the process of re-engineering ‘Strategy 2010’. Since 1990, Northern Ireland's output and employment growth performance has certainly surpassed the United Kingdom average by a substantial margin, but the challenge now is to build, so as to continue and maintain that achievement.

I support the motion.

Mr McGrady: Like other Members before me, I commend the Chairperson and the Committee for carrying out a very difficult task and for the panoramic view they have given us of the way forward in industrial development and social well-being. I would like to think that it is not a wish list, but that it will be further honed down and developed into a series of enterprises that are properly prioritised and, equally important, properly funded to be capable of implementation.

It is in a sense a *vade mecum* of where we are going in economic and social terms, and for that reason it is a very important document. Dr Birnie has dealt with the origins of this paper, and I well remember very severe criticisms being made of the 2010 document because of its lack of external input and expertise from other fields. However, that can be addressed as time goes on.

One is not qualified to be categorical in any one area, but the question of the land border between ourselves and the Republic of Ireland is a very big subject given the differential in taxes and duties and the potential differential in coinage. How that will affect us needs to be addressed much more fundamentally than it has been in this document. It would be tempting to go down that avenue with fiscal flexibility, the Barnett formula and tax duties, but I must resist that because we will be trapped for eternity if we address these lofty issues. I will leave that for another time.

I have taken one or two areas which time will allow me to address. The first is recommendation 13 on

regional disparities. This is a very complex issue, particularly if we are looking at a strategy based on a knowledge-driven economic society. If information technology is going to be the central plank of the strategy to dispense with regional disparities, IT education must be decentralised, particularly at university level. Graduates will naturally be the focus of most IT companies, and the only way to ensure inward investment in regions that have not yet received it is to create a local pool. Quite frankly, the current provision of HND and HNC at these levels may not be adequate.

5.15 pm

It is important to address this in another context as well. The real meaning of wealth is well-being. Well-being is not based on economic factors alone, it also relates to social factors. We must create a new society in which that well-being exists. Everyone agrees that long-term unemployment is a primary issue which needs to be tackled first but, in reality, it is difficult to go about doing this. Recommendation 16 of the report notes that employers are reluctant to recruit the long-term unemployed. There are economic disincentives in social security and welfare benefits, and the skills base still needs to be addressed. In addressing the lack of skills, the report refers once again to IT, but we cannot all participate in this field. There must be other skills from which people can earn a good living. While addressing the IT deficit, we must also address the lack of general skills. Many of the long-term unemployed would not be comfortable in an IT-based job. We must look beyond IT, even though it is fashionable today.

I welcome the concept of a tax exemption for creative industries, a sector which could assist regional decentralisation. We have an enormous wealth of talent in the creative industries which we have yet to harvest. This is not just a cultural issue, but an economic matter, and there is enormous potential for export if the cultural industry is approached on a full economic basis.

The tourism industry was mentioned by one or two Members. In such a broad, panoramic paper there must be something that has not been emphasised — the potential of tourism has been under-emphasised. We speak about tourism all the time, and we all support the concept of boosting that industry, but we need to get down to brass tacks. A new economic development agency which has been set up will devote some of its energies to key inward investment in the tourism sector. However, the agency must be driven, it must be financed and it must have specific targets to deliver a strong tourist industry. If it were properly dealt with, tourism could become the second largest base industry in Northern Ireland.

Recommendation 22 addresses support for the social economy. The recommendation, and the Executive's synopsis of it, relate once again to the local economy. The linked issues of regional disparity and long-term

unemployment, which emerge once again in this recommendation, can only be dealt with if the local economy is addressed.

I do not recall which recommendation deals with partnership, but partnership must be all-embracing. It must incorporate all forms of representatives and elected personnel if the concept of inclusiveness is to take on its true meaning. There is also the practical argument that the more people you seek ideas from, the better are the ideas you get.

It is time that we removed the financial cap on local government spending in the economic development sector. This would allow local politicians who represent the rate payers — those who contribute to the funding — to make more fundamental decisions which address the market failure in many districts.

Referring back to the IT syndrome, the location of technology centres needs to be more dispersed, with greater emphasis on areas outside the cosmopolitan areas of Belfast, Derry or any other area that aspires to such a description. You can get away from that.

Unemployment is another issue. The only suggestion that I found in that synopsis was that the Committee would urge the Department to consider the fast track to information technology (FIT). As a group, the long-term unemployed are not all going to be accommodated by that. We must broaden the concept of how we enhance the skills and retrain the unemployed with IT abilities, and also with other abilities, if we are to tackle the long-term unemployment issue properly.

This is a social contract, and many issues will need to be honed down and developed. Each time a decision is made to pursue a particular priority, the financial resources must be identified and considered at the same time in order that the practicality of the implementation is carried out. These recommendations and their development should not simply be a wish list of things to be done in the future, without hope of implementation.

Mr M Robinson: I am sure I do not need to remind Members that the next decade will be one of massive change to the economic infrastructure of our society. The old labour-intensive industries, such as shipbuilding and textile manufacturing, are slowly being replaced by new industries. One need only look to companies such as Nortel to see how this is the case. All over the world this cycle of decline in the old industries and rejuvenation through the new service providers is being repeated. It is vital that we in Northern Ireland embrace the changes taking place in the world markets to ensure that we offer an attractive, competitive and first-class destination for would-be investors.

I would like to take this opportunity to place on record my own support for the proposals outlined in the 'Strategy 2010' document. The proposals as outlined in

section 9 of the document are innovative, but they are also realistic and achievable aims which can ensure the continuance of the economic renaissance which Northern Ireland has seen in the last few years. I shall focus my remarks today on section 9 of the report, which outlines the recommendations of the steering group. One of the recommendations that grabbed my attention is contained in the skills and education section of the report, page 150, in which the authors recommend that

“A valued sub-degree level vocational educational programmes should be established.”

In my view this has much to do with raising the value, both in the eyes of employers and of students who may wish to undertake such a course, of the current GNVQ qualification. The fact of the matter is that although it carries the equivalent value of two A levels, the GNVQ is scorned as a qualification. This is most unsatisfactory. Young people who take up these courses must be assured that their qualifications are of value and will guarantee them a fair chance when they do enter the employment market.

Another of the recommendations of the steering group is contained under the section entitled ‘Innovation’, page 158. In this section they say

“There should be a campaign to promote innovation and good design.”

The importance of being seen on the international stage as a place where technological innovation and improvement are rapidly evolving is vital if Northern Ireland is to hold its own in an increasingly dynamic world market. The Government cannot simply sit back and hope for great genius and design to come forth. They must take an active part in encouraging companies to diversify and invest in research and new techniques, and the commencement of such a campaign would be an excellent start. The campaign could take the form of a charter mark as established under the previous Tory Government and awarded for excellence, or perhaps an incentive to the company proven to be most innovative and forward-looking.

One of the most interesting recommendations is contained in the section entitled ‘The Planning System’, page 178. In this section we read that the steering group recommends that the Assembly introduce a rates regime which helps to nurture small, indigenous retail businesses. One can only assume that by “nurture small, indigenous businesses” the authors of this document did not mean “cripple many of them with a massive 8% rates rise”. The ordinary shopkeepers in my constituency remember who is to blame for this and no doubt will deliver their verdict come the elections. There is, however, much in this report to be welcomed. Many of the proposals are constructive and well thought out, and I have no hesitation in recommending its adoption by the House.

Mrs Carson: I welcome the Committee’s report on the ‘Strategy 2010’ document and commend the Committee for the work and ideas on what it deems is required for the strategy’s implementation in Northern Ireland. This is an opportunity for the Assembly, its Committees and all the Departments to grasp what this Committee has recommended and to endeavour to see that its recommendations are implemented. We have seen from many previous Committee reports the need for devolved government, and this is a further example of how that can be improved on. It is a vast job for our elected Members, but after a 30-year vacuum it is a golden opportunity for us all to do something. We had the luxury of apportioning blame on others before this — we could blame the Northern Ireland Office and Secretaries of State — but now it is our opportunity to address the problems that really concern Northern Ireland.

I echo the Committee’s concern on the three issues where we in Northern Ireland are at a distinct disadvantage to the rest of the United Kingdom because of the proximity of the Republic of Ireland and the border. The Republic of Ireland has lower corporation tax, lower fuel prices and road tax and the damaging currency differential, which is a big problem.

There are 37 detailed recommendations, and a number are worthy of mention. Recommendation 12 — on a single development agency incorporating the IDB, LEDU and the Industrial Research and Technology Unit — will streamline the provision of aid to business and reduce wasteful duplication, which can only be a positive step.

On the environmental issues, I agree with the enhanced environmental protection. Industries should be encouraged towards clean, green production methods, using alternative energy if possible, and to work for a reduction in waste production.

Recommendation 10 is important, and business and industry should take note. The recent Northern Ireland Waste Arisings Survey Report by the Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) pointed out that waste collection, processing and disposal is costing Northern Ireland business more than £45 million per year. Fewer than one in three companies are taking effective steps to minimise the impact of waste on their business profits. The environment is a very important aspect of our life, and caring for our environment will not only help to reduce the negative impact of pollution on the environment in which we live, but it should also save businesses money if they take the recommendations on board.

Recommendation 11 is an important step in recognising that the development of new technology industries can be designed to enhance environmental protection and reduce global warming while remaining profitable. In my constituency, the research and development of a biogas plant has been ongoing in Fivemiletown. That development hopes to have a number of uses, producing

three saleable products — electricity, heat and bio-fertilisers. If operational, it will benefit the whole local community and the environment by recycling waste material. More research and development in similar environmental technologies would benefit the environmental and economic life of Northern Ireland.

Recommendations 31 to 33 will help build on our economic strengths in the tourism sector. Fermanagh and South Tyrone should benefit from this, as a fully co-ordinated strategy will help the overall aim of a partnership approach on economic development through a sustainable approach to tourism.

This should focus on a quality product and a quality service. The Fermanagh and South Tyrone constituency has much to offer with the fishing lakes, boating and the friendly bed-and-breakfast accommodation — the whole historic character of the constituency. Through the implementation of this report, we should be in a better position to take advantage of economic benefits for tourism.

In conclusion, this report has the potential to benefit the whole of Northern Ireland. It should not gather dust but should be acted upon. I support the motion.

5.30 pm

Mrs Courtney: I welcome the opportunity to take part in this debate. As has already been stated, 'Strategy 2010' was published by the Department in March 1999 and, following its publication, serious concerns were expressed about it. As the Chairperson has stated, it was because of this that the Committee launched its inquiry.

I am a relative newcomer to the Committee, having joined it in January 2001, and at that stage the first inquiry draft was just completed. It was followed by a second and a third draft. I say this to give some idea of its scope and of the painstaking way in which the inquiry was conducted. This was of course in stark contrast to the consultation that took place on the original 'Strategy 2010' document. I thank the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee staff for all their help.

The criticism of the original 'Strategy 2010' document was that there were too many unstructured recommendations — 62 in total. The Committee has made 37 detailed and two general recommendations, but I intend to concentrate on the two relating to skills and education — recommendations 26 and 27.

The Committee recommends a system of education that releases the potential of all children, reduces the failure culture, improves access to employment through careers guidance, enhances links with business and industry, gives more recognition to vocational studies and makes greater use of work placement in industry. It also recommends greater links between the further education sector and industry, particularly with a view to preparing students for new skills to accommodate the knowledge-based economy, increased support for in-house

training at all levels and reskilling courses, particularly for those sectors, such as textiles, which are particularly vulnerable to changes. These recommendations have the support of the trade unions and educational bodies. Courses within the educational establishment need to be customised to make changes in the workplace and the knowledge-based economy.

There should be stronger working links between the further education sector and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment agencies. We already have evidence of that when we see the Minister of Further and Higher Education, Training and Employment, Sean Farren, and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Sir Reg Empey, travelling to Europe and America seeking jobs and inward investment.

We support an economic development strategy that informs the education and training policy and its funding delivery mechanisms. For too long, colleges have been left to make provision for courses and qualifications with inadequate market intelligence. Partnership is the key between schools, colleges and relevant businesses in order that the necessary skills are taught.

There needs to be greater support for in-house training within sectors, such as the textile industry, which are very vulnerable to change. Even in this past week, we have seen further job losses at Desmonds in Derry. This type of training needs to start sooner rather than later, if we are to have a sound economy. We need to be proactive rather than reactive, and we need to monitor carefully the implementation of these recommendations.

To finish, I would like to highlight two other recommendations that are close to my heart. The first one, which has already been highlighted by my Colleague Eddie McGrady is tax exemption for the creative industries. This is a very important recommendation. We recommend a tax exemption for artists and crafts people in creative industry in Northern Ireland. At the moment, when we are talking about developing cultural quarters in all the major cities, this is an excellent recommendation and one that the House should support.

The other recommendation concerns women in the workplace. We recommend an increased focus on the recruitment and promotion of women in the workplace, including targeted training for women, workplace crèche facilities, increased access to job-share and greater use of family-friendly and flexible working hours. Thankfully, that is happening now in more places than it used to, particularly in hospitals, but it is something that we have to encourage if we are to get more women back into the workplace.

I support the motion.

Mr Shannon: It is disappointing that we have had three major motions crammed into one day. That does not do justice to any of the issues. Each of them could

have done with a full day's debate. Many more Members would have been able to contribute.

The councils, including Ards Borough Council, made a significant contribution to 'Strategy 2010'. It is important that Members reiterate some of the points that were made through that. Ards Borough Council represents some 80,000 people living in the borough, mainly around Newtownards. However, there is now a focus and a population growth in the Comber and Ballygowan areas, which tend to be dormitory towns for the Greater Belfast area. It is clear, even to the untrained eye, that that area is going to face some considerable problems over the next 10 years with respect to the inadequate provision of industrial incentives, despite the suitable location.

It is essential for the future success of Ards borough that attention be focused on the regeneration of industry and the expansion of the hospitality sector, which is pitifully low in the borough. We heard this morning about the problems facing the hospitality sector because of the foot-and-mouth outbreak. That is a problem in my area.

Problems that may arise in the future will be linked to the increase in population predicted in 'Shaping our Future'. The Ards borough will have some 7,500 new houses in the next 13 years, translating into 21,000 people and 14,000 extra jobs for the borough.

One of the areas in special need is Comber. It is one of the more popular parts of the borough for housing, but it has little or nothing to offer any individual or company wishing to direct inward investment to the area. There must be extra zoning of industrial land in that area.

Local government should have a direct influence on planning procedures. Local government is accountable and has a grasp of all influencing issues. It has been suggested that a fairly small number of industrial units, through which we could monitor the needs and requirements of the growing population and how industry should grow, could be created in association with Government agencies.

The role of local government in the development of its own jurisdiction needs some clarification. At present, the organisation of local government into 26 separate entities has led to a diffuse and complex list of priorities and goals. Clarity is needed in this area if inward investment is to be effectively attracted to all the areas of Northern Ireland, and not just to Ards borough. Local government authorities are in the best position to understand the needs of their own areas, and as a local form of authority they are best placed to provide all relevant information to those in the area who wish to create or develop business opportunities.

It is all well and good to have the relevant information at your disposal, but if it cannot be distributed effectively it might as well not be there. Local people must be able to access business development information and assistance

without difficulty or hindrance. Local government is in a position to fulfil that task in a manner that is accountable to the ratepayer.

One of the targets in 'Strategy 2010' is to reduce unemployment from 4% to 2%. Is that achievable? Local government has a strong role to play in that and can help to achieve that goal.

Cross-border co-operation has always been surrounded by controversy and political expediency and must be approached on a practical basis. The thrust of the Belfast Agreement is to harmonise infrastructure and policy north and south of the border, but any co-operation with southern companies should not rise above the importance of co-operation with a company from the mainland United Kingdom. Above all, any relationship must be based firmly on respect for the integrity of Northern Ireland's constitutional position in the United Kingdom and the authority of the Crown here.

When this is established we can have a working relationship with companies from the Republic of Ireland in areas such as fisheries, forestry, energy and technology. In this vein, I agree that assistance is required to optimise co-operation between companies north and south of the border.

With regard to internal co-operation, I suggest that projects backed by local government authorities should not be adopted willy-nilly. The health and wealth of the respective boroughs should be the overwhelming priority when it comes to business development. There are cases where such arrangements will be of mutual benefit to those participating. However, we should not enter into such arrangements blindly.

It is essential, from an international aspect, that Ards borough be identified with the Greater Belfast area as opposed to the Down area since international companies will immediately recognise Belfast as a place for locating business. My Colleague Jim Wells will not be happy with that, but we have to look at what is best for our own areas. We also have to put it on record. On the other hand, co-operation with local government authorities on tourist projects may be of benefit. Down District Council, Newry and Mourne District Council, Ards Borough Council and North Down Borough Council are all involved in tourist projects on the coast of Down.

Ards Borough Council has suffered greatly as a result of the decline in the British textile industry. It is important to identify industry which could be attracted into the area. Such industries include technology and marketing. Some work has been carried out to create a market for high quality linens and textiles, which are outside the previous market, but these have been undermined by cheap eastern imports. The quality sector of the market is, therefore, free for development and expansion. However, Northern Ireland is establishing itself in foreign markets as a leader in this field. Efforts must also be made to

increase IT awareness among the local workforce. The IT sector is expanding rapidly beyond the rate at which individuals are being trained. Everyone must play a role in that.

In conclusion, the way forward for industrial development is for local government authorities to take existing small businesses and market their products overseas, whether on the United Kingdom mainland or in the United States, through targeted trade missions as opposed to inward investment drives. Government agencies, as currently structured, can cope with this and develop inward investment separately. Together we can make this work.

Mr Wells: When I was being considered for a position on the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee I thought that it sounded interesting. I thought that we would have the odd wander around factories and look at industrial investment. It did not sound too difficult. After eight months on the Committee I asked why every other Committee seems like a Sunday afternoon stroll when the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee's work seems like an assault course. It is the busiest Committee in the Assembly and has the hardest working staff.

Mr McFarland: What about the Regional Development Committee?

Mr Wells: I can assure Mr McFarland that the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee does a lot more work than the Regional Development Committee, and I speak as someone who has experience of both. We need to pay tribute to the extremely hard working Committee staff who have produced this huge document. We have gathered information from the widest possible range of interest groups. While the other Committees were lounging on some beach during the summer recess or having a glass of wine in some Greek restaurant, the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee was working hard gathering evidence. It also went on a fact-finding mission to the United States.

There is a lot to commend in this report. We are in a period of enormous transition in Northern Ireland. In the Senate Chamber above the Public Gallery are three paintings on the ceiling depicting the three cornerstones of Northern Ireland's industrial heritage. One is ship-building, the second is agriculture, and the third is textiles. The sad reality is that the one thing the three industries have in common is that they are declining fast. Employment opportunities are drying up very quickly in those three pillars of society. How we manage the change from the decline of those three pillars to the new vibrant global economy in which we find ourselves will decide whether Northern Ireland goes forward as a heartland of industrial expansion or stagnates.

5.45 pm

There is much to commend in the report, particularly the way in which it deals with the major impediments

that face us as we go forward. As someone who represents a constituency very close to the border, I strongly support the recommendation that we examine in detail the problems we face in having a land border with the Irish Republic. The fact that Northern Ireland is outside the euro zone while the Irish Republic is inside is a problem, and we know that we have lost opportunities for inward investment because of that. The decision on whether we do or do not join the Euro is not — thank goodness — one that this Assembly will ever have to take. That is a much bigger issue than even Sir Reg Empey could cope with. It is just as well that we do not have to deal with that, but we have to accept that not being in the euro zone causes difficult trading conditions.

The dreadful problem of the unequal excise duties on fuel has decimated employment in the fuel industry within 20-30 miles of the border. I understand that there has been a decline of 50% in the amount of diesel sold in Northern Ireland, while there has been an increase of 20% in the number of diesel cars. Something there does not add up, and it has had an enormous effect on garage businesses in the border area.

The big threat on the horizon is the aggregates tax. It is not that the tax is being implemented at a differential rate in the Republic; it is not being implemented there at all. I spoke to quarry owners last weekend, and many of them are seeking out quarries in the Irish Republic so that they can transfer staff and investment from Northern Ireland into such counties as Cavan, Leitrim, Westmeath and, to a lesser extent, Donegal. Jobs will migrate, simply because of the imposition of a tax that will have a disproportionate impact on Northern Ireland in comparison with the rest of the United Kingdom.

I take Mr Shannon's point entirely. Clearly, none of this should call into question the constitutional status of Northern Ireland, but on the basis of two sovereign Governments sitting down and discussing this issue, we must find some way of reducing the impact of these impediments to our economic growth.

I also strongly support the proposal for a review of the Barnett formula. This is one of those issues that need to be handled very carefully. At the moment, many believe that the Barnett formula should be assessed on the basis of need, rather than being a pure mathematical formula based on population. On the basis of need, Northern Ireland would get a higher proportion of the UK cake.

An issue that came up quite late in the inquiry — and I am glad that Mr Neeson quite properly raised it — was the role of the banks in the Northern Ireland economy. Many of us attended an event in the Long Gallery, sponsored by Dr McDonnell, at which the results of a survey were revealed. They indicated that the greatest single impediment to the expansion of local industry in Northern Ireland was the attitude of our banks.

The cartel of four large banks overcharges, places almost impossible conditions on loans, charges ridiculous rates of interest and tries to hide unfair charges in complicated statements. Eighty-five per cent of the businesses questioned suggested that they were the main impediment. Until we get the banks on board in the process, there will always be difficulties for the expansion of small industry in Northern Ireland.

I do not know what whip this Assembly or the Executive can crack with the banks, but there must be something wrong with institutions that take over £250 million per year out of the Northern Ireland economy and that seem almost to have a monopoly on small business loans. That simply cannot be allowed to continue. For example, £90 million a year from one bank goes straight out of the Northern Ireland economy to Australia. The Australians do not need it, and the Northern Ireland economy does. We must look at that. We are not talking about nationalisation, but we must bring these bodies under control. They have had it too good for too long.

My party and I strongly welcome the proposal to amalgamate all the industrial promotion bodies into one new unit. That is one of the most far-sighted proposals made by the Committee, and we support it. We also support the concept of its being taken outwith the Civil Service and given the flexibility and power to go out and attract industry and to employ the very best executives to seek new investment in Northern Ireland. That is an extremely welcome development that cannot come soon enough.

On the downside, however, the one issue that will handicap Northern Ireland's future growth, apart from the difficulties of having the common land border and not being part of the euro, is the tremendous problem facing our infrastructure. We have the very difficult problem to crack of 25 to 30 years of underinvestment in our roads, ports and rail. Mr Campbell is looking at this matter, and I wish him well. When he was in the United States recently he looked at possible options for private sector investment without the loss of public control in infrastructure. If we can crack that problem, then we get round the other great bottleneck that is affecting our future expansion. If we cannot transport goods and services round and in and out of the Province quickly, we will always be lagging behind when it comes to future growth.

I support recommendations 10 and 11, which suggest that not only should we have a vibrant economy but also an environmentally aware and green economy. I do not see these aspects as being mutually exclusive. Ms Morrice spoke at length on this issue in the Committee. I see the revolution in the attitude to green issues as an opportunity for Northern Ireland rather than a threat. We have a problem with our shipbuilding industry, but perhaps instead of making ships we should make wind turbines. Northern Ireland should take the lead on these

issues and show that it is possible to combine the protection of the environment with a vibrant economy.

There are some exciting opportunities as well as some concerns, and I commend the report to the Assembly. However, I agree with Mr Shannon that it is appalling that three absolutely vital issues affecting this Province were discussed and debated on the same day. This is the most important report to have come from any of the Committees so far, and an entire day should have been set aside for the debate. To have the debate on the same day as a debate on consequential loss for the rural community because of the foot-and-mouth disease outbreak, together with a debate on foot-and-mouth disease itself, is not acceptable.

The full impact of this report should be on the front page of almost every newspaper in the Province, but that opportunity has been lost because of the foot-and-mouth disease debate. We have to manage our business better to ensure that this does not happen in the future.

Mr Ford: Members will be pleased to hear that I do not intend to take up in full my allocated ten minutes. Unfortunately I have not heard much of the debate because I was at a meeting, but I have endeavoured to follow on television some of what has been said.

Given my past experience as a social worker, I welcome the fact that the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee, which might have been thought to have been solely concerned with the "hard economy", has made some firm and straightforward recommendations under the section which it headlines 'Partnership and Cohesion'. There are major problems for the economy because of the failure to address the issues of poverty and long-term unemployment. We are not going to develop the economy of Northern Ireland in the way we need to if those who are educated do well and those at the bottom of the educational heap continue in short-term unskilled jobs and fail to contribute to the economy in the way in which they and their families need to in terms of the income payable. The Committee has made a significant contribution in that area, and that is to be welcomed. Frequently in the past that has been left out when looking at the field of economic development. Similarly the remarks on social cohesion, and the social economy and the role it can play, need to be followed through.

I should have known, having to follow Jim Wells, that the second of my hobby horses — environmental aspects of the economy — would have been well covered. So perhaps I should not make too much of that. The clean, green image that we have on this island compared to much of Europe is a major strength for potential economic development. It also presents a major threat if we do not continue to keep that image right, but it is a major opportunity for growth in the relevant areas of the economy, many of which Mr Wells covered.

I want to look at part of the issue raised by Sean Neeson, and that is the way in which the public sector relates to the private sector and the way in which the public sector manages to control, guide or exercise discretion over the direction of the economy.

I welcome the inclusion in the report of the slightly coy and guarded agreement that the need for tax varying powers has to be seriously addressed. We do not have the luxury of the Scots, who have tax varying powers in law but are frightened to use them. This is something that we will have to look into in the future. The report clearly lays down guidelines for carrying out a study, and we could build on that. It is the responsibility of everyone in the Chamber to look at the best economic future for Northern Ireland and only by using all the economic levers that we can to get the economy growing, people employed and businesses thriving will we begin to invest in infrastructure, develop private industry and start to repair the damage of the past.

‘Strategy 2010’ is an important document in that respect, and the Committee report must be welcomed. We should be working for economic success. It is perhaps regrettable that the Committee hedged round how tax varying powers might be handled in points 15, 16 and 17. At least it has recognised the term “fiscal flexibility”, and I welcome the fact that that term appears.

It is not only dangerous radicals like me who think that fiscal flexibility is important. Bodies such as the Institute of Directors have joined the call for such powers as well. It is logical and makes common sense. A mature Government, even a devolved regional legislature, must have the power to control their own purse, or they will not have the powers they need. This is not just about how to spend the money — which we spent time discussing when we looked at budgets — it is also about where the money comes from and how we raise it. In that sense tax varying powers are integral to any economic planning.

Look at some of the debates we have had. We discussed fuel tax and looked at the problem of the different tax rates across the border. We had a recent debate on the aggregates tax. Mr Wells has left, so he cannot exercise his environmentalist concern over the way in which the aggregates tax may or may not be applied. However, if it is applied as currently proposed by the UK Government, there is no doubt that there will be a migration of jobs to quarries in the Republic.

We all recognise that we need to determine policy and drive it forward — not just taking the income as given. We could look at taxation in a number of other areas as well. Part of the reason for the economic growth in the Republic is that it has a lower rate of corporation tax than we do. That creates difficulties for this corner of the island that the “Celtic tiger” economy does not have.

I welcome the recognition of all that is inadequate with the Barnett formula. There must be change. As the report acknowledges, Barnett was thought to be a short-term solution in the 1970s. It is something that we are stuck with, a blunt instrument that has completely failed to address the levels of real need in the three “Celtic fringe” nations as opposed to England.

Last week the redistribution of Government resources within the regions of England was raised. That issue is not going to go away. However, the Assembly should be careful to say that the revision of Barnett is not just a threat — although there is a degree of threat — it is also an opportunity. We can make a case for a needs-based assessment rather than a simple headcount-based assessment. Whatever needs to be adjusted between English regions, like the south-west and the north-east on the one hand and Greater London and the south-east on the other, there is a continuing need for this region to receive a fair allocation from the UK Exchequer. That requires a modification to Barnett and amendments to our tax varying powers, whenever we get them.

6.00 pm

When we discussed the regional rate, my party was accused of wanting the money but not wanting to raise it because we opposed the increase. The increase was gradually whittled down due to the pressure that the Minister of Finance and Personnel was under. Every time he looked in his back pocket, the Civil Service allowed him to find a few more million pounds.

The regional rate, however it is used for raising taxes, is about the most blunt and unfair possible taxation. We need to look for a better system of taxation based, almost certainly, on income tax but with variations on corporation tax. There is also potential for other tax-varying powers, which we must have.

This is the first report from any Assembly Committee that has recognised that Barnett is a matter for all Members, not just the Minister of Finance and Personnel, and has agreed the need for tax-varying powers. I welcome and endorse the Committee’s report on ‘Strategy 2010’.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Sir Reg Empey): I welcome the report and thank the Committee, the strategy steering group (SSG) and the Economic Development Forum (EDF) for their contributions. I feared that Mr Wells was going to eulogise and even propose the beatification of some of the Committee members who were obviously working so hard. However, I also acknowledge the work that they put in.

They worked over the summer, which my Department hopes they will do again this summer. There are plans in the pipeline to keep them occupied. We hope that the result of this significant amount of activity will be positive.

Adam Ingram, as Minister responsible for the Department of Economic Development, initiated the process.

In the foreword to 'Strategy 2010' he emphasised that it had been produced as a basis for discussion. It was also envisaged that leadership for that debate would come from the Assembly and that there would be extensive involvement from the wider community. I highlight those points because the Chairperson's opening remarks focused on the consultation issue, which has also been mentioned by others.

I have made it clear that I have never, either now or in the past, viewed 'Strategy 2010' as a definitive or fixed blueprint to be slavishly followed. Rather, it was an agenda for change created over two years ago in a unique partnership that would extend through a consultative process to the implementation of accepted recommendations.

It will be recalled that delays in getting devolution had an impact on the speed at, and the degree to, which recommendations were implemented. Adam Ingram indicated in the foreword of the document that the Assembly would have to deliberate on it and, ultimately, decide its fate.

By initiating this debate the Committee has obviously led the further stage of the process, which was added to by the 58 written evidence and 45 oral evidence sessions — a substantial amount of work. The SSG, the 11 sectoral and seven cross-sectoral teams and the 'Strategy 2010' consultation panel deserve thanks for their efforts to produce the strategy in the first place.

Members will recall that a huge number of people, much larger than in the past, were involved in this exercise. It would not have taken place in this fashion had it not been for the arrival of devolution. Never before under direct rule was such a substantial amount of consultation undertaken, and, although the Committee has pointed out weaknesses with that process, we must nevertheless thank those who gave voluntarily of their time to enable it to occur.

Thanks are due to the EDF which was established as one of the recommendations in the 'Strategy 2010' report. It has given generously of its time over the past 18 months to provide advice on many of the other recommendations and related key issues. It should be noted that, during the Committee's inquiry, our new structures have been working increasingly effectively and the Programme for Government has been developed and approved.

The Programme for Government states the Executive's priorities across all areas of expenditure, including economic development. It is important to remember that the programme is not set in stone but is designed to be reviewed on an annual basis. This provides the opportunity for many of the recommendations that are foreshadowed in the report to find their way through into the programme because that is the only way, ultimately, in which they will be implemented.

The task now is to ensure that agreed priorities and measures are reflected in the Programme for Government as it is rolled out over the years. I repeat that this will be on an annual basis because things change continually. It is not possible to determine what should happen and then sit and wait for it to happen in the economy. The Chairperson of the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee also focused on the lack of economic modelling, and I know that that has been a criticism from some professional economists. However, the 'Strategy 2010' report did understand those matters, and there was a number of contributions from the Northern Ireland Economic Counsel (NIEC), which has done reports in the past, and from the Northern Ireland Economic Research Centre (NIERC) itself, which exists to carry out research. The 'Strategy 2010' Committees were not without an awareness of such matters.

Globalisation has also been mentioned today, and, of course, that was in the context of today's being May Day. The Chairperson also spoke about the Republic, and how well it has been doing. There is no economy that has benefited more from globalisation than the Republic because it was that process that brought the benefits, and that needs to be spelled out.

Several Members, including the Chairperson, referred to the question of equality. Equality and social cohesion was one of the 'Strategy 2010' report's key themes. Page 14 of the report states that

"Everyone in Northern Ireland must have a stake in economic success. The benefits must be fairly shared and we need real partnership in our drive for common goals and social cohesion."

Equality and social cohesion, therefore, are incorporated into the 'Strategy 2010' report. The Programme for Government has picked this theme up and it states that

"Our vision — as set out in the agreement — is of a peaceful, inclusive, prosperous, stable and fair society".

It goes on to say that this vision is and must be

"based on 'partnership, equality and mutual respect'".

New TSN is also a new policy of the Executive, and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment policies give priority to New TSN areas. I noticed that Mr Carrick raised the issue of the borough of Craigavon and said that he did not want his area to be disadvantaged by New TSN policies. There is an element of unnecessary alarm about the issue. There is nothing wrong in saying to people, who might wish to invest, that there are certain areas of our territory where we wish to see industry strengthened because there are weaknesses. We cannot instruct and we do not attempt to prevent people going to another location if that is what they want to do. However, we do encourage them and that can be done financially, as well as in other ways. If an employer decides that he wants to invest in a particular area, there would be no question of our taking any action to prevent that. However, the Department is saying that there are

clearly identified areas in our Province that have specific and special needs, and it is only proper that we give credence to that policy. The Department is fully committed to that; it has targets in the Programme for Government, and I am happy to say that, at the moment, it is achieving those targets.

I hope that Mr Carrick will not be alarmed. I have been to his borough on a number of occasions, and I have spoken to the representatives of the district council; I have visited the area extensively, and I can assure him that no discrimination is taking place against the borough as a result of New TSN policies.

A number of Members referred to partnership and shared ownership, and the Chairperson mentioned the Fast Track to employment IT schemes in the Republic. Obviously that is a matter that my colleague, Dr Farren, will want to address together with a number of the recommendations in the report.

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has identified that the Committee's recommendations are spread over eight of the 10 Departments, and seven Departments have recommendations pertaining to them. Consequently, my Department has written to the other Departments seeking their views and advice on those recommendations. Therefore I am not in a position to come to a definitive view on the report today. I communicated that to the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson in advance of today's debate, because I do not want it to be seen as any discourtesy to the Committee.

Think of the practicalities. The Committee has taken months to prepare this substantial report — the Department has only had it for a few weeks. Many of the recommendations involve other Departments; we have not yet had their input, and it is not possible to have definitive views on such a wide range of recommendations yet. Furthermore, I have been asked to respond in writing by early June, when it would be my intention to give a more definitive response.

I do not believe that the Committee expects me to treat such a substantial report with a cursory view, so I am not in a position to say that I can, and will, implement every one of the recommendations. I can say that each is being pursued actively and will be responded to, by me in writing, in early June provided that I am given the proper responses by the other Departments that I have contacted. I have no doubt that that will be the case.

A number of Members, including the Deputy Chairperson, referred to the Barnett formula and the fiscal environment; indeed Mr Ford talked about the matter at some length. I have written to the Financial Secretary many times about items such as aggregates tax and fuel duty. I have been to see the Financial Secretary and I know that my Colleague, Mark Durkan, has prepared a comprehensive list of tax issues. The First Minister and

the Deputy First Minister saw the Chancellor earlier this year. I receive regular and frequent correspondence on those two issues, and I know, and agree, that anybody who is seriously taking a land border into account would not have come up with the aggregates tax as currently drafted. It amounts to a tax in excess of 60% on quarry products here compared with 25% on quarry products in Great Britain.

Anybody with an ounce of wit could see that a lorry load of stones can be driven a few miles along the road and would replace the production needs of a particular area. I share the environmental objective that the people who designed this tax may have; and a number of Members, including Mrs Carson, have referred to environmental issues. However, if the product can be replaced a few miles down the road, the tax is not capable of achieving its objective, and there is no point in having it. Quarrying will not become a revenue raising activity, because the revenue, like fuel duty, is being substituted.

6.15 pm

Statistics show that, in the last five or six years, the amount of legally-imported fuel into Northern Ireland has halved. However, we all know that there has been a substantial increase in the number of vehicles on the road. It is perfectly clear that fuel duty is being lost to the Chancellor. We have pointed this out on a number of occasions. I have received delegations from a wide range of Assembly Members who are all saying the same thing. Mr Durkan, the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister regularly correspond with the Treasury on one or other of those issues — and sometimes on all of them. The Executive are very focused on this issue, and we are trying to do our best.

We have to deal with the issue of the Barnett formula and related matters very cautiously. We are opening up a Pandora's box, so we need to be very careful. We have benefited significantly from substantial public expenditure over the years. We are fortunate that throughout the first three years of devolution we have benefited, and will continue to benefit, from a background of real increases in public expenditure — not simply cash increases, but increases in real terms, after adjustment for inflation. That is a background that we did not think we would have. I know that Mark Durkan, the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister are looking very closely at that issue and that research is being carried out. The alternative to the Barnett formula is a needs-based formula in which you have to prove the needs.

I have little doubt that we can all think of examples, such as in health or education, where our need is greater. There may be other areas where we do better than other UK regions. However, do not assume that we will have a smooth passage from the Treasury. I can assure you that that will not be the case. Some Members have referred to the single development agency — Mr Neeson was

one of them. We are making progress on that. It is a very complicated exercise, but its time has come. The agencies were developed over 30 years; things have now moved on, and it is only right and proper that at this stage we implement our decision to create a new agency. I hope that that work will result in legislation being brought to the House at some stage in the latter part of next month, but clearly it will have to carry over into the autumn before its passage is completed.

Mr McClarty focused very strongly on tourism — an industry that has been growing steadily. As has been indicated by a number of Members, it has huge potential. It could very well be our second fastest growing industry, if not our fastest. There is great potential in Northern Ireland for tourism, and it is very sad that we have been crippled so far this year by the unfortunate circumstances of the foot-and-mouth outbreak.

Dr McDonnell made the point that the ‘Strategy 2010’ document was valuable and was a major milestone. That is probably true — it was the first document of its type under direct rule. It involved a wide range of people. However, as Dr McDonnell rightly pointed out, it is the quality of the intervention, rather than the quantity, that is important. That is a lesson that we have learnt.

Dr Birnie referred to the grant mentality that we used to have. Indeed, we are at the top of a European League table. If one examines the amount of money that is given by agencies now and analyses what it is given for, one can see that LEDU has almost done away with capital grants. Technically it still has got the power to give them, but very rarely does so.

I have closely examined the major investment decisions on projects costing over £1 million, which require my approval, and very few of these involve capital expenditure. Such expenditure is rarely a significant part of any package. Far more emphasis, from LEDU’s point of view, is placed on what is described as “soft assistance”, but I think that is the wrong term. The assistance is often based on advice and marketing, but in many agencies it is focused on individuals by means of employment grants, assistance with premises and other matters. Capital grant aid is not the significant force that it once was. The Department is working towards rebalancing this package as part of a long-term process.

It is great to stand up here and to debate this issue, but we all know that if problems hit an area or a company in a Member’s own constituency, the economic theory is thrown out of the window, and it is more a case of Members saying “We have got to bail this boy out”. We are all politicians, and we have to admit that these things happen. If it happens in our own back yard, we will go out to save the operation as best we can.

It is easy to uphold the theory, and Members might reject the concept of capital grants by saying “We are not going to subsidise inefficiency, we are just going to

let that company close”. However, when such a closure actually takes place, few people will come out of the trenches. When companies get into difficulties, I receive phone calls and letters. Members also ask me “Can I bring so-and-so to see you?” We are all the same; I am no different. The theory is fine, but its implementation is another matter. Nobody wants to see enterprises failing or closing, but we must develop the strong trend away from the grant mentality, towards different forms of finance.

I agree entirely with Mr Neeson’s suggestion that we examine the procedures of America’s small business administration. It is a totally different system, but it seems to have been very successful, therefore there might be some potential in that. However, while the Treasury continues to treat guarantees as money spent in total, we will have serious problems, and I think that the Member knows that.

I have already mentioned Mr Carrick’s point. Ms Morrice said that this is a gigantic task, and I fully acknowledge that. She also stated that wealth should not be measured in terms of GNP alone, but on the basis of quality of life. That is a very good point, and Northern Ireland could do very well in this regard, because it is possible to enjoy a very good quality of life here, provided that one is given peace to get on with it. One of the things that we like to tell visitors is that we have a very high quality of life in Northern Ireland.

Dr Birnie also referred to the consultation with professional economists, and he made a rather colourful analogy drawn from naval architecture. One can think of others, but “re-engineering” ‘Strategy 2010’, as he referred to it, is probably an appropriate phrase because it was never intended to be set in concrete. I have never said that I accept every recommendation, because I have never done that. I have no doubt that we will “re-engineer” this report in due course.

Mr McGrady referred to the new agency. He also — as is often the case from his correspondence — referred to tourism in his area. I know that he feels strongly about these matters. He mentioned removing the local government cap on local economic development expenditure. I do not have a problem with that. The vast majority of local authorities do not spend to the 5p limit. Some councils have stuck with the 2p limit that they have been used to while one or two have raised their limit. However, it is a matter for the Minister of the Environment and I have made my views known to him.

Mark Robinson talked about massive changes and said that we must embrace such changes. He referred to a number of education issues such as general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) being scorned. I understand his point. It is a problem of perceptions, and Sean Farren is very focused on that.

Mr Robinson also referred to the 8% rise in business rates. It is not an 8% rise in business rates — the rise is

3.3% after Mr Durkan compared how we are faring with GB. People must understand that the Treasury take a very jaundiced view of our policy on rates for properties and businesses. It consistently argues that in many cases our rates are not more than 40% of what people in GB would be paying. It argues that there is a significant financial gap. I am pleased that it has been possible to retain the increase to 3.3% for businesses, and that will include businesses in the Member's constituency.

Mrs Carson, and a number of Members, referred to the section of the report dealing with the clean, green economy. She also referred to biomass and other products in her area. There is potential for all of these, and if we can get the technology right, it is an area that agriculture could move into, particular after the recent trauma that there has been in that sector.

Mrs Courtney referred to tax exemption for creative industries. There has been a very strong group formed on creative industries. We are pushing them very hard because we see big advantages there. It is an issue that the Chancellor is going to have to address. I would be happy to add that topic to the list of tax issues that Mr Durkan is looking at. I would ask my officials to remind me to write to him about that. It could be a way of giving people a chance to get started. There may be some measures that have been introduced, but perhaps they could be more adventurous.

Mr Shannon referred to the role of local government. He is speaking to the converted because I spent a long time in local government. I agree with him that there are many things that local authorities can do. When the reform of local government takes place — and I made this clear to the forum that we held in Antrim a couple of weeks ago for all local authorities — I want to see them having a more defined role. The problem at the moment is that some local authorities are so small that they do not have enough of a financial base to give them the opportunity to provide adequate services.

I referred to Mr Wells and the assault course that he has embarked on. He seems to be thriving on it. He is obviously anxious for more, and, undoubtedly, our Department will have picked that up and will be very happy to provide him with more activity.

We now have one of the positive products of devolution. It takes time to change policy; it is like an oil tanker — it takes time to turn around. We are moving to a stage where mature discussions and debates can take place.

While it is for the Business Committee to organise debates, much activity has been crammed into one day — all of it on issues that we feel strongly about. I hope that the Assembly authorities can take this point on board. By this time a number of Members may be beginning to run out of steam. This is an issue that we should be spending more time debating.

I thank the Chairman, the Deputy Chairman and the members of the Committee. My Department is taking the report very seriously; all our senior officials are in the Chamber to hear the debate. We will be responding comprehensively when we get the reports from the other Departments. I acknowledge the report, but at this stage I am unable to do justice to all the recommendations by giving responses off the top of my head.

6.30 pm

I will respond to the Committee in detail, recommendation by recommendation, early next month. When we get through that process and have agreement between the Committee and the Department, we may find that it is necessary to amend the policies in the Programme for Government. If so, we can go forward jointly with the amendments when the review of that process comes up at the end of this year.

Mr P Doherty: Go raibh maith agat, LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister and all the Members who participated in the debate. I am greatly encouraged by the support of the Minister, and I understand the parameters within which he has to work.

There is agreement that urgent measures need to be undertaken to develop sound economic policies that will ultimately provide a better standard of living for us all. I will respond briefly to some of the comments.

Sean Neeson made a very telling comment that was reflected in the Minister's speech — 'Strategy 2010' is not written in tablets of stone. It is a developing document. Mr Neeson focused on fiscal policy and, cautiously, on the Barnett formula. He also focused on the need to support small businesses to such an extent that they become the backbone of our economy. I support him.

David McClarty spoke of the importance of tourism, saying that it could develop to such an extent that it would become the second most important industry in Ireland. I recognise that. He talked about the need to market the island of Ireland as a whole so that we can all move forward and focus in on this industry. He said that events tourism is the way forward, giving the North West 200 as an example.

Alasdair McDonnell focused — as he did in Committee — on globalisation. Globalisation is the name of the game and has been for the last 10 years. We need to accept that, along with all its problems. He also said that the single development agency needed to have teeth and real talent in order to produce inward investment. He said that we must penetrate new technology to create new, better-paid jobs, and he made that point continuously throughout our deliberations.

Mervyn Carrick said that it was two years since 'Strategy 2010' was first produced and that it had moved on. He also said that we needed to focus on education

and training and to gear them to the skills required in industry.

Jane Morrice said that economic and social development must always go hand in hand. She said that we needed to move out of the mentality of the fear of failure, as that was crippling us, and that we should learn from the way that the Americans took risks and developed. She also focused on the needs and demands of women in the workplace, the single European currency that we can no longer ignore and the value of the social economy, which is something that we are all recognising.

Esmond Birnie said that the economy urgently needed entrepreneurs and managers. I was aware of all of his comments and have taken note of his three areas of concern. We had a separate dialogue — in fact, it was probably the first dialogue between Committee Chairpersons. We were both aware that, in many ways, our report touched on areas of concern to his Committee. Very early on in our final submissions we agreed to extract all the facets of our report that were of relevance to his report. It was a good exercise for us, and I appreciate very much his comments on the report.

Eddie McGrady spoke about the need to focus on regional disparities in relation to the long-term unemployed. We did that quite thoroughly, but he focused on one aspect of the IT skills. He also mentioned that tourism needed to be driven, financed and given specific targets, which was a very good comment.

Mark Robinson said that we needed to market ourselves as a first-class destination for inward investment, and that the GNVQ should be valued as a qualification. Those are very good recommendations.

Joan Carson talked about the lower corporation tax in the South and how that was having an effect on us. She also said that we, as an Assembly, now had an opportunity to address our problems rather than to depend on other people to do so.

Annie Courtney, another Committee Colleague, talked of the stronger links required between further education and industry and the need for tax exemptions for creative industries. Again, she focused on women in the work place.

Jim Shannon spoke on the need for extra zoning of industrial land. He also said that the role of local government needed clarification and that local government should have a role in reducing unemployment. These were well made points, and they are recognised.

Committee Colleague Jim Wells highlighted at the start of his contribution the fact that the three big industries of shipbuilding, textiles and agriculture were all in decline and that we needed to recognise that and focus on the new emerging IT and related industries to replace them. He highlighted the aggregates tax as a big problem and the fact that we have a land border with the South. With your permission, a Cheann Comhairle, I

was almost going to say that I had a solution for him on that, but I will not develop it today given the time factors. He mentioned the way in which the banks take profit out of the state — that is well recognised, and we should support his position on that.

David Ford spoke of the major problems for the economy arising from poverty-related issues and long-term unemployment. He spoke very clearly on the need to tackle the issue of tax-varying powers. The Barnett formula was again mentioned. Even though there are problems — which the Minister highlighted — it is not simply an open chequebook that we will be seeking in renegotiating that. He also said that the regional rates are a fairly blunt and unfair way of raising tax.

In a conversation I had with the Minister some time ago, he reiterated the point that we, in a sense, had inherited ‘Strategy 2010’ from Adam Ingram and his committee. That is where the origins of the document lie. For him, and I suppose for us, it is an agenda for change. At one stage, perhaps not today, he said that the original document — and our criticism and evaluation of it — is actually a living document that is constantly developing. I think that that is true — we could be back here in a year’s time developing it further. It is in that context that I take all his other points. He noted the benefits of globalisation and reiterated the commitments to New TSN.

I understand entirely that the Minister cannot give a definitive commitment today to the document because it covers eight other Departments and is a living and developing document. I appreciate his commitment to it and the praise he gave the work put in so far. He also said that he would respond in due course to all of the recommendations, which I also appreciate.

The aggregates tax, the fuel tax, the Barnett formula and the single development agency were also touched on essentially to culminate in the improved quality of life we are collectively trying to achieve as we move forward with joined-up government.

I accept that some of the recommendations can be introduced relatively easily and quickly. However, others are more long term and will involve a substantial cost. We do not underestimate the difficulties that lie ahead. It is crucial that all the Committees take a full interest in the issues that fall within their own Departments’ responsibility. It is also crucial that all the Departments involved give a clear commitment to deliver those recommendations, which do much to highlight the impact that joined-up government can have.

In conclusion, I would like to thank all the Committee members, for this was an enormous task that we undertook — probably a much bigger task that we realised at the outset. Our Committee is made up of, as other Committees are, 11 members from six parties. It consists of three members of the SDLP, two members of

the UUP, two members of Sinn Féin, two members of the DUP, one member of the Alliance Party and one member of the Women's Coalition.

The six parties worked together, even through the summer recess — something I will not inflict on them again this summer, unless the Committee Clerk, Cathie White, decides otherwise. I would like to thank every one of the Committee members — and also the new members who joined us for the work — for the collective way in which the work was approached. It is proof that when we focus on an issue we can deal with it and leave other issues outside the door. I would also like to thank the Committee staff, who did an enormous amount of work — we could not have had better staff.

Finally, I would like to thank the Minister and his entire Department for the way in which they related to

us while we were dealing with the report. I thank the Minister for the open way that he gave us access to whatever we requested and for the openness with which his departmental officials dealt with us. That too is a recommendation of the way to move forward and on how to make joined-up government work. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Question put.

Resolved:

That this Assembly approves the Second Report of the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee on its inquiry into the 'Strategy 2010' Report (2/00R) and calls on the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to implement the recommendations of the Committee at the earliest opportunity.

Adjourned at 6.44 pm.

Committee Stage Records

**NORTHERN IRELAND
ASSEMBLY**

**FINANCE AND PERSONNEL
COMMITTEE**

Tuesday 13 March 2001

**FAMILY LAW BILL
(NIA 4/00)**

Members present:

Mr Molloy (Chairperson)
Mr Leslie (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Attwood
Mr Close
Mr Dodds
Ms Lewsley
Mr Weir

Clause 4 (Commencement)

Clause 5 (Short title)

The Committee Clerk: The Health and Public Safety Committee is dealing with clauses 1, 2 and 3 of the Family Law Bill. I understand that it has gone quite a distance with that. I think there is an issue with regard to clause 1 which they hope to be able to resolve in the next week or so. Clauses 4 and 5 are still to be dealt with. At the outset, the agreement was that our Committee would deal with clauses 4 and 5. However, clause 4 deals with commencement, which simply identifies how the Act will come into operation, and clause 5 is simply the short title.

Before we formally deal with the two clauses, allow me to inform the Committee that the Act is to be known as the Family Law Act (Northern Ireland) 2000. As it will be passed in 2001 that title will be changed to reflect the correct year. However, that is a technical detail which will be handled by the Bill Office, and we do not have to deal with it formally in Committee.

The Committee needs to formally adopt clauses 4 and 5. I have checked with the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee Clerk, who has advised me that no issues have been raised concerning either of the two clauses during their consultation, and they do not envisage any difficulties.

Clause 4 agreed to.

Mr Close: I would like it on the record that I think the farcical nature of this clearly demonstrates the necessity for your letter, Mr Chairperson. This needs to be sorted out.

Clause 5 agreed to.

**NORTHERN IRELAND
ASSEMBLY**

**FINANCE AND PERSONNEL
COMMITTEE**

Tuesday 13 March 2001

**DEFECTIVE PREMISES
(LANDLORD'S LIABILITY) BILL
(NIA 5/00)**

Members present:

Mr Molloy (Chairperson)
Mr Leslie (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Attwood
Mr Close
Mr Dodds
Ms Lewsley
Mr Weir

Witnesses:

Mr Michael Foster) Office of Law Reform

Clause 3 (Tenancies to which this Act applies)

The Committee Clerk: That now brings us to the Defective Premises (Landlord's Liability) Bill. Last week we completed our consideration of all the clauses in the Bill, except for clause 3. Whilst all of the information had been provided to the Committee, members decided to take an extra week to mull it over in order to reach a final conclusion. The outstanding issue concerns the exemption in clause 3 respecting tenancies in restricted and regulated categories.

I have set out the issues for the Committee in a table. On the left are the arguments put forward by the Office of Law Reform (OLR) and the Law Reform Advisory Committee as to why those exemptions should remain in the Bill. The arguments given by the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health and the Housing Rights Service are set out in the right-hand column. I also took the opportunity to pass the table to the OLR. Mr Foster has commented on some of the issues in the attached e-mail, particularly with regard to the argument that these exemptions should be taken out of the Bill. It is now up to members to consider and reach a decision on that matter.

Mr Leslie: I had some sympathy with the OLR and, with all due respect, I did not think that the Clerk's summary table accurately reflected the points made, particularly in relation to restricted and regulated tenancies.

The Committee Clerk: My intention was to put forward the arguments as they were presented to the Committee. Mr Foster has filled in some of the underlying arguments. Mr Foster is here in case the Committee if further information is required.

Mr Weir: The Department for Social Development is conducting a review which may resolve some of these issues. Do we know when that review group is due to report?

Mr Foster: That review group is, I understand, being constituted at the moment, and its provisional timetable is to issue a consultation document on the matter in September of this year, dealing with the whole area of private controlled rented accommodation.

The Chairperson: Do you have any other questions? We have discussed the issues involved and it comes down to the question of whether the term "defective premises" refers to liability as opposed to housing conditions for the purposes of this legislation.

The argument put forward by the OLR is that this is a Bill which deals with liability in tort and is not intended to introduce a mechanism for improving property. The Bill does not cover the condition of the house or the living accommodation within that house, though it applies to the people's rights to claim accordingly. On that basis, the exemptions will actually stand in that situation because it does not actually relate to the condition of the housing.

Mr Close: The part that I have greatest difficulty with is its conception and perception. This is addressed and commented on in the letter. At present the Bill may discriminate against the elderly and the less affluent members of our society — but only in a conceptual way. I have huge difficulties with the fact that it appears that way. This apparent discrimination against the elderly and the poorest in society is the very stick that could be used to beat us all. People will say "You just ignored us. It did not really matter about us." and they will not see beyond that. Whereas, if we tried to change this instrument in such a way as to remove that conception, we would have the best of all worlds. Although we are generally aware of that difficulty, I have not heard arguments which address this problem.

Mr Leslie: If you want to hear an argument the other way, I will give you one. I do not agree that the Bill discriminates in that way. Why do people choose to live in these properties? It is because they pay a very low rent, which they are statutorily entitled to pay in perpetuity. They have a right to go and live somewhere else.

The landlord gains no benefit from the situation at all. He would like to be able to do something with these prop-

erties, but he cannot because of the restrictions placed on them. It seems to me that it is entirely voluntary for people to stay in that situation. I do not think this Bill discriminates against people. I think that the general state of the law relating to these premises discriminates against both the landlord and the tenant. They are both seriously disadvantaged.

If you wanted to live in premises that provided the facilities and standards unavailable in these, you would pay £70 per week instead of £1 per week. This is the choice that one has. Most landlords would be absolutely delighted to sort out these premises and get the rent up from £1 per week to the market level of £60-£80. To me, that is the argument.

We need to keep focused on the very narrow remit of this Bill. I agree that there is a bigger issue there, but it is not for us to solve. We could not solve it with this Bill anyway.

Mr Close: Try to tell some of the people there that they have a choice and that all they have to do is move somewhere else.

Mr Leslie: If that is so, they can apply to the Housing Executive like anyone else. They are not required to carry on living there if they can show that the housing is totally unsatisfactory, which in some of these cases should be easy enough. I think that people live in these premises because they have got used to them.

Mr Close: Thought and practice are different things. I could refer to a number of my constituents whose situation is not as simple as that, or at least they do not see it as being as simple as that.

Ms Lewsley: Elderly people who have lived in an area for a long time may feel reluctant to move because of their sense of belonging to a community. Also, some of the waiting lists are horrendous in the areas these people might want to move to.

Mr Leslie: There are no waiting lists in Ballymoney.

Ms Lewsley: Not everyone wants to move to Ballymoney.

The Chairperson: We must concentrate on the purpose of the Bill. Its purpose is not to improve the housing stock; its purpose is to deal with landlord's liability. The next Bill or housing review might address housing conditions. There is confusion between the two.

Ms Lewsley: We cannot allow the Bill to discriminate against the elderly or the less affluent in society in the matter of liability.

Mr Leslie: It does not discriminate on the grounds of human rights as regards liability.

Mr Foster: Part of the argument advanced by the OLR and the Law Reform Advisory Committee was that many tenants would not appreciate the upheaval involved if landlords were forced to carry out such repairs. The landlord's position also had to be taken into account.

We have received clear advice that imposing another obligation on landlords, who are already carrying a disproportionate burden on their properties, will involve human rights issues. Increasing that burden might contravene human rights legislation. That advice had to be taken into account when striking a balance.

Ultimately, the Bill does not focus on landlords and tenants; it focuses on plaintiffs and defendants. To say that the Bill will, theoretically, discriminate against an elderly person is in only partly correct. To take an extreme example, if an elderly person's property is outside the terms of the Bill, the Lord Chief Justice, could enter that person's property, suffer an injury, and not be able to take advantage of the Bill as it stands.

I repeat: the Bill is not about landlords and tenants, it is about plaintiffs and defendants. Statistically, someone from a less affluent section of society might theoretically be in more danger of being injured on a restricted property. There is, however, no way of proving that to be the case.

Mr Weir: The issue of restricted and regulated tenancies must be resolved. The Department for Social Development's review will deal with it more comprehensively than we can.

The Bill deals with restricted and regulated tenancies. It is inequitable to place the same burden on landlords who receive a much smaller rent. A reasonable case could be made that, as this is inequitable, it might constitute a breach of human rights.

It could be argued that clause 3 means that defendants on regulated or restricted tenancies would have slightly fewer rights than others. Tenants would, however, be paying lower rent.

Removing the restriction in clause 3 would create an inequity as far as landlords are concerned. The best way of resolving the matter is through the Department for Social Development's review. There is no perfect solution, but clause 3, as it presently stands, is the best way forward.

The Chairperson: The Committee should go along with the exemptions. It should send a record of the issues raised to the Department for Social Development to be used in its review. The Committee could make that clear to the Assembly. We should raise issues to which our intention has been drawn and say that this Bill will not deal with them.

Mr Dodds: Much has been made of landlords having access to repair grants. If available, they would reduce the cost to the landlord of carrying out repairs. From your evidence, Mr Foster, it seems that grants are not, at present, sufficient to deal with the problem. If this stipulation were introduced, insurance premiums would rise slightly, and landlords would say, "I shall pay it, and that is the end of the matter" — and complain. However, the Bill would not result in their carrying out any work.

Mr Foster: Absolutely not. The current level of grants — and the grant system itself — need to be radically over-

hauled. This has been accepted in the Department for Social Development's proposals for the current review.

Mr Weir: Faced with being compelled to upgrade, the landlord might simply say that he is no longer prepared to rent out the premises.

Mr Foster: I am not entirely sure that the Rent (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 would allow him to do that. However, since no authority or body has enforcement powers to encourage the landlord of a restricted or regulated tenancy to carry out such repairs, the obligation would be in many ways merely nominal. In practice, it would raise landlords' insurance premiums. We must remember that their properties, which will not be in as good a state of repair as others, will possibly be saddled with higher payments.

Mr Close: Would an amendment ameliorate the situation?

Mr Foster: No.

Mr Close: Has that not been considered?

Mr Foster: On the contrary. The Department of Finance and Personnel the Law Reform Advisory Committee have expressed such a concern. The OLR and the Law Reform Advisory Committee were agreed that we should do everything within our remit to improve the private controlled sector, and we have looked at every alternative. However, the situation with grant regulations and the lack of enforcement regarding the extension of liability to landlords without giving them any proportionate rights in return mean that our hands are tied.

That has been our focus. Had we been able to reword the legislation or had we been able to give a different slant, we would have. However, we could not.

Clause 3 agreed to.

The Chairperson: Does the Committee agree that we send a report of the issues raised to the Department for Social Development for its review?

Members indicated assent.

That concludes the Committee's consideration of the Bill.

**NORTHERN IRELAND
ASSEMBLY**

**COMMITTEE FOR HEALTH, SOCIAL
SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY**

Wednesday 21 March 2001

**FAMILY LAW BILL
(NIA 4/00)**

Members present:

Dr Hendron (Chairperson)

Mr Berry

Rev Robert Coulter

Ms Hanna

Mr J Kelly

Mr McFarland

Ms McWilliams

Ms Ramsey

Mrs I Robinson

Witnesses:

Ms C Archbold) Office of Law Reform

Mr N Lambe)

The Chairperson: I welcome Ms Claire Archbold and Mr Neil Lambe back to the Committee. You have received some documentation from us, and I ask you to talk us through the letter that you sent to us on 20 March.

Mr Lambe: As a result of the evidence given by Ms Archbold and me on 7 March, several members of the Committee asked for clarification.

First, the Office of Law Reform was asked to provide the Committee with a list of those with whom we had consulted. Members should now have that document before them. In particular I draw members' attention to the wide range of groups representing women, children and fathers with whom we consulted.

Secondly, the Committee also asked the Office of Law Reform to consider an amendment to clause 1(2)(c) of the Bill that would refer explicitly to a best interest test when a court is making an order for parental responsibility. With the Committee's approval, we could discuss that issue at greater length later.

Thirdly, with regard to clause 3, the Committee asked for information on who pays the costs for tests to determine parentage, and whether blood samples or bodily samples would be destroyed immediately.

In relation to the first issue, a general principle in civil proceedings is that costs follow the event. By that I mean that if a parent with care institutes proceedings to obtain a declaration of parentage and is successful, it is the parent who has disputed the parentage who will bear the costs.

Similarly, if the Child Support Agency takes a case against an absent parent who disputes parentage and loses the case, the cost of obtaining the DNA tests and the associated legal costs would be borne by the Child Support Agency.

As to the length of time for which samples are kept, both the Child Support Agency and the courts have a contract with Cellmark Diagnostics Ltd. The company has informed me that the terms of the contract require them to keep the samples for two months, after which they are destroyed.

The main reason for keeping the samples for that period is to enable further tests or challenges in relation to the tests to be made prior to the court making a decision in any case where parentage is disputed. That two-month period is not a statutory period — it is simply a matter of the contract between the various bodies.

The Committee also requested a copy of Mr Desmond Perry's response to the original consultation paper in 1999. He is the chairman of the Belfast Family Proceedings Court Standing Committee and members should now have a copy of his response.

Clause 1 (Acquisition of parental responsibility by father or step-parent)

The Chairperson: Thank you. You have already received our documentation. The first point relates to whether the Committee is content with the current definition of parental responsibility in the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. The alternative is to consider tabling an amendment to give the definition greater balance with regard to the caring and controlling aspects of parenting as contained in the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. Have you any comments to make on that?

Ms Archbold: We have given careful consideration to that matter, and we have also done some reading in relation to it. It seems to us that the arguments are finely balanced, but we would come down against a statutory definition for several reasons.

The first reason relates to the views of the academic authorities. I refer in particular to Bromley and Lowe, who are the authors of one of the standard texts on family law. Even though they say that they prefer the Scottish way of doing things — other authors disagree — they have said that the English provision, which is like ours, works well and that there is no point in changing something that works in practice.

The Scottish definition is not making any new law — it is setting out in statute what is already known from the common law and from cases that the courts have decided. Those principles are part of the common law in this jurisdiction, so the fact that they are not set down in statute does not mean that there is not a significant jurisprudence in case law of what parental responsibility means. We wonder whether, to clarify the law to members for the public —

The Chairperson: That is the key point because they would not be aware of that information.

Ms Archbold: Is a statutory definition the best way to do that? Alternatively, would the best way to do that be, for example, through a public information brochure that could be given to new parents? The Scots have produced a brochure called ‘Your Children Matter’. In it they set out not only the definition of parental responsibility in plain English — giving concrete examples that will help parents to understand them — but a friendly form on how one can obtain parental responsibility if one is an unmarried father.

They also give the example of a little boy who lives with his grandparents because his parents are dead and the example of a little girl who lives with her aunt and uncle because her father is working away and her mother has gone to London. That is a good way of bringing the matter to people’s attention. It is the sort of thing that we had in mind when we mentioned a publicity campaign last week.

We want to make two further points on a statutory definition of parental responsibility. Although a statutory definition may define what parental responsibility is at the moment, it is an evolving issue, and the courts evolve what it means. If we set it down at one particular moment, we may be putting it in aspic and perhaps tying courts’ hands at later date.

The final point, which leads us to believe that it might be better not to look at this point on this occasion, is that the Family Law Bill is quite a short Bill. It deals with only a few matters contained in the 1995 Order. If we redefine parental responsibility, that definition is not just going to affect article 7 cases. It is going to affect article 8 cases, which are contact and residence cases. It is also going to affect cases in the public care system.

We have not consulted on that. If it is something that will be very wide-ranging, it may need consultation. Perhaps the Bill is not the right vehicle, given the stage at which we are. Those are the arguments that occur to us and we hope that they are helpful to the Committee.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much. Have members any questions?

Ms McWilliams: The Scots were able to produce that little pamphlet because of their legislation.

Ms Archbold: They were able to produce the pamphlet, and we would be able to produce a pamphlet even though we do not have those principles set out in legislation.

Ms McWilliams: I realise what you are saying, and that is what I was going on to say. It follows that the Scots should have a pamphlet to outline what is in the legislation. We are producing a pamphlet giving a definition that is not in the legislation, and which has no legislative authority. A person cannot stand up in court and say “Your Honour, this little pamphlet says what responsibility is”. It is only a public awareness campaign.

Ms Archbold: It does have the authority. The principles that we would be setting down would be those that are in common law. They have been decided by courts in cases, and they have the authority of case law. However, a publicity brochure is not going to cite the case of *J v C* or *Gillick v West Norfolk and Wisbech Area Health Authority*.

Those principles will be the principles that are set out in the legal textbooks, and which are derived from common law. They are matters that lawyers argue about in court on the basis of common law.

Ms McWilliams: My final question is about someone taking parental responsibility. I suppose they go through a solicitor. However, they may not be familiar with what they are taking on. The unmarried mother may not be familiar with what she is giving. It can be either an encouraging or a discouraging mechanism, but at least it is in law and people know exactly what they are signing up to. If it were in a pamphlet quoting many precedents, it would not have the same effect. I am asking that question because I am concerned that we should make better law. As you know, there is a campaign that is not going in that direction, led by those who are saying that the Bill gives too many rights. Others may say that it does not give enough. We end up in a dispute about what rights it gives.

Ms Archbold: The point that you make relates to clarity and simplicity in the law. That is something to weigh in the balance. Our analysis is that at this time — and in relation to this piece of legislation — there is work to be done to make people more aware of family law. However, to put a statutory definition of parental responsibility into this legislation may not be the right thing to do. The timing may also not be right.

The Chairperson: If we were to table an amendment, would you take it to the Minister or would we have to proceed ourselves?

Ms Archbold: That is not a matter that we have discussed with the Minister. If it were a matter that was contained in the Committee’s report the Minister would have to consider it. However, we could not say any more than that.

The Chairperson: I understand the reasons why you say that it should be left as it is, but I also see Monica McWilliams’s point.

Mr McFarland: We have a new scenario here — a bunch of thrown politicians whose job it is to make law.

I appreciate that this is half-foreign from the good old days when lawyers spoke to lawyers and it was all sorted out according to plan. We took a stance on several occasions when we were considering the Health and Personal Social Services Bill. The Committee disagreed with what was produced in certain areas because we felt that it was not sufficiently simple. The draft used complicated and obtuse language and we managed to have matters clarified. We are trying to produce law here for ordinary people — not for lawyers — so that they can understand what they are supposed to be doing. That is a good general principle. I appreciate that it is not always like that. It is handy for lawyers when issues are confusing because the lawyers require a great deal of money to explain them to the common man. However, if we can clarify such matters we should.

I have one concern. Will it embarrass you because you have not consulted widely on this? You said that if you changed the 1995 Order, several other pieces of legislation would be affected, and that that would embarrass you because you had not consulted on them. Is that a serious issue?

Ms Archbold: It is not that it will embarrass us. It is the fact that this is a matter which is outwith the original terms of the consultation and remit of the Bill. It is a serious matter upon which we would be unhappy to proceed without further and wide-ranging consultation.

Mr McFarland: That is the point that I am making. If it is going to cause enormous chaos by our changing the Bill and inserting an amendment —

The Chairperson: We have consulted on those matters.

Mr McFarland: — regardless of how wise we might think it is, we must not do that because it is not possible, without further consultation, for us to take that decision. Is that what you are saying?

Ms Archbold: It would not be for us to tell the Committee what it must or must not do. It is our view that to proceed to change the definition of parental responsibility in our law, or to set that down in statute, would be a large undertaking. It would require further wide public consultation because it has effects outside the remit of the Family Law Bill.

The Chairperson: We went to consultation ourselves on this, and the point that has been made is something that came back to us.

Ms Archbold: Is that something that you specifically asked people about or did they bring the matter to you?

The Chairperson: They brought it to us.

Ms Archbold: We would want to bring it to the appropriate people for consultation and to give them an opportunity for discussion.

Mr McFarland: It would have been useful to know that at the outset.

The Chairperson: You have a list of the people whom we consulted.

Mr McFarland: You had time to discuss this earlier today. If we had known it was a non-starter, we could have saved ourselves a great deal of time.

The Chairperson: We have a decision to make. We either accept the clause as it stands or we amend it. I understand the argument that you make, Ms Archbold, but there is also an argument — perhaps along the Scottish line — that the clause should be amended. Certainly with our consultations —

Ms McWilliams: May I ask one question that might clarify matters? Had the amendment only pertained to this Bill, without implications for other sections of the 1995 Order, could you have accepted it?

Mr Lambe: I would be reluctant to take that line because it would be confusing to have a statutory definition of parental responsibility for one type of court order and also a common law that defines parental responsibility for other types of proceedings that affect children. A statutory definition of parental responsibility would not necessarily be a straightforward replication of the Scottish definition without further research into how that definition operates in Scotland, and on how the Scottish courts have interpreted it, and whether they have gone further and developed additional guidelines as to what parental rights and responsibilities have been in Scotland.

The Chairperson: If the Bill was amended and passed, and there is a statutory definition, is the case law nullified? Does statutory law override case law? What is the difference between the two?

Ms Archbold: In relation to our presumptions of parentage in this Bill, for example, the statute simply re-enacts the existing law. Previous case law will still be relevant and the courts can look to it when they are interpreting the statute.

The Chairperson: What if they are different?

Ms Archbold: If they are different then the statute that is later in time, and is also superior to case law in our constitution, would take precedence. However, if there were an incompatibility, you would have to look at the previous case law to see whether the statute addressed that point.

Mr Lambe: I am not persuaded by the Scottish definition because it does not state what decisions a parent can or cannot make. Courts still make that decision.

The Chairperson: Our amendment would be to include, not to exclude. It is a very complex issue and I am not sure what colleagues wish to do.

Ms McWilliams: May I make one final point? I am concerned that the explanatory and financial memorandum says

“the authority which by law a parent of a child has in relation to the child and his property”.

The Scottish definition mentions nothing about property.

The Committee Clerk: The Scottish Act has a subsection.

Ms McWilliams: I see. It has been clarified that the issue of property is not a legislative problem because it is contained in the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995.

Mr McFarland: We are being advised that we cannot table an amendment because it affects another law. If we cannot do it, we should not discuss it any further.

The Chairperson: The Bill makes no provision for unmarried fathers to acquire parental responsibility automatically, as is the case with natural mothers and married fathers. Sorry, we have already agreed that.

We shall move on to the next point. The Bill gives courts the power to divest unmeritorious unmarried fathers of parental responsibility; no such provision exists for unworthy mothers or married fathers. Is there an equality or human rights question here? The Committee considers that there should be provision for all or any parents to cease to have parental responsibility given the proper emphasis that was placed on the rights of the child by the Office of Law Reform officials when they gave evidence to us.

Ms Archbold: In the case of married parents or the unmarried mother, any time that there is a dispute about parental responsibility and the exercise of particular aspects of it — such as residence or contact — or if there is a need to make a prohibited steps order or a specific issues order, the case is brought before a court and the court decides about that area of parental responsibility.

If there is concern about the way in which the child is being raised, and it is felt that the child is suffering significant harm, the child will be taken into care, and parental responsibility, as well as resting with the parents, will be with Health and Social Services. Social workers will only apply to court to have the child adopted when a case is so bad that they think that no amount of work with the family would enable it to function and live together in such a way that the child would not suffer significant harm. Adoption divests married parents and unmarried mothers of parental responsibility. That is the mechanism by which our law does that.

The Chairperson: Does the Committee agree that the Bill should be revised to enable a step-parent to acquire parental responsibility on the order of a court? Should there be an inbuilt requirement in the Bill to take account of the child's views of the step-parent?

Ms Archbold: Is that related to the best interest test concerning the unmarried father obtaining parental responsibility? At our previous meeting we said that the child's views and wishes are one of the factors that are taken into account in the best interest test. Are those two matters related?

Ms McWilliams: That was a separate question. My understanding is that they may be related because we come

to the best interest test later. That was simply a question about step-parents acquiring parental responsibility on the order of a court. It is simply a view — I think that it was Ms Ramsey's view. Should the child have some say in the matter if he or she is old enough?

Mr Lambe: It may be appropriate to address the two issues together. The question relating to the best interest test is whether that should be a specific factor to be considered by the court when making an order in relation to an unmarried father. The only way that a step-parent can acquire parental responsibility is by a similar order of the court conferring parental responsibility.

We considered the request to table an amendment on best interests in clause 1. We are minded to introduce such an amendment and the Minister has approved that approach. If a court makes an order conferring parental responsibility on an unmarried father or a step-parent, it is consistent that the best interest test should be applied explicitly. That test is set out in article 3 of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. The first requirement is that the court will take the wishes of the child into account, but the age and understanding of the child must also be considered.

Ms Archbold: The Committee might consider that it would be advisable to use the same tests for both. That is why we think the points are related.

Ms McWilliams: If we took the two together, would you agree with the proposal that the best interests of the child should be added to new paragraph (1A) of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995?

Ms Archbold: Yes.

Mr Lambe: The exact location of the amendment would be a matter for legislative counsel. However, the court would be required to take into account the best interest checklist in article 3 of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995.

Ms Ramsey: Will the best interests of the child feature throughout the Bill?

Mr Lambe: No. That will only apply to clause 1.

The Chairperson: There will be scope for more than two people to have simultaneous parental responsibility for a child. How will that work in practice when there are disputes among the parties about decisions that will affect the child? Who would arbitrate in such circumstances?

Ms Archbold: Where more than one person has parental responsibility for a child, a dispute may arise. Article 8 of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 provides the mechanism for the court to arbitrate in disputes about contact, residence, specific issues or prohibitive steps.

The Chairperson: Committee members are agreed to clause 1, provided that the amendment is tabled.

Clause 1 referred for further consideration.

Clause 3 agreed to.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Tuesday 3 April 2001

TRUSTEE BILL (NIA 11/00)

Members present:

Mr Molloy (Chairperson)
Mr Leslie (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr B Bell
Mr Close
Mr Hussey
Mr Maskey
Mr Weir

Witnesses:

Mr M Foster)
Mrs E Harkness) Office of Law Reform

The Committee Clerk: Today representatives of the Office of Law Reform will explain how the various clauses of the Bill achieve the Bill's objectives. We again welcome Mr Michael Foster and Mrs Ethne Harkness. At a previous meeting they explained the principles of the Bill. However as we did not actually have the Bill in front of us, we were unable to see how the clauses achieve those objectives. It would be helpful to our examination of the Bill to have an explanation of how the clauses produce those objectives. The Committee Office has written to a fairly wide range of public consultees, and the next step will be to receive those responses over the next week or two.

I propose that at our next meeting we should take evidence from any organisations that have raised concerns about the Bill. Today will be basically a briefing on the way in which the clauses reflect the objectives.

Mr Foster: As the Clerk has pointed out, the Bill has now implemented the policy document that members received and were briefed on last month. It also takes into account the results of the various consultation processes that have taken place over the last number of years.

The Bill itself is divided into seven broad parts, each of which deals with a specific area. It has 46 clauses and four schedules. Part I outlines the duty of care that a trustee

will be subject to from now on. Part II sets out the general powers of investment conferred on trustees. Part III introduces a new power to acquire land. In Part IV there are various clauses dealing with agents, nominees and custodians. Parts V, VI and VII deal with various other aspects of the law that the main parts of the Bill will refer to.

Mrs Harkness will now start the detailed analysis of each of the clauses and relate them to the policy document.

Mrs Harkness: The core of the policy behind the Bill is focused on the investment powers of trustees and their ramifications in several different areas.

The discussion arose originally out of dissatisfaction with investment issues, in particular the defects in the existing system of trustee investments that were highlighted in the case of Nestlé versus the National Westminster Bank in 1993. Those defects have focused the reform proposals that we are now advancing.

That case involved a trust fund that had been in existence from 1922 to 1986. An initial capital of £54,000 in 1922 had become £250,000 by 1986. Prior to the case some studies were done on returns and investments, and it was suggested that the outcome of that fund, with good investment, could have been £2.6 million rather than £250,000. Not surprisingly, an action was then brought on behalf of the beneficiaries in the Nestlé family against the trustees — the National Westminster Bank. Several issues were raised, and it is hoped that all of those are addressed in the Bill.

The first difficulty — and I say this by way of identifying the policy objectives that we are going to try to trace in each of the Bill's clauses — is that the trustees, despite being in a bank, had misunderstood their powers of investment. There was a lack of clarity about what powers of investment they had. Furthermore, when statutory powers were changed in 1961, they then misunderstood the way in which those applied to them, so they added insult to injury in that way.

They had not carried out reviews of investments between 1922 and 1986. The National Westminster Bank had only changed one investment during that period, and that was because the investment in question had become defunct and something else had taken its place. With that catalogue of errors in investment, it is amazing to discover that the trustees were held to be not liable. They were supposed to line up to a test based on a prudent businessman at that time. However, it was held that there was no liability based on the fact that they had not made a big enough mess of the situation.

Basically, that case established that the standard demanded of trustees was not challenging enough; it was a victory for complacency at that time. Many demands for changes in the system arose from that case. The basic principle is that you first look at the trust instrument —

the document setting out the primary source of the powers and duties of trustees — to see what trustees can do, although in some cases trust documents do not go into detail about what those powers and duties are. In that situation, trustees without their own separate trust document details fall back on what is called a default regime. We are changing the default regime through this legislation.

The present default regime is based on the Trustee Investments Act 1961. That introduces a very complicated, cumbersome, restricted and expensive to administer regime that pushes trustees into limiting themselves to a narrow range of investment — often to Government bonds and bank or building society accounts. It tends to keep a large part of their funds away from equities. It is estimated that that alone costs trustees' beneficiaries substantial amounts of money — amounts that are difficult to estimate. In the House of Lords, in relation to the charity sector, an estimate of £40 million a year less than the expected returns was given recently. That is the effect of the default regime under the 1961 Act, and that is what the legislation aims to change.

It became apparent that there were many matters apart from investment needed to be changed to make the investment system work better. Issues such as supplementary powers to appoint agents, the use of fund managers to place investments in nominees and the payment of remuneration to trustees are to be dealt with. Furthermore, the default regime operates alongside a regime set up by people who have professionally drafted trust instruments of their own. Therefore you have an obvious contrast — there is the state scheme, but running alongside is the procedure that the real experts have devised for themselves. That shows the difference between the two and invites a comparison. That comparison is at the heart of the policy behind this Bill. The Bill endeavours to extend to default trusts the sorts of advantages and benefits enjoyed by the professionally drafted trusts. We have an example of what can be done, and the Bill gives an opportunity to do it.

I will sum up the overall policy objectives. We aim to keep the basic principle of a trust instrument and a default regime. However, the default regime should be beneficial and not a second-class system. It should be simplified, deregulatory, flexible and cost-effective. However, there is a need for balance if there are going to be wider powers for trustees. There also must be counterbalancing protection for beneficiaries. Those are the basic policy objectives.

I will now turn to each part of the Bill. Part I of the Bill — clauses 1 to 2 — is about the duty of care. It imposes a duty of reasonable care and skill on trustees. The standard of care is "reasonable in the circumstances", but takes into account the knowledge and experience of the individual as well as the circumstances of the case. Clause 2 refers to schedule 1, which lists the situations in which the duty of care is to apply.

The policy objectives are to deliver a balance, or a protection to beneficiaries, against negligence, exuberance or a lack of prudence on the part of trustees. The duty of care is protects against that. It applies across a range of situations and so gives clarity and uniformity. It is clear when it applies and what it consists of, but it also has flexibility. Those are the objectives behind that.

Committee members might wish to look at a point in schedule 1. Paragraph 7 makes it plain that it is possible to exclude the duty of care by a term in the trust instrument saying that it is not meant to apply. That obviously keeps the basic principle that the trust instrument is the primary source of the powers and duties. However, it does raise questions about the scope for exempting liability.

The Chairperson: Do members have any questions about the duty of care?

Mr Close: How would the duty of care have operated over the past 12 months in relation to large investments? The person who sat back and did nothing a year ago would obviously have exercised a better duty of care than the person who continued to invest. Will actions start to be taken if somebody operating a trust has continued to invest and shift money about throughout the past year and has ended up losing a lot of money because of the stock market?

Mrs Harkness: Not necessarily. Many prudent people might have lost money in the stock market over the last year. The fact that there is a loss does not necessarily mean that there was negligence. However, your question is possibly aimed at investment duties and not just at the duty of care, which is in Part I. Specific duties are laid down in Part II of the Bill about seeking advice and having periodic reviews of investments. That will cover balancing and perhaps issues such as returns to capital and returns to income. Those are the more specific issues but your basic point is correct. The duty of care applies to investments unless it is excluded, but it is a duty to do what is reasonable in the circumstances, and a changing market and changing prices are obviously relevant.

Mr Close: If this legislation had been in place 12 months ago, is it possible that beneficiaries would try to use it to demonstrate that a duty of care had not been exercised because they were losing money?

Mrs Harkness: That is a possibility but, equally, this is not completely new; it is putting a duty of care in a statutory form. There is already a common law duty of care. The difficulty is that its scope and application are hard to pin down. The Nestlé case that I mentioned earlier appeared at first glance — and even on analysis — to be a prime case for liability but proved not to be. Practitioners have made the point to me that even if the wording of this were dissimilar to a common law duty, the fact that it is put in statutory form helps to concentrate the mind and bring the duty to people's attention.

The Chairperson: OK. Are there any other questions on the duty of care?

Mr Leslie: Yes. Is there any other case law that is helpful in defining the extent of the duty of care?

Mrs Harkness: Yes. There is case law *Whiteley*, for example. Some recent case law even expands the existing duty of care in relation to awareness of the tax implications of investment decisions, which is becoming increasingly important. There is therefore case law to amplify it, and the terms suggest that it will be as applicable to the new formulation as to the present common law duty of care. The case I would cite in particular, apart from *Nestlé*, is *Whiteley*.

Mr Leslie: The danger is that if this were too exacting, it would be very hard to get trustees. The Bill is pushing generally towards professional trustees. There is not anything wrong with that, but you must be careful that you are not asking the trustees to do the impossible. Nobody knows what an investment market is going to do, and nobody knows what tax changes there are going to be.

Mrs Harkness: That is right. The point about reasonableness addresses that argument. It is not enough to show that a loss was made. It is a question of reasonableness and also of the special knowledge or experience that the trustee had or claimed to have had. The example usually quoted is that if you appoint an investment banker, a lawyer or someone from certain other professions as a trustee, you are entitled to expect more of that person than of someone from another profession, such as a bee-keeper. I do not know why bee-keepers are singled out in all the commentaries. The idea seems to be that bee-keepers know less about investment than bankers.

Mr Close: Perhaps it is because they get stung more often.

The Chairperson: OK. We now move on to Part II, which covers investment.

Mrs Harkness: Part II comprises clauses 3 to 7 and deals with powers of investment. Basic policies delivered here include deregulation and opening up investment opportunities for trustees on the default regime. That allows them to achieve the sort of returns that are enjoyed by those with wide powers of investment under the trust documents.

The other basic policy is flexibility. There is no list of authorised investments; there is instead a general power of investment that is set out in clause 3. A trustee may make any kind of investment if he or she is absolutely entitled to the assets of the trust. As that is obviously a wide power, the counterbalance is in the safeguards for beneficiaries. Those safeguards are found in the duty of care that we have mentioned and in clause 4, which directs the trustee to regard standard investment criteria. Clause 5 requires advice to be taken.

Mr Weir: People have a general power to invest in whatever they see fit. Have any trusts been set up with

restricted powers of investment? I am referring to an almost restrictive situation where a person has been given explicit instructions to invest in a particular type of industry. For example, how would the general power of investment affect the case of someone who had set up a trust for a relative but, because of particular moral views, he or she decided not to invest in certain industries, such as those of tobacco or alcohol?

Mrs Harkness: That is dealt with in clauses 6 and 7. The provisions can apply to existing trusts, but the basic principle is that the settlor's wishes should be respected. Therefore, if a settlor has opted out of giving wide powers to a trustee, the settlor's wishes override those of the trustee. The settlor's wishes are effective. That could be exactly what happened in your example of the person who did not want his or her trustees to invest in tobacco or other companies.

The exception to that is the situation governed by clause 7(2). It sounds slightly strange because it draws a line under 3 August 1961: any restrictions contained in trust deeds that were drawn up before 1961 are not effective, but post-1961 restrictions are taken into account. It is not an arbitrary date; the current legislation — the Trustee Investments Act — came into being in 1961, and it swept away all the existing restrictions on investment powers. They died on that date. We did not feel justified in resurrecting them and saying that the old restrictions would come into operation again, having been dead for 40 years. Post-1961 restrictions that have been operating will continue to operate. Therefore, people who do not want their trustees to invest in tobacco companies can rest content that the restrictions are in place. Likewise a person setting up a trust in the future could put a restriction on it, and it would be obeyed.

Mr Hussey: The person setting up the trust can establish restrictions. Can beneficiaries request that restrictions be placed on what they would regard as immoral investments?

Mrs Harkness: They can make a request or make representations about that, but the obligation to take investment decisions rests with the trustees. In the interests of harmony, they will want to respond to the wishes of beneficiaries, but not at the expense of risking their own obligations.

Mr Close: Please help me to get my head round the advice issue. You must take proper advice unless you consider it unnecessary to do so. OK, but what are we saying? You either "must" take advice or else you "need not". What I am hearing is that if you can say, "I did not think it necessary to take advice" then you can be excluded. To me advice would be good advice if the investment, for example, proves to be increasing. It will be looked on —

Mrs Harkness: Ex post facto.

Mr Close: Yes. How can you square that with this wording?

Mrs Harkness: In clause 5(3) the wording is “reasonably concludes”. Was it reasonable to conclude that it was unnecessary to seek advice? For example, if you were on a panel of three trustees and the panel included someone who was an investment broker, a bank manager or a financial journalist, you might reasonably conclude that it was unnecessary to seek advice from the sort of person that you already had in-house anyway.

On the other hand, even with that panel of trustees, if you decided that you were going to invest in the art market, you might well feel that the people you have are not experts in art. It would therefore not be reasonable not to seek advice. It is a question of whether a trustee can reasonably conclude it to be unnecessary or inappropriate.

Another factor would be size. If you have a very small trust, the most sensible thing to do might well be to invest the money in a building society. It would be pointless and a waste of resources to pay for professional advice given the scale of operations. There is flexibility there.

Mr Leslie: It is the trustee’s risk though. The trustee makes that decision, and if he is later deemed to have done it unreasonably it is his risk.

Mrs Harkness: Yes.

Mr Leslie: That is fair enough. Your point about a small trust is very relevant. It is a classic example.

Mrs Harkness: Yes. It would be unnecessary, or inappropriate in terms of the cost-effectiveness, to seek advice.

The Chairperson: Have members any further questions on Part II? OK, we move then to Part III on the acquisition of land.

Mrs Harkness: Part III contains what I thought at one point we might be able to avoid in this jurisdiction. You will have noticed that the power of investment under Part II does not include investing in land. However, we have given a power to invest in land under Part III. We have had to separate that issue because there is already so much regulation in relation to land — especially in relation to settlements of land and family estates — that it was too difficult to amend existing legislation to have that included as part of the general power of investment.

Alongside the general power of investment, the Bill also grants a power to invest in land. Trustees might also wish to buy land for occupation by a beneficiary. In that situation there might not be any return, so one could not term it an investment. For example, trustees might decide to buy a dwelling house for a beneficiary, such as a widow. The house will not necessarily provide an income or a return on the capital. However, allowing trustees to do so is useful and fulfils the terms of the trust. They may buy land for occupation by a beneficiary or for any other reason.

Charitable trusts are among the reasons included. A school with charitable-trust status might wish to buy playing fields, for example. Again, one could not term that an investment. The point about this is that the protection that we mentioned in relation to investments and the duty of care applies in the same way when trustees act under such provisions; they do not enjoy *carte blanche*.

The Chairperson: In the absence of any further questions, we will move on to Part IV.

Mrs Harkness: Part IV relates to agents, nominees and custodians. I mentioned that the Bill arose from dissatisfaction with investment opportunities. From an examination of the ways in which investment powers might be changed, it became apparent that, for really effective investment, several supplementary or ancillary powers were necessary. Such powers would give trustees access to modern investment methods and markets and to available expertise, thus opening opportunities to them that those operating under well-drafted trusts are already exploiting fully. The powers are also designed with the overall objective in mind of helping trustees to administer their trusts more efficiently.

On the power to employ agents — people to carry out certain functions on behalf of the trustees of a trust — the question of which functions can be delegated obviously arises. Those functions that can be delegated by the trustees are set out in clause 11. They are called “delegable functions”; I have my doubts about “delegable”, but it is the word that is used. Delegable functions vary for ordinary or private trustees on the one hand and charitable trustees on the other. The basic reason for that is private trustees work differently from their charitable counterparts, and their activities take in different types of areas. Much of what charitable trustees do is connected with raising and accumulating funds before distributing them, whereas private trustees might well be given an initial amount to invest and distribute. Clause 11 sets out the delegable functions, and the one that allows trustees to appoint fund managers to deal with investment issues will probably prove to be the most important. Fund managers will probably be the sort of agent appointed most frequently.

Apart from the question of “What can the agent do?”, the second question is “Who can you delegate to and who are these people going to be?”. Clause 12 deals with that, and it allows for a broad scope with few restrictions, although it cannot be a beneficiary. Of course, the duty of care principle is still applicable to what happens.

We have dealt with what can be delegated and who the delegates are. The next point is the terms on which they can be delegated, and that is where clauses 13 to 15 come in. Clause 13 provides that the statutory duties that we have already talked about will be applied to the terms under which an agent operates. Therefore, if you are delegating to somebody in relation to investment, the standard investment criteria duties will be applied.

Clause 14, entitled “Terms of agency”, regulates the terms on which you appoint your agent. It gives freedom of choice to trustees in deciding on the terms on which they appoint an agent. However, there are three terms to be taken account of in clause 14(3). If you are going to appoint an agent on those terms then it can only be done if it is “reasonably necessary” to do so. The three terms are: permitting the agent to appoint a substitute; restricting the liability of the agent; and permitting the agent to act in circumstances capable of giving rise to a conflict of interest.

I will move quickly on, although we can come back to those points. There are also powers to appoint nominees and custodians. Again, the legislation asks and answers the questions, “Who will these people be and on what terms can they be appointed?” That takes us through to clause 20.

I shall explain what a nominee and a custodian are, although they are defined in the explanatory memorandum. A nominee holds investments in someone’s name. Trustees appoint a nominee to hold investments in their name. That means that if, for example, you want to sell those investments on the stock exchange, it can be done quickly without requiring all 15 of your trustees to sign documents to give powers of transfer or whatever.

The Chairperson: What type of person would actually do that? Would it be a solicitor or legal representative?

Mrs Harkness: That is dealt with in clause 19, “Persons who may be appointed as nominees or custodians”. Essentially, they are people who do business of that nature, for example investment managers or brokers of some sort. They might also include certain corporate bodies.

In this regard, charitable trusts are subject to another qualification or safeguard. Clause 19(4) states that charitable trusts that want to use a nominee or a custodian will receive guidance from the Department for Social Development about the sort of people or companies that are suitable. They must then comply with that guidance.

Clauses 21 to 23 are concerned with obligations to review the work of agents, nominees and custodians. One cannot just appoint these people and then adopt an out of sight, out of mind approach. One must check, supervise and review what is happening.

Clause 23 deals with liability for agents, nominees and custodians. It concerns the extent to which the trustee is liable if these people default. This hangs on the trustee’s duty of care. The trustee could be liable if he has not complied with his duty of care in selecting the person, in the terms in which they are appointed, or in supervising them.

Mr Close: Does that also apply to reviewing?

Mrs Harkness: Yes. That duty is encompassed in the term “supervision”.

I would like to recap for the sake of completeness. I have not yet drawn your attention to clause 15, which involves appointing an agent and asking him to exercise asset management functions including investment-type decisions. That sets in motion special restrictions that are designed as added safeguards. Basically, you must prepare a policy statement of guidance to guide your agent about how you want those powers to be exercised.

Mr Hussey: Will you please explain clause 22(4), which deals with the power of intervention?

Mrs Harkness: That involves a situation in which trustees are reviewing an agent’s performance. They must decide whether it is satisfactory or whether they should exercise powers of intervention. Those powers include the power to give directions to the agent and the power to revoke authorisation to get rid of that particular person.

It would be the trustees’ responsibility to consider carefully whether they should intervene in that way. A choice not to intervene is made at their risk.

Mr Hussey: Presumably, they also risk comeback from the appointed agent or nominee?

Mrs Harkness: Yes. That might be in the form of a claim for breach of contract or something like that.

Mr Hussey: Could it take the form of a complaint of a slight upon their professional handling?

Mrs Harkness: Yes. That is a possibility. Trusteeship is a very onerous responsibility.

The Chairperson: We will now move to Part V of the Bill.

Mrs Harkness: Part V is about remuneration payment for trustees. The policy objective is essentially to encourage the effective administration of trusts. Coincidentally, I have just said that a trustee’s role is very demanding.

It is often argued that professional expertise is valuable to trust administration. However, persons with professional expertise can be reluctant to act as trustees without payment for their services. This group of clauses addresses that problem. Clause 28 focuses on the situation where a trust instrument contains an express provision governing the matter of payment. It also clarifies some ambiguities and confusion about how a clause such as that should be interpreted. Clause 29 is possibly more crucial. It gives a right and entitlement of payment to certain trustees even where they do not have a trust document that says those are entitled to payment. This right is limited to trustees who are acting in a professional capacity.

I shall endeavour to follow the order of the Bill. Trustees who act in a professional capacity will become entitled to remuneration. First in the list come trust corporations. These are bodies such as banks that act as trustees, especially in relation to wills. Neither charitable trusts nor sole trustees will be viewed as professional

trustees for the purposes of clause 29. A situation where you have only one trustee would obviously lend scope for abuse, as he could authorise payment to himself. Remuneration can apply to arrangements where someone has several trustees, but the other trustees must agree that one is going to receive payment. Reasonable remuneration is stipulated, which basically means the rate for the job in the circumstances. However, that will not be available if the trust instrument or any statute says something inconsistent with it. Often, the trust instrument is silent in those regards.

I mentioned charitable trusts. Essentially, it is recognised that different arguments apply to charitable trusts. The impact of introducing remuneration for charitable trustees has not been investigated thoroughly. The solution proposed in clause 30 is to leave the issue for future resolution by empowering the Department for Social Development (DSD). In other words, DSD will have a responsibility to further investigate the regulation of charitable trusts and possibly to advance legislation at a later date.

Clauses 30, 31 and 32 deal with expenses rather than remuneration and are fairly straightforward.

Mr Maskey: If the current position is uncertain and it is left to DSD to clarify it at a later stage, is it not the case that people might be told that they may well qualify for this remuneration? I presume many people do this for charitable organisations probably for nothing.

Mrs Harkness: Trustees must work for nothing in this situation unless the terms of the charitable trust authorise payment to trustees. Trustees can only receive payment if they are authorised by the terms of the charitable trust, by statute or by a court order of some sort.

If the trust instrument is silent on the matter, trustees are not allowed payment. That remains the case. It is argued that the administration of charitable trusts is very demanding and may benefit from expert handling. To attract the desired sort of charitable trustees it may be best to allow them to be paid; DSD is being invited to investigate the pros and cons of that argument to see whether that will be the case. If the DSD decision is in favour of introducing the same provision for charitable trustees as the Trustee Bill introduces for non-charitable trustees, the matter will then go back to the Assembly for approval. However, it is argued that the situation is different for charitable trustees.

Mr Weir: I presume that when the charitable trustees cannot get remuneration for expenses incurred they will be covered by the provisions of clause 31?

The Chairperson: There are no more questions so we will move to Part VI.

Mrs Harkness: Part VI steps aside from the objectives that we have been talking about; it tidies up a gap that has become apparent in the existing provision in recent years. Part VI is about the circumstances in which new

trustees can be appointed and old trustees — not necessarily existing trustees — can retire. That situation is currently regulated by the Trustee Act (Northern Ireland) 1958.

A gap has been revealed, and this group of clauses attempts to fill it. All the beneficiaries of a trust are adult — they are over 18 years of age — and they have full legal capacity. As a group they could bring the trust to an end because they have total ownership. Nobody else is entitled to any share.

The Trustee Act (Northern Ireland) 1958 does not allow such people to appoint a new trustee. If all the trustees have died, there is no longer anyone capable of nominating a new trustee. The beneficiaries do not have the power to nominate trustees under the 1958 Act. The proposed reforms are designed to give them the power to appoint a trustee in very limited situations.

Clause 35 addresses the situation where trustees are incapable of carrying out their functions due to a mental disorder. Nobody is able to do anything about that apart from the beneficiaries. Under the current legislation they do not have the power to intervene, but this clause fills that gap by allowing them to do so.

Mr Hussey: The power to appoint trustees when all the existing trustees have died is welcome, and I am aware of many circumstances where that applies.

However, I would like to query one particular situation. Will the provision apply where an organisation has a building and appointed trustees to run that building? Suppose one of the trustees were to leave the organisation and the beneficiaries did not want that person to remain a trustee. Has that been covered?

The Chairperson: I was going to ask a similar question about trustees of a building, but without investment.

Mrs Harkness: That is not covered by this specific legislation. Part V of the Bill only fills certain gaps. The Trustee Act (Northern Ireland) 1958 deals with situations where there is a recalcitrant trustee, for example where one is out of line and refuses to co-operate with the others, or where the trustees have all died. Those are very specific scenarios. To address the facts that you are spelling out, you might have to go to court to get directions or to get a new trustee appointed.

Part V deals with what is a very narrow situation. Chiefly, we have a block of beneficiaries who are, as a group, absolutely entitled to all the trust fund. I get the impression that you are perhaps talking about a charitable trust or something similar.

Mr Hussey: All would be over the age of 18?

Mrs Harkness: I obviously cannot answer that specific question — not wearing this hat.

Mr Weir: Where reference is made to direction by beneficiaries, is unanimity mandatory? Depending upon

the nature of the trust, there could be either a small or a very large number of beneficiaries. Would all the beneficiaries have to sign up?

Mrs Harkness: Yes, unanimity is required, and that is governed by clause 36. Although the beneficiaries can get together and join in one document, form groups or submit individual documents, they must all be included. None may withdraw.

Mrs Harkness: Part VII contains miscellaneous supplementary provisions, and it deals with several different areas. First is the power to insure. That amends the 1958 Act, bringing it up to date and including a power to insure against any risks. Concerning prudence, we have already mentioned that trustees have responsibility for buildings. It is obviously crucial that they should have a power to take out insurance cover for the property.

One group of clauses deals with special cases that do not quite fit the pattern set up by the rest of the Bill. There must be a bit of modification or tweaking of the provisions to make them applicable to those cases in a suitable way. Personal representatives — people administering the estate of a deceased person, under a will or intestacy — can be trustees, and the idea is that the provision should apply to them as far as possible.

Some of the provisions will apply to pension schemes, but essentially pension trustees have their own regulatory framework. It is intended that that should not be disturbed by these provisions. Myners' recent report looks again at pension trustees, so something else may come along to change the legislation in the Pensions (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. However, that is a more long-term situation.

Authorised unit trusts regulated under their own regime should not be disturbed. Again there should be adequate powers of investment and so on to look after them.

The provision relating to common investment schemes for charities is not widely used in Northern Ireland. However, it is on the statute book, and therefore provision is made to exclude them. I am reluctant to commit myself, but I vaguely recollect that there are actually only a couple of those schemes in operation in Northern Ireland. I think that one is connected with Queen's University.

Clause 42 states that the Bill binds the Crown. Clause 43 is on interpretation. There are then supplementary provisions in relation to amendments and the commencement.

Mr Leslie: I have a question on clause 39 about the pension schemes. I have not looked at this in detail. It is slightly tricky — it seems to me that some parts apply and some do not. I am trying to understand why Part I applies in that way. Has the pension industry expressed satisfaction with that approach?

Mrs Harkness: I am not sure how to answer on behalf of the pension industry.

Mr Leslie: I agree that that would be difficult.

Mrs Harkness: Certainly no adverse comments have been received. Perhaps attention has been focused in this area by the recent Myners inquiry, which published a paper recently on pension trustees.

Paul Myners published a report at the beginning of March on pension schemes. That report proposed some changes to powers of investment. Proposals were also made in relation to reviewing investments and related issues. The minds of the pension industry were focused on those concerns rather than on this. This provision leaves their regulatory structure to operate as it has done to date.

Mr Leslie: In clause 39(6), it says:

“The trustees of a pension scheme may not under Part IV authorise a person who is—

- (a) an employer in relation to the scheme, or
 - (b) an associate of or connected with such an employer,
- to exercise any of their functions as their agent.”

I am quite surprised by that. I would have thought that you might have a subsidiary or an associated company that might reasonably act as custodian, for example, for the asset. I do not know enough about other aspects of pension legislation to know whether it specifically excludes that eventuality. I cannot see that any particular harm would ensue if those people were not excluded, although this piece of legislation is perhaps driven by the ‘Daily Mail’ or perhaps it was ‘The Mirror’.

Mrs Harkness: It is perhaps the ghost of Maxwell.

Mr Leslie: Exactly. I guess that it is a sort of belt-and-braces approach. It is not a very big issue, but perhaps we ought to examine that a bit further. I am slightly concerned about ripping up perfectly sound pension practice.

Mrs Harkness: On that specific point I would like to see what the situation is under the pensions legislation. Clause 39(6) says that the trustees of a pension scheme may not under Part IV authorise such a person to act as their agent.

They may have powers to authorise an agency under some other provisions in the pensions legislation. For our purposes, the legislation before us says that they cannot do so through this vehicle. For a more complete answer I would have to look at the pensions legislation to see if that allows them to do so under that vehicle and using whatever protections. Perhaps they are allowed to do it, subject to detailed restrictions set out in the pensions legislation.

Mr Leslie: This is all perfectly prudent, so I do not have a fundamental objection to it. I am just slightly concerned about practicalities. If we have stopped a perfectly sound pension scheme operating in the way that it had been

doing hitherto, albeit inadvertently, we may need to give some warning. It would require a bit of transition. I suppose that it is up to the industry to have spotted it, however. As you say, who can speak for the pensions industry?

Mrs Harkness: Yes. Another part of the argument is that Part IV provides a default regime. In the case of a pension scheme, if they are permitted to have people in those categories acting as agent, I would expect them to be doing it on the basis of a provision in their own scheme, rather than through reliance on a provision such as this.

Mr Leslie: That is a perfectly fair point.

The Chairperson: We will come back to this later. Are there any particular issues regarding the schedules?

Mrs Harkness: We have already mentioned schedule 1, which determines when the duty of care applies. Schedule 2 has minor and consequential amendments. I have mentioned both settled land and 1958 Act. Schedule 2 also contains amendments in relation to bodies that exercise statutory powers of investment, even though they may not technically be trustees. The amendments are basically bringing the powers of investment they might have up to date, in line with this system.

Schedule 3 is about transitional provisions and savings, and schedule 4 regulates repeals.

Mr Hussey: Concern has been expressed about paragraph 7 of schedule 1.

The Clerk: Perhaps I can explain that. We received that letter from Bryce Dickson of the Human Rights Commission in response to our normal letter. We read comments from 30 or 40 groups, bodies, organisations and individuals. I have copied that letter to the Office of Law Reform so that they can consider it and advise us. I have also copied it to the Assembly's legal adviser, Percy Johnston, and asked for his opinion. I suggest that once we have received all the responses we might take evidence from the Human Rights Commission. The letter may be all we need. All that evidence may be discussed at future sessions with the Office of Law Reform. We now need to get people to mull it over.

The Chairperson: That is everything for today. Obviously we will come back to this in more detail. Thank you very much.

**NORTHERN IRELAND
ASSEMBLY**

**COMMITTEE FOR
HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION,
TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT**

Thursday 26 April 2001

**DEPARTMENT FOR LEARNING
AND EMPLOYMENT BILL
(NIA 12/00)**

Members present:

Dr Birnie (Chairperson)
Mr Carrick (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Beggs
Mr Byrne
Mrs Carson
Mr Dallat
Mr Hay
Mr R Hutchinson
Mr J Kelly
Ms McWilliams
Mrs Nelis

Witnesses:

Mr A Shannon) Department of Higher and Further
Mr J Murray) Education, Training and Employment

The Chairperson: I welcome the Permanent Secretary, Mr Alan Shannon, and the legislation liaison officer, Mr John Murray, who are here to give us an official briefing at the Committee Stage of the Department for Learning and Employment Bill. Thank you for the written brief that you provided.

Mr Shannon: I will make a short introduction. At the plenary session, the Minister explained that the departmental name must be changed because of the length of the current title and the unfortunate acronym which it creates.

Although the acronym attracted attention in the early days, most of us are now used to it, and it does not create difficulties. However, when we are abroad or in other jurisdictions the acronym raises eyebrows, therefore there is enthusiasm for changing the title.

When we were agonising over our choice of a new title, we identified four criteria. The first was to include a reference to each of the three key departmental areas — the Training and Employment Agency, the further and

higher education divisions of the former Department of Education, and the employment staff from the former Department of Economic Development.

The Department amalgamates those key areas, and one of our objectives is to create cohesion, therefore it is important that each of the units feel that they belong. That consideration is partly aimed at placing equal emphasis on higher education and further education, while giving equal weight to the training sector and the employment service.

The second criterion was to create a shorter and more manageable title, and the third was to avoid trampling on other Departments by making sure that our new title did not overlap with their names. Our final criterion was to find a more acceptable acronym.

We debated a number of options, including the Department of Learning and Employment, but the acronym for this title would be DOLE. We considered naming it the Department of Advanced Learning and Employment, which would have highlighted the Department's involvement with higher education, but that would not have done justice to our training activities and basic skills provision. We thought about naming it the Department of Education, Training and Employment, but we thought that the Department of Education might not be too happy if we included the word "education" in our title in this way.

This illustrates how the process involved suggesting options and rejecting each of them for a variety of reasons. We believe that we have come up with the best possible title. We had an informal consultative process in which we discussed ideas for six to nine months and tested others' reactions.

In our judgement, the title that we have come up with is acceptable to our staff, the universities, the further-education sector and the various political parties. While the acronym is not perfect, it steers away from most of the pitfalls that the others invite. That is the background to why we have chosen this option.

Ms McWilliams: This is a one-clause Bill, and it is difficult to put so many words into a title. Ending the name with the word "learning" hanging in mid-air is not an ideal way to rename a Department. I am concerned that you have completely dropped "training" from the title. Have you considered the Department for Employment, Learning and Training? Learning, after all, can include learning for training and employment. Given that so much of the Department's work concerns training, it is worrying that the core sense of what the Department does is not expressed in the suggested title.

Our work does not always concern employment; we are concerned with training for many other aspects of life.

Much of the new education sector is concerned with that, and this title could narrow that concept rather than broaden it. The title I am suggesting would give us the acronym DELT, which is not the worst option in the world. I am concerned that we have lost ‘training’ — one of the Department’s key roles.

Mr Shannon: I agree with you that DELT is not an unacceptable acronym, but we return to the question of length: once again, three major areas are included in the title. We had no intention of devaluing the importance of training. After all, a significant proportion of our staff is devoted to training, although most of the budget is spent on education. We felt that the Jobskills and New Deal programmes are well covered by our employment and life-long-learning strategies, and, therefore, that the different aspects of training were covered by the words “learning” or “employment”. We do not want to give the impression that training has lost any of its significance.

Ms McWilliams: The title should have a word which reflects the Department’s involvement with colleges and universities. We have, however, lost the word education because of your concern at the overlap with the Department of Education’s title. You could not include “education”. However, a compromise might be to keep the word “training”, because that is what goes on in the colleges and universities.

I do not like the suggested title. “Education” and “Learning” are included, but learning for what? We do need a distinctive flavour. Employment is one area, but universities are not just concerned with employment; they cover all aspects of life. A title ending with “learning” gives the impression that learning has been left hanging in mid-air.

Mr Shannon: Placing “learning” in the middle rather than at the end — the Department for Learning and Employment — would be a matter of deciding on the compromises that must be made to encapsulate all the concepts. The Minister felt that the word “learning” alone encompassed the components of further education and training, especially given our strategy on lifelong learning. In fact, we considered including lifelong learning in the title, but this idea was rejected. Lifelong learning is a fashionable term at the moment, but in five year’s time, another term might emerge.

Ms McWilliams: You can trip over it.

Mr Shannon: Yes.

Mr Carrick: Like Ms McWilliams, I have a difficulty with your suggested title. You have just explained why the term “lifelong learning” was excluded, despite your having identified as components for consideration in your Explanatory and Financial Memorandum the factors of lifelong learning and preparation for employment. These considerations are counterbalanced by the objective of creating a shorter title, and I appreciate that. How-

ever, the learning process starts at age two, three or four, and continues throughout primary and secondary level. What consideration was given to creating a distinction between primary or secondary education and learning in preparation for work?

Mr Shannon: The distinction is made through the use of the term “adult learning”. However, one of our current preoccupations is a 16-to-19 strategy, which involves people who are not yet adults. We also have a legitimate interest in the curriculum for pupils aged 14 upwards. The Careers Service, for which we are partly responsible, visits schools and deals with younger people as well. We thought that we did not need to make this distinction, especially since it would add to the length of the title.

Mr Byrne: I share the sentiment that the word “training” should be incorporated in the title. If we are aiming to gear the Northern Ireland economy for the future, the inclusion of “training” is essential. Ms McWilliams suggested the Department of Employment, Learning and Training. Another option is the Department of Learning, Training and Employment, which also incorporates just one additional word. Has the final position on the title been taken, or is it likely that there will be an amendment?

The Chairperson: Surely that is what we are here to determine today?

Mr Byrne: I am reeling myself in, Mr Chairperson.

The Chairperson: That is our role at the Committee Stage, which allows for possible amendment.

The Committee Clerk: It allows for the recommendation of amendments.

The Chairperson: Strictly speaking, yes.

Mr Beggs: I agree with the rejection of the words “Advanced Learning and Employment”. The word “Advanced” is too elitist. We are trying to upgrade basic skills as well, therefore the inclusion of “Advanced” might be inappropriate. We must cover the complete range of continuing/lifelong learning, as you have said. I have perhaps come to this conclusion through a process of negative reasoning.

I agree that the inclusion of the word “education” might create conflict with the Department of Education, therefore it would be best to omit it. The words “Learning” and “Employment” do seem to encapsulate your Department’s role. Given that young people and unemployed people are learning while they undergo training, surely those two words should cover the concept to the required extent? I do not like wordy titles, and I am not sufficiently opposed to the proposed title, nor have I not come up with a better proposal myself, therefore I accept the proposal.

Mrs Carson: I agree that we should include the word “training”, because we have had so many representations from firms and other establishments that have placed great

emphasis on training. If we could include this aspect, this would round up the Department's recommendations.

Mr Hay: The Department has a wide range of responsibilities in many areas, and this is why it is difficult to shorten its title. I fear that the more we tinker about with the name, the more we will add to its length, and I have not yet heard a better suggestion. Ultimately, it is going to be difficult to incorporate everything the Department does in a title of three or four words.

If we come up with a name that suits everyone, is there a time limit within which the name must be incorporated? Will there be a mechanism in place to effect this change?

Mr Shannon: There is no time constraint. Frankly, I would have liked this change to have taken place a year ago. We took a long time to toss the ideas around, and like the Committee, we heard a different suggestion from each person we talked to.

There is an added complication, and that is that the Executive is working on producing a corporate logo. Therefore, we hope to schedule any reprinting of stationery, or anything like that, to coincide with introduction of the Executive's logo. I do not know how long the Executive will take to decide on that. If the process goes smoothly we could be finished by mid-June. However, it will not be the end of the world if there are other reasons for delay.

The current title comprises five words: Department for Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment. So far, we have found that title to be awfully clumsy, and very difficult for everybody. We propose to shorten it to two words. Some of the other suggested titles incorporate four or three words, which is better than what we have but still lengthy.

Although the point about training is important, a good deal of our training has now been transferred to the further-education sector. Now that the training centres are being wound up and their services transferred to the further-education colleges, we are no longer carrying out training ourselves — we are purchasing training. Some of that training is purchased through the training providers, and we are funding other courses indirectly through the further education colleges. Training functions are no longer as distinct as they were in the past.

Mr Hutchinson: I sympathise with Ms McWilliams's comments, however, you mentioned that representatives of the sector had been consulted. What is their reaction to the name? If they can live with it —

Mr Shannon: They were consulted, but we did not go through any formal consultation process.

Mr Hutchinson: That is the problem.

Mr Shannon: We did not think that the process lent itself to formal consultation. I shudder to think about how many suggestions would have been made. We sought reactions to options as they emerged. In general, the

Minister's suggestion seemed to be well accepted, however, there are as many views on the title as there are options.

The Chairperson: A possible problem has already arisen with the proposed title DFLE. It would be very easy for people to get confused between "for" and "of". Earlier this month, the Minister was quoted by the 'Belfast Telegraph' as having said, "we want to have the Department of Learning and Employment". That was obviously a mistake.

I am happy with the Bill as it stands, but with that proviso. I am concerned that people might substitute "for" with "of", thus creating the DOLE slogan. Why did the Department not guard against this by proposing the title of the Department for Employment and Learning? In this way, even if the word "of" is used, the acronym would be DOEL, and perhaps pronounced in a different way.

Mr Shannon: The Department for Employment and Learning is slightly more difficult to pronounce. The Department originally thought of the acronym DOLE, but that was rejected. DLE was also rejected for the reason that you have just given — people might slip in the "o", and that is what we do not want. Therefore, by including the letter "f", we are preventing people from putting the "o" in.

Our suggested title is analogous to the name of the Department for Education and Employment in London whose acronym is DfEE. The high German script version of "f" is used, almost as emphasis and to discourage the reader from including an "o". In choosing a logo we might be tempted to take a similar step.

The Chairperson: Did the figure quoted by the Minister in the House include the cost of the re-design of the logo image?

Mr Shannon: It did. There are a number of factors which contribute to the cost.

Mr Dallat: I feel that we have missed a golden opportunity to put aside our paradigms, and to look for something completely different. We should not be striving to dovetail with something that is fashionable in London at the minute. The message that this Department has to sell is probably more critical than that of any other Department. It is particularly critical to the 250,000 people who cannot read or write.

I have a vision that someday the acronyms that have been fashionable for a number of years will be put in the bin. It is now almost impossible to read a document without referring to a glossary to interpret the acronyms. I know that the Department was probably put under a great deal of pressure to restrict the costs. The sum of £10,000 was mentioned. Surely it would have been worthwhile to invest money in creating a name and logo that match, before using the money to create a vision that would attract all the necessary people to the Department.

That might sound a bit glossy, but this process is more important than a “name the doll” competition. I will accept your proposal because I cannot suggest any improvement on what has been suggested here or anywhere else. However, we are missing out on a golden opportunity to create an image, a logo and a message that will influence the people I care about most — those who will benefit most from the services of the Department. I do not think that any of the suggested words cover what we are looking for.

Mr Shannon: I understand your point. The Department thought that it would be better to do this as economically as possible, because we have been criticised for the amount of money that we have spent on branding and logos in the past. The Minister was anxious not to be accused of doing that again.

On the question of costs, we have felt for some time that a change was needed, therefore only small stocks of stationery were ordered. In any case, a large proportion of the Department still uses Training and Employment Agency (T&EA) stationery. The departmental seal will have to be changed, but that will only cost £150. Much of our material is produced digitally, and stocks are not kept. It is a “just in time” contract.

We are quite well placed to change without any particular cost. If we have to change when the Executive logo is introduced, there will be no additional marginal cost, as that will be borne by the other necessary change.

Ms McWilliams: You mentioned the range of people you consulted, and you said that you had tried out the name change with political parties. What did you mean by that?

Mr Shannon: During the past 12 months we chatted informally to people like yourselves — in corridors, at meetings and so on. People know that we have been looking at a name change, but we have not had formal consultation. I do not want to mislead you; all I am saying is that MLAs have made comments to us, from time to time, about the title.

Mr Hay: If you were to formally start discussions with political parties, the suggestions would be endless. You would create more problems than you would solve. The Department has handled it the best way.

Ms McWilliams: I wanted to give the chief executive an opportunity to clarify what he said, because the session is being recorded.

Mr Dallat: If political parties can make suggestions, I would be very keen on the name “Special Department for Learning and Practice (SDLP)”.

Mr R Hutchinson: What have we decided?

The Chairperson: That is the next stage. I thank Mr Shannon and Mr Murray for coming here today, and for their written submission — both have been very helpful.

We wish you well in this exercise, and we will give detailed scrutiny to the Bill.

Mr Shannon: We did not have to go through the clauses of the Bill in detail today. However, we will have the chance to do so on some other occasion with another Bill. I look forward to hearing the outcome of your deliberations.

Clause 1 (Renaming of Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment).

The Chairperson: We now move to the detailed scrutiny of the Bill. Broadly speaking, we have three alternatives. First, we can agree it as it stands; in which case it moves back to the Floor of the Assembly and then becomes law. That partially answers Ms McWilliams’s questions, as the change would become law from that date. Secondly, we can put forward an amendment to be voted on. That would presumably involve a different name, or a different order of words. Thirdly, we can ask for further information and withhold a decision at that point. How many Members would feel that the best option is to go with the proposed name DFLE?

Mrs Carson: It is not the best name, but I cannot think of anything better.

Mr Hay: The problem is that the clause is OK unless we come up with something better. If we can come up with something better, we will require an amendment. That is what the Committee needs to be examining.

Mr Byrne: Can we ask the Department whether something relating to training can be included in the title?

Ms McWilliams: No, we would have to propose an amendment, and it would have to fall. I feel so strongly about it that I would like to propose it and if it falls, it falls. I cannot believe that the Department — from headquarters down — has come up with a title that did not include the core part of its work.

Mr Hay: What is your proposal to rectify that?

Ms McWilliams: “The Department of Employment, Learning and Training (DELT)”. It is easy to say and identify with.

The Chairperson: OK, DELT.

Mr Carrick: The permanent secretary indicated, in the Department’s own criteria, that he did not want any undue weighting in any area. Ms McWilliams’s proposal highlights the fact that training has been ignored, and that would correct the situation.

Ms McWilliams: I also propose it on the grounds that I would hate to think that I work in a university or college, which is only about learning. I want to identify what the learning is for — it is for training purposes. Schools and secondary schools have a very different type of learning. We have lost education completely from the title, and it is extremely important that we try

to win back identification for those members of staff who are employed right across the sectors. I am saying that “hand on heart”, and I am trying to think of a way for them to feel that they own the Department because it deals with employment, learning and training.

Mr Dallat: I do not want to be divisive. I will go along with anything, but surely it is understood that you move from learning to employment through training, or am I being totally silly?

The Chairperson: You may be right, but the issue is whether we want to make it explicit or not — that is the dilemma. Does anyone else want to comment on Ms McWilliams’s proposal?

Mr Hutchinson: I am happy to go along with Ms McWilliams’s proposal. Is there any great difficulty with it?

The Chairperson: It contains one word more than the Department’s proposal but one word less than the existing title, and the permanent secretary said that they want to shorten it. They are glad they have shortened it quite a lot.

Ms McWilliams: My proposal has shortened it, and has taken out that silly Germanic ‘f’ word. Other Department titles do not have ‘o’ or ‘f’, so they do not need it. If you end up with my title, you will have shortened it, and we will have something that people can say — DELT.

Mr Dallat: If we are going for that, can I suggest that somebody check the dictionaries in case we discover that we have concocted a German, French or Italian word, which means something horrible.

The Chairperson: It is doubtful.

Mr Dallat: I would not take it for granted.

Mr Carrick: It could be that DELT could be “DEALT”, as that is what it sounds like. Picking up on Mr Dallat’s point, and linking it to Ms McWilliams amendment, DLTE does not roll off the tongue as easily but at least it gets the order — the Department of Learning, Training and Employment.

The Chairperson: That reflects the training and employment aspect, and is another possibility — DLTE.

Mr Dallat: Is that not what it is at the minute?

Ms McWilliams: No. It is the Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment.

The Chairperson: The current proposal is the Department for Learning and Employment. Ms McWilliams, would you be happy in putting forward the proposal for the Department of Learning, Training and Employment?

Ms McWilliams: I am happy with that, but DELT is easier to say. It is hard to get your tongue around DLTE. As you know, all Departments are known by shortened forms, such as CAL. This one could be DELT, which is much easier to identify. I often teach by trying to get students to remember prompt names. When they get

their prompt names, they know where they are going with them. DELT is easy to remember.

Mrs Carson: It rolls off the tongue nicely, but it is the wrong way round. DLTE is the correct sequence — learning, training and employment. The other sounds nice, but this is the sequence we would hope for.

The Chairperson: It is a trade off, as we cannot get both. My personal feeling is that Ms McWilliams is right — the acronym is more important than getting the timed sequence of events correct.

Mr Hutchinson: I am prepared to second Ms McWilliams’s proposal.

The Chairperson: For procedure purposes, first of all, is the Committee content with the clause as drafted, which is really the Bill? I get the impression that the majority of Committee Members are not content.

Mr Beggs: Another issue is whether we are agreed on an alternative option.

The Chairperson: We cannot go on to deal with the alternative until we have established this.

Mr Byrne: There is consensus that most of the Members of the Committee would like training in the title, as we recognise the significance of having training in it. It boils down to the arrangement of letters.

The Chairperson: I want to get procedure correct. Can I establish that the Committee is not content with the clause as drafted because of the training aspect?

Mr Beggs: We did have a vote to see how many were content. We are now deciding whether a contrary view should be taken. I am just interested in how many are not content and how many are abstaining.

The Chairperson: OK, we will have a show of hands, which will be recorded.

Mr Hay: I said that, if there were no better name on the table, I would run with the Department’s proposal. By teasing this out we have come up with a slightly better arrangement of what it should be called — our own version.

Question put, That the Committee is content with the clause as drafted.

The Committee divided: Ayes 2, Noes 7.

AYES

Roy Beggs, John Dallat

NOES

Esmond Birnie, Joe Byrne, Mervyn Carrick, Joan Carson, William Hay, Roger Hutchinson, Monica McWilliams

Question accordingly negatived.

The Chairperson: We now proceed to an amendment. In a sense we have debated the amendment, which we are required to do. Normally, we should seek advice as to the technical competence of any amendment, but in this case we are probably safe in assuming that a change in the name will still be technically competent. We will have to subsequently investigate that, but I think that it will be correct.

Question put, That the Committee recommend to the Assembly that the clause be amended as follows: in page 1, line 4, leave out “Learning and Employment” and insert “Employment, Learning and Training”.

In page 1, line 9, leave out “Learning and Employment” and insert “Employment, Learning and Training”.

In page 1, line 13, leave out “Learning and Employment” and insert “Employment, Learning and Training”.

In page 1, line 15, leave out “Learning and Employment” and insert “Employment, Learning and Training”. — [*Ms McWilliams*]

The Committee divided: Ayes 7, Noes 2.

AYES

Esmond Birnie, Joe Byrne Mervyn Carrick, Joan Carson, William Hay, Roger Hutchinson, Monica McWilliams

NOES

Roy Beggs, John Dallat.

Question accordingly agreed to.

The Chairperson: We have now completed the scrutiny. On the basis of today’s proceedings, a draft report

will be presented to the Committee for our consideration at our meeting on Thursday 10 May. That is the next legally required stage in the process. In order to meet that deadline, two weeks from today, Members will have to turn around any changes to the Hansard report promptly. If you read it and feel that you have not been correctly reported, please tell the Committee Office immediately. Assuming that the Committee agrees the report on the 10 May, it will be printed and taken to the Floor of the Assembly before the summer recess. It all depends on how Assembly reacts, whether they vote for the Committee’s amendment, or for the Minister’s original Bill.

There is also the matter of a precautionary motion. I have to ask the Committee Members if they are content that a precautionary motion be put down to seek an extension of the length of time for this Bill, in case of unforeseen circumstances. This will be needed if the Committee does not agree the report on 10 May. If the report is agreed on that date, the motion will be withdrawn before it appears in the Order Paper, so it never has to be used. However, it is safer to take a vote at this stage. Therefore, I suggest the following motion:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 31(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 31(2) be extended to 17 June 2001 in relation to the Committee Stage of the Department for Learning and Employment Bill (NIA 12/00).

Are Members agreed?

Members indicated assent.

**NORTHERN IRELAND
ASSEMBLY**

**COMMITTEE FOR
HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION,
TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT**

Thursday 3 May 2001

**DEPARTMENT FOR LEARNING
AND EMPLOYMENT BILL
(NIA 12/00)**

Members present:

Dr Birnie (Chairperson)
Mr Carrick (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Beggs
Mr Dallat
Mr R Hutchinson
Mrs Nelis

The Chairperson: The main matter arising is the Committee Stage of the Bill for the Department for Learning and Employment. The Bill proposes to change the Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to the Department for Learning and Employment. The indications are that the abbreviated title will be DfLE.

Last week we had the Committee Stage consideration. We took evidence from the permanent secretary, Alan Shannon, after which we had our own discussion. Following that discussion we agreed that the name should change to the Department for Employment, Learning and Training, or DELT for short. On Monday I attended a National Union of Students conference on student support. The Minister was also there and we had a brief conversation about the Bill. The Minister indicated that he would like to talk to myself and, if possible, the Deputy Chairperson about that matter. The following day the Clerk and myself had an informal meeting with the Minister. The Deputy Chairperson was unavailable because of other business.

Basically, the Minister repeated, and in a sense re-emphasised, perhaps even more strongly, the points previously made by Alan Shannon. There is strong support in the Department for the name to be the Department for Learning and Employment. He also gave the grounds for not including “training” in the name. Of course, at the

previous meeting a number of Committee members said that the inclusion of “training” would be the obvious thing to do. The Minister argued that by putting “training” in the name there would be a perceived unfairness to the further and higher education side of the Department because “education” is not in the name. The words “higher and further” would need to be put in again, to avoid confusion with the Department of Education. Consequently, the Department would be back to having a long title.

The Minister felt sufficiently strongly about the Committee’s pursuit of the amendment and the presentation of the report to the Assembly to imply that he would withdraw the Bill. The net result of that would be that the Department’s name would stay the same. I put a proposal to the Minister as a possible compromise. It meets some of his feelings, and, I think, also meets some of the points raised by Committee members last week. Some members were concerned about use of the word “for”, and, particularly, the letter “F” in the abbreviated title. This is used in London for the Department for Education and Employment, although, according to certain rumours, that Department may cease to exist after the general election; therefore, the precedent may disappear.

Committee members are also concerned with getting a memorable and reasonable acronym — DHFETE is memorable, but for the wrong reasons. I put a compromise to the Minister, and he seemed to react fairly warmly to it. This was that we accept the Learning and Employment name but reverse the word order so that it becomes the Department for Employment and Learning. There are two advantages to that. One is that the acronym is DEL, so the Department, if it wishes, can use that for labels, letterheads and wall plaques. Secondly, the letter “F” does not need to be used, and the danger of the Department’s acronym becoming DOLE is avoided. The Minister did not categorically say that he would accept such an amendment, but I got the impression that he would.

I propose that we go through the process of voting on the new amendments, and also decide on the name of the Bill, if you feel that the amendment that I am putting to you today — Department for Employment and Learning — is better than what we had last week.

Mr Beggs: It has not changed; the Minister has got exactly the same as before.

The Chairperson: No, his new name is Department for Learning and Employment.

Mr Beggs: He has just changed two words around.

The Chairperson: Yes, but the obvious way to sell it to the Assembly is by saying the Minister has put forward a Bill and we agree with much of his reasoning. However, we can say that we feel that it can be improved by simply reversing the word order and then give the reasons.

There would be widespread feeling in the Assembly that our arguments are reasonable.

Mr Beggs: I can see the concern of some members about the word “of” occasionally dropping into the original proposal. The abbreviated title could develop into the word DOLE, by those who want to use the jargon, to represent the Department, which is unhelpful. I can see genuine concern for that.

The Committee needs to be careful of creating a “storm in a teacup”. We could end up going head to head with the Minister over a name, and we will not come out of this issue unscathed if it gets to that stage. The Minister will not come out of this looking very well if he withdraws the Bill, nor would we. We have to consider whether this is a life and death issue, and if we want to burn up a degree of goodwill. The Minister would not be getting what he wanted, which is the possible DOLE label, and at the same time the Committee would not be getting our original preference. I see some validity in your proposal and I am willing to accept that.

Mr Dallat: Last week, Mr Beggs and myself were happy to stay with the ministerial proposal, but I will accept your suggested amendment. I certainly do not want to debate it on the Floor of the Assembly because the work we are involved in, as demonstrated earlier today, is at a higher level than arguing over a title. It is important for the Department to have a name that it can develop, promote and sell in a positive way. There are possibilities with this title, as with the original, but either way I am happy.

Mr Carrick: You gave me prior notice of this issue when I spoke to you earlier in the week. I do not want to be dogmatic. Nevertheless, I find the Minister’s argument for not including training a little weak, and I cannot follow the rationale. We should try to reach consensus with the Minister. It would not look well if we take this onto the Floor of the Assembly and are seen to labour over it, when there are so many other burning issues.

Mr Dallat: The impression being picked up is that the Minister is being stubborn, and we tend to see Ministers in this light. He has the job of selling it to the Department. He may not have the final say, but he must be satisfied that it is right.

Mr Carrick: Perhaps the Minister will not mind being known as the “DEL Boy”, but he will have to live with it.

Mrs Nelis: “DEL Boy” is preferable to DHFETE — in fact, anything is preferable to DHFETE. I find it extraordinary that the Minister wants to exclude training even though he has just incorporated the Training and Employment Agency into his Department.

The Chairperson: Last week Alan Shannon and the Minister explained to me, at some length, their logic for not putting “training” in the title. While it is true that the

Training and Employment Agency is no longer a first steps agency, at arms length from the Department, it will still exist, with its offices in most town centres. Therefore, the argument is that it is not needed in the title of the Department. As Mr Carrick said, we can all have positive or negative feelings about that.

It is also a question of being equitable in respect of the training arm of the Department, the universities and further education side, and how it goes down with the staff who have to live with the title. Some staff may feel that some of their colleagues are being recognised directly in the title, and they are not. There must be a balance across the different arms of the Department, without making it into a huge sprawling title once again.

Mr R Hutchinson: I do not want to get into the same situation as the last session on student fees. Neither the Minister nor ourselves came out of that with any great dignity. I am prepared to go along with this, without creating any hassle. Last week I felt strongly that it should be incorporated. The only thing that would make me dig my heels in is the Minister saying he will withdraw the whole thing if he does not have his way — that would make me thran, coming from Larne. That would make me want to stand my corner and take him on, but that would not do anybody any good. I am quite prepared to go with the rest, under protest.

The Chairperson: Some Members mentioned their reactions to the Minister’s reasoning. The Minister would be keen, if necessary, to come and explain his reasoning. However, given that we are going to have our own consensus around this amendment, which substantially keeps the title that he was initially pushing for, albeit reversing the order, on reflection I am not sure if there is a need for him to attend. It is not absolutely necessary, but he did offer to come. It would have been difficult today because of the Executive meeting. We are trying to avoid using “f” in the abbreviated title. Are Members happy to keep the word “for” in the title?

Mr Beggs: It is a minor issue.

The Chairperson: My inclination would be to leave it in, so that you preserve another word in the Bill.

Mr Beggs: The word “for” or “of” must be included. Are we talking about the abbreviated version?

The Chairperson: We cannot really vote on that now. The spirit of what we are saying is that we hope it will be DEL, but that is for the image consultants to work out. We might want to take a view on that down the line if we felt that they had made a mess of it, but I am sure they will not.

Do we have to formally “unvote” last week’s amendments, or do we proceed to vote now on the new amendments?

The Committee Clerk: You vote that you are not content with last week's amendments. Then you can vote for the new amendments.

The Chairperson: This is complicated, but it has to be done. We must have a vote to rescind what we had last week. Are Members in favour of that?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: We now need to take five votes because the title appears five times in the Bill. This includes the title of the Bill, because that also has to be changed.

Mr R Hutchinson: Are we voting on your proposal, and not that of the Minister? We are not sure whether he is going to accept it.

Mr Beggs: We are voting on Department for Employment and Learning, which is the Chairperson's suggestion.

The Chairperson: The Clerk and I had a private meeting with the Minister at which we formed a definite impression. You can never guarantee anything in politics, but I got the impression that he could work with this amendment. In other words, he would not oppose it. Can we proceed to agree the new title?

Question proposed: That the Committee recommend to the Assembly that the clause be amended as follows:

In page 1, line 4, leave out "Learning and Employment" and insert "Employment and Learning."

In page 1, line 9 leave out "Learning and Employment" and insert "Employment and Learning."

In page 1, line 13 leave out "Learning and Employment" and insert "Employment and Learning".

In page 1, line 15 leave out "Learning and Employment" and insert "Employment and Learning." —

In the long title leave out "Learning and Employment Bill" and insert "Employment and Learning Bill." — [*The Chairperson.*]

Question put and agreed to.

The Chairperson: That concludes the scrutiny aspect for this week. The procedure now is the same as last week. A draft report will be presented to the Committee on 10 May. All being well it will be agreed and will then proceed to the House as a recommendation. Then there will be the Consideration Stage, which could be late May or early June, and I hope, as has been our intent throughout, that there will be consensus between the Committee and the Minister. We can then proceed and by the summer the Department should have a new and, we hope, more manageable and superior name.

Written Answers

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 16 March 2001

Written Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Victims Unit: Funding

Mr David Hilditch asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail the proposed spend on the Victims Unit for the financial year 2001/02.
(AQW 2121/00)

Reply: The Victims Unit has, to date, been allocated £150,000 for the 2001/02 financial year. Bids for additional resources will be made in monitoring rounds during the year.

The Northern Ireland Executive will also be contributing approximately £1.67 million to a total allocation of around £6.67 million for the new victims' measure under the Peace II Programme. The Victims Unit will be responsible for this measure.

The Northern Ireland Office recently made available substantial extra funds of £12 million over 3 years for victims. £3 million of this is to go to the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund and Ministers Haughey and Nesbitt will be meeting with Mr Ingram in the near future to discuss the allocation of the remaining £9 million.

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Foot and Mouth Disease: Export Controls

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the steps she is taking to ensure a lifting of the export ban on Northern Ireland beef, sheep, pigs and poultry.
(AQW 2065/00)

Ms Rodgers: We will have to monitor the current Foot and Mouth Disease situation closely. One case of the disease has been confirmed to date. After an appropriate period without any further cases being confirmed, Northern Ireland would be regarded as free from Foot and Mouth Disease. This would enable us to seek recognition from the European Commission as a disease-free region.

As soon as we are sure that we have eradicated Foot and Mouth Disease I will be making the case vigorously to the Commission for regionalisation of Northern Ireland which would free us from the export controls currently in place.

Foot and Mouth Disease: Export Controls

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to provide financial assistance for Northern Ireland beef, pig, sheep and poultry producers for losses incurred by the current export ban.
(AQW 2066/00)

Ms Rodgers: We will shortly be able to start paying compensation to those who have had livestock slaughtered as a result of the disease outbreak and we will be examining the subsidy aspects of these cases to ensure that the producers in question do not lose out. I have also asked my officials to ensure that the newly announced agri-monetary compensation is paid out as quickly as possible.

German Cattle Imports

Mr Clyde asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (a) the number of German cattle imported into Northern Ireland (b) the dates of importation (c) if any of these cattle were slaughtered in County Antrim and (d) where they were slaughtered.
(AQW 2090/00)

Ms Rodgers: For the 14-month period 01/01/00 – to date, a total of 245 cattle of German origin were imported into Northern Ireland.

Of these, 62 were imported on 2nd February 2001. These 62 cattle were slaughtered as follows:

- 1 in County Antrim on 8th February;
- 41 in County Armagh on 5th February 2001; and
- 20 in County Down on 5th February 2001,

The remaining 183 German cattle are still in other herds throughout Northern Ireland, mainly in small numbers on individual farms. The specific details of these animals could be provided if required but only with a disproportionate effort. At this critical time I hope you will understand that I would prefer not to divert valuable veterinary resources from the work to contain the Foot and Mouth outbreak.

Salmonid Enhancement Scheme

Mr Close asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail any expenditure on the Salmonid Enhancement Scheme since its inception.

(AQW 2144/00)

Ms Rodgers: The Salmonid Enhancement Programme (SEP) was launched in December 1995 and was aimed at improving the economies of rural communities and fostering reconciliation by encouraging the development of game angling.

The programme was divided into three tranches.

The total award for Tranche I was £2,002,624.55 which was awarded to 59 projects. The amount actually spent was £1,999,528.70 leaving an underspend of £3,095.85.

Tranche II was awarded £412,948.50. This funded 59 projects and to date the total spend is £371,960.56. This leaves a remainder of £40,987.94 to be spent. Two clubs have still to complete their projects.

Tranche III was launched in 1999 with 40 clubs and associations awarded funding of £1,739,965.23. The total spend to date is £1,386,068.26 leaving £353,896.97 to be spent. Clubs have so far declared they will be surrendering £23,892.25 leaving £330,004.72 to be claimed by June 2001.

In order to assist you, the table below summarises this expenditure.

SALMONID ENHANCEMENT PROGRAMME - PAYMENTS MADE AT 12/03/01

Tranche I - Closed		Tranche II		Tranche III	
Total award:	£2,002,624.55	Total award:	£412,948.50	Total award:	£1,739,965.23
Total Spent:	£1,999,528.70	Total spent to date:	£371,960.56	Total spent to date:	£1,386,068.26
Unspent:	£3,095.85	Remainder to spend:	£40,987.94	Remainder to spend:	£353,896.97
		Two clubs still not completed-Glenelly and Upper Bann		Clubs not claiming:	£23,892.25
				Remainder:	£330,004.72

Bann Systems Ltd

Mr Close asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail how much financial compensation has been paid to Bann Systems Limited and to give an assessment of the benefit of such payments.

(AQW 2145/00)

Ms Rodgers: Bann Systems Limited has been paid a total of £61,000 for the years 1996-1998 under the Salmonid Enhancement Programme (SEP). This was for the right to operate the salmon traps at the cutts on the Lower Bann to take brood stock for the production of

eggs and fry for restocking the Lough Neagh system. They were assessed to be capturing up to 4000 mature salmon annually, which were migrating into the Lough Neagh tributaries.

The non-operation of the traps for three consecutive years has allowed additional mature salmon returning from the sea into the Lough Neagh system. This not only provided additional fish for angling, but increased the numbers of spawning adults available to each of the Lough Neagh tributaries to utilise habitat which was being improved or created by clubs funded by SEP.

The benefit accruing from this expenditure was:

1. 725 fish caught by anglers, assuming a value of £100 per fish to the economy (based on the value of a rod caught fish on the Bush), is estimated at £72500 per annum.
2. Value of the natural spawning from the additional salmon in the system – assuming an extra 2900 fish of which 55% are female producing 55825 smolts at a value of £12 per wild smolt added benefit is £669900.
3. Overall benefit is therefore estimated at approximately £0.75 million per annum.

Salmonid Enhancement Scheme

Mr Close asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (a) what targets he has set to measure the success of the Salmonid Enhancement Scheme and (b) whether these targets have been met. (AQW 2147/00)

Ms Rodgers: The Salmonid Enhancement Programme (SEP) was launched in December 1995 and was aimed at improving the economies of rural communities most affected by violence, and fostering reconciliation by encouraging the development of game angling. The programme offered angling clubs the opportunity to implement projects to improve fish populations, access and angling facilities.

As a measure of its success it has improved access to all of the clubs that received funding, including access by the angling public and tourists alike through the provision of day permits. The number of salmon in Northern Ireland rivers as a result of improvements funded by SEP are difficult to determine as improvements in habitat take a number of seasons to be translated into increased numbers of adult fish returning.

A salmon management plan has been set up and funded by SEP to provide hard data on adult salmon returning to individual catchments. This will enable the Fisheries Conservancy Board to provide the Department with advice on salmon stocks. This project requires the construction of fish counting facilities in Northern Ireland which is currently underway.

Improvements to the Dunlady Stream and Overflow Culvert

Mr Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans the Rivers Agency has to improve Dunlady Stream and the overflow culvert following the flooding, on 29 September 2000, at Dunlady Park; Canberra Park; Canberra Gardens; Ballyregan Crescent and Cherryville Road, Dundonald. (AQW 2162/00)

Ms Rodgers: I can confirm that Rivers Agency has implemented a number of improvements to the Dunlady Stream and overflow culvert in Dundonald to reduce the risk of flooding. Works completed include replacement of the main culvert inlet grille plus maintenance of the designated channel upstream. Installation of an interceptor trash grille is planned as soon as possible. Extension of the designated limit is being actively pursued with a view to undertaking any further maintenance deemed beneficial.

Farmers Summoned for Offences

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to (a) detail the number of farmers, in the Dungannon District Council area, that have been summonsed by her Department for offences arising from (i) late registration of cattle, (ii) herd book irregularities and (b) comment on how these figures compare to the rest of Northern Ireland. (AQW 2166/00)

Ms Rodgers: The information requested is not held by District Council area. Our information is held by Divisional Veterinary Office and I have included the details for Dungannon and the rest of Northern Ireland since 1 January 2000 below:

DVO	Late Registration	Herd Book Irregularities
Armagh	0	10
Ballymena	1	1
Coleraine	0	5
Dungannon	10	13
Enniskillen	0	1
Larne	4	3
Londonderry	0	0
Newry	2	2
Newtownards	0	1
Omagh	2	8

Foot and Mouth Disease in Germany

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the steps she is taking to prevent the importation of German produce to Northern

Ireland following the discovery of foot and mouth disease in Germany on 27 February 2001.

(AQW 2167/00)

Ms Rodgers: There has been no outbreak of Foot and Mouth disease in Germany. Some sheep imported from Great Britain were found to have Foot and Mouth antibodies and were slaughtered as a precautionary measure.

As there is no Foot and Mouth disease in Germany, the trade in produce to Northern Ireland is not affected and is permitted in line with conditions laid down in a variety of EU Directives.

Salmonid Enhancement Scheme

Mr Close asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (a) how many "rock- planks" have been installed in rivers with assistance from the Salmonid Enhancement Scheme (b) the average cost of these installations and (c) how many are still in working condition. (AQW 2171/00)

Ms Rodgers: Under the Salmonid Enhancement Programme (SEP) most in-river works involve the placement of rock to create fishery habitat by providing pools, riffles and glides. These features were inspected by staff of DANI (Now DCAL) as part of the grant procedures, work which has been ongoing since 1996.

Rivers are dynamic habitats and it would be expected that some features would change over a period of time.

At this stage officers of DCAL are unable to inspect these features due to Foot and Mouth disease and the cost of doing so is disproportionate:

250 man hours inspection @ £20/hour (Fishery Officer 1)	£ 5,000
8 man hours collation @ £27/hour (Senior fishery officer)	£ 216
Travel	£ 2,000
Administration	£ 800
Total	£ 8,016

Forestry

Mr Fee asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (a) what proportion of land is dedicated to commercial forestry (b) how much afforested land is privately owned and (c) what plans she has to increase the proportion of afforested land.

(AQW 2174/00)

Ms Rodgers:

- (a) Areas that are predominantly for commercial wood production account for 75% of Forest Service area;
- (b) Private woodland extends to 22,000 ha;
- (c) Forest Service intends to increase afforested land on average by 700 ha per annum. The Rural

Development Plan allows continued support for the private woodland programme, at a rate of 600 hectares of new planting on agricultural land. The balance of 100 ha will be planted by the Forest Service.

Pesticide Control

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail her policy on pesticide control and the number of staff involved in this area.

(AQW 2192/00)

Ms Rodgers: There are very stringent EU legislative requirements for pesticides, which apply across all Member States. Statutory pesticide controls operate uniformly throughout the UK. In GB responsibility for these matters falls to the Pesticides Safety Directorate (PSD), an executive agency of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF), while in Northern Ireland the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) is responsible. PSD and DARD enforce the legislative regime through the introduction of parallel Regulations covering the approval, revocation, etc of pesticides.

In carrying out their functions PSD and UK Agriculture Departments are advised by the Advisory Committee on Pesticides (ACP), an independent panel of scientific and medical experts. The ACP is in turn advised by other experts, as necessary, such as the Pesticides Residue Committee, which also has an entirely independent membership.

In addition to ensuring compliance with EU and national legislative requirements, work proceeds to encourage pesticide minimisation, for example, through training and advice such as PSD's publication of Local Environmental Risk Assessments for Pesticides (LERAPS).

There are 19 DARD administrative and professional staff involved in pesticides, whether in relation to preparation of legislation and general administration or in monitoring and enforcement. However these staff are not dealing exclusively with pesticide issues; they have other duties as well. You may also note that Health and Safety Executive staff and the Environmental Health Officers of local District Councils also have responsibilities in relation to pesticides.

You may be aware that the UK Government had proposed the introduction of a pesticides tax as a means to achieve environmental benefits. However before coming to a final decision they provided opportunity for the agro-chemical industry to propose voluntary arrangements that would achieve equivalent effects. The Crop Protection Association (CPA) submitted proposals, which secured the support of farming organisations, including the Ulster Farmers' Union, and environmentalists. The Budget statement of 7 March 2001 welcomed these proposals and the Treasury will soon meet the CPA to discuss the timetable for implementation. I am confident that avoidance of a pesticides tax represents the best possible outcome for Northern Ireland agriculture.

The Forestry Service

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail her proposed spend on the Forestry Service in parliamentary constituency of East Antrim for 2001-02.

(AQW 2212/00)

Ms Rodgers: An approximation of the spend by Forest Service for 2001/02 in the East Antrim Constituency is £130,000.

Foot and Mouth Disease: Compensation

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (a) her policy on the payment of compensation due to the outbreak of Foot and Mouth disease and (b) who will be eligible for such compensation.

(AQW 2222/00)

Ms Rodgers: The payment of compensation in the event of an outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease is provided for in Schedule 2 Part II of the Diseases of Animals (Northern Ireland) Order 1981. That legislation makes provision for compensation to be paid in respect of animals slaughtered because either:

- they are affected with foot and mouth disease;
- they have been in contact with affected animals; or
- they have been exposed to the infection.

Under the terms of the legislation animals are valued prior to slaughter. Compensation payable for an affected animal is its value before it became affected and in every other case the value of the animal before it was slaughtered.

Herd and flock owners whose animals have been slaughtered either because of evidence of infection or as a precautionary measure to halt the spread of the foot and mouth disease virus are normally eligible for compensation. However, the Department may withhold, either wholly or partially, compensation in respect of a slaughtered animal where, in the judgement of the Department, the owner or person in charge of the animal has been guilty of an offence tending to prejudice the due control of Foot and Mouth Disease.

The legislation also allows for compensation to be paid for a limited range of other materials, such as carcasses, fodder or feedingstuffs that may be seized to prevent the spread of the disease.

Importation of Animals: Meigh, Co Armagh

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to confirm (a) that the shipment of animals to the farm at Meigh, County Armagh had previously been refused entry to Northern Ireland and

(b) the number of sheep in that consignment traced and slaughtered. (AQW 2224/00)

Ms Rodgers: Investigations are still continuing into the circumstances surrounding the importation of sheep from Great Britain to Meigh, Co. Armagh. Until such time as these investigations are completed, I am not in a position to comment further on this matter, other than the statements I have already given in the Assembly on 12 March 2001.

Fishing Industry: Payment of Light Dues

Mr Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to provide additional funding to offset the Light Dues levied annually on the Northern Ireland fishing industry. (AQW 2262/00)

Ms Rodgers: Responsibility for policy relating to the collection of lights dues rests with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions in London. As such I am continuing to lobby on behalf of Northern Ireland fishermen for the removal or reduction of the payment of lights dues.

As you know I wrote to Mr. Keith Hill, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, seeking a reduction or the removal of the payment of lights dues by UK fishermen. In his reply he has stated that, while sympathetic to the financial state of the industry, the removal or reduction of lights dues would be contrary to the “user pays” principle, and that, as users of aids to navigation, lights dues are a proper charge against fishermen. I have responded that I feel the particular difficulties being experienced by the fishing industry have not been fully considered – the reduction in Total Allowable Catches, the closure of the Irish Sea to cod fishing, the additional closure of the West of Scotland fishery, the high cost of fuel, and have reminded him of the non-payment of lights dues by neighbouring fleets, both in Ireland and Europe.

Since policy on the payment of lights dues remains a reserved matter I have asked that when reviewing that policy the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions considers the economic circumstances of the industry and also considers the wider European context under which the fishing industry is regulated. I await a reply.

I can assure you that in the event of policy in this matter being devolved to this administration I shall indeed consider providing the funding required to offset lights dues payments by local fishermen. There are a number of considerations to take into account in making such a decision, such as the EU rules on State Aids. However while such matters need to be considered in full, I remain committed to helping the local industry as much as I can in the difficult times it faces.

Importation of Animals: Veterinary Inspections

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to her statement to the Assembly of 5 March, to list the European Union regulations which prohibit the inspection, at port of arrival, of animals being imported into Northern Ireland.

(AQW 2268/00)

Ms Rodgers: Council Directive 90/425 sets down the veterinary checks that apply for trade in certain live animals within the EU as part of the Single European Market. This Directive is implemented in Northern Ireland legislation by the Animals and Animal products (Import and Export) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000.

The Directive places the onus on the exporting Member State to ensure that all animals exported comply with the conditions of trade. Article 5 allows the competent authority of the Member State of destination to carry out only non-discriminatory veterinary spot checks but only at the point of destination – not at the port. It does not specify the level of checks. This is left to Member States to decide in relation to the particular animals and the risk of particular diseases from each type of animal.

While trade between Great Britain and Northern Ireland is not directly covered by the Directive, we have, since the Single European Market was introduced, been applying its terms to relevant animals and material arriving in Northern Ireland.

Article 8 of the Directive allows much more intensive checking if animal disease or fraud is suspected and that is what is now being invoked in Northern Ireland following the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak in Great Britain.

Directive 90/425 seeks to achieve a balance between free trade within Member States and disease risk. To apply stricter controls between Northern Ireland and Great Britain at times other than in the current emergency would be contrary to the principle of an open market and the free movement of goods.

Agrimonetary Compensation

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline her policy on the future payment of agrimonetary compensation and to make a statement. (AQW 2308/00)

Ms Rodgers: As I indicated in my reply to your previous question on this topic (AQO 1331/00), I favour the payment of all available agrimonetary compensation as it represents one of the few ways in which we can channel money directly into the hands of hard-pressed producers without breaching the very strict EU State Aid Rules. Since becoming Minister, I have argued, with a good measure of success, for the payment of agrimonetary

compensation on each occasion that it has become available and will continue to do so for as long as it is available and is needed by our industry. However, as there is no regional discretion on its payment, agreement has to be reached at a UK level on this issue.

CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Consultancy Services

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail his projected spend for consultancy services in the 2001/2002 financial year. (AQW 1950/00)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McGimpsey): My Department has not yet finalised its plans for the use of consultants next year. A number of areas are under consideration. The purpose of these projects will be to assist my Department undertake its core business and to take decisions on improving the delivery of the services provided by it and the bodies it funds. As a new Department it is essential that it has an up-to-date assessment of how these are being delivered and what is required to enhance and improve them.

The following are the areas that are being considered.

Accountancy support, including preparation of annual accounts for DCAL	£20k
Development of an E -business strategy for DCAL	£45k
Randalstown Hydro Scheme (impact on fish stock)	£25k
Review of the Fisheries Conservation Board	£15k
Review of overall Management of Lough Erne	£15k
Review of the Library Service	£75k
Review of the Planetarium	£25k
Electronic records management and the development of IS/IT strategy for PRONI	£35k
Accountancy support, including preparation of annual accounts and development of new Management Information System for PRONI	£15k
Soccer Strategy	£40k
National Stadium	£30k
Business case for a Safe Sports Grounds Scheme	£05k
Total	£345k

In addition, to the above consultancy services, the Electronic Libraries for Northern Ireland (ELFNI) Project for Procurement advice under PFI is at a projected cost of £145k.

Access to the Arts

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the steps he is taking to widen access to the Arts. (AQW 2068/00)

Mr McGimpsey: In November 2000 my Department initiated a pilot programme administered by ADAPT Northern Ireland (Access for Disabled People to Arts Premises Today) to carry out a comprehensive audit of an initial 40 venues and buildings in the culture, arts and leisure sectors. The pilot programme runs to March 2001 and comprises:

- access appraisals carried out in buildings chiefly funded directly or indirectly by DCAL;
- assessment of training needs of staff in these buildings and the delivery of training on universal accessibility issues; and
- the establishment of a small grants scheme to provide incentives and lever funding for access improvements.

Decisions on the scale and format of future programmes will be informed by an evaluation of the pilot programme to be carried early in the new financial year.

It is important that people regardless of age, gender, income or geographical location should be able to attend and participate in as wide a range as possible of arts activity. In its recent announcement of allocations for 2001-2002, the Arts Council has re-profiled its expenditure to allow a stronger focus on arts in the community and arts for young people. My Department has commissioned an independent review of community arts to be completed later this year and under its TSN action plan has commissioned work to identify indicators of social disadvantage in the context of the arts and identify barriers to social exclusion.

In the current financial year DCAL is also making up to £170,000 available to strengthen and expand the "New Belfast" Community Arts Initiative, involving high levels of participation from among the most socially disadvantaged communities in Belfast. DCAL funding will support a dramatic increase in the scale and scope of the project, giving it the ability to capture the public imagination and involve larger numbers of people in the production of major artworks. The additional resources will also provide for some of the themes to be explored in an associated outreach initiative in Portadown.

Rural Sports Facilities

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail what assessment he has made of the quality of sports facilities in rural areas. (AQW 2069/00)

Mr McGimpsey: At local level, each District Council is responsible for securing the provision for its area of adequate facilities for recreational, physical and cultural activities. District Councils and sporting bodies may make application to the Sports Council for Northern Ireland which has overall responsibility for the development of sport, for assistance with facility development. The Sports Council makes no difference in the quality of the

facilities provided in either rural or urban areas. Applications for the development of facilities in both rural and urban areas are assessed for quality in a range of criteria, including building dimensions, design concept and build quality and the quality of sporting activities for which provision has been made is constantly monitored.

National Lottery Funding to Areas of Greatest Social Need

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail those measures he is taking to ensure National Lottery funding is distributed to those areas with the greatest social need. (AQW 2072/00)

Mr McGimpsey: The National Lottery is a reserved matter and overall responsibility rests with the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport in London (DCMS). Policy Directions were issued to the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and the Sports Council for Northern Ireland by the former Department of Education for Northern Ireland which acted as an agent for DCMS. This responsibility now rests with DCAL. The Directions define how the distributing bodies will distribute lottery proceeds and include the need to consider the scope for reducing economic and social deprivation. Both bodies are also designated under equality legislation. The Distributing Bodies can also solicit applications to pursue strategic objectives and can therefore target areas where there is social need and a low uptake of grants or less interest in applying.

Government has also re-launched the Targeting Social Need initiative under the banner of New TSN. New TSN is about identifying people and areas in greatest need in our society and trying to ensure that all public sector programmes are more effective in helping them. New TSN will be taken into consideration in all Lottery programmes.

Promotion of Ulster-Scots Language, Culture and History: North Antrim

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the proposed timetable for the promotion of the Ulster Scots language, culture and history in North Antrim. (AQW 2076/00)

Mr McGimpsey: The North/South Ministerial Council on 5 December 2000 approved Tha Boord o Ulster-Scotch corporate plan for 2001/2 to 2003/4. Tha Boord circulated the plan on 2 January 2001 for a period of consultation which ended on 28 February 2001. In accordance with its remit under the North/South Bodies (Implementation Order) (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 that plan covers the promotion of Ullans and Ulster- Scots cultural issues throughout Northern Ireland.

My Department commissioned research to help the Ulster-Scots Language Society develop their strategic

planning capability. The report which has recently been received outlines a three-year strategy for promoting awareness, understanding and respect for the Ulster-Scots language as a central and integral part of the Ulster-Scots identity and to support its use and development.

I understand that Tha Boord o Ulster Scotch and the Ulster-Scots Language Society will work closely on implementing their respective plans.

Special Adviser

Mr Douglas asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (a) whom he has employed as special adviser(s) (b) the qualifying criteria used for the appointment and (c) the remit of the special adviser(s). (AQW 2083/00)

Mr McGimpsey: I can confirm that I have appointed Mr Bob Stoker as my Special Adviser. Mr Stoker was appointed on the basis of his ability to carry out the functions of the post.

The remit is set out in Part 1 of Schedule 2 to the standard contract of employment for such advisers, a copy of which has been placed in the library.

Parity of Funding Between the Irish and Ulster-Scots Languages

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail his timetable to achieve parity of funding between the Irish and Ulster-Scots languages. (AQW 2106/00)

Mr McGimpsey: The North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) on 5 December approved Tha Boord o Ulster Scotch corporate plan for 2001/2 to 2003/4. Tha Boord circulated the plan on 2 January 2001 for a period of consultation which ended on 28 February 2001. The Corporate Plan for Foras na Gaeilge will be submitted to NSMC shortly.

The Ulster-Scots and Irish languages are at different stages of development and this is reflected in the funding for Tha Boord o Ulster Scotch and Foras na Gaeilge. It is also reflected in the treatment of the two languages under the Council of Europe Charter on Regional or Minority Languages, Ulster-Scots is specified for Part II whereas Irish is specified for Part III of the Charter.

There will be equity of treatment for the Irish and Ulster-Scots languages. It is not, however, appropriate to use the treatment of one language as a benchmark for the treatment of the other because one is not comparing like with like in terms of actions required to sustain and celebrate individual languages.

Football

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail his plans to (a) develop football stadiums and (b) provide a coaching framework to enhance football skills. (AQW 2148/00)

Mr McGimpsey: The Safe Sports Grounds scheme, which I announced in August, is designed to implement urgent health and safety work at the major sports grounds in Northern Ireland, including Football, Gaelic Football and Rugby. The main objective of the scheme is to assist clubs who host fixtures at the larger sports grounds in Northern Ireland to upgrade safety arrangements at their respective venues.

Two Categories of clubs are eligible to apply for funding. Those in Category A include Premier League Football (10 clubs), Main County GAA grounds (6 clubs), League of Ireland (1 ground) and Rugby (1 ground). Those in Category B include 1st Division Football (10 clubs) and Secondary County GAA grounds (6 clubs).

Funding is provided under three Programmes:

- The Major Works programme is available only to Category A grounds and provides funding to assist clubs to carry out more substantial works to upgrade spectator accommodation at their venues. The assistance available under this element of the scheme is 85% of the total cost, subject to a maximum grant of £250k.
- The Urgent Works Programme provides funding to assist clubs to address structural related matters which may place spectators or others visiting their respective venues at risk. The assistance available for urgent works is 85% of the total cost, subject to a maximum grant of £25,000 for Category A clubs and £15,000 for Category B clubs.

The Safety Management Programme includes the training of safety officers and stewards, nominal remuneration for stewards, grant-aid for CCTV for larger fixtures, grant-aid for crowd control and 'super' stewards for larger, potentially confrontational fixtures. All clubs are required to participate fully in this element of the scheme before applying for funding under Programmes (1) and (2).

The Safe Sports Grounds scheme has allowed a start to be made on tackling urgent health and safety needs at our major sports grounds. I am aware, however, that the long-term needs have yet to be addressed but the outcome of the Soccer Strategy should be an important consideration in determining future developments.

Furthermore, the process of developing a strategy for soccer, which I instigated last August, is intended to identify ways of tackling the long-term problems facing local soccer, including coaching. Following the release last month of a report commissioned by me and carried out by PricewaterhouseCoopers, on the difficulties facing

local soccer, my Department organised a 3-day conference workshop in Newcastle, in which all interests in football were represented, to identify key issues to be confronted. The Conference has drawn together a list of follow-up projects under which it is intended to create both a strategy for the development of coaching and youth football and which may incorporate the concept of a centre for technical development.

Collaboration Between Museums, Galleries and Visitor Centres

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether he has consulted with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to strengthen collaboration between Museums, Galleries and Visitor Centres and to make a statement. (AQW 2163/00)

Mr McGimpsey: To date, I have not consulted with my Ministerial colleague about visitor centres, or, more generally, visitor amenities.

The design and implementation of a strategy for the development of visitor amenities is a key task in my Department's corporate strategy. My officials will, therefore, consider how to take this forward in light of the recommendations of the Local Museums and Heritage Review, which should be available shortly. I may seek a meeting with the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment when I have had an opportunity to study the Review for myself.

Preliminary discussions on visitor amenities have already taken place between our two Departments at official level.

EDUCATION

Consultancy Services

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Education to detail his projected spend on consultancy services in the 2001/02 financial year. (AQW 1957/00)

The Minister of Education (Mr M McGuinness): The Department of Education's projected expenditure on consultancy services in the 2001/02 financial year is £934,000.

Autism

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education to (a) confirm the number of children who have a statement of educational need on the basis of autism (b) detail what educational facilities are provided for such children and (c) specify what funding is set aside for them in the educational budget. (AQW 2045/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The October 2000 school census show a total of 179 children in nursery, primary and

secondary schools as having autism according to their statements of special educational needs. I will also provide information on the numbers in special schools when these become available.

Many autistic children with severe learning difficulties attend special schools where there are appropriate staff and facilities to meet their special educational needs. Depending on the severity of their needs, some of those at mainstream schools may have classroom assistance and be supported either by a peripatetic teacher or an outreach teacher attached to a special school.

Money to meet the needs of autistic children is drawn from the Special Education budget which is intended to meet the needs of children with all kinds of learning difficulties and disabilities.

Special Adviser

Mr Douglas asked the Minister of Education to detail (a) whom he has employed as special adviser(s) (b) the qualifying criteria used for the appointment and (c) the remit of the special adviser(s). (AQW 2079/00)

Mr M McGuinness: I have appointed Mr Aidan McAteer as a Special Adviser. Mr McAteer was appointed on the basis of his ability to carry out the functions of the post. His remit is set out in Part 1 of Schedule 2 to the standard contract of employment for such advisers, a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

Teaching of Languages

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister of Education what steps he has taken to ensure that the teaching of European languages in primary schools would not be promoted to the detriment of the Northern Ireland schools curriculum. (AQW 2105/00)

Mr M McGuinness: There is currently no requirement to teach a European language in primary schools, although many schools choose to do so, on an informal basis. The statutory school curriculum is not designed to take up 100% of teaching time, and this allows schools to teach other topics/subjects which they consider to be important for a pupil's development. It is a matter for individual schools to determine whether the teaching of languages is one of their priorities. It is generally recognised that starting to learn a language early can be beneficial and this is an issue that the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment will be considering as part of their current review of the curriculum.

Boarders

Mr Taylor asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of boarders at each of the schools that provide boarding facilities. (AQW 2111/00)

Mr M McGuinness: From the information in the school census, and provided directly by schools, the figures are:

GRANT-AIDED SCHOOLS

Grammar Schools	Preparatory Departments	Secondary Departments
Campbell College	6	56
Methodist College	5	141
Royal School Armagh	1	72
Royal School Dungannon	Not Applicable	38
St Colman's College	Not Applicable	50
Victoria College	3	54
Special Schools		
Fleming Fulton	7	
Jordanstown	12	
Lakewood	20	
Fallowfield	9	
Independent Schools		
Glencraig Curative School	37	
Rockport	21	

Number of Pupils in the Parliamentary Constituency of Strangford

Mr Taylor asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of pupils enrolled in each of the primary, secondary and grammar schools in the parliamentary constituency of Strangford in the 2000/01 academic year. (AQW 2112/00)

Mr M McGuinness: From the annual school census, the information requested is as follows:

Primary Schools	
Abbey Primary School	602
Alexander Dickson Primary School	203
Andrews Memorial Primary School	450
Ballycloughan Primary School	63
Ballykeigle Primary School	43
Ballywalter Primary School	177
Brooklands Primary School	697
Carrickmannon Primary School	96
Carrowdore Primary School	138
Carryduff Primary School	260
Castle Gardens Primary School	353
Comber Primary School	383
Darragh Cross Primary School	87
Derryboy Primary School	66
Dundonald Primary School	601
Greyabbey Primary School	74
Killinchy Primary School	236
Killyleagh Primary School	116

Primary Schools	
Kircubbin Integrated Primary School	98
Kirkistown Primary School	63
Londonderry Primary School	300
Loughries Primary School	79
Moneyrea Primary School	131
Newtownards Model Primary School	398
O'Neill Memorial Primary School	26
Portaferry Integrated Primary School	66
Portavogie Primary School	182
Regent House School Preparatory Department	158
St Finian's Primary School	130
St Joseph's Primary School	831
St Mary's Primary School, Comber	35
St Mary's Primary School, Ballygowan	29
St Mary's Primary School, Killyleagh	138
St Mary's Primary School, Kircubbin	172
St Mary's Primary School, Portaferry	251
St Patrick's Primary School	106
Victoria Primary School, Newtownards	569
Victoria Primary School, Ballyhalbert	108
West Winds Primary School	190
Secondary Schools	
Comber High School	386
Dundonald High School	622
Glastry College	568
Lagan College	967
Movilla High School	891
Saintfield High School	342
St Columba's High School	290
Strangford Integrated College	328
Grammar Schools	
Regent House School	1,448

The Post-Primary Review Body: Remit

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education whether he has any plans to extend the remit of the Post-Primary Review Body to include the timing, quality and impact of pre-school provision on the learning process and to make a statement. (AQW 2158/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The Terms of Reference of the Post-Primary Review Body were agreed with the Executive and discussed with the Assembly Education Committee and relate to the arrangements for post-primary education. It would not be appropriate or practical at this stage to extend the remit of the Review Body. However a major research project on children's progress and development from age 3 to 7 is already under way. "The Effective Pre-School Provision in Northern Ireland Project" was jointly commissioned by my Department and the then Department of Health and Social Services and is due to report in Spring 2003.

Rostulla Special School

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail the action he is taking to increase the provision of speech and language therapy at Rostulla Special School in Jordanstown and Roddensvale School in Larne. (AQO 1063/00)

Mr M McGuinness: My Department is not responsible for the provision of speech and language therapy. Although the need for such therapy is specified in some children's statements of special educational needs, this is as recommended and provided by the relevant Health and Social Services Trusts.

North/South Ministerial Council: Education Working Groups

Mr McHugh asked the Minister of Education to detail progress made by the Education Working Groups set up under the North-South Ministerial Council. (AQO 1053/00)

Mr M McGuinness: I very much regret that there has not been a meeting of the North/South Education Sectoral Council since 3 July 2000. I reported progress from that meeting in the Assembly on 11 September. The Working Groups of officials, established under the Council, are continuing their work, and formal reports will be considered by the Council when it next meets, following which I will report to the Assembly. I am considering what further action I should take to ensure that the North/South Council meets again as soon as possible, to enable me to exercise my full range of Ministerial responsibilities, and to ensure that this important work is not delayed further.

Voluntary and Controlled Grammar Schools: Funding

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 1530/00, to explain the disparity in funding between Voluntary and Controlled Grammar schools. (AQO 1028/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Differences in the per capita funding allocations arise from the additional responsibilities exercised by voluntary grammar schools compared to their counterparts in the controlled sector. In particular, voluntary grammar schools have responsibility to meet the full costs of maintenance and certain administration costs including those relating to audit and accountancy. In the case of controlled grammar schools these costs are met centrally by the Education and Library Boards. Voluntary Grammar Schools must also pay VAT whereas these costs can be reclaimed in respect of schools funded by the Boards.

Ulster-Scots Language

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education to detail the steps he is taking to include the teaching of the Ulster-Scots language in the school curriculum.

(AQO 1035/00)

Mr M McGuinness: As I indicated in my answer to the Member for East Belfast, Dr Adamson, in the written answers for Friday 16 February 2001, scope already exists within the statutory curriculum for schools to introduce aspects of Ulster-Scots language, literature and culture as part of the Cultural Heritage and Education for Mutual Understanding cross-curricular themes and resource material is available from the Ulster-Scots Heritage Council.

Protection of School Property

Mr Dodds asked the Minister of Education to detail arrangements he has put in place to consult the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) on issues affecting the safety of schoolchildren and the protection of school property.

(AQO 1057/00)

Mr M McGuinness: I personally have made no arrangements to consult with the RUC nor is there any necessity for me to do so. The protection of school property is the responsibility of individual school authorities and this is determined locally in light of the circumstances which prevail. My Department has issued guidance to all schools which provides practical advice and guidance on security and personal safety in schools.

Additional Fees

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister of Education to detail (a) what guidelines he provides to schools charging additional fees or requesting special contributions from parents for items and services not covered by tuition grants and (b) if he is satisfied that parents are fully informed as to the voluntary nature of any such fees and to make a statement.

(AQO 1080/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Guidance is provided in a 1991 Department of Education Circular (No 1991/21) on the circumstances in which charges can and cannot be levied on parents of registered pupils in grant-aided schools. This has been supplemented by a number of letters from my Department to Voluntary Grammar Schools reinforcing the requirement to make clear in school prospectuses and other school literature that there is no obligation on parents to make voluntary contributions.

I am content that the arrangements for schools seeking voluntary contributions are satisfactorily set out in the legislation and circular and that parents are aware of these.

Executive Programme Funds

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Education to detail the bids he made for Executive Programme Funds.

(AQO 1062/00)

Mr M McGuinness: In the present bidding round the Department of Education has submitted a total of 24 bids, amounting to £24 million, £64 million and £88 million over the next three years, across the five Executive Programme Funds.

Earlier this month I forwarded details of the bids to the Chairman of the Education Committee and invited the Committee to let me have its views on the broad order of priority attaching to bids within each Fund and the bids generally.

Capital Projects - Resources

Mr Berry asked the Minister of Education to detail the resources made available for capital projects.

(AQO 1050/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The capital budget for 2001/02 amounts to £96m, the largest part of which will be directed to school capital projects. On 1 March I announced a capital investment programme incorporating 17 capital projects to be taken forward under the conventional school building programme - at a cost of over £62 million - and up to 8 secondary school projects - with a capital value of some £70m - to be taken forward under Public Private Partnerships.

Information Communication Technology

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education to detail the steps he is taking to provide Information Communication Technology (ICT) training for teachers.

(AQO 1052/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Teachers were trained in generic ICT skills by the Education and Library Boards under their Connecting Teachers to ICT programme, in preparation for their training in the use of ICT in subject teaching. There are already 30% of teachers engaged in the follow-on initiative and all teachers will have been trained when the project is completed in March 2003.

Local Management of Schools: Funding Formula

Dr Birnie asked the Minister of Education to detail when the consultation process on a common Local Management of Schools (LMS) funding formula will begin.

(AQO 1064/00)

Mr M McGuinness: A consultation paper containing proposals for a common funding formula is being finalised

and will issue shortly. Consultation with schools and other education interests will take place until the end of June 2001, after which the necessary legislative and administrative arrangements will be put in place for implementation by April 2002.

North/South Task Force

Mr Maskey asked the Minister of Education to detail the progress made by the North/South Task Force for the provision of education for children suffering from autism.
(AQO 1083/00)

Mr M McGuinness: I very much regret that there has not been a meeting of the North/South Education Sectoral Council since 3 July 2000. I reported progress from that meeting in the Assembly on 11 September. The Working Group of officials, established under the Council, is continuing its work, and a formal report will be considered by the Council when it next meets, following which I will report to the Assembly. I am considering what further action I should take to ensure that the North/South Council meets again as soon as possible, to enable me to exercise my full range of Ministerial responsibilities, and to ensure that this important work is not delayed further.

Allocated Funding

Mr S Wilson asked the Minister of Education to detail the funding allocated to helping children for whom English is not their first language (excluding Irish medium education) in the year 1999/2000.
(AQO 1085/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Current arrangements provide for the Education and Library Boards to provide support centrally for all schools with pupils for whom English is not their first language, usually in the form of assistance by the peripatetic teaching service. It is estimated that some £490,000 was allocated by Boards during 1999/2000 for this purpose.

In addition the Belfast Education and Library Board allocates a further amount in respect of each pupil enrolled who has English as an additional language and has received less than two years full-time education here. In 1999/2000 financial year each such pupil attracted funding of £763.04.

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Northern Ireland Tourist Board: Marketing Strategy

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to give his view on the future marketing strategies of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Tourism Ireland Limited and to make a statement.
(AQW 2085/00)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Sir Reg Empey): The marketing strategy of Tourism Ireland Limited will, in line with the company's remit, focus on increasing tourism to the island of Ireland. The marketing strategy of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board will focus on promoting the Northern Ireland product. Both strategies should be complementary to help maximise tourism to Northern Ireland.

Tourism Ireland Limited

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to give his assessment of the decision by Tourism Ireland Limited to consider Great Britain as a foreign market.
(AQW 2086/00)

Sir Reg Empey: Tourism Ireland Limited was set up to increase tourism to the island of Ireland. In this context it will target all key tourism markets, including Great Britain which is a major source of tourism to both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Tourism Ireland Limited: Operational Arrangements

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether any Northern Ireland Tourist Board office will close as a result of the establishment of Tourism Ireland Limited.
(AQW 2087/00)

Sir Reg Empey: A sub-committee comprising the Chief Executive of both tourist boards together with their Human Resource Managers under the Chairmanship of the Vice Chair of Tourism Ireland Ltd has been established to consider the future structure of the new company and its operational arrangements, including premises. It is envisaged that Tourism Ireland Limited will assume responsibility for the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Bord Failte network of offices outside the island of Ireland in its attempts to deliver its remit for destination marketing.

Northern Ireland Tourist Board: Operational Arrangements

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to give his assessment of the future for Northern Ireland Tourist Board offices in Great Britain.
(AQW 2088/00)

Sir Reg Empey: Both Bord Failte and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board have offices in Great Britain. It is envisaged that Tourism Ireland Ltd will assume responsibility for these and both Boards' current network of overseas offices. The future structure of Tourism Ireland Ltd, its operational arrangements including premises, will reflect the needs of the new organisation in taking its remit forward.

Scottish Visitors

Dr Birnie asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (a) the number of Scottish tourists who visited Northern Ireland in each of the last three years for which figures are available (b) the projected figures for 2001, 2002 and 2003 and (c) the total promotional spending by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board on the Scottish market. (AQW 2096/00)

Sir Reg Empey:

- (a) The number of Scottish visitors who visited Northern Ireland in the last three years were:

1998	243,000
1999	276,000
Projected figures for 2000	254,000

- (b) Targets set for the Scottish market for the next three years are:

2001	263,000
2002	275,000
2003	288,000

- (c) The total promotional spend by NITB on the Scottish market in the last three years was £71,000.

Unemployment Statistics

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail unemployment statistics by District Council area within Mid Ulster for 1997, 1998 and 1999; and to give his assessment as to how these compare with the Northern Ireland average. (AQW 2101/00)

Sir Reg Empey: Unemployment statistics at District Council level are only available from the claimant count.

Mid Ulster Parliamentary Constituency is made up of Cookstown District Council, Magherafelt District Council and six of the twenty-two wards from Dungannon District Council.

Details of claimant count unemployment in each of these Councils and comparisons with Northern Ireland as a whole can be found in the attached table.

Annual average number and rate of claimant count unemployed in Cookstown District Council,

MAGHERAFELT DISTRICT COUNCIL, DUNGANNON DISTRICT COUNCIL AND NORTHERN IRELAND.

Year	Numbers Unemployed			
	Cookstown	Magherafelt	Dungannon	Northern Ireland
1997	1,169	1,289	1,995	63,456
1998	977	1,131	1,774	57,467
1999	818	963	1,273	50,805

Year	% of the Workforce			
	Cookstown	Magherafelt	Dungannon	Northern Ireland
1997	10.2	8.2	9.2	8.1
1998	8.6	7.2	8.2	7.3
1999	7.4	6.3	6.0	6.5

B H McCleery & Co Ltd, Ballygowan

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to confirm the amount of financial assistance the Industrial Development Board for Northern Ireland offered to Lamont Holdings, Ballygowan in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

(AQW 2109/00)

Sir Reg Empey: In the last five years no financial assistance by IDB was offered to B H McCleery & Co Ltd, the Lamont Holdings subsidiary located in Ballygowan.

Employment and Unemployment Figures

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to give his assessment of the change in (a) employment and (b) unemployment in the last twelve months for which figures are available. (AQW 2131/00)

Sir Reg Empey: The latest available employee jobs estimate relates to December 2000. At that date there were 639,570 employee jobs in Northern Ireland, the highest figure on record. Over the year December 1999 to December 2000 the number of employee jobs in Northern Ireland has increased by 5,580 (0.9%).

Unemployment data at Northern Ireland level is available from two sources - the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the Claimant Count. LFS estimates for the 3-month period November 2000 to January 2001 indicate that there were 44,000 persons unemployed, a fall of 3,000 on the same period one year earlier. Over the same period the unemployment rate fell from 6.3% of the workforce to 5.9%.

The latest claimant count data refers to February 2001. At that date seasonally adjusted unemployment stood at 40,400, a fall of 3,400 (7.8%) compared to February 2000. Over the same period the claimant count rate fell from 5.6% to 5.2%.

ENVIRONMENT

Special Adviser

Mr Douglas asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (a) whom he has employed as special adviser(s) (b) the qualifying criteria used for the appointment and (c) the remit of the special adviser(s). (AQW 2081/00)

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Foster):

- (a) I have employed Mr Stephen Barr as a special adviser.
- (b) He was appointed on the basis of his ability to carry out the functions of the post.
- (c) The remit is set out in Part 1 of Schedule 2 to the standard contract of employment for such advisers, a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

Welfare, Housing and Control of Dangerous Animals

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment to detail consultations he has had with the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development in relation to the welfare, housing and control of dangerous animals.

(AQW 2104/00)

Mr Foster: I intend to bring policy proposals for regulating dangerous wild animals kept by private individuals before the Executive Committee during March and to introduce a Bill into the Assembly by the end of October 2001.

Although the Bill will be concerned primarily with the public safety aspects of keeping such animals, it will also provide that welfare considerations will be a factor to be taken into account by district councils in deciding whether to grant a licence.

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development already has overall responsibility for animal welfare issues under the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 1972 and was consulted as part of a consultation exercise into the current proposals which was carried out in 1999.

My officials will continue to co-operate closely with their counterparts in DARD as the Bill progresses to ensure that welfare considerations are properly taken into account.

Planning Appeals Commission

Ms Hanna asked the Minister of the Environment how often a barrister represented the Department in a case heard by the Planning Appeals Commission, where the appellant was unsuccessful, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 2116/00)

Mr Foster: The answers to questions (a) and (b), including appeals to the Planning Appeals Commission on grounds of non-determination of an application, calculated on the basis of decisions made in each of the last five years are as follows:

Year	95/96	96/97	97/98	98/99	99/00
Decided	258	268	279	248	288
Successful	76	114	139	145	142

As regards (c), we only have complete information available for 1999/2000. In that year, 19 appellants were represented by a barrister, and 16 were successful.

Planning Appeals Commission

Ms Hanna asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (a) the number of appeals heard by the Planning Appeals Commission (b) the number of successful appeals and (c) in how many cases was the successful appellant represented by a barrister in each of the last five years.

(AQW 2117/00)

Mr Foster: The answers to questions (a) and (b), including appeals to the Planning Appeals Commission on grounds of non-determination of an application, calculated on the basis of decisions made in each of the last five years are as follows:

Year	95/96	96/97	97/98	98/99	99/00
Decided	258	268	279	248	288
Successful	76	114	139	145	142

As regards (c), we only have complete information available for 1999/2000. In that year, 19 appellants were represented by a barrister, and 16 were successful.

Recycled Waste

Mr Fee asked the Minister of the Environment to detail by District Council area the percentage of industrial waste which is recycled under the following categories; (a) paper (b) glass and (c) fabric in each of the last five years for which figures are available. (AQW 2127/00)

Mr Foster: Information on the levels of recycling of individual waste types by District Council area is not currently held by my Department.

Following a pilot survey in 1998/99 on municipal waste arisings, my Department has now commissioned a more detailed survey of municipal, commercial and industrial wastes, covering all Council areas.

The survey will provide (where available) information on the percentage of industrial waste presently recycled by District Council area. This information will support District Councils in the development of their Waste Management Plans. I expect the completed report to be submitted to my Department by early July.

Planning Application - Riverside, Comber

Mr Taylor asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (a) the date on which the planning application for the Residential Development at Riverside, Comber was received (b) when a planning decision is expected and to make a statement. (AQW 2160/00)

Mr Foster: The application was received by the Planning Service on 12 November 1998 and an Environmental Statement was requested on 3 December 1998. This was received on 21 June 1999 and supplementary Environmental Statement reports on land contamination, flooding and archaeology were received on 22 November 1999.

My Department has now completed its assessment of this application and expects to indicate its opinion on how this application should be progressed during March 2001.

Planning Application No Y/2000/0610/0

Mr Taylor asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (a) how many objections were received to planning application number Y/2000/0610/0 for development of lands at the junction of Ballyregan Road and Stoney Road, Dundonald (b) how many new homes are proposed at this site (c) what stage this planning application has reached and to make a statement. (AQW 2161/00)

Mr Foster: The answers to your questions are set out below:

- (a) 459 objections have been received;
- (b) the application is for outline permission for approximately 200 dwellings on a 14.5 hectare site; and, the application was given major status under Article 31 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 on 21 December 2000. Certain consultation responses are awaited, and it has yet to be decided whether to proceed by way of a Public Inquiry or the issue of a Notice of Opinion.

Regional Park Across Belfast Hills

Mr Adams asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the steps he is taking to establish a regional park across the Belfast Hills. (AQW 2194/00)

Mr Foster: I have no plans at present to establish a regional park across the Belfast Hills.

A study into options for management of the Belfast Hills reported in 1999. It identified a lack of support, particularly among landowners, for the establishment of a Regional Park in the Belfast Hills, recommending instead the setting up of a Belfast Hills Trust to provide a co-ordinated approach between statutory bodies and others towards caring for the Belfast Hills.

Conservation of Belfast Hills

Mr Adams asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the steps he is taking to conserve the Belfast Hills and, in particular, the Black Mountain. (AQW 2195/00)

Mr Foster: An options study commissioned by Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) of my Department

recommended in 1999 the setting up of a Belfast Hills Trust to provide a co-ordinated approach between statutory bodies and others towards caring for the hills.

In 2000 EHS established a Working Group which commissioned consultants to prepare a business plan for the proposed Trust.

The plan will be published later this year and will be used in a bid to secure funding for the establishment of a Belfast Hills Trust, which will provide a practical and integrated management mechanism for the Belfast side of the Hills.

Black Mountain is seen as an important component within the operational boundary of the Belfast Hills Trust area. It has particular importance because of its visual prominence on the skyline and its closeness to a large population. A strategic plan for its wise use and that of the Belfast Hills as a whole would be seen as a major priority for the Trust.

The Belfast Urban Area Plan (BUAP) 2001, the current statutory Development Plan for the greater Belfast area, identified the Belfast Hills as an Area of High Scenic Value, protected by the Green Belt. Work on the forthcoming Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan has commenced, and the future of these hills will be addressed in an 'Issues' Paper to be published in November 2001.

Quarrying: Black Mountain

Mr Adams asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the steps he is taking to end quarrying of the Black Mountain. (AQW 2196/00)

Mr Foster: My Department is taking no steps to end quarrying of the Black Mountain.

Quarrying is taking place under a valid planning permission, which was granted on 10 May 1988.

Over the past year, officials have routinely visited the site to assess the operator's compliance with conditions attached to the previously approved permissions and have found no significant breaches of planning control.

Agricultural Waste

Mrs Carson asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the steps he is taking to reduce agricultural waste, in particular waste silage wrap disposal. (AQW 2226/00)

Mr Foster: Agricultural waste is currently excluded from the Waste Management Strategy. However the Strategy commits my Department and DARD to develop an agricultural waste strategy for incorporation within the overall Waste Management Strategy at its first review in 2003. Plastic wrap is an effective means of reducing the risk of damage from silage effluent and for

the present, represents a good environmental option. In line with the Strategy's aim of promoting recycling, my Department is actively looking at market development for used silage wrap.

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Public Sector Comparator

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail his proposals for the construction of a public sector comparator for Northern Ireland and what assessment has he made, in value for money terms, following the introduction of private finance initiatives in Northern Ireland. (AQW 2052/00)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan): As part of the preparatory work leading up to the decision to put each individual project out to tender under the Private Finance Initiative (PFI), the awarding authority develops an outline business case to establish if the PFI procurement route is the right solution. An outline business case would include a fully costed reference project or "Public Sector Comparator (PSC)" to test whether an affordable option exists. The Public Sector Comparator will usually be refined to take account of the issues which emerge as a result of the PFI process and after such refinement provide a benchmark for measuring the value for money of tenderers' proposals.

PFI projects can proceed only where their value for money can be demonstrated using Government accounting and economic appraisal guidelines. Twenty projects with a capital value of some £107 million have been awarded in Northern Ireland since the introduction of the Private Finance Initiative. These include schools, further education colleges, renal units, IT systems, energy and sewerage schemes, all of which have been subjected to value for money assessments.

Special Adviser

Mr Douglas asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (a) whom he has employed as special adviser(s) (b) the qualifying criteria used for the appointment and (c) the remit of the special adviser(s). (AQW 2080/00)

Mr Durkan:

- (a) The Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Mark Durkan has appointed Mr Damian McAteer as a special adviser.
- (b) My Special Adviser, Mr Damian McAteer was appointed on the basis of his ability to carry out the functions of the post.

- (c) The remit is set out in Part 1 of Schedule 2 to the standard contract of employment for such advisers, a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

Gap Funding: North West

Mrs Nelis asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail how the additional resources identified in the spring supplementary budget will be allocated as gap funding in the North West. (AQW 2093/00)

Mr Durkan: In my Statement to the Assembly on 12 February 2001, I announced that the Executive have agreed that Departments should be authorised to make advance payments to projects where they judge that there is a very strong likelihood that the project will be eligible for funding and successful in an application under the new PEACE II Programme. The £2 million which was set aside under the Executive Programme Fund for social inclusion and community regeneration will act as a safety net against the risk that there might be some cases where Departments in good faith assist a project in the short-term, but which does not in the end succeed in an application for funding under the new PEACE II Programme. The allocation of gap funding will therefore not depend upon geographic area but upon the number and value of applications which come forward from existing projects and which are judged very likely to succeed in an application for funding under the new Programme.

Victims Groups

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail those victims groups to which the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust allocated European Union and/or Government funding in each of the last five years. (AQW 2108/00)

Mr Durkan: The victims groups allocated funding by the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust under the European Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation and the Northern Ireland Single Programme (Physical and Social Environment Programme) in each of the last five years are listed below.

NIVT are also responsible for administering the Core Funding for the Victims/Survivors Groups Grants Scheme which is overseen by the Victims Liaison Unit (VLU) of the NIO. Information in respect of the VLU is however a reserved matter and questions relating to this Unit should be addressed in writing to the Minister for Victims, the Rt. Hon. Adam Ingram JP MP.

1996-97

Northern Ireland Music Therapy Trust (NIMTT)
The Shankill Stress & Trauma Group
WAVE

C.A.L.M.S. (Community Action for Locally Managed Stress)
 CRUSE Bereavement Care (NI)
 F.E.A.R. (Fear Encouraged Abandoning Roots) Survivors of Trauma
 Stepping Stone Craigavon
 The Cost of the Troubles Study Ltd
 Victim Support Northern Ireland
 The Shankill Stress & Trauma Group
 Treetops - A Children's Bereavement Group
 CRUSE Bereavement Care (Foyle)
 Institute for Counselling and Personal Development
 Barnardos - Victims of Violence
 Bogside and Brandywell Initiative
 Disabled Police Officers Association
 Northern Ireland Intermediate Treatment Association

1997-98

Columba Victim Support Service (formerly Columba Victim Services)
 Lifeline
 St James' Community Forum
 Barnardos - Victims of Violence
 Disabled Police Officers Association
 The Shankill Stress & Trauma Group
 WAVE
 CRUSE Bereavement Care (NI)
 Coleraine/Ballymoney Branch of the Regimental Assoc.
 UDR
 Stepping Stone Craigavon
 Survivors of Trauma

1998-99

Victim Support Northern Ireland
 The Cost of the Troubles Study Ltd
 Ballymurphy Womens Support Group
 Institute for Counselling and Personal Development
 Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Centre
 Relatives for Justice
 Stepping Stone Craigavon
 Survivors of Trauma
 The Bloody Sunday Trust
 CRUSE Bereavement Care (Foyle)
 FAIR (Families Acting for Innocent Relatives)
 Victims and Survivors Trust
 WAVE
 Ballymoney District Partnership
 CUNAMH
 H.U.R.T. (Homes United by Ruthless Terror)
 VOICE (Victims of Injustice Campaigning for Equality)
 Wider Circle
 Drumcree Community Trust

1999-2000

Columba Victim Support Service (formerly Columba Victim Services)
 Counselling Network (N. Ireland)
 Omagh Support & Self Help Group
 Survivors of Trauma

The Cost of the Troubles Study Ltd
 WAVE
 CUNAMH
 C.A.L.M.S. (Community Action for Locally Managed Stress)
 CRUSE Bereavement Care (Belfast)
 Coleraine/Ballymoney Branch of the Regimental Assoc.
 UDR
 Corpus Christi Services
 Disabled Police Officers Association
 FAIR (Families Acting for Innocent Relatives)
 Families Against Crime by Terrorism - F.A.C.T.
 Fermanagh District Partnership
 Greater Ballymurphy Women's Community Support Group
 H.U.R.T. (Homes United by Ruthless Terror)
 Lifeways Psychotherapy & Counselling Centre
 Loughgall Truth and Justice Campaign
 Nexus Institute N.I.
 North East Antrim Cluster of District Partnership
 Northern Ireland Music Therapy Trust (NIMTT)
 Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust
 Relatives for Justice
 Stepping Stone Craigavon
 Strabane Befriending and Counselling Association
 South Down Action for Healing Wounds (S.D.A.H.W.)
 Survivors of Trauma
 The Bloody Sunday Trust
 The Mount Help Centre
 The Shankill Stress Group
 The Shankill Stress & Trauma Group
 VOICE (Victims of Injustice Campaigning for Equality)
 Victims and Survivors Trust
 West Tyrone Voice

2000-2001

NIL

Gap Funding

Mr Fee asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline what provision has been made to bridge the gap between Peace I and Peace II funding. (AQW 2124/00)

Mr Durkan: I would refer the member to the statement which I made to the Assembly on Monday 12 February which addresses the funding gap problem. In brief, I have proposed dealing with this issue by allowing Departments to consider requests from project sponsors for gap funding in the context of the new Structural Funds Regulations and the funding criteria specified in the PEACE II Operational Programme. Departments have been authorised to make advance payments to projects where they judge there is a very strong likelihood that the project will be eligible for funding and successful in an application under the new round. These will, in effect be advance payments against PEACE II allocations. I would, however, emphasise that

PEACE II is a separate and different Programme from PEACE I. Departments will therefore be called upon to make considered judgements about applications for project funding against the selection criteria for PEACE II agreed with the European Commission and it is possible that a range of existing projects may not qualify for assistance under the new Programme.

To ensure that the issue is dealt with fully, the £2 million which was set aside under the Executive Programme Fund for social inclusion and community regeneration will act as a safety net against the risk that there might be some cases where Departments in good faith assist a project in the short-term, but which does not in the end succeed in an application for funding under the new PEACE II Programme.

NICS Recruitment Service: Job Applications

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of job applications received by the Northern Ireland Civil Service Recruitment Service during 2000 and how many of these were in (a) the English Language and (b) the Irish Language. (AQW 2138/00)

Mr Durkan: 24,649 applications were received, all in English.

NICS Recruitment Service: Job Advertisements

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (a) how many job advertisements were placed in newspapers by the Northern Ireland Civil Service Recruitment Service during 2000 (b) how many of these were in the English language and how many in the Irish language (c) the total cost of advertisements placed in the English language and (d) the total cost of advertisements placed in the Irish language. (AQW 2139/00)

Mr Durkan: (a) 428

(b) All in English

(c) £355,579

(d) Nil

Job Advertising in Newspapers

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to list the newspapers and other publications in which job advertisements were placed by the Northern Ireland Civil Service Recruitment Service during 2000.

(AQW 2140/00)

Mr Durkan:

Newspapers

Belfast Telegraph

Other Journals

British Medical Journal

Newspapers

Irish News
News Letter
Tyrone Constitution
Fermanagh Herald
Ulster Herald
Irish Independent
Irish Times
Guardian
Sunday Times
Ulster Gazette
The Outlook
Newry Reporter
Down Democrat
Down Recorder
Banbridge Chronicle
Andersonstown News
Derry Journal
Strabane Weekly
Armagh Observer
Dungannon Observer
Mid Ulster Observer
Coleraine Chronicle
Northern Constitution
Ballymena Guardian
Portadown Times
Lurgan Mail
Craigavon Echo
The Leader
Ulster Star
Lisburn Echo
Tyrone Times
Mid Ulster Mail
Mid Ulster Echo
Ballymena/Antrim Times
Larne Carrick Times
Coleraine/Ballymoney Times
Londonderry Sentinel
North West Echo
Mourne Observer
Daily Telegraph
The Times
Carrickfergus Advertiser
Impartial Reporter

Other Journals

Financial Times
Royal Statistical Society News
The ENDS Report
Journal of Waste Management
The Economist
Racing Post
Horse & Hound
The Irish Field
Community Care
Farmers Weekly
Landlines Journal
Veterinary Record
Portico
Forestry & British Timber
Nursing Times
Fishing News
Doctor
Planning
People Management
Health Service Journal
British Dental Journal
New Scientist
Library Association Record
Chemical Engineer

New Social Security Office in Newry

Mr Fee asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what progress has been made in identifying a site for the new Social Security Office in Newry. (AQW 2169/00)

Mr Durkan: The replacement of the office will be by way of a design and build contract. We have recently sought expressions of interest from developers based on three options (a) site and building, (b) construction on the Bridge Street site and (c) refurbishment of an existing building in Newry.

The question of identifying a site therefore does not arise as this will be determined by the proposal which most successfully meets our requirements.

Rate Collection Agency: Enforcement Action

Mr Fee asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of occasions, in each of the last five years, when an enforcement action has been initiated on a client by the Rates Collection Agency while a Housing Benefit application from the client was still being processed. (AQW 2177/00)

Mr Durkan: The Rate Collection Agency has identified seven cases in the last five years where the case has been lodged with the Enforcement of Judgements Office when the client had already submitted a claim for Housing Benefit.

Peace II

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail when Peace II programme funding will be made available. (AQW 2187/00)

Mr Durkan: From 1 April 2001 the Executive has authorised Departments to make advance payments to existing projects from PEACE II allocations where they judge that there is a very strong likelihood that the project will be eligible for funding and successful in an application under the new round. Funding for new projects will be available this summer after the Programme Complement containing detailed selection criteria has been agreed by the Monitoring Committee and administrative arrangements for handling applications are put in place by the implementing bodies.

Percentage Increase in Departmental Budgets

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the percentage increase in the budget for each Department for (a) Departmental running costs and (b) public expenditure in the 2001/02 financial year. (AQW 2202/00)

Mr Durkan: The information in the format requested is available in the Executive Budget: Public Expenditure Plans: 2001/02 to 2003/04 (page numbers 10 and 49) which was agreed by the Assembly on Monday 18 December 2000.

Rate Arrears

Mr Close asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the action he is taking to reduce the level of rates arrears. (AQO 1045/00)

Mr Durkan: The Rate Collection Agency pursues rate arrears through use of the Magistrates' Courts and Enforcement of Judgments Office. Depending on the circumstances of the individual debtor the Agency may accept arrangements or continue with recovery action to collect the rates due. The Agency is currently reviewing its enforcement strategy.

Children's Birth Certificates

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what plans he has to facilitate parental requests for children's birth certificates to be made available in bi-lingual form. (AQO 1060/00)

Mr Durkan: Legislation governing registration of births in Northern Ireland provides for a forename(s) and surname to be recorded in English or Irish. There is no provision in legislation for a birth to be registered in bilingual form.

Programme for Government

Mr S Wilson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what assessments he plans to make of the relationship between public expenditure and the commitments contained in the Programme for Government. (AQO 1087/00)

Mr Durkan: The Budget was developed in the context of supporting the priorities and principles of the draft Programme for Government which was introduced to the Assembly on 24 October 2000 by the First and Deputy First Ministers.

The revised Programme for Government, presented to the Assembly last month, included Public Service Agreements for the Northern Ireland Departments. These set out each Department's overall aim, objectives, key targets, and supporting actions, thus linking funding to the commitments given in the Programme for Government.

The Public Service Agreements are designed to increase accountability and provide a yardstick for assessing the Executive's performance in meeting its commitments.

Barnett Formula

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the steps he is taking in preparation for possible negotiations on increasing resources allocated under the Barnett formula. (AQO 1077/00)

Mr Durkan: It will only be possible to mount a successful challenge to the Barnett Formula in its existing format if we have a solid foundation in terms of clear information on our public expenditure needs and the effectiveness of our existing policies. My officials are

currently working to this end in co-operation with officials from the Economic Policy Unit and other Departments.

Rates Collection Agency

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (a) the total capital raised by the rates system (b) the cost of running the Rates Collection Agency and (c) the cost of running the Valuation and Lands Agency. (AQO 1049/00)

Mr Durkan:

- (a) The amount of rates collected by the Rate Collection Agency during 1999/2000 was just over £490 million. This excludes arrears totalling £16.1 million and discharges totalling just over £62 million. Discharges include discounts, rebates, vacancies and various relief cases.
- (b) The total costs for the Rate Collection Agency's operations during 1999/2000 were £8.3 million. The collection and recovery of rates accounted for £6.9 million and the administration of housing benefit £1.4 million.
- (c) The total costs for the Valuation & Lands Agency's operations during 1999/2000 were £10.509 million. The relevant expenditure in respect of the rating function was £6.468 million. The other business area - Client Services, (which includes Housing Benefit), had an expenditure of £4.041 million.

Barnett Formula

Mr McGrady asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail what progress has been made in negotiations with the Chancellor of the Exchequer concerning the allocation of additional financial resources to Northern Ireland and to make a statement. (AQO 1037/00)

Mr Durkan: In response to representations by myself and the First and Deputy First Ministers, HM Treasury has agreed to a number of adjustments in the operation of the Barnett formula. These changes are worth some £40m extra a year to Northern Ireland over the 2000 Spending Review period.

I will continue to seek changes in relation to the Barnett Formula and press for funding allocations which fully reflect the higher levels of need in Northern Ireland.

I also have reservations about the appropriateness of the Barnett Formula in its current format under the new Resource Accounting and Budgeting regime. My officials have already registered my concerns about this aspect of Barnett funding.

Rateable Valuation of Meeting Halls

Mr Poots asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to consider reducing the rateable valuation of meeting halls of the Loyal Orders and Ancient Order of Hibernians given their role in providing a community service. (AQO 1038/00)

Mr Durkan: The qualifying criteria for exemption from rates are set out in the principal rating legislation, the Rates (NI) Order 1977. Article 41 of the 1977 Order provides for exemption from rates for properties used for public, charitable or certain other purposes including "public religious worship". As the named institutions are not, without restriction, open to the general public an exemption from rates cannot be granted. However, occupiers of halls can receive a measure of relief where the premises are used by the wider community.

Framework Agreement

Dr Birnie asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline how the presentation of official statistics at Northern Ireland level is co-ordinated with that at national level within the context of the Framework Agreement. (AQO 1072/00)

Mr Durkan: Official statistics produced by Northern Ireland Departments come within the Framework for National Statistics, published in June of last year, which was agreed by the UK Government and the devolved administrations. The arrangements governing the publication of National Statistics will be contained in a Code of Practice for National Statistics and an associated Release Practices Protocol which are currently in preparation.

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Acute Hospitals

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) the remit of the Acute Hospitals Review Group (b) the total cost expended to date (c) the issues examined to date and (d) whether the Group is considering the number and location of Acute Hospitals. (AQW 2094/00)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms de Brún):

- (a) The remit of the Acute Hospitals Review Group is "to review the current provision of acute hospital services and, taking account of the issues of local accessibility, safety, clinical standards and quality of services, to make recommendations to the Minister

on the future profile of hospital services. In taking forward its work, the Review Group will be expected to take into account the views of individuals, organisations and groups with an interest or involvement in the provision of hospital services and assess the scope for co-operation in the provision of local services with hospitals in other parts of the island."

- (b) The total cost expended to date is £156,000.
- (c) The Review Group is an independent body and detailed information about the issues it has examined to date is not available.
- (d) I expect that the Group is considering all issues relating to the future of acute hospital services.
- (a) Is iad na téarmaí tagartha den Ghrúpa Athbhreithnithe Géarospidéal ná "athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar sholáthar seirbhísí géarospidéil faoi láthair agus ag cur san áireamh ceisteanna rochtana áitiúla, sábháilteachta, caighdeán clínicíúil agus cáilíocht seirbhísí, agus moltaí a dhéanamh leis an Aire ar phroifíl seirbhísí ospidéil amach anseo. Leis an obair s'aige a thabhairt chun tosaigh, beifear ag súil go cuirfidh An Grúpa Athbhreithnithe san áireamh: barúlacha daoine aonarach, eagraíochtaí agus grúpaí a bhfuil spéis nó baint acu le seirbhísí ospidéil a sholáthar agus go ndéanfaidh sé measúnú ar an fhéidearthacht le comhoibriú i soláthar seirbhísí áitiúla le hospidéal in áiteanna eile ar an oileán."
- (b) An méid iomlán airgid a caitheadh go nuige seo £156,000.
- (c) Is comhlacht neamhspleách an Grúpa Athbhreithnithe agus níl an mioneoilas ar fáil faoi na ceisteanna a scrúdaigh sé go nuige seo.
- (d) Tá mé ag súil go mbeidh an Grúpa ag breathnú ar na ceisteanna uile a bhaineann le todhchaí seirbhísí géarospidéil.

Autism

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) the number of children who are designated autistic (b) the number of health professionals who specialise in the treatment of autism (c) her policy on the care of autistic children and (d) what funding is targeted to improve both staff training and level of care towards this group. (AQW 2095/00)

Ms de Brún: Information on numbers of children diagnosed with autism and health professionals specialising in its treatment is not collected centrally. Care of autistic children is provided under the Learning Disability Programme of Care and policy is set out in the Review of Policy for People with a Learning Disability, published by the then Department of Health and Social Services in 1995. My Department does not identify separate allocations

for staff training or the care of children with autism. Resources are allocated to Health and Social Services Boards which, in partnership with Trusts, allocate those resources to best meet the needs of local populations, including the needs of children with autism.

Ní chruinnítear go lárnach eolas ar líonta na bpáistí fáthmheasta le huathachas agus na ngairmithe sláinte ag déanamh speisialtóireachta ar a chóireáil. Soláthraítear cúram do pháistí le huathachas faoin Chlár Cúraim Míchumais Fhoghlamtha agus leagtar an polasaí amach san Athbhreithniú ar Pholasaí do Dhaoine le Míchumas Foghlamtha, foilsithe ag an iar-Roinn Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta i 1995. Ní aithníonn an Roinn s'agam dáiltí ar leith d'oilíúint foirne nó do chúram páistí le huathachas. Dáiltear acmhainní ar Bhoird Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta a dháileann, i gcomhar le hIontaobhais, na hacmhainní sin sa dóigh is fearr le riachtanais dhaonraí áitiúla a chomhlíonadh, riachtanais pháistí le huathachas san áireamh.

Medical Workforce

Mr Berry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the steps she is taking to increase the medical workforce across Northern Ireland. (AQW 2114/00)

Ms de Brún: My Department constantly monitors workforce levels and demands and produces a workforce plan to meet these demands. Recently approval was given to an increase in the undergraduate student intake to the School of Medicine at The Queen's University of Belfast.

Current numbers in higher specialist training are sufficient to increase consultant numbers by more than 10% over the next 4 years. In addition, the number of specialist trainees was increased by 7% in the past year in anticipation of further growth in consultant requirements. This reflects the commitment in the Programme for Government to developing a modern acute hospital service here. This commitment will also be reflected in the recruitment of additional medical and other front-line staff to reduce waiting lists and meet winter pressures, and the recruitment of additional medical staff to consolidate progress on the implementation of the cancer strategy.

Déanann an Roinn s'agam monatóireacht i gcónaí ar leibhéil agus ar éilimh na meithle oibre agus cuireann sí plan meithle oibre amach leis na héilimh seo a chomhlíonadh. Ar na mallaibh, tugadh cead do mhéadú i nglacadh isteach fochéimithe sa Scoil Leighis ag Ollscoil na Banríona, Béal Feirste.

Is leor na líonta atá i sainoilíúint níos airde faoi láthair le líonta na lianna a mhéadú níos mó ná 10% thar na 4 bliana seo chugainn. Ina theannta sin, tháinig méadú 7% i líon na sainphrintíseach sa bhliain seo a chuaigh thart in oirchill an tuillidh fháis i riachtanais lianna. Léiríonn sé seo an gealltanas sa Chlár Rialtais le

seirbhís ghéarotharlainne nua-aimseartha a fhorbairt anseo. Léireofar an gealltanas seo in earcaíocht foirne leighis agus tosaigh eile breise le liostaí feithimh a laghdú, agus le dul i gceann brúnna Geimhridh, agus in earcaíocht foirne leighis breise leis an dul chun cinn i gcur i bhfeidhm na straitéise aille a neartú.

Number of Consultants

Mr Berry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of consultants per 100,000 of population in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 2115/00)

Ms de Brún: In the Health and Personal Social Services, at 30 September 2000 there were 49.3 whole time equivalent consultants per 100,000 population.

Ag an 30ú Meán Fómhair 2000, bhí 49.3 lia coibhéise ama iomláin ann de réir daonra 100,000 sna Seirbhísí Sláinte agus Sóisialta Pearsanta.

Speech Therapy: East Antrim

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans she has to reduce the current waiting time of eleven months for those children assessed in need of speech therapy in the parliamentary constituency of East Antrim.

(AQW 2119/00)

Ms de Brún: I refer the Member to my answer to AQW 2055/00.

Luaim don Bhall an freagra a thug mé ar AQW 2055/00.

Specialty Waiting Lists

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number currently on specialty waiting lists, for each Board Area, and comparative figures for each of the previous three years.

(AQW 2123/00)

Ms de Brún: Information on persons waiting for inpatient treatment and first outpatient appointment is available for the quarters ending September 2000, September 1999, September 1998 and September 1997 and is detailed in Tables 1 to 8 below.

TABLE 1. PERSONS WAITING FOR INPATIENT TREATMENT BY BOARD AND SPECIALTY, SEPTEMBER 2000

Specialty	EHSSB	NHSSB	SHSSB	WHSSB	Total
General Surgery	5,892	2,978	3,198	1,297	13,365
Urology	2,159	104	1,484	452	4,199
T & O	4,467	0	0	701	5,168
ENT	2,869	1,155	1,262	1,004	6,290
Ophthalmology	4,596	0	0	950	5,546

Specialty	EHSSB	NHSSB	SHSSB	WHSSB	Total
Oral Surgery	292	0	122	273	687
Restorative Dentistry	2	0	0	0	2
Paediatric Dentistry	178	0	0	0	178
Orthodontics	0	0	0	0	0
Neurosurgery	508	0	0	0	508
Plastic Surgery	2,485	0	0	0	2,485
Cardiac Surgery	591	0	0	0	591
Paediatric Surgery	638	0	0	0	638
Thoracic Surgery	189	0	0	0	189
A&E	0	0	24	0	24
Anaesthetics	440	0	0	0	440
Pain Management	5	79	0	0	84
General Medicine	736	588	98	356	1,778
Gastroenterology	356	26	66	0	448
Endocrinology	35	0	0	0	35
Haematology (Clinical)	0	0	16	0	16
Clinical Psychology	0	0	0	0	0
Clinical Pharmacology	0	0	0	0	0
Audiological Medicine	0	0	0	0	0
Clinical Genetics	0	0	0	0	0
Clinical Immunology	0	0	0	0	0
Rehabilitation	0	0	0	0	0
Palliative Medicine	0	0	1	0	1
Cardiology	809	19	5	4	837
Dermatology	275	7	77	0	359
Thoracic Medicine	1	0	6	0	7
Infectious Diseases	0	0	0	0	0
Genito-Urinary Medicine	0	0	0	0	0
Nephrology	102	0	0	0	102
Medical Oncology	0	0	0	0	0
Nuclear Medicine	0	0	0	0	0
Neurology	133	0	0	0	133
Clinical Neuro-physiology	0	0	0	0	0
Rheumatology	636	0	78	0	714
Paediatrics	8	0	1	0	9
Paediatric Neurology	0	0	0	0	0
Geriatric Medicine	2	0	1	0	3
Dental Medicine	0	0	0	0	0
Medical Ophthalmology	0	0	0	0	0
Obstetrics	0	0	0	0	0
Gynaecology	2,434	1,380	894	539	5,247
Obstetrics (Ante natal)	0	0	0	0	0
Obstetrics (Post natal)	0	0	0	0	0

Specialty	EHSSB	NHSSB	SHSSB	WHSSB	Total
Well babies –Obstetrics	0	0	0	0	0
Well babies –Paediatrics	0	0	0	0	0
GP Maternity	0	0	0	0	0
GP other	0	0	0	0	0
Learning Disability	0	0	0	0	0
Mental Illness	0	0	0	0	0
Child & Adolescent Psychiatry	0	0	0	0	0
Forensic Psychiatry	0	0	0	0	0
Psychotherapy	0	0	0	0	0
Old Age Psychiatry	0	0	0	0	0
Clinical Oncology	99	0	1	0	100
Radiology	0	0	0	0	0
General Pathology	0	0	0	0	0
Blood Transfusion	0	0	0	0	0
Chemical Pathology	0	0	0	0	0
Haematology	1	0	0	0	1
Histopathology	0	0	0	0	0
Immunopathology	0	0	0	0	0
Medical microbiology	0	0	0	0	0
Neuropathology	0	0	0	0	0
Community Medicine	0	0	0	0	0
Occupational Medicine	0	0	0	0	0
Joint Consultant Clinic	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0	0
Total	30,938	6,336	7,334	5,576	50,184

TABLE 2. PERSONS WAITING FOR INPATIENT TREATMENT BY BOARD AND SPECIALTY, SEPTEMBER 1999

Specialty	EHSSB	NHSSB	SHSSB	WHSSB	Total
General Surgery	5,585	2,550	2,654	1,119	11,908
Urology	2,254	188	1,137	352	3,931
T & O	4,686	0	0	534	5,220
ENT	2,340	1,329	1,048	1,263	5,980
Ophthalmology	4,253	0	0	916	5,169
Oral Surgery	303	0	155	223	681
Restorative Dentistry	1	0	0	0	1
Paediatric Dentistry	97	0	0	0	97
Orthodontics	0	0	0	0	0
Neurosurgery	377	0	0	0	377
Plastic Surgery	2,326	0	0	0	2,326
Cardiac Surgery	510	0	0	0	510
Paediatric Surgery	566	0	0	0	566

Specialty	EHSSB	NHSSB	SHSSB	WHSSB	Total
Thoracic Surgery	223	0	0	0	223
A&E	0	0	12	0	12
Anaesthetics	685	121	0	0	806
Pain Management	0	0	0	0	0
General Medicine	621	474	83	214	1,392
Gastroenterology	388	0	100	0	488
Endocrinology	39	0	0	0	39
Haematology (Clinical)	3	0	0	0	3
Clinical Psychology	0	0	0	0	0
Clinical Pharmacology	0	0	0	0	0
Audiological Medicine	0	0	0	0	0
Clinical Genetics	0	0	0	0	0
Clinical Immunology	0	0	0	0	0
Rehabilitation	0	0	0	0	0
Palliative Medicine	0	0	0	0	0
Cardiology	787	29	8	3	827
Dermatology	285	3	74	14	376
Thoracic Medicine	1	0	0	0	1
Infectious Diseases	0	0	0	0	0
Genito-Urinary Medicine	0	0	0	0	0
Nephrology	99	0	0	0	99
Medical Oncology	0	0	0	0	0
Nuclear Medicine	0	0	0	0	0
Neurology	150	0	0	0	150
Clinical Neuro-physiology	0	0	0	0	0
Rheumatology	227	5	89	0	321
Paediatrics	8	0	11	8	27
Paediatric Neurology	0	0	0	0	0
Geriatric Medicine	0	3	2	35	40
Dental Medicine	4	0	0	0	4
Med. Ophthalmology	0	0	0	0	0
Obstetrics	0	0	0	0	0
Gynaecology	2,118	1,330	905	467	4,820
Obstetrics (Ante natal)	0	0	0	0	0
Obstetrics (Post natal)	0	0	0	0	0
Well babies – Obstetrics	0	0	0	0	0
Well babies – Paediatrics	0	0	0	0	0
GP Maternity	0	0	0	0	0
GP other	0	0	0	0	0

Specialty	EHSSB	NHSSB	SHSSB	WHSSB	Total
Learning Disability	0	0	0	0	0
Mental Illness	0	0	0	0	0
Child & Adolescent Psychiatry	0	0	0	0	0
Forensic Psychiatry	0	0	0	0	0
Psychotherapy	0	0	0	0	0
Old Age Psychiatry	0	0	0	0	0
Clinical Oncology	38	0	0	0	38
Radiology	0	0	0	0	0
General Pathology	0	0	0	0	0
Blood Transfusion	0	0	0	0	0
Chemical Pathology	0	0	0	0	0
Haematology	0	0	0	0	0
Histopathology	0	0	0	0	0
Immunopathology	0	0	0	0	0
Medical microbiology	0	0	0	0	0
Neuropathology	0	0	0	0	0
Community Medicine	0	0	0	0	0
Occupational Medicine	0	0	0	0	0
Joint Consultant Clinic	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0	0
Total	28,974	6,032	6,278	5,148	46,432

TABLE 3. PERSONS WAITING FOR INPATIENT TREATMENT BY BOARD AND SPECIALTY, SEPTEMBER 1998

Specialty	EHSSB	NHSSB	SHSSB	WHSSB	Total
General Surgery	4,858	2,631	2,790	1,691	11,970
Urology	2,220	55	974	272	3,521
T & O	4,623	0	0	655	5,278
ENT	2,437	1,193	1,105	1,418	6,153
Ophthalmology	3,944	0	0	801	4,745
Oral Surgery	359	0	86	217	662
Restorative Dentistry	0	0	0	0	0
Paediatric Dentistry	102	0	0	0	102
Orthodontics	0	0	0	0	0
Neurosurgery	422	0	0	0	422
Plastic Surgery	2,378	0	0	0	2,378
Cardiac Surgery	437	0	0	0	437
Paediatric Surgery	1,042	0	0	0	1,042
Thoracic Surgery	186	0	0	0	186
A&E	0	0	5	0	5
Anaesthetics	739	97	0	1	837
Pain Management	0	0	0	0	0

Specialty	EHSSB	NHSSB	SHSSB	WHSSB	Total
General Medicine	437	433	29	159	1,058
Gastroenterology	559	0	60	0	619
Endocrinology	21	0	0	0	21
Haematology (Clinical)	0	0	0	0	0
Clinical Psychology	0	0	0	0	0
Clinical Pharmacology	0	0	0	0	0
Audiological Medicine	0	0	0	0	0
Clinical Genetics	0	0	0	0	0
Clinical Immunology	0	0	0	0	0
Rehabilitation	0	0	0	0	0
Palliative Medicine	0	0	0	0	0
Cardiology	981	11	5	0	997
Dermatology	232	1	86	14	333
Thoracic Medicine	1	0	0	0	1
Infectious Diseases	0	0	0	0	0
Genito-Urinary Med.	0	0	0	0	0
Nephrology	120	0	0	0	120
Medical Oncology	0	0	0	0	0
Nuclear Medicine	0	0	0	0	0
Neurology	229	0	0	0	229
Clinical Neuro-physiology	0	0	0	0	0
Rheumatology	132	109	70	0	311
Paediatrics	7	0	4	0	11
Paediatric Neurology	0	0	0	0	0
Geriatric Medicine	4	6	1	4	15
Dental Medicine	0	0	0	0	0
Medical Ophthalmology	0	0	0	0	0
Obstetrics	0	0	0	0	0
Gynaecology	2,160	1,171	1,027	554	4,912
Obstetrics (Ante natal)	0	0	0	0	0
Obstetrics (Post natal)	0	0	0	0	0
Well babies – Obstetrics	0	0	0	0	0
Well babies – Paediatrics	0	0	0	0	0
GP Maternity	0	0	0	0	0
GP other	0	0	0	0	0
Learning Disability	0	0	0	0	0
Mental Illness	0	0	0	0	0
Child & Adolescent Psychiatry	0	0	0	0	0

Specialty	EHSSB	NHSSB	SHSSB	WHSSB	Total
Forensic Psychiatry	0	0	0	0	0
Psychotherapy	0	0	0	0	0
Old Age Psychiatry	0	0	0	0	0
Clinical Oncology	59	0	0	0	59
Radiology	0	0	0	0	0
General Pathology	0	0	0	0	0
Blood Transfusion	0	0	0	0	0
Chemical Pathology	0	0	0	0	0
Haematology	4	0	0	0	4
Histopathology	0	0	0	0	0
Immunopathology	0	0	0	0	0
Medical microbiology	0	0	0	0	0
Neuropathology	0	0	0	0	0
Community Medicine	0	0	0	0	0
Occupational Medicine	0	0	0	0	0
Joint Consultant Clinic	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0	0
Total	28,693	5,707	6,242	5,786	46,428

TABLE 4. PERSONS WAITING FOR INPATIENT TREATMENT BY BOARD AND SPECIALTY, SEPTEMBER 1997

Specialty	EHSSB	NHSSB	SHSSB	WHSSB	Total
General Surgery	5,093	3,338	2,864	2,150	13,445
Urology	2,442	121	922	177	3,662
T & O	4,495	0	0	742	5,237
ENT	2,504	1,380	1,067	1,076	6,027
Ophthalmology	3,521	0	0	823	4,344
Oral Surgery	236	0	105	191	532
Restorative Dentistry	0	0	0	0	0
Paediatric Dentistry	101	0	0	0	101
Orthodontics	0	0	0	0	0
Neurosurgery	405	0	0	0	405
Plastic Surgery	2,939	0	0	0	2,939
Cardiac Surgery	533	0	0	0	533
Paediatric Surgery	1,558	0	0	0	1,558
Thoracic Surgery	207	0	0	0	207
A&E	0	0	11	0	11
Anaesthetics	566	61	0	0	627
Pain Management	0	0	0	0	0
General Medicine	255	385	23	71	734
Gastroenterology	409	0	67	0	476
Endocrinology	20	0	0	0	20
Haematology (Clinical)	3	0	0	0	3

Specialty	EHSSB	NHSSB	SHSSB	WHSSB	Total
Clinical Psychology	0	0	0	0	0
Clinical Pharmacology	0	0	0	0	0
Audiological Medicine	0	0	0	0	0
Clinical Genetics	0	0	0	0	0
Clinical Immunology	0	0	0	0	0
Rehabilitation	0	0	0	0	0
Palliative Medicine	0	0	0	0	0
Cardiology	872	0	77	0	949
Dermatology	203	1	90	0	294
Thoracic Medicine	3	0	0	0	3
Infectious Diseases	0	0	0	0	0
Genito-Urinary Med.	0	0	0	0	0
Nephrology	62	0	0	0	62
Medical Oncology	0	0	0	0	0
Nuclear Medicine	0	0	0	0	0
Neurology	210	0	0	0	210
Clinical Neuro-physiology	0	0	0	0	0
Rheumatology	188	97	73	0	358
Paediatrics	7	0	4	7	18
Paediatric Neurology	2	0	0	0	2
Geriatric Medicine	10	5	0	0	15
Dental Medicine Spec	0	0	0	0	0
Medical Ophthalmology	0	0	0	0	0
Obstetrics	0	0	0	0	0
Gynaecology	2,024	1,170	951	505	4,650
Obstetrics (Ante natal)	0	0	0	0	0
Obstetrics (Post natal)	0	0	0	0	0
Well babies – Obstetrics	0	0	0	0	0
Well babies – Paediatrics	0	0	0	0	0
GP Maternity	0	0	0	0	0
GP other	0	0	0	0	0
Learning Disability	0	0	0	0	0
Mental Illness	0	0	0	0	0
Child & Adolescent Psychiatry	0	0	0	0	0
Forensic Psychiatry	0	0	0	0	0
Psychotherapy	0	0	0	0	0

Specialty	EHSSB	NHSSB	SHSSB	WHSSB	Total
Old Age Psychiatry	0	0	0	0	0
Clinical Oncology	39	0	0	0	39
Radiology	0	0	0	0	0
General Pathology	0	0	0	0	0
Blood Transfusion	0	0	0	0	0
Chemical Pathology	0	0	0	0	0
Haematology	0	0	0	0	0
Histopathology	0	0	0	0	0
Immunopathology	0	0	0	0	0
Medical microbiology	0	0	0	0	0
Neuropathology	0	0	0	0	0
Community Medicine	0	0	0	0	0
Occupational Medicine	0	0	0	0	0
Joint Consultant Clinic	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0	0
Total	28,907	6,558	6,254	5,742	47,461

TABLE 5. PERSONS WAITING FOR FIRST OUTPATIENT APPOINTMENT BY BOARD AND SPECIALTY, QUARTER ENDING SEPTEMBER 2000

Specialty	EHSSB	NHSSB	SHSSB	WHSSB	Total
General Surgery	4,465	3,212	2,210	3,212	13,099
Urology	1,152	307	1,030	549	3,038
Trauma and Orthopaedics	9,984	0	0	2,396	12,380
ENT	5,087	2,661	2,081	2,977	12,806
Ophthalmology	5,360	0	2,404	3,647	11,411
Paediatric Dentistry	86	0	8	0	94
Orthodontics	0	34	316	560	910
Neurosurgery	334	0	0	0	334
Plastic Surgery	4,153	0	1	0	4,154
Cardiac Surgery	19	0	0	0	19
Paediatric Surgery	557	0	0	0	557
Thoracic Surgery	29	0	3	0	32
Accident & Emergency	16	105	0	0	121
Anaesthetics	131	0	0	0	131
Pain Management	297	346	257	303	1,203
General Medicine	2,068	1,094	732	571	4,465
Gastroenterology	312	145	2	0	459
Endocrinology	334	0	15	0	349
Haematology (Clinical)	106	12	19	14	151
Audiological Medicine	79	0	0	0	79
Rehabilitation	62	0	0	0	62
Cardiology	1,395	376	837	574	3,182

Specialty	EHSSB	NHSSB	SHSSB	WHSSB	Total
Dermatology	4,870	1,641	1,923	1,174	9,608
Thoracic Medicine	204	0	56	0	260
Nephrology	220	73	26	0	319
Medical Oncology	23	0	0	0	23
Neurology	1,410	38	269	436	2,153
Clinical Neuro-Physiolo	4	0	0	0	4
Rheumatology	1,864	123	423	700	3,110
Paediatrics	683	310	713	256	1,962
Paediatric Neurology	45	3	1	2	51
Geriatric Medicine	549	13	22	94	678
Obs & Gyn (Gynaecology)	3,137	1,328	1,423	1,622	7,510
Obs & Gyn (Obstetrics Ante natal)	442	265	103	0	810
Obs & Gyn (Obstetrics Post natal)	0	0	1	0	1
Well Babies (Paediatric)	1	0	0	0	1
Mental Illness	1,032	182	380	0	1,594
Child & Adolescent Psychiatry	0	300	175	0	475
Psychotherapy	1	1	0	0	2
Old Age Psychiatry	22	22	8	0	52
Learning Disability	0	0	0	20	20
Clinical Oncology	105	0	0	0	105
Chemical Pathology	0	2	46	8	56
Haematology	4	1	0	0	5
Oral Surgery	0	0	353	603	956
Total	50,642	12,594	15,837	19,718	98,791

TABLE 6. PERSONS WAITING FOR FIRST OUTPATIENT APPOINTMENT BY BOARD AND SPECIALTY, QUARTER ENDING SEPTEMBER 1999

Specialty	EHSSB	NHSSB	SHSSB	WHSSB	Total
General Surgery	4,440	2,809	2,071	3,254	12,574
Urology	1,167	122	972	568	2,829
Trauma and Orthopaedics	6,940	0	0	2,590	9,530
ENT	4,802	1,912	1,850	2,203	10,767
Ophthalmology	3,654	0	1,808	3,143	8,605
Oral Surgery	1,597	0	247	576	2,420
Restorative Dentistry	885	0	0	0	885
Paediatric Dentistry	70	0	27	0	97
Orthodontics	66	37	288	672	1,063
Neurosurgery	343	0	0	2	345

Specialty	EHSSB	NHSSB	SHSSB	WHSSB	Total
Plastic Surgery	3,325	0	16	0	3,341
Cardiac Surgery	66	0	0	0	66
Paediatric Surgery	577	0	0	0	577
Thoracic Surgery	32	0	1	0	33
Accident & Emergency	7	86	0	0	93
Anaesthetics	340	288	306	234	1,168
General Medicine	2,057	1,044	759	468	4,328
Gastroenterology	70	0	2	0	72
Endocrinology	231	0	20	0	251
Haematology (Clinical)	53	14	17	16	100
Audiological Medicine	58	0	0	0	58
Rehabilitation	35	0	0	0	35
Cardiology	1,554	342	480	454	2,830
Dermatology	3,737	1,271	1,964	1,131	8,103
Thoracic Medicine	291	0	17	0	308
Nephrology	193	47	16	0	256
Medical Oncology	6	0	0	0	6
Neurology	1,409	33	244	440	2,126
Rheumatology	1,410	243	446	585	2,684
Paediatrics	541	207	725	150	1,623
Paediatric Neurology	37	0	9	4	50
Geriatric Medicine	291	18	14	93	416
Obs & Gyn (Gynaecology)	3,062	1,013	1,357	1,516	6,948
Obs & Gyn (Obstetrics Ante natal)	490	198	273	0	961
Obs & Gyn (Obstetrics Post natal)	1	0	0	0	1
Well Babies (Paediatric)	1	0	0	0	1
Mental Illness	392	165	335	0	892
Psychotherapy	9	0	0	0	9
Child & Adolescent Psychiatry	0	189	198	0	387
Old Age Psychiatry	0	44	2	0	46
Learning Disability	0	0	0	17	17
Clinical Oncology	65	0	3	0	68
Radiology	2	0	0	0	2
Chemical Pathology	6	2	4	8	20
Haematology	2	2	0	0	4
Total	44,314	10,086	14,471	18,124	86,995

TABLE 7. PERSONS WAITING FOR FIRST OUTPATIENT APPOINTMENT BY BOARD AND SPECIALTY, QUARTER ENDING SEPTEMBER 1998

Specialty	EHSSB	NHSSB	SHSSB	WHSSB	Total
General Surgery	4,355	2,309	1,802	2,252	10,718
Urology	950	193	594	266	2,003
Trauma and Orthopaedics	4,833	0	0	1,914	6,747
ENT	4,055	1,223	1,488	1,531	8,297
Ophthalmology	3,579	0	1,223	2,467	7,269
Oral Surgery	1,511	0	260	375	2,146
Restorative Dentistry	795	0	0	0	795
Paediatric Dentistry	44	0	15	0	59
Orthodontics	61	0	549	847	1,457
Neurosurgery	275	0	0	0	275
Plastic Surgery	2,536	0	0	0	2,536
Cardiac Surgery	76	0	0	0	76
Paediatric Surgery	694	0	0	0	694
Thoracic Surgery	51	0	1	0	52
Accident & Emergency	5	0	0	0	5
Anaesthetics	471	289	225	180	1,165
General Medicine	1,796	962	526	416	3,700
Gastroenterology	144	0	1	0	145
Endocrinology	216	0	13	0	229
Haematology (Clinical)	30	11	19	10	70
Rehabilitation	48	0	0	0	48
Cardiology	1,183	326	356	363	2,228
Dermatology	3,680	910	2,350	1,163	8,103
Thoracic Medicine	178	0	0	0	178
Nephrology	165	47	19	0	231
Medical Oncology	7	0	0	0	7
Neurology	1,270	40	190	328	1,828
Rheumatology	1,051	319	330	605	2,305
Paediatrics	493	214	494	316	1,517
Paediatric Neurology	26	2	3	5	36
Geriatric Medicine	246	18	21	57	342
Obs & Gyn (Obstetrics)	6	0	0	0	6
Obs & Gyn (Gynaecology)	3,088	1,087	1,066	1,410	6,651
Obs & Gyn (Obstetrics Ante natal)	700	227	240	0	1,167
Obs & Gyn (Obstetrics Post natal)	1	0	1	0	2
Well Babies (Paediatric)	1	0	0	0	1
Mental Illness	303	154	378	0	835
Psychotherapy	4	0	0	0	4

Specialty	EHSSB	NHSSB	SHSSB	WHSSB	Total
Child & Adolescent Psychiatry	0	137	170	0	307
Old Age Psychiatry	0	41	0	0	41
Learning Disability	0	0	0	7	7
Clinical Oncology	50	0	3	0	53
Radiology	10	0	0	0	10
Haematology	5	0	0	0	5
Chemical Pathology	0	1	0	9	10
Community Medicine	0	0	6	0	6
Other	66	0	0	0	66
Total	39,058	8,510	12,343	14,521	74,432

TABLE 8. PERSONS WAITING FOR FIRST OUTPATIENT APPOINTMENT BY BOARD AND SPECIALTY, QUARTER ENDING SEPTEMBER 1997

Specialty	EHSSB	NHSSB	SHSSB	WHSSB	Total
General Surgery	3,735	2,328	1,600	2,402	10,065
Urology	935	210	268	324	1,737
Trauma and Orthopaedics	3,238	0	0	1,597	4,835
ENT	3,165	1,753	1,253	1,835	8,006
Ophthalmology	3,311	0	942	2,751	7,004
Oral Surgery	1,431	0	167	212	1,810
Restorative Dentistry	708	0	0	0	708
Paediatric Dentistry	40	0	2	0	42
Orthodontics	53	79	830	886	1,848
Neurosurgery	276	0	0	0	276
Plastic Surgery	1,732	0	0	0	1,732
Cardiac Surgery	58	0	0	0	58
Paediatric Surgery	430	0	0	0	430
Thoracic Surgery	31	0	5	0	36
Accident & Emergency	2	0	0	0	2
Anaesthetics	467	259	194	140	1,060
General Medicine	1,100	941	582	611	3,234
Gastroenterology	149	0	3	0	152
Endocrinology	185	0	14	0	199
Haematology (Clinical)	34	4	5	20	63
Clinical Genetics	1	0	0	0	1
Rehabilitation	47	0	0	0	47
Cardiology	1,054	258	297	279	1,888
Dermatology	3,231	1,047	2,228	885	7,391
Thoracic Medicine	144	0	0	0	144
Nephrology	145	25	0	0	170
Medical Oncology	8	0	0	0	8
Neurology	770	37	109	264	1,180

Specialty	EHSSB	NHSSB	SHSSB	WHSSB	Total
Rheumatology	594	285	287	337	1,503
Paediatrics	347	259	444	257	1,307
Paediatric Neurology	23	1	1	7	32
Geriatric Medicine	285	17	10	47	359
Obs & Gyn (Gynaecology)	2,595	1,116	1,015	1,441	6,167
Obs & Gyn (Obstetrics Ante natal)	351	201	379	0	931
Obs & Gyn (Obstetrics Post natal)	2	0	1	0	3
Mental Illness	232	146	304	0	682
Psychotherapy	0	3	0	0	3
Child & Adolescent Psychiatry	0	145	189	0	334
Old Age Psychiatry	0	28	0	0	28
Learning Disability	0	0	0	6	6
Radiology	9	0	0	0	9
Chemical Pathology	5	0	0	0	5
Haematology	4	1	0	0	5
Immunopathology	3	0	0	0	3
Community Medicine	0	0	1	0	1
Other	274	0	0	0	274
Clinical Oncology	0	0	0	6	6
Total	31,204	9,143	11,130	14,307	65,784

Tá eolas ar daoine ag fanacht ar chóireáil othair chónaithigh agus ar a gcéad choinne othair sheachtraigh ar fáil do na ráithí ag críochnú Meán Fómhair 2000, Meán Fómhair 1999, Meán Fómhair 1998 agus Meán Fómhair 1997, agus mionléirítear i dTáblaí 1 go 8 thíos é.

TÁBLA 1. DAOINE AG FANACHT AR CHÓIREÁIL OTHAIR CHÓNAITHIGH DE RÉIR BOIRD AGUS SPEISIALTACHTA, MEÁN FÓMHAIR 2000.

Speisialtacht	BSSSO	BSSST	BSSSD	BSSSI	IOM-LÁN
Máinliacht Ghinearálta	5,892	2,978	3,198	1,297	13,365
Úreolaíocht	2,159	104	1,484	452	4,199
T & O	4,467	0	0	701	5,168
ENT	2,869	1,155	1,262	1,004	6,290
Oftailmeolaíocht	4,596	0	0	950	5,546
Máinliacht Bhéil	292	0	122	273	687
Déidliacht Íocshláinteach	2	0	0	0	2
Déidliacht Phéidiatraiceach	178	0	0	0	178
Ortadónaice	0	0	0	0	0

Speisialtacht	BSSSO	BSSST	BSSSD	BSSSI	IOM-LÁN
Néarmhainliacht	508	0	0	0	508
Máinliacht Phlaisteach	2,485	0	0	0	2,485
Máinliacht Chroí	591	0	0	0	591
Máinliacht Phéidiatraiceach	638	0	0	0	638
Máinliacht Thórcasach	189	0	0	0	189
T&É	0	0	24	0	24
Ainéistéisigh	440	0	0	0	440
Ionramháil Phéine	5	79	0	0	84
Leigheas Ginearálta	736	588	98	356	1,778
Gastra-eintreo- laíocht	356	26	66	0	448
Iontálacheolaíocht	35	0	0	0	35
Haemateolaíocht (Cliniciúil)	0	0	16	0	16
Siceolaíocht Chliniciúil	0	0	0	0	0
Cógaseolaíocht Chliniciúil	0	0	0	0	0
Leigheas Closeolaíoch	0	0	0	0	0
Géineolaíocht Chliniciúil	0	0	0	0	0
Imdhíoneolaíocht Chliniciúil	0	0	0	0	0
Athshlánú	0	0	0	0	0
Leigheas Maolaitheach	0	0	1	0	1
Cairdeolaíocht	809	19	5	4	837
Deirmeolaíocht	275	7	77	0	359
Leigheas Tórcasach	1	0	6	0	7
Galair Thógálacha	0	0	0	0	0
Leigheas Géiniteach-Fualach	0	0	0	0	0
Neifreolaíocht	102	0	0	0	102
Oinceolaíocht Leigheasach	0	0	0	0	0
Leigheas Núicléach	0	0	0	0	0
Néareolaíocht	133	0	0	0	133
Néarfhisceolaíocht Chliniciúil	0	0	0	0	0
Réamaiteolaíocht	636	0	78	0	714
Péidiatraic	8	0	1	0	9
Néareolaíocht Phéidiatrach	0	0	0	0	0
Leigheas Seanliachta	2	0	1	0	3
Leigheas Déadach	0	0	0	0	0
Oftailmeolaíocht Leigheasach	0	0	0	0	0

Speisialtacht	BSSSO	BSSST	BSSSD	BSSSI	IOM-LÁN
Cnáimhseachas	0	0	0	0	0
Liacht Bhan	2,434	1,380	894	539	5,247
Cnáimhseachas (Réamh-Naíoch)	0	0	0	0	0
Cnáimhseachas (Iar-Naíoch)	0	0	0	0	0
Leanaí maithe – Cnáimhseachas	0	0	0	0	0
Leanaí maithe –Péidiatraic	0	0	0	0	0
GD Máithreachas	0	0	0	0	0
GD eile	0	0	0	0	0
Míchumas Foghlamtha	0	0	0	0	0
Tinneas Meabhrach	0	0	0	0	0
Síciatracht Pháiste agus Ógánaigh	0	0	0	0	0
Síciatracht Dhlí-eolaíochta	0	0	0	0	0
Siciteiripe	0	0	0	0	0
Síciatracht Sheanaoise	0	0	0	0	0
Oinceolaíocht Chliniciúil	99	0	1	0	100
Raideolaíocht	0	0	0	0	0
Gnáthphait- eolaíocht	0	0	0	0	0
Fuilaistriú	0	0	0	0	0
Paiteolaíocht Cheimiceach	0	0	0	0	0
Haemateolaíocht	1	0	0	0	1
Histeaphait- eolaíocht	0	0	0	0	0
Imdhíonphait- eolaíocht	0	0	0	0	0
Micri-bhitheolaí- ocht Leigheasach	0	0	0	0	0
Néarphaiteolaíocht	0	0	0	0	0
Leigheas Pobail	0	0	0	0	0
Leigheas Saothair	0	0	0	0	0
Clinic Comh-mhainlianna	0	0	0	0	0
Eile	0	0	0	0	0
Iomlán	30,938	6,336	7,334	5,576	50,184

**TÁBLA 2. DAOINE AG FANACHT AR CHÓIREÁIL OTHAIR
CHÓNAITHIGH DE RÉIR BOIRD AGUS SPEISIALTACHTA,
MEÁN FÓMHAIR 1999.**

Speisialtacht	BSSSO	BSSST	BSSSD	BSSSI	IOM-LÁN
Máinliacht Ghinearálta	5,585	2,550	2,654	1,119	11,908
Úreolaíocht	2,254	188	1,137	352	3,931
T & O	4,686	0	0	534	5,220

Speisialtacht	BSSSO	BSSST	BSSSD	BSSSI	IOM-LÁN
ENT	2,340	1,329	1,048	1,263	5,980
Oftailmeolaíocht	4,253	0	0	916	5,169
Máinliacht Bhéil	303	0	155	223	681
Déidliacht Íocshláinteach	1	0	0	0	1
Déidliacht Phéidiatraiceach	97	0	0	0	97
Ortadóntaic	0	0	0	0	0
Néarmhainliacht	377	0	0	0	377
Máinliacht Phlaisteach	2,326	0	0	0	2,326
Máinliacht Chroi	510	0	0	0	510
Máinliacht Phéidiatraiceach	566	0	0	0	566
Máinliacht Thórcsach	223	0	0	0	223
T&É	0	0	12	0	12
Ainéistéisigh	685	121	0	0	806
Ionramháil Phéine	0	0	0	0	0
Leigheas Ginearálta	621	474	83	214	1,392
Gastra-eintreo-laíocht	388	0	100	0	488
Iontálacheolaíocht	39	0	0	0	39
Haemaiteolaíocht (Cliniciúil)	3	0	0	0	3
Siceolaíocht Chliniciúil	0	0	0	0	0
Cógaseolaíocht Chliniciúil	0	0	0	0	0
Leigheas Closeolaíoch	0	0	0	0	0
Géineolaíocht Chliniciúil	0	0	0	0	0
Imdhíoneolaíocht Chliniciúil	0	0	0	0	0
Athshlánú	0	0	0	0	0
Leigheas Maolaitheach	0	0	0	0	0
Cairdeolaíocht	787	29	8	3	827
Deirmeolaíocht	285	3	74	14	376
Leigheas Tórcsach	1	0	0	0	1
Galair Thógálacha	0	0	0	0	0
Leigheas Géiniteach-Fualach	0	0	0	0	0
Neifreolaíocht	99	0	0	0	99
Oinceolaíocht Leigheasach	0	0	0	0	0
Leigheas Núicléach	0	0	0	0	0
Néareolaíocht	150	0	0	0	150
Néarfhisceolaíocht Chliniciúil	0	0	0	0	0

Speisialtacht	BSSSO	BSSST	BSSSD	BSSSI	IOM-LÁN
Réamaiteolaíocht	227	5	89	0	321
Péidiatraic	8	0	11	8	27
Néareolaíocht Phéidiatrach	0	0	0	0	0
Leigheas Seanliachta	0	3	2	35	40
Leigheas Déadach	4	0	0	0	4
Oftailmeolaíocht Leigheasach	0	0	0	0	0
Cnáimhseachas	0	0	0	0	0
Liacht Bhan	2,118	1,330	905	467	4,820
Cnáimhseachas (Réamh-Naíoch)	0	0	0	0	0
Cnáimhseachas (Iar-Naíoch)	0	0	0	0	0
Leanaí maithe – Cnáimhseachas	0	0	0	0	0
Leanaí maithe – Péidiatraic	0	0	0	0	0
GD Máithreachas	0	0	0	0	0
GD eile	0	0	0	0	0
Míchumas Foghlamtha	0	0	0	0	0
Tinneas Meabhrach	0	0	0	0	0
Siciatracht Pháiste agus Ógánaigh	0	0	0	0	0
Siciatracht Dhlí-eolaíochta	0	0	0	0	0
Siciteiripe	0	0	0	0	0
Siciatracht Sheanaoise	0	0	0	0	0
Oinceolaíocht Chliniciúil	38	0	0	0	38
Raideolaíocht	0	0	0	0	0
Gnáthphaiteol-aíocht	0	0	0	0	0
Fuilaistriú	0	0	0	0	0
Paiteolaíocht Cheimiceach	0	0	0	0	0
Haemaiteolaíocht	0	0	0	0	0
Histeaphaiteol-aíocht	0	0	0	0	0
Imdhíonphaiteol-aíocht	0	0	0	0	0
Micri-bhitheol-aíocht Leigheasach	0	0	0	0	0
Néarphaiteolaíocht	0	0	0	0	0
Leigheas Pobail	0	0	0	0	0
Leigheas Saothair	0	0	0	0	0
Clinic Comh-mháinlianna	0	0	0	0	0
Eile	0	0	0	0	0
Iomlán	28,974	6,032	6,278	5,148	46,432

TÁBLA 3. DAOINE AG FANACHT AR CHÓIREÁIL OTHAIR CHÓNAITHIGH DE RÉIR BOIRD AGUS SPEISIALTACHTA, MEÁN FÓMHAIR 1998.

Speisialtacht	BSSSO	BSSST	BSSSD	BSSSI	IOM-LÁN
Máinliacht Ghinearálta	4,858	2,631	2,790	1,691	11,970
Úreolaíocht	2,220	55	974	272	3,521
T & O	4,623	0	0	655	5,278
ENT	2,437	1,193	1,105	1,418	6,153
Oftailmeolaíocht	3,944	0	0	801	4,745
Máinliacht Bhéil	359	0	86	217	662
Déidliacht Íocshláinteach	0	0	0	0	0
Déidliacht Phéidiatraiceach	102	0	0	0	102
Ortadóntaic	0	0	0	0	0
Néarmháinliacht	422	0	0	0	422
Máinliacht Phlaisteach	2,378	0	0	0	2,378
Máinliacht Chroí	437	0	0	0	437
Máinliacht Phéidiatraiceach	1,042	0	0	0	1,042
Máinliacht Thórcsach	186	0	0	0	186
T&É	0	0	5	0	5
Ainéistéisigh	739	97	0	1	837
Ionramháil Phéine	0	0	0	0	0
Leigheas Ginearálta	437	433	29	159	1,058
Gastra-eintreol-aíocht	559	0	60	0	619
Iontálacheol-aíocht	21	0	0	0	21
Haemaiteolaíocht (Cliniciúil)	0	0	0	0	0
Síceolaíocht Chliniciúil	0	0	0	0	0
Cógaseolaíocht Chliniciúil	0	0	0	0	0
Leigheas Closeolaíoch	0	0	0	0	0
Géineolaíocht Chliniciúil	0	0	0	0	0
Imdhíoneolaíocht Chliniciúil	0	0	0	0	0
Athshlánú	0	0	0	0	0
Leigheas Maolaitheach	0	0	0	0	0
Cairdeolaíocht	981	11	5	0	997
Deirmeolaíocht	232	1	86	14	333
Leigheas Tórcsach	1	0	0	0	1
Galair Thógálacha	0	0	0	0	0
Leigheas Géiniteach-Fualach	0	0	0	0	0

Speisialtacht	BSSSO	BSSST	BSSSD	BSSSI	IOM-LÁN
Neifreolaíocht	120	0	0	0	120
Oinceolaíocht Leigheasach	0	0	0	0	0
Leigheas Núicléach	0	0	0	0	0
Néareolaíocht	229	0	0	0	229
Néarfhisceolaíocht Chliniciúil	0	0	0	0	0
Réamaiteolaíocht	132	109	70	0	311
Péidiatraic	7	0	4	0	11
Néareolaíocht Phéidiatrach	0	0	0	0	0
Leigheas Seanliachta	4	6	1	4	15
Leigheas Déadach	0	0	0	0	0
Oftailmeolaíocht Leigheasach	0	0	0	0	0
Cnáimhseachas	0	0	0	0	0
Liacht Bhan	2,160	1,171	1,027	554	4,912
Cnáimhseachas (Réamh-Naíoch)	0	0	0	0	0
Cnáimhseachas (Iar-Naíoch)	0	0	0	0	0
Leanaí maithe – Cnáimhseachas	0	0	0	0	0
Leanaí maithe – Péidiatraic	0	0	0	0	0
GD Máithreachas	0	0	0	0	0
GD eile	0	0	0	0	0
Míchumas Foghlamtha	0	0	0	0	0
Tinneas Meabhrach	0	0	0	0	0
Síciatracht Pháiste agus Ógánaigh	0	0	0	0	0
Síciatracht Dhlí-eolaíochta	0	0	0	0	0
Síciteiripe	0	0	0	0	0
Síciatracht Sheanaoise	0	0	0	0	0
Oinceolaíocht Chliniciúil	59	0	0	0	59
Raideolaíocht	0	0	0	0	0
Gnáthphaitheol-aíocht	0	0	0	0	0
Fuilaistriú	0	0	0	0	0
Paiteolaíocht Cheimiceach	0	0	0	0	0
Haemaiteolaíocht	4	0	0	0	4
Histeaphaiteol-aíocht	0	0	0	0	0
Imdhíonphaitheol-aíocht	0	0	0	0	0
Micri-bhitheol-aíocht Leigheasach	0	0	0	0	0

Speisialtacht	BSSSO	BSSST	BSSSD	BSSSI	IOM-LÁN
Néarphaiteolaíocht	0	0	0	0	0
Leigheas Pobail	0	0	0	0	0
Leigheas Saothair	0	0	0	0	0
Clinic Comh-mháinlianna	0	0	0	0	0
Eile	0	0	0	0	0
Iomlán	28,693	5,707	6,242	5,786	46,428

TÁBLA 4. DAOINE AG FANACHT AR CHÓIREÁIL OTHAIR CHÓNAITHIGH DE RÉIR BOIRD AGUS SPEISIALTACHTA, MEÁN FÓMHAIR 1997.

Speisialtacht	BSSSO	BSSST	BSSSD	BSSSI	IOM-LÁN
Máinliacht Ghinearálta	5,093	3,338	2,864	2,150	13,445
Úreolaíocht	2,442	121	922	177	3,662
T & O	4,495	0	0	742	5,237
ENT	2,504	1,380	1,067	1,076	6,027
Oftailmeolaíocht	3,521	0	0	823	4,344
Máinliacht Bhéil	236	0	105	191	532
Déidliacht Íocshláinteach	0	0	0	0	0
Déidliacht Phéidiatraiceach	101	0	0	0	101
Ortadóntaic	0	0	0	0	0
Néarmháinliacht	405	0	0	0	405
Máinliacht Phlaisteach	2,939	0	0	0	2,939
Máinliacht Chroí	533	0	0	0	533
Máinliacht Phéidiatraiceach	1,558	0	0	0	1,558
Máinliacht Thórsach	207	0	0	0	207
T&É	0	0	11	0	11
Ainéistéisigh	566	61	0	0	627
Ionramháil Phéine	0	0	0	0	0
Leigheas Ginearálta	255	385	23	71	734
Gastra-eintreol-aíocht	409	0	67	0	476
Iontálacheolaíocht	20	0	0	0	20
Haemaiteolaíocht (Cliniciúil)	3	0	0	0	3
Síceolaíocht Chliniciúil	0	0	0	0	0
Cógaseolaíocht Chliniciúil	0	0	0	0	0
Leigheas Closeolaíoch	0	0	0	0	0
Géineolaíocht Chliniciúil	0	0	0	0	0
Imdhíoneolaíocht Chliniciúil	0	0	0	0	0
Athshlánú	0	0	0	0	0

Speisialtacht	BSSSO	BSSST	BSSSD	BSSSI	IOM-LÁN
Leigheas Maolaitheach	0	0	0	0	0
Cairdeolaíocht	872	0	77	0	949
Deirmeolaíocht	203	1	90	0	294
Leigheas Tórsach	3	0	0	0	3
Galair Thógálacha	0	0	0	0	0
Leigheas Géiniteach-Fualach	0	0	0	0	0
Neifreolaíocht	62	0	0	0	62
Oinceolaíocht Leigheasach	0	0	0	0	0
Leigheas Núicléach	0	0	0	0	0
Néareolaíocht	210	0	0	0	210
Néarfhisceolaíocht Chliniciúil	0	0	0	0	0
Réamaiteolaíocht	188	97	73	0	358
Péidiatraic	7	0	4	7	18
Néareolaíocht Phéidiatrach	2	0	0	0	2
Leigheas Seanliachta	10	5	0	0	15
Leigheas Déadach	0	0	0	0	0
Oftailmeolaíocht Leigheasach	0	0	0	0	0
Cnáimhseachas	0	0	0	0	0
Liacht Bhan	2,024	1,170	951	505	4,650
Cnáimhseachas (Réamh-Naíoch)	0	0	0	0	0
Cnáimhseachas (Iar-Naíoch)	0	0	0	0	0
Leanaí maithe – Cnáimhseachas	0	0	0	0	0
Leanaí maithe – Péidiatraic	0	0	0	0	0
GD Máithreachas	0	0	0	0	0
GD eile	0	0	0	0	0
Míchumas Foghlamtha	0	0	0	0	0
Tinneas Meabhrach	0	0	0	0	0
Síciatracht Pháiste agus Ógánaigh	0	0	0	0	0
Síciatracht Dhlí-eolaíochta	0	0	0	0	0
Siciteiripe	0	0	0	0	0
Síciatracht Sheanaoise	0	0	0	0	0
Oinceolaíocht Chliniciúil	39	0	0	0	39
Raideolaíocht	0	0	0	0	0
Gnáthphaiteol-aíocht	0	0	0	0	0

Speisialtacht	BSSSO	BSSST	BSSSD	BSSSI	IOM-LÁN
Fuilaistriú	0	0	0	0	0
Paiteolaíocht Cheimiceach	0	0	0	0	0
Haemaiteolaíocht	0	0	0	0	0
Histeaphaiteolaíocht	0	0	0	0	0
Imdhíonphaiteolaíocht	0	0	0	0	0
Micri-bhitheolaíocht Leigheasach	0	0	0	0	0
Néarphaiteolaíocht	0	0	0	0	0
Leigheas Pobail	0	0	0	0	0
Leigheas Saothair	0	0	0	0	0
Clinic Comh-mháinlianna	0	0	0	0	0
Eile	0	0	0	0	0
Iomlán	28,907	6,558	6,254	5,742	47,461

TÁBLA 5. DAOINE AG FANACHT AR A GCÉAD CHOINNE OTHAIR SHEACHTRAIGH DE RÉIR BOIRD AGUS SPEISIALTACHTA, RÁITHE AG CRÍOCHNÚ MEÁN FÓMHAIR 2000.

Speisialtacht	BSSSO	BSSST	BSSSD	BSSSI	IOM-LÁN
Máinliacht Ghinearálta	4,465	3,212	2,210	3,212	13,099
Úreolaíocht	1,152	307	1,030	549	3,038
Sceimhle agus Ortopéide	9,984	0	0	2,396	12,380
ENT	5,087	2,661	2,081	2,977	12,806
Oftailmeolaíocht	5,360	0	2,404	3,647	11,411
Déidliacht Phéidiatraiceach	86	0	8	0	94
Ortadóntaic	0	34	316	560	910
Néarmháinliacht	334	0	0	0	334
Máinliacht Phlaisteach	4,153	0	1	0	4,154
Máinliacht Chroí	19	0	0	0	19
Máinliacht Phéidiatraiceach	557	0	0	0	557
Máinliacht Thórsach	29	0	3	0	32
Timpistí & Éigeandálaí	16	105	0	0	121
Ainéistéisigh	131	0	0	0	131
Ionramháil Phéine	297	346	257	303	1,203
Leigheas Ginearálta	2,068	1,094	732	571	4,465
Gastra-eintreolaíocht	312	145	2	0	459
Iontálacheolaíocht	334	0	15	0	349
Haemaiteolaíocht (Cliniciúil)	106	12	19	14	151
Leigheas Closeolaíoch	79	0	0	0	79

Speisialtacht	BSSSO	BSSST	BSSSD	BSSSI	IOM-LÁN
Athshlánú	62	0	0	0	62
Cairdeolaíocht	1,395	376	837	574	3,182
Deirmeolaíocht	4,870	1,641	1,923	1,174	9,608
Leigheas Tórsach	204	0	56	0	260
Neifreolaíocht	220	73	26	0	319
Oinceolaíocht Leigheasach	23	0	0	0	23
Néareolaíocht	1,410	38	269	436	2,153
Néarfhisceolaíocht Chliniciúil	4	0	0	0	4
Réamaiteolaíocht	1,864	123	423	700	3,110
Péidiatraic	683	310	713	256	1,962
Néareolaíocht Phéidiatrach	45	3	1	2	51
Leigheas Seanliachta	549	13	22	94	678
Cnáimhseachas & Liacht Bhan (Liacht Bhan)	3,137	1,328	1,423	1,622	7,510
Cnáimhseachas & Liacht Bhan (Cnáimhseachas Réamh-Naíoch)	442	265	103	0	810
Cnáimhseachas & Liacht Bhan (Cnáimhseachas Iar-Naíoch)	0	0	1	0	1
Leanaí maithe (Péidiatraic)	1	0	0	0	1
Tinneas Meabhrach	1,032	182	380	0	1,594
Siciatracht Fáiste agus Ógánaigh	0	300	175	0	475
Sciteiripe	1	1	0	0	2
Siciatracht Sheanaoise	22	22	8	0	52
Míchumas Foghlamtha	0	0	0	20	20
Oinceolaíocht Chliniciúil	105	0	0	0	105
Paiteolaíocht Cheimiceach	0	2	46	8	56
Haemaiteolaíocht	4	1	0	0	5
Máinliacht Bhéil	0	0	353	603	956
Iomlán	50,642	12,594	15,837	19,718	98,791

TÁBLA 6. DAOINE AG FANACHT AR A GCÉAD CHOINNE OTHAIR SHEACHTRAIGH DE RÉIR BOIRD AGUS SPEISIALTACHTA, RÁITHE AG CRÍOCHNÚ MEÁN FÓMHAIR 1999.

Speisialtacht	BSSSO	BSSST	BSSSD	BSSSI	IOM-LÁN
Máinliacht Ghinearálta	4,440	2,809	2,071	3,254	12,574
Úreolaíocht	1,167	122	972	568	2,829

Speisialtacht	BSSSO	BSSST	BSSSD	BSSSI	IOM-LÁN
Sceimhle agus Ortopéide	6,940	0	0	2,590	9,530
ENT	4,802	1,912	1,850	2,203	10,767
Oftailmeolaíocht	3,654	0	1,808	3,143	8,605
Máinliacht Bhéil	1,597	0	247	576	2,420
Déidliacht Íocshláinteach	885	0	0	0	885
Déidliacht Phéidiatraiceach	70	0	27	0	97
Ortadóntaic	66	37	288	672	1,063
Néarmhánliacht	343	0	0	2	345
Máinliacht Phlaisteach	3,325	0	16	0	3,341
Máinliacht Chroí	66	0	0	0	66
Máinliacht Phéidiatraiceach	577	0	0	0	577
Máinliacht Thórcsach	32	0	1	0	33
Timpistí & Éigeandálaí	7	86	0	0	93
Ainéistéisigh	340	288	306	234	1,168
Leigheas Ginearálta	2,057	1,044	759	468	4,328
Gastra-eintreol-aíocht	70	0	2	0	72
Iontálacheolaíocht	231	0	20	0	251
Haemaiteolaíocht (Cliniciúil)	53	14	17	16	100
Leigheas Closeolaíoch	58	0	0	0	58
Athshlánú	35	0	0	0	35
Cairdeolaíocht	1,554	342	480	454	2,830
Deirmeolaíocht	3,737	1,271	1,964	1,131	8,103
Leigheas Tórcsach	291	0	17	0	308
Neifreolaíocht	193	47	16	0	256
Oinceolaíocht Leigheasach	6	0	0	0	6
Néareolaíocht	1,409	33	244	440	2,126
Réamaiteolaíocht	1,410	243	446	585	2,684
Péidiatraic	541	207	725	150	1,623
Néareolaíocht Phéidiatrach	37	0	9	4	50
Leigheas Seanliachta	291	18	14	93	416
Cnáimhseachas & Liacht Bhan (Liacht Bhan)	3,062	1,013	1,357	1,516	6,948
Cnáimhseachas & Liacht Bhan (Cnáimhseachas Réamh-Naíoch)	490	198	273	0	961
Cnáimhseachas & Liacht Bhan (Cnáimhseachas Iar-Naíoch)	1	0	0	0	1

Speisialtacht	BSSSO	BSSST	BSSSD	BSSSI	IOM-LÁN
Leanaí maithe (Péidiatraic)	1	0	0	0	1
Tinneas Meabhrach	392	165	335	0	892
Siciteiripe	9	0	0	0	9
Siciatracht Pháiste agus Ógánaigh	0	189	198	0	387
Siciatracht Sheanaoise	0	44	2	0	46
Míchumas Foghlamtha	0	0	0	17	17
Oinceolaíocht Chliniciúil	65	0	3	0	68
Raideolaíocht	2	0	0	0	2
Paiteolaíocht Cheimiceach	6	2	4	8	20
Haemaiteolaíocht	2	2	0	0	4
Iomlán	44,314	10,086	14,471	18,124	86,995

TÁBLA 7. DAOINE AG FANACHT AR A GCÉAD CHOINNE OTHAIR SHEACHTRAIGH DE RÉIR BOIRD AGUS SPEISIALTACHTA, RÁITHE AG CRÍOCHNÚ MEÁN FÓMHAIR 1998.

Speisialtacht	BSSSO	BSSST	BSSSD	BSSSI	IOM-LÁN
Máinliacht Ghinearálta	4,355	2,309	1,802	2,252	10,718
Úreolaíocht	950	193	594	266	2,003
Sceimhle agus Ortopéide	4,833	0	0	1,914	6,747
ENT	4,055	1,223	1,488	1,531	8,297
Oftailmeolaíocht	3,579	0	1,223	2,467	7,269
Máinliacht Bhéil	1,511	0	260	375	2,146
Déidliacht Íocshláinteach	795	0	0	0	795
Déidliacht Phéidiatraiceach	44	0	15	0	59
Ortadóntaic	61	0	549	847	1,457
Néarmhánliacht	275	0	0	0	275
Máinliacht Phlaisteach	2,536	0	0	0	2,536
Máinliacht Chroí	76	0	0	0	76
Máinliacht Phéidiatraiceach	694	0	0	0	694
Máinliacht Thórcsach	51	0	1	0	52
Timpistí & Éigeandálaí	5	0	0	0	5
Ainéistéisigh	471	289	225	180	1,165
Leigheas Ginearálta	1,796	962	526	416	3,700
Gastra-eintreol-aíocht	144	0	1	0	145
Iontálacheolaíocht	216	0	13	0	229

Speisialtacht	BSSSO	BSSST	BSSSD	BSSSI	IOM-LÁN
Haemaiteolaíocht (Cliniciúil)	30	11	19	10	70
Athshlánú	48	0	0	0	48
Cairdeolaíocht	1,183	326	356	363	2,228
Deirmeolaíocht	3,680	910	2,350	1,163	8,103
Leigheas Tóracasach	178	0	0	0	178
Neifreolaíocht	165	47	19	0	231
Oinceolaíocht Leigheasach	7	0	0	0	7
Néareolaíocht	1,270	40	190	328	1,828
Réamaiteolaíocht	1,051	319	330	605	2,305
Péidiatraic	493	214	494	316	1,517
Néareolaíocht Phéidiatrach	26	2	3	5	36
Leigheas Seanliachta	246	18	21	57	342
Cnáimhseachas & Liacht Bhan (Cnáimhseachas)	6	0	0	0	6
Cnáimhseachas & Liacht Bhan (Liacht Bhan)	3,088	1,087	1,066	1,410	6,651
Cnáimhseachas & Liacht Bhan (Cnáimhseachas Réamh-Naíoch)	700	227	240	0	1,167
Cnáimhseachas & Liacht Bhan (Cnáimhseachas Iar-Naíoch)	1	0	1	0	2
Leanaí maithe (Péidiatraic)	1	0	0	0	1
Tinneas Meabhrach	303	154	378	0	835
Siciteiripe	4	0	0	0	4
Siciatracht Pháiste agus Ógánaigh	0	137	170	0	307
Siciatracht Sheanaoise	0	41	0	0	41
Míchumas Foghlamtha	0	0	0	7	7
Oinceolaíocht Chliniciúil	50	0	3	0	53
Raideolaíocht	10	0	0	0	10
Haemaiteolaíocht	5	0	0	0	5
Paiteolaíocht Cheimiceach	0	1	0	9	10
Leigheas Pobail	0	0	6	0	6
Eile	66	0	0	0	66
Iomlán	39,058	8,510	12,343	14,521	74,432

TÁBLA 8. DAOINE AG FANACHT AR A GCÉAD CHOINNE OTHAIR SHEACHTRAIGH DE RÉIR BOIRD AGUS SPEISIALTACHTA, RÁITHE AG CRÍOCHNÚ MEÁN FÓMHAIR 1997.

Speisialtacht	BSSSO	BSSST	BSSSD	BSSSI	IOM-LÁN
Máinliacht Ghinearálta	3,735	2,328	1,600	2,402	10,065
Úreolaíocht	935	210	268	324	1,737
Sceimhle agus Ortapéide	3,238	0	0	1,597	4,835
ENT	3,165	1,753	1,253	1,835	8,006
Oftailmeolaíocht	3,311	0	942	2,751	7,004
Máinliacht Bhéil	1,431	0	167	212	1,810
Déidliacht Íocshláinteach	708	0	0	0	708
Déidliacht Phéidiatraiceach	40	0	2	0	42
Ortadóntaic	53	79	830	886	1,848
Néarmháinliacht	276	0	0	0	276
Máinliacht Phlaisteach	1,732	0	0	0	1,732
Máinliacht Chroí	58	0	0	0	58
Máinliacht Phéidiatraiceach	430	0	0	0	430
Máinliacht Thóracasach	31	0	5	0	36
Timpistí & Éigeandálaí	2	0	0	0	2
Ainéistéisigh	467	259	194	140	1,060
Leigheas Ginearálta	1,100	941	582	611	3,234
Gastra-eintreolaíocht	149	0	3	0	152
Iontálaicheolaíocht	185	0	14	0	199
Haemaiteolaíocht (Cliniciúil)	34	4	5	20	63
Géineolaíocht Chliniciúil	1	0	0	0	1
Athshlánú	47	0	0	0	47
Cairdeolaíocht	1,054	258	297	279	1,888
Deirmeolaíocht	3,231	1,047	2,228	885	7,391
Leigheas Tóracasach	144	0	0	0	144
Neifreolaíocht	145	25	0	0	170
Oinceolaíocht Leigheasach	8	0	0	0	8
Néareolaíocht	770	37	109	264	1,180
Réamaiteolaíocht	594	285	287	337	1,503
Péidiatraic	347	259	444	257	1,307
Néareolaíocht Phéidiatrach	23	1	1	7	32
Leigheas Seanliachta	285	17	10	47	359
Cnáimhseachas & Liacht Bhan (Liacht Bhan)	2,595	1,116	1,015	1,441	6,167

Speisialtacht	BSSSO	BSSST	BSSSD	BSSSI	IOM-LÁN
Cnáimhseachas & Liacht Bhan (Cnáimhseachas Réamh-Naíoch)	351	201	379	0	931
Cnáimhseachas & Liacht Bhan (Cnáimhseachas Iar-Naíoch)	2	0	1	0	3
Tinneas Meabhrach	232	146	304	0	682
Siciteiripe	0	3	0	0	3
Siciatracht Pháiste agus Ógánaigh	0	145	189	0	334
Siciatracht Sheanaoise	0	28	0	0	28
Míchumas Foghlamtha	0	0	0	6	6
Raideolaíocht	9	0	0	0	9
Paiteolaíocht Cheimiceach	5	0	0	0	5
Haemaiteolaíocht	4	1	0	0	5
Imdhíonphaiteolaíocht	3	0	0	0	3
Leigheas Pobail	0	0	1	0	1
Eile	274	0	0	0	274
Oinceolaíocht Chliniciúil	0	0	0	6	6
Iomlán	31,204	9,143	11,130	14,307	65,784

Asperger's Syndrome

Mr Fee asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what provision has been made, in each Trust area, for the treatment of (a) children and (b) adults who have been diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome. (AQW 2125/00)

Ms de Brún: Treatment of children and adults with Asperger's Syndrome is provided under the learning disability programme of care. Provision for the treatment of this condition is not separately identified.

Soláthraítear cóireáil pháistí le Siondróm Asperger faoin Chlár Cúraim Míchumais Fhoghlamtha. Ní aithnítear cóireáil an riochta seo mar sholáthar ar leith.

Asperger's Syndrome

Mr Fee asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of (a) children and (b) adults who have been diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome, in each Trust area, in each of the last five years for which figures are available. (AQW 2126/00)

Ms de Brún: This information is not collected centrally.

Ní chruinnítear an t-eolas seo go lárnach.

Ambulance Response Times: Rural Areas

Mr Fee asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail her plans to improve the response times of ambulances to rural areas. (AQW 2128/00)

Ms de Brún: The Report on the Strategic Review of the Ambulance Service set out options for the improvement of ambulance response times for the benefit of all communities. One of the project groups established to look more closely at how the Report's recommendations could be implemented and the costs of doing so is considering ways of improving A&E Services including ambulance response times in rural areas.

Leag an Tuairisc ar Athbhreithniú Straitéiseach na Seirbhíse Otharcharr roghanna amach do fheabhsú amanna freagartha otharcharr ar mhaithe leis na pobail go léir. Tá ceann de ghrúpaí an tionscadail, a bunaíodh le scrúdú níos géire a dhéanamh ar an dóigh a bhféadfaí moltaí na Tuairisce a chur i gcrích agus ar a chostais, ag déanamh machnaimh ar dhóigheanna le seirbhísí T&É a fheabhsú, amanna freagartha otharcharr i gceantair tuaithe san áireamh.

Cardiac Surgery: Average Length of Stay in Hospital

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average length of stay in hospital for those recovering from heart surgery in the year 1998-99 and 1999-2000. (AQW 2129/00)

Ms de Brún: In the cardiac surgery specialty the average length of time between the date of operation and the discharge date in local hospitals was 8 days for both 1998-99 and 1999-2000.

Sa Chlinic Speisialtachta Cairdiach ba é 8 lá, an meántamall idir dáta na hobráide agus dáta an scaoilte amach in otharlanna áitiúla do na blianta 1998-99 agus 1999-2000 araon.

Prostate Cancer Screening

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to initiate a screening programme for prostate cancer for men aged 50 and over. (AQW 2134/00)

Ms de Brún: The National Screening Committee which advises Health Ministers does not currently recommend prostate cancer screening based on the prostate specific antigen (PSA) test. However the matter is being kept under review and will be revisited when any new research evidence becomes available. With the current test false positives are a major problem. Prostate surgery can cause unnecessary harm, including impotence and incontinence, to healthy men.

Ní mholann an Coiste Scagtha Náisiúnta a chomhairlíonn Airí Sláinte, scagadh d'aile na faireoige prostátaí bunaithe ar shainaintaigin na faireoige prostátaí (SFP) faoi láthair. Bíodh sin mar atá, táthar ag coinneáil an ábhair faoi athbhreithniú agus amharcfar arís air nuair a chuirtear fianaise thaighde nua ar fáil. Leis an teist atá ann faoi láthair is fadhb mhór iad na bréagthorthaí deimhneacha. Is féidir le máinliacht phrostátach a lán dochair a dhéanamh, éagumas agus neamhchoinneáltacht san áireamh, d'fhir shláintiúla.

Mental Illness

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether she could confirm that there has been an increase in the numbers of young people suffering mental illness and what assessment has she made of the accuracy of statistical data on this issue. (AQW 2149/00)

Ms de Brún: Between 1997 and 1999, the number of young people aged under 18 admitted for the first time as mental health inpatients here increased by 11%. This information was obtained from the Mental Health Inpatients System, which has had some problems with data quality. Work has been undertaken over the past year to improve it.

The Survey of Health and Social Wellbeing includes information on the prevalence of mental ill health. The first Survey was conducted in 1997 and the second Survey is currently being undertaken. The results should be available in 2002 and it should allow a more comprehensive comparison of the prevalence of mental ill health among young people.

Idir 1997 agus 1999, bhí méadú 11% ar líon na ndaoine óga faoi 18 mbliana d'aois a chuaigh isteach den chéad uair mar othair chónaitheacha mheabhairghalair. Fuarthas an t-eolas seo ón Chóras Othar Cónaitheach Meabhairghalair, a raibh cuid fadhbanna aige le cáilíocht a shonraí. Rinneadh obair an bhlian dheireanach seo le feabhas a chur air.

Cuimsíonn an Suirbhé ar Shláinte agus Dea-bhail Shóisialta eolas ar fhlúirseacht na drochshláinte mheabhrach. Rinneadh an chéad Suirbhé i 1997 agus tá an dara Suirbhé á dhéanamh faoi láthair. Ba chóir do na torthaí bheith ar fáil i 2002 agus ba chóir go ligeann sin do dhaoine comparáid níos cuimsithí a dhéanamh maidir le flúirseacht na drochshláinte meabhrach i measc daoine óga.

Asperger's Syndrome

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline her policy regarding

the treatment of Asperger's Syndrome and to detail the number of individuals diagnosed with this illness. (AQW 2150/00)

Ms de Brún: Care of individuals with Asperger's Syndrome is provided under the Learning Disability Programme of Care and the policy is set out in the Review of Policy for people with a Learning Disability, published by the then Department of Health and Social Services in 1995. A copy of this policy is available in the Assembly Library. Information on the numbers of individuals diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome is not collected centrally.

Soláthraítear cúram do dhaoine aonair le Siondróm Asperger faoin Chlár Cúraim Míchumais Fhoghlamtha, agus tá an polasaí leagtha amach san Athbhreithniú ar Pholasaí do dhaoine le Míchumas Foghlamtha, foilsithe ag an iar-Roinn Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta i 1995. Tá cóip den pholasaí seo ar fáil i Leabharlann an Tionóil. Ní chruinnítear eolas go lárnach ar líonta na ndaoine fáthmheasta le Siondróm Asperger.

Funding Allocated

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of sufferers in each of the following categories: (i) Arthritis (ii) back disorders (iii) Osteoporosis (iv) Fibromyalgia (v) Parkinson's disease (vi) Multiple Sclerosis (vii) Myalgic Encephalomyelitis and the level of funding allocated to each category. (AQW 2151/00)

Ms de Brún: Information is not available in the form requested.

Níl eolas ar fáil san fhoirm a iarradh.

Sure Start Programme

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the level of funding available for the Sure Start Programme and how much of this has been allocated. (AQW 2153/00)

Ms de Brún: In July last year, I announced the allocation of £2m to introduce the Sure Start programme for families with young children in 15 areas of social disadvantage in 2000-01, with £4m for full year costs of these projects from April 2001.

I was, however, concerned that there were still areas of high deprivation which were not covered by Sure Start projects and I will therefore be making available an additional £1.8m from April 2001 to allow some new projects to be brought forward. This brings to £5.8m the funds that will be committed annually to the Sure Start programme here.

I Mí Iúil anuraidh, d'fhógair mé dáileadh £2m leis an chlár Sure Start a thabhairt isteach do theaghlaigh le páistí óga i 15 réimse de mhíbhuntáiste sóisialta i 2000/01, le dáileadh £4m eile do chostais bhliana iomláine na scéimeanna seo ó Aibreán 2001.

Bhí mé buartha áfach go raibh ceantair ann ar an ardanás go fóill nár cumhdaíodh ag na scéimeanna Sure Start, agus ar an ábhar sin, beidh mé ag cur £1.8m breise ar fáil ón Aibreán 2001 chun roinnt scéimeanna nua a thabhairt chun tosaigh. Is é sin £5.8m iomlán an airgid a thabharfar go bliantúil don chlár Sure Start anseo.

Sure Start Programme

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether she can confirm that a third round of applications will be sought for the Sure Start Programme and when this will take place.

(AQW 2154/00)

Ms de Brún: In July 2000, 15 Sure Start projects were approved for funding. However, as there were still some highly disadvantaged areas with no Sure Start projects, I asked the Childcare Partnerships to identify areas where they wished to see additional Sure Start projects and support applicants in those areas to submit suitable proposals.

The introduction of the second round of projects from April this year will complete the allocation of all of the funding available for the Sure Start programme.

I Mí Iúil 2000, ceadaíodh maoiniú do 15 scéim Sure Start. Mar go raibh roinnt ceantar ar an ardanás go fóill gan scéimeanna Sure Start, d'iarr mé ar Pháirtíochtaí Cúraim Pháistí ceantair a aithint ar mhian leo scéimeanna Sure Start breise a fheiceáil agus tacaíocht a thabhairt d'iarratasóirí sna ceantair sin le moltaí fóirsteanacha a chur isteach.

Críochnóidh tabhairt isteach an dara babhta de scéimeanna ó Aibreán i mbliana, dáileadh an mhaoinithe iomláin ar fáil don chlár Sure Start.

Ulster Hospital: Theatre Utilisation

Mr McFarland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the usage per day, in hours, for each operating theatre in the Ulster Hospital for the period: (a) 5-11 February 2001 (b) 12-18 February 2001 and (c) 19-25 February 2001. (AQW 2155/00)

Ms de Brún: This information is detailed in the tables below.

THEATRE UTILISATION 5TH FEBRUARY - 11TH FEBRUARY 2001

	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th
Theatre 1	9	6	4	7.5	5	-	-

	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th
Theatre 2	10	11.5	8.5	6	9	-	2.5
Theatre 3	7.5	7	10	3.5	11	1	-
Theatre 4	4	6	6	8.5	4	10.5	10
Theatre 5	9	4	2.5	7	8	4.5	0.5
Theatre 6	3.5	5.5	-	9	4.5	-	-
Theatre 7	6	3	5	8.5	3.5	-	-
Paeds Theatre	4	2.5	3.5	3.5	0.5	-	-

THEATRE UTILISATION 12TH FEBRUARY - 18TH FEBRUARY 2001

	12th	13th	14th	15th	16th	17th	18th
Theatre 1	5.5	8.5	13	9	-	-	-
Theatre 2	12	13.5	5.5	-	6.5	-	-
Theatre 3	7	3	-	4	2.5	5.5	11.5
Theatre 4	11.5	12	11.5	5	11.5	4	-
Theatre 5	7	5	3	8.5	9	4.5	-
Theatre 6	0.5	3.5	6.5	7.5	2	-	-
Theatre 7	-	3.5	5.5	5.5	5.5	-	-
Paeds Theatre	4.5	7.5	-	5.5	3	-	-

THEATRE UTILISATION 19TH FEBRUARY - 25TH FEBRUARY 2001

	19th	20th	21st	22nd	23rd	24th	25th
Theatre 1	8	8.5	5	6	4.5	-	-
Theatre 2	6	6.5	13	4.5	-	-	-
Theatre 3	2.5	12.5	6	7	2.5	5.5	4
Theatre 4	13.5	11	6	13	12	5.5	5
Theatre 5	6	6.5	4.5	6.5	5	3.5	-
Theatre 6	6.5	6.5	6	7.5	4	-	-
Theatre 7	7	7	7	4	1	-	-
Paeds Theatre	2	2	-	3	4	-	-

Tá an t-eolas seo liostaithe sna táblaí thíos.

ÚSÁID OBRÁDLAINNE 5Ú FEBHRA – 11Ú FEBHRA 2001

	5ú	6ú	7ú	8ú	9ú	10ú	11ú
Obrádlann 1	9	6	4	7.5	5	-	-
Obrádlann 2	10	11.5	8.5	6	9	-	2.5
Obrádlann 3	7.5	7	10	3.5	11	1	-
Obrádlann 4	4	6	6	8.5	4	10.5	10
Obrádlann 5	9	4	2.5	7	8	4.5	0.5
Obrádlann 6	3.5	5.5	-	9	4.5	-	-
Obrádlann 7	6	3	5	8.5	3.5	-	-
Obrádlann Péidiatraice	4	2.5	3.5	3.5	0.5	-	-

ÚSÁID OBRÁDLAINNE 12Ú FEABHRA – 18Ú FEABHRA 2001

	12ú	13ú	14ú	15ú	16ú	17ú	18ú
Obrádlann 1	5.5	8.5	13	9	-	-	-
Obrádlann 2	12	13.5	5.5	-	6.5	-	-
Obrádlann 3	7	3	-	4	2.5	5.5	11.5
Obrádlann 4	11.5	12	11.5	5	11.5	4	-
Obrádlann 5	7	5	3	8.5	9	4.5	-
Obrádlann 6	0.5	3.5	6.5	7.5	2	-	-
Obrádlann 7	-	3.5	5.5	5.5	5.5	-	-
Obrádlann Péidiatraice	4.5	7.5	-	5.5	3	-	-

ÚSÁID OBRÁDLAINNE 19Ú FEABHRA – 25Ú FEABHRA 2001

	19ú	20ú	21ú	22ú	23ú	24ú	25ú
Obrádlann 1	8	8.5	5	6	4.5	-	-
Obrádlann 2	6	6.5	13	4.5	-	-	-
Obrádlann 3	2.5	12.5	6	7	2.5	5.5	4
Obrádlann 4	13.5	11	6	13	12	5.5	5
Obrádlann 5	6	6.5	4.5	6.5	5	3.5	-
Obrádlann 6	6.5	6.5	6	7.5	4	-	-
Obrádlann 7	7	7	7	4	1	-	-
Obrádlann Péidiatraice	2	2	-	3	4	-	-

Belfast City Hospital: Theatre Utilisation

Mr McFarland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the usage per day, in hours, for each operating theatre in the Belfast City Hospital for the period (a) 5-11 February 2001 (b) 12-18 February 2001 and (c) 19-25 February 2001.

(AQW 2156/00)

Ms de Brún: This information is detailed in the tables below.

THEATRE UTILISATION 5-11 FEBRUARY 2001

Theatre	Theatre Hours						
	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th
Tower Theatre 1	9.25	3.75	9.25	5.25	7.25	At Week-End	
Tower Theatre 2	6.75	3.0	9.25	7.0	3.25		
Tower Theatre 3	2.75	4.25	4.25	0.5	0		
Tower Theatre 4	0	0	0	7.5	0		
Tower Theatre 5	8.0	8.25	6.75	2.75	4.5		
Tower Theatre 6	2.75	7.5	8.0	8.25	5.75		
Dufferin 1	3.5	3.75	2.0	4.25	0		
Dufferin 2	5.5	6.75	2.25	3.0	7.5		
DPU Theatre	3.0	3.0	4.25	3.5	3.0		
DPU Uroscop	6.75	3.25	4.0	0	0		
Renal	1.5	2.75	0	3.5	0		

THEATRE UTILISATION 12 - 18 FEBRUARY 2001

Theatre	Theatre Hours						
	12th	13th	14th	15th	16th	17th	18th
Tower Theatre 1	9.75	8.25	4.5	3.5	5.0	At Week-End	
Tower Theatre 2	5.5	4.5	4.0	3.0	3.75		
Tower Theatre 3	5.75	4.75	4.0	3.25	0		
Tower Theatre 4	0	0	0	4.5	0		
Tower Theatre 5	4.0	7.5	4.25	3.25	3.25		
Tower Theatre 6	6.5	6.25	3.5	6.75	11.0		
Dufferin 1	6.75	3.5	2.75	6.75	0		
Dufferin 2	3.25	7.0	2.5	3.0	6.0		
DPU Theatre	7.0	2.25	3.5	2.75	3.5		
DPU Uroscop	6.75	3.5	0	6.75	5.0		
Renal	3.0	3.5	0	3.0	0		

THEATRE UTILISATION 19-25 FEBRUARY 2001

Theatre	Theatre Hours						
	19th	20th	21st	22nd	23rd	24th	25th
Tower Theatre 1	5.75	2.0	10.0	6.0	5.0	At Week-End	
Tower Theatre 2	0	4.0	8.0	7.5	0		
Tower Theatre 3	7.25	8.0	4.25	0	4.75		
Tower Theatre 4	2.25	0	0	4.0	0		
Tower Theatre 5	4.5	8.25	6.75	6.5	5.0		
Tower Theatre 6	7.75	5.0	8.5	3.75	7.25		
Dufferin 1	6.75	6.25	4.0	6.0	0		
Dufferin 2	6.5	6.0	4.0	3.25	7.75		
DPU Theatre	1.5	0	3.25	3.5	0		
DPU Uroscop	5.0	3.75	4.0	4.0	0.5		
Renal	4.0	2.0	0	1.5	0		

Tá an t-eolas seo liostaithe sna táblaí thíos:

ÚSÁID OBRÁDLAINNE 5-11 FEABHRA 2001

Obrádlann	Uaireanta Obrádlainne						
	5ú	6ú	7ú	8ú	9ú	10ú	11ú
Obrádlann Túir 1	9.25	3.75	9.25	5.25	7.25	Deire-Adh Seach-Taine	
Obrádlann Túir 2	6.75	3.0	9.25	7.0	3.25		
Obrádlann Túir 3	2.75	4.25	4.25	0.5	0		
Obrádlann Túir 4	0	0	0	7.5	0		
Obrádlann Túir 5	8.0	8.25	6.75	2.75	4.5		
Obrádlann Túir 6	2.75	7.5	8.0	8.25	5.75		
Dufferin 1	3.5	3.75	2.0	4.25	0		
Dufferin 2	5.5	6.75	2.25	3.0	7.5		
Obrádlann AML	3.0	3.0	4.25	3.5	3.0		
Úrascóp AML	6.75	3.25	4.0	0	0		
Duánach	1.5	2.75	0	3.5	0		

ÚSÁID OBRÁDLAINNE 12-18 FEABHRA 2001

Obrádlann	Uaireanta Obrádlainne						
	12ú	13ú	14ú	15ú	16ú	17ú	18ú
Obrádlann Túir 1	9.75	8.25	4.5	3.5	5.0	Deire-Adh Seach-Taine	
Obrádlann Túir 2	5.5	4.5	4.0	3.0	3.75		
Obrádlann Túir 3	5.75	4.75	4.0	3.25	0		
Obrádlann Túir 4	0	0	0	4.5	0		
Obrádlann Túir 5	4.0	7.5	4.25	3.25	3.25		
Obrádlann Túir 6	6.5	6.25	3.5	6.75	11.0		
Dufferin 1	6.75	3.5	2.75	6.75	0		
Dufferin 2	3.25	7.0	2.5	3.0	6.0		
Obrádlann AML	7.0	2.25	3.5	2.75	3.5		
Úrascóp AML	6.75	3.5	0	6.75	5.0		
Duánach	3.0	3.5	0	3.0	0		

ÚSÁID OBRÁDLAINNE 19-25 FEABHRA 2001

Obrádlann	Uaireanta Obrádlainne						
	19ú	20ú	21ú	22ú	23ú	24ú	25ú
Obrádlann Túir 1	5.75	2.0	10.0	6.0	5.0	Deire-Adh Seach-Taine	
Obrádlann Túir 2	0	4.0	8.0	7.5	0		
Obrádlann Túir 3	7.25	8.0	4.25	0	4.75		
Obrádlann Túir 4	2.25	0	0	4.0	0		
Obrádlann Túir 5	4.5	8.25	6.75	6.5	5.0		
Obrádlann Túir 6	7.75	5.0	8.5	3.75	7.25		
Dufferin 1	6.75	6.25	4.0	6.0	0		
Dufferin 2	6.5	6.0	4.0	3.25	7.75		
Obrádlann AML	1.5	0	3.25	3.5	0		
Úrascóp AML	5.0	3.75	4.0	4.0	0.5		
Duánach	4.0	2.0	0	1.5	0		

Royal Victoria Hospital: Theatre Utilisation

Mr McFarland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the usage per day, in hours, for each operating theatre in the Royal Victoria Hospital for the period (a) 5-11 February 2001 (b) 12-18 February 2001 and (c) 19-25 February 2001.

(AQW 2157/00)

Ms de Brún: This information is detailed in the tables below.

THEATRE UTILISATION 5 - 11 FEBRUARY 2001

Theatre	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th
A Block							
Theatre 1	-	-	8.75	6	5.75	-	-
Theatre 2	9.25	7	13	8.75	4.75	3	-
Theatre 3	3.25	7.5	14	12.75	4.75	2.5	3.5
Theatre 4	-	7.5	10.75	7	-	-	-
Theatre 5	9.75	8	5	9	10.5	-	-

Theatre	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th
Theatre 6	8	8	8.25	7	6.75	7.75	8.75
Eyes/Ent							
Theatre 1	5.25	6.75	4	6.5	3.5	-	-
Theatre 2	6.25	6	5.75	-	7.75	-	-
Theatre 3	7.25	5.5	7.15	6.75	4	-	-
Theatre 4	7.25	7	-	3.5	4.5	-	-
Dpu 2	5.25	5.75	4	5.5	2.75	-	-
Main Block							
MTB-C	-	8	8.15	8.5	8	-	-
MTB-E	8.25	7	6.15	9.5	-	-	-

THEATRE UTILISATION 12 - 18 FEBRUARY 2001

Theatre	12th	13th	14th	15th	16th	17th	18th
A Block							
Theatre 1	5	1.5	2.75	8.75	7	-	-
Theatre 2	11	8	3	4.75	11.75	1.75	4
Theatre 3	5.5	11.25	14.5	-	8.25	8.5	9
Theatre 4	4.75	5.75	5.75	9.75	4.5	2	5
Theatre 5	8	8.5	1.75	7	12	-	-
Theatre 6	6.25	10.25	6.5	5.5	5.5	6.75	5.5
Eyes/Ent							
Theatre 1	6	7	-	5.5	4	-	-
Theatre 2	6	7	-	5	-	-	-
Theatre 3	3.75	6.75	3.5	5.75	-	-	-
Theatre 4	6.5	7.5	3.5	7	-	-	-
Dpu 2	7.75	6	3	6.5	-	-	-
Main Block							
MTB-C	-	7.15	4.5	8.15	8.5	-	-
MTB-E	1.5	-	4.25	9	-	-	-

THEATRE UTILISATION 19 - 25 FEBRUARY 2001

Theatre	19th	20th	21st	22nd	23rd	24th	25th
A Block							
Theatre 1	5.5	5	8.5	10	6.75	4.25	-
Theatre 2	8.75	8.25	8	12	9.25	-	3
Theatre 3	4.25	6.75	8.5	10.5	6.75	11.5	4
Theatre 4	1.75	5.75	4.25	5.75	8	-	-
Theatre 5	11	10.5	10.5	8	9	-	4.25
Theatre 6	7.25	7.75	8	7.75	6.75	7.75	4
Eyes/Ent							
Theatre 1	-	-	3.75	7.5	-	-	-
Theatre 2	5.75	6.5	6	3.5	5.25	-	-
Theatre 3	6	6.25	6.5	3	4.25	-	-
Theatre 4	4.75	7.25	7	5.75	4.5	-	-
Dpu 2	4	6.75	-	5.75	2.75	-	-
Main Block							
MTB-C	2.5	9	7.5	4.75	-	-	-
MTB-E	6.5	3.75	7	7	-	-	-

RVH WARD 38 BURNS THEATRES UTILISATION

5-11 FEBRUARY 2001

5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th
5.25	-	4	3.75	-	-	-

12-18 FEBRUARY 2001

12th	13th	14th	15th	16th	17th	18th
4.25	-	-	2.25	3	-	-

19-25 FEBRUARY 2001

19th	20th	21st	22nd	23rd	24th	25th
1.75	-	4.25	2.25	2.25	-	-

RVH DPU AMBULATORY SERVICES UTILISATION

5-11 FEBRUARY 2001

Theatre	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th
DPU 1	4.25	1.75	5.25	3.25	3.75	-	-
Endoscopy	6.75	6.75	6.25	6	4.5	-	-
Endoscopy 2	2.75	2.25	5.25	3.75	-	-	-

12-18 FEBRUARY 2001

Theatre	12th	13th	14th	15th	16th	17th	18th
DPU1	3.25	5.25	2.5	3	3.25	-	-
Endoscopy	5.75	5.5	2.75	6.25	6.5	-	-
Endoscopy 2	2.25	1	2	3.5	-	-	-

19-25 FEBRUARY 2001

Theatre	19th	20th	21st	22nd	23rd	24th	25th
DPU1	5.25	5.75	5.25	3.5	3.75	-	-
Endoscopy	5	2.5	7.25	6.25	4.25	-	-
Endoscopy 2	2.25	1.5	6	6.5	-	-	-

Tá an t-eolas seo léirithe sna táblaí thíos.

ÚSÁID OBRÁDLAINNE 5- 11 FEABHRA 2001

Obrádlann	5ú	6ú	7ú	8ú	9ú	10ú	11ú
Ceap A							
Obrádlann 1	-	-	8.75	6	5.75	-	-
Obrádlann 2	9.25	7	13	8.75	4.75	3	-
Obrádlann 3	3.25	7.5	14	12.75	4.75	2.5	3.5
Obrádlann 4	-	7.5	10.75	7	-	-	-
Obrádlann 5	9.75	8	5	9	10.5	-	-
Obrádlann 6	8	8	8.25	7	6.75	7.75	8.75
Súile/Sss							
Obrádlann 1	5.25	6.75	4	6.5	3.5	-	-
Obrádlann 2	6.25	6	5.75	-	7.75	-	-
Obrádlann 3	7.25	5.5	7.15	6.75	4	-	-
Obrádlann 4	7.25	7	-	3.5	4.5	-	-
Aml 2	5.25	5.75	4	5.5	2.75	-	-
Príomhcheap							

Obrádlann	5ú	6ú	7ú	8ú	9ú	10ú	11ú
PT-C	-	8	8.15	8.5	8	-	-
PT-E	8.25	7	6.15	9.5	-	-	-

ÚSÁID OBRÁDLAINNE 12 - 18 FEABHRA 2001

Obrádlann	12ú	13ú	14ú	15ú	16ú	17ú	18ú
Ceap A							
Obrádlann 1	5	1.5	2.75	8.75	7	-	-
Obrádlann 2	11	8	3	4.75	11.75	1.75	4
Obrádlann 3	5.5	11.25	14.5	-	8.25	8.5	9
Obrádlann 4	4.75	5.75	5.75	9.75	4.5	2	5
Obrádlann 5	8	8.5	1.75	7	12	-	-
Obrádlann 6	6.25	10.25	6.5	5.5	5.5	6.75	5.5
Súile/Sss							
Obrádlann 1	6	7	-	5.5	4	-	-
Obrádlann 2	6	7	-	5	-	-	-
Obrádlann 3	3.75	6.75	3.5	5.75	-	-	-
Obrádlann 4	6.5	7.5	3.5	7	-	-	-
Aml 2	7.75	6	3	6.5	-	-	-
Príomhcheap							
PT-C	-	7.15	4.5	8.15	8.5	-	-
PT-E	1.5	-	4.25	9	-	-	-

ÚSÁID OBRÁDLAINNE 19 - 25 FEABHRA 2001

Obrádlann	19ú	20ú	21ú	22ú	23ú	24ú	25ú
Ceap A							
Obrádlann 1	5.5	5	8.5	10	6.75	4.25	-
Obrádlann 2	8.75	8.25	8	12	9.25	-	3
Obrádlann 3	4.25	6.75	8.5	10.5	6.75	11.5	4
Obrádlann 4	1.75	5.75	4.25	5.75	8	-	-
Obrádlann 5	11	10.5	10.5	8	9	-	4.25
Obrádlann 6	7.25	7.75	8	7.75	6.75	7.75	4
Súile/Sss							
Obrádlann 1	-	-	3.75	7.5	-	-	-
Obrádlann 2	5.75	6.5	6	3.5	5.25	-	-
Obrádlann 3	6	6.25	6.5	3	4.25	-	-
Obrádlann 4	4.75	7.25	7	5.75	4.5	-	-
Aml 2	4	6.75	-	5.75	2.75	-	-
Príomhcheap							
PT-C	2.5	9	7.5	4.75	-	-	-
PT-E	6.5	3.75	7	7	-	-	-

ORV BARDA 38 ÚSÁID OBRÁDLAINNE DÓNNA

5-11 FEABHRA 2001

5ú	6ú	7ú	8ú	9ú	10ú	1ú
5.25	-	4	3.75	-	-	-

12-18 FEABHRA 2001

12ú	13ú	14ú	15ú	16ú	17ú	18ú
4.25	-	-	2.25	3	-	-

19-25 FEABHRA 2001

19ú	20ú	21ú	22ú	23ú	24ú	25ú
1.75	-	4.25	2.25	2.25	-	-

ORV AML ÚSÁID SEIRBHÍSI OTHARCARRANNA**5-11 FEABHRA 2001**

Obrádlann	5ú	6ú	7ú	8ú	9ú	10ú	11ú
AML 1	4.25	1.75	5.25	3.25	3.75	-	-
Ionscópach	6.75	6.75	6.25	6	4.5	-	-
Ionscópach 2	2.75	2.25	5.25	3.75	-	-	-

12-18 FEABHRA 2001

Obrádlann	12ú	13ú	14ú	15ú	16ú	17ú	18ú
AML 1	3.25	5.25	2.5	3	3.25	-	-
Ionscópach	5.75	5.5	2.75	6.25	6.5	-	-
Ionscópach 2	2.25	1	2	3.5	-	-	-

19-25 FEABHRA 2001

Obrádlann	19ú	20ú	21ú	22ú	23rd	24ú	25ú
AML 1	5.25	5.75	5.25	3.5	3.75	-	-
Ionscópach	5	2.5	7.25	6.25	4.25	-	-
Ionscópach	2.25	1.5	6	6.5	-	-	-

Addiction Clinics

Mr Fee asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail, by each Health Trust, the location and capacity of outpatient addiction clinics which are not solely dedicated to the treatment of people with addictions. (AQW 2168/00)

Ms de Brún: This information is not available in the form requested.

Although there are specific addiction clinics dedicated to patients with an addiction, a patient with an addiction may in fact receive treatment at many outpatient clinics.

Níl an t-eolas seo ar fáil san fhoirm a iarradh.

Cé nach bhfuil clinicí andúla ar leith ann ceangailte le hothair le handúil, is féidir le hothair le handúil cóireáil a fháil ag a lán clinicí othair sheachtraigh.

Tuberculosis Vaccinations

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the steps she is taking to increase the number of tuberculosis vaccinations. (AQW 2172/00)

Ms de Brún: For the last two years the sole manufacturer of licensed vaccine against tuberculosis (BCG) has had ongoing production problems resulting in severe shortages. BCG has continued to be made available for individuals at high risk but there has been no alternative

but to suspend the routine schools programme here and in England, Scotland and Wales, since September 1999. Negotiations aimed at securing a new supply have been ongoing and I am confident that these will be finalised shortly. A resumption of the schools programme will follow very quickly. This will aim to catch up, as a priority, with those children who have missed out since September 1999.

Le dhá bhliain anuas, bhí fadhbanna táirgthe ag dul ar aghaidh ag an aon dhéantóir amháin vacsaíne ceadúnaithe in éadán eitinne (BCG) ar tháinig géarghanntanais astu. Leanadh ar aghaidh an BCG a chur ar fáil do dhaoine aonair i mbaol mór, ach ní raibh an dara suí sa bhuaile ach an gnáthchlár scoileanna ar chur ar ceal anseo, i Sasana, in Albain agus sa Bhreatain Bheag, ó Mheán Fómhair 1999. Bhí idirbheartaíocht dírithe ar chinntiú soláthair nua ag dul ar aghaidh agus tá mé muiníneach go dtabharfar chun críche ar ball í. Tosóidh an gnáthchlár scoileanna arís go han-ghasta ina dhiaidh seo. Is é an cuspóir tosaíochta atá aige seo teacht suas leis na páistí sin a cailleadh ó Mheán Fómhair 1999.

Health Reviews

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of Reviews she is currently undertaking and the total cost of each to date. (AQW 2179/00)

Ms de Brún: Details of the Reviews I am currently undertaking and the costs, of each to date, are as follows:

Review	Cost To Date (end-February 2001)
Acute Hospitals Review Group	£156,000 ¹
Cardiac Surgery Review	not available ²
Review of Human Tissue Act (NI) 1962	Nil
Review of the Mental Health Commission	£16,000
Review of Community Care Services	Nil ³

- 1 This figure also includes the salary costs of officials seconded to work on the Review.
- 2 This is being conducted by DHSSPS officials with clinicians and others in the Health and Personal Social Services and costs are not readily available.
- 3 Minimal costs incurred to date. A joint review of Housing Adaptations Service is being taken forward by my Department and the Housing Executive. In addition there a number of operational reviews being undertaken by my Department.

Seo a leanas sonraí na nAthbhreithnithe atá mé a dhéanamh faoi láthair agus costais gach ceann díobh go dtí seo.

Athbhreithniú	Costas Go Dti Seo (Ag Críochnú- Feabhra 2001)
Grúpa Athbhreithnithe na nGéarotharlann	£156,000 ¹
Athbhreithniú Máinliachta Cairdaiche	Nil sé ar fáil

Athbhreithniú	Costas Go Dlí Seo (Ag Críochnú- Feabhra 2001)
Athbhreithniú an Achta Fhíocháin Dhaonna (TÉ) 1962	Náid
Athbhreithniú an Choimisiúin Shláinte Meabhrach	£16,000
Athbhreithniú Seirbhísí Cúraim Phobail	Náid ³

- 1 Cuireann an figiúr seo costais thuarastail oifigeach a aistriódh go sealadach le hobair ar an Athbhreithniú san áireamh.
- 2 Tá sé seo á dhéanamh ag oifigigh RSSSP le dochtúirí agus le daoine eile nach iad sna Seirbhísí Sláinte agus Sóisialta Pearsanta, agus níl costais ar fáil go réidh.
- 3 Íoscostais tarraingthe go dtí seo

Tá comhabhreithniú ar an tSeirbhís Oiriúnaithe Tithíochta á dhéanamh ag an Roinn s'agamsa agus ag an Fheidhmeannas Tithíochta. Ina theannta sin, tá roinnt athbhreithnithe feidhmiúla á ndéanamh ag an Roinn s'agamsa.

HSS Trusts: Deficit Position

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current level of deficits for all Trusts. (AQW 2180/00)

Ms de Brún: The surplus or deficit position of each HSS Trust from its formation to 31 March 2000 was set out in AQW 1513/00. The final figures for the current financial year will not be available until after the end of March 2001, but current projections would indicate a likely further net deficit of £8m for this financial year for all Trusts. This is before the application of additional monies being made available in the current year to address deficits.

Leagadh staid fhuíll agus easnamh gach Iontaobhas SSS óna bhunú go dtí an 31ú Márta 2000 amach in AQW 1513/00. Ní bheidh na figiúirí deiridh don bhliain airgeadais reatha ar fáil go dtí deireadh Mhí an Mhárta 2001, ach léireodh réamh-mheas reatha gach cosúlacht go mbeadh easnamh glan breise £8m sa bhliain airgeadais seo do na hIontaobhais go léir. Tá sé seo roimh chur ar fáil iarratais airgead breise i mbliana chun dul i gceann easnamh.

Cost of Treatment

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail, by Board area, (a) the cost to each Board of treating patients who reside in another Board area and (b) the cost to each Board of treating patients who reside outside Northern Ireland. (AQW 2186/00)

Ms de Brún: Boards do not meet the costs of treatment of patients who reside in another Board area. All such costs are met by the Board of residence of the individual

concerned. The one exception to this is A&E provision, where the host Board meets the full cost of such provision irrespective of where users come from.

Nor do Boards generally meet the costs of treating patients from other regions or countries. If the patient is from England, Scotland or Wales there are arrangements in place for the local Trust providing the care to be reimbursed by the individual's local health authority.

Ní íocann Boird costais chóireála othar a chónaíonn i limistéar Boird eile. Íocann an Bord ina gcónaíonn an duine aonair na costais uile. Eisceacht amháin is ea soláthar T&É, mar go n-íocann an Bord ina bhfuil sé á chur ar fáil, costas iomlán an tsoláthair beag beann ar ar as na húsáideoirí.

Ní íocann Boird costais chóireála othar ó réigiúin nó ó thíortha eile de ghnáth chomh maith. Más as Sasana, as Albain nó as an Bhreatain Bheag an t-othar, tá socrúithe i bhfeidhm don Iontaobhas áitiúil ag soláthar an chúraim le bheith aisíoctha ag údarás áitiúil sláinte an duine aonair.

Miscarriages

Ms Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail, by Trust Board area, how many people have suffered miscarriages in the last five years. (AQW 2190/00)

Ms de Brún: The information requested is not available.

Níl an t-eolas a iarradh ar fáil.

Management of Infected Health Care Workers

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether she intends to introduce legislation to prevent staff, who have tested positive for human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), from having access to patients in the Health Service. (AQW 2193/00)

Ms de Brún: I have no plans at present to legislate in this area.

Detailed guidance on the management of infected health care workers has been in place since 1991 and is kept under regular review. The guidelines were last updated in December 1998 and were widely distributed to health professionals here and to medical, dental and nursing schools. The revised guidance was based on recommendations from the Expert Advisory Group on AIDS. My Department is represented on the Group.

Níl rún ar bith agam faoi láthair reachtaíocht a thabhairt isteach sa réimse seo.

Bhí mionthreoirilínte ar láimhseáil oibrithe cúraim shláinte galraithe i bhfeidhm ó 1999 agus coinnítear faoi athbhreithniú rialta iad. Leasaíodh na treoirilínte is

déanaí i Mí na Nollag 1998 agus tugadh go forleathan do ghairmithe sláinte anseo agus do scoileanna leighis, fiacloireachta agus banaltrachta iad. Bunaíodh na treoirilínte leasaithe ar mholtaí ón Ghrúpa Comhairleach Saineolaithe ar SEIF. Tá ionadaíocht ón Roinn s'agamsa ar an Ghrúpa.

Asthma: Cases Diagnosed

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of cases of asthma diagnosed in each health board area in each of the last two years for which figures are available.

(AQW 2199/00)

Ms de Brún: The information requested is not available.

Níl an t-eolas a iarradh ar fáil.

Diabetes: Cases Diagnosed

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of cases of diabetes diagnosed in each health board area in each of the last two years for which figures are available.

(AQW 2200/00)

Ms de Brún: The information requested is not available.

Níl an t-eolas a iarradh ar fáil.

Health Indices for Northern Ireland

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what health indices exist for Northern Ireland and to state how these compare with those produced elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

(AQW 2205/00)

Ms de Brún: The Standardised Mortality Ratio (SMR) all ages is the only regularly produced health index where we can be compared to England, Scotland and Wales.

Table 1 below details the male, female and all persons all ages SMR for here, England, Wales and Scotland. SMRs allow death rates to be compared even where populations have different age and gender profiles.

TABLE 1: STANDARDISED MORTALITY RATIO¹ ALL AGES, 1998

Index (UK=100)

	Northern Ireland	England	Wales	Scotland
Male	105	98	100	117
Female	101	98	101	116
All persons	102	98	101	115

Source: Regional Trends 35

¹ Rates Standardised to the mid-1991 population (combined for all four countries) for males and females separately. Figures for male and females cannot be compared.

Is é an Cóimheas Básmhairachta Caighdeánaithe (CBC) do gach aois an t-aon innéacs sláinte amháin a dhéantar go rialta ar féidir linn comparáid a dhéanamh eadrainn agus Sasana, Albain agus An Bhreatain Bheag.

Mionléiríonn Tábla 1 thíos fir, mná agus gach duine de gach aois CBC anseo, i Sasana, in Albain agus sa Bhreatain Bheag. Déanann CBCanna comparáid idir rátaí báis fiú nuair atá próifílí éagsúla aoise agus inscne ag daonraí.

TÁBLA 1: CÓIMHEAS BÁSMHAIREACHTA CAIGHDEÁNAITHE¹ GACH AOIS, 1998

Innéacs (RA=100)

	Tuaisceart Éireann	Sasana	An Bhreatain Bheag	Albain
Fir	105	98	100	117
Mná	101	98	101	116
Gach duine	102	98	101	115

Foinse: Regional Trends 35

¹ Rátaí Caighdeánaithe go dtí an daonra i lár 1991 (curtha le chéile do na ceithre thír go léir) d'fhir agus do mhná ina nduine agus ina nduine. Ní féidir comparáid a dhéanamh idir na figiúirí d'fhir agus do mhná.

Primary Care Pilot Schemes

Mr O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail her plans for the future of primary care pilot schemes.

(AQW 2241/00)

Ms de Brún: The primary care pilot schemes were due to end on 31 March 2001. However, in light of the decision by the Assembly to delay the ending of fundholding until April 2002 and the impact this would have on the timetable for introducing new primary care arrangements, I decided to continue funding the pilots for a further 6 months from 1 April 2001. In announcing my decision on 12 February 2001, I explained that I would keep the funding of the pilots under review in the light of the outcome of the consultation exercise on *Building the Way Forward in Primary Care*. I expect that during the course of the year we will be looking to those involved in the pilots to move into the new arrangements that emerge from the consultation.

Bhí na scéimeanna píolóta príomhchúraim le críochnú ar an 31ú Márta 2001. Mar gheall ar chinneadh an Tionóil áfach le deireadh ciste-shealbhaíochta a mhoilliú go dtí Aibreán 2002, agus ar an éifeacht a bheadh aige seo ar an chlár ama do thabhairt isteach socruithe nua príomhchúraim, chinn mé go leanfainn ar aghaidh ag maoiniú na scéimeanna píolóta ar feadh 6 mhí breise ón 1ú Aibreán 2001. Nuair a d'fógair mé mo chinnidh ar an 12ú Feabhra 2001, mhínigh mé go gcoinneoinn maoiniú na scéimeanna píolóta faoi athbheithniú mar gheall ar chinneadh an chleachtaidh chomhairligh ar Ag Tógáil an Bhealaigh chun Tosaigh i bPríomhchúram. Tá mé ag súil, le linn na bliana, go mbeidh muid ag iarraidh go nglacfaidh iad siúd a bhí páirteach sna scéimeanna

piólóta leis na socruithe nua a thiocfaidh chun cinn ón chomhairliú.

Drug Misuse

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm that, in implementing the Programme for Government's action point to reduce drug misuse, members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary will have a central role to play on local committees.

(AQO 1027/00)

Ms de Brún: Four Drugs Co-ordinating Teams have responsibility, at local level, for the implementation of the Drugs Strategy in a manner appropriate to local needs and situations. The Teams include representation from the Health and Social Services Boards and Trusts, the Education and Library Boards and Youth Service, the voluntary and community sector and the RUC.

Ar leibhéal áitiúil, tá freagracht ar cheithre Fhoireann Comhordaithe Drugaí as an Straitéis Drugaí a chur i bhfeidhm ar dhóigh atá ar fóirstean do riachtanais agus do thosca áitiúla. Ar na foirne tá ionadaithe ó na Boird agus Iontaobhais Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta, na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne agus Seirbhíse Óige, an earnáil dheonach agus phobail agus ón RUC.

Injuries Caused by Fireworks

Rev Robert Coulter asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of injuries caused by fireworks during 2000. (AQO 1071/00)

Ms de Brún: Following the Halloween period in the year 2000, it was reported that 100 persons were treated at local A&E departments as a result of injuries caused by fireworks.

I ndiaidh Oíche Shamhna na bliana 2000, tuairiscíodh gur tugadh cóireáil do 100 duine i rannóga Taismí agus Éigeandála mar gheall ar ghortuithe a fuair siad ó thinte ealaíne.

Long Term Care

Mr Dodds asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if she intends to bring forward legislation to implement any aspect of the report by the Royal Commission on Long Term Care (Cm 4192-I) entitled "With Respect to Old Age: Long Term Care-Rights and Responsibilities."

(AQO 1056/00)

Ms de Brún: It is my intention to bring forward amendments to the Health and Personal Social Services (NI) Order 1972 to pave the way for the introduction of free nursing care from April 2002. It will also be necessary to make changes to the 1972 Order, the Social Security Contributions and Benefits (NI) Act 1992 and the

Jobseekers (NI) Order 1995 in connection with both the ending of the Income Support Preserved Rights scheme and the transfer of claimants to care management by the health and personal social services in April 2002. It is intended that the necessary amendments will be carried in a further Health and Personal Social Services Bill to be presented to the Assembly after the summer recess.

Tá rún agam leasuithe ar an Health and Personal Social Services (NI) Order 1972 a thabhairt chun tosaigh leis an bhealach a réiteach do chúram altranais saor in aisce a thabhairt isteach ó Aibreán 2002. Beidh sé riachtanach fosta athruithe a dhéanamh ar Ordú na bliana 1972, an Social Security Contributions and Benefits (NI) Act 1992 agus an Jobseekers (NI) Order 1995 mar gheall ar dheireadh a chur leis an scéim Cearta Caomhnaithe Tacaíochta Ioncaim agus le héilitheoirí a aistriú go bainisteoireacht cúraim faoi na seirbhísí sláinte pearsanta agus sóisialta in Aibreán 2002. Tá sé de rún go mbeidh na leasuithe riachtanacha i mBille Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Pearsanta agus Sóisialta eile atá le cur faoi bhráid an Tionóil i ndiaidh shos an tsamhraidh.

Air/Sea Rescue

Mr Leslie asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to give her assessment of Air/Sea Rescue provision.

(AQO 1069/00)

Ms de Brún: This is a reserved matter.

Is ní forchoimeádtá é seo.

Northern Ireland Ambulance Service

Dr Adamson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail her policy on recruitment to the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service.

(AQO 1070/00)

Ms de Brún: The Ambulance Service's employment policies and practices are established in line with appropriate employment legislation and Codes of Practice. The 1998 Act has placed new duties on all public authorities with regard to Equality and recruitment policies in the Ambulance Service are amongst those to be reviewed in light of the new statutory duties. Recruitment activity in the Ambulance Service is based on Workforce plans which take into account the current needs of the Ambulance Service and planned Service developments.

Tá polasaithe agus cleachtais reatha na Seirbhíse Otharcharr ag cur leis an reachtaíocht fostaíochta iomchuí agus le Cóid Cleachtais. Leag an tAcht 1998 dualgais úra ar gach údarás poiblí maidir le Comhionannas, agus tá polasaithe earcaíochta sa tSeirbhís Otharcharr orthu sin atá le haithbhreithniú faoi na dualgais reachtúla nua. Tá an earcaíocht sa tSeirbhís Otharcharr bunaithe ar

phleananna Lón Saothair a chuireann riachtanais reatha na Seirbhíse Otharcharr agus forbairtí beartaithe na Seirbhíse san áireamh.

Retention of Human Organs

Ms Hanna asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what progress has been made to provide a support group for those affected by reports on unauthorised retention of human organs.

(AQO 1031/00)

Ms de Brún: Arrangements are now well advanced regarding the establishment of the Support Group that I announced to the Assembly on 13 February, as part of a package of measures to address the whole issue of post-mortem, organ removal and retention. Membership of the Group, to be entitled 'the Relatives Reference Group', is currently being finalised, and I will announce both its membership and terms of reference shortly.

Tá socrúithe faoi lán seoil maidir leis an Ghrúpa Tacaíochta a d'fhógair mé don Tionól ar 13 Feabhra a chur ar bun mar chuid de phacáiste beart le aghaidh a thabhairt ar shaincheist scrúduithe iarbháis, agus orgáin a bhaint agus a choinneáil. Tá bailchríoch á cur ar bhallraíocht an ghrúpa, a mbeidh "An Grúpa Tagartha Gaolta" mar theideal air. Fógróidh mé a bhallraíocht agus a théarmaí tagartha ar ball.

Single Use Instruments

Ms McWilliams asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of tonsillectomy and adenoidectomy operations that have been postponed and/or cancelled with the introduction of new guidelines on single use instruments issued by the Chief Medical Officer on 1 February 2001.

(AQO 1020/00)

Ms de Brún: The information requested could only be provided at disproportionate cost. It is known, however, that approximately 100 of these operations are normally carried out every month in hospitals.

Níorbh fhéidir an t-eolas a iarradh a chur ar fáil ach ar chostas díréireach. Tá a fhios, áfach, go ndéantar thart ar 100 de na hobráidí seo in ospidéal áitiúla achan mhí.

Air Ambulance

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail any progress made towards the provision of an Air Ambulance on an all Ireland basis.

(AQO 1082/00)

Ms de Brún: The Cross Border Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Working Group is presently considering the case for the provision of an air ambulance service to cover

the whole island. The Group is currently in the process of commissioning independent advice on the costs and benefits of such a service.

Faoi láthair tá an Mheitheal Oibre Trasteorann do Chúram Éigeandála Réamhospidéal ag breathnú ar cé acu arbh fhéidir seirbhís aerotharcharr a sholáthar d'iomlán an oileáin. Faoi láthair tá an mheitheal ag coimisiúnú comhairle neamhspleách ar chostais agus ar bhuntáistí seirbhíse den chineál.

Performance Related Pay

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to give her assessment on the practice of paying performance related pay within Trusts that are currently running deficits.

(AQO 1081/00)

Ms de Brún: It is important to understand the basis of the deficits issue. Trust deficits have largely emerged as a problem within the last two financial years and most deficits have occurred in the acute hospital trusts. There are a number of reasons for these deficits including increasing demands on service and HPSS funding not keeping pace with this rising demand. These are issues which are not within the direct control of managers.

Performance related pay is designed to reward managers for good performance against the objectives for the individual and the organisation. I would expect the organisation to take all relevant factors into account, including the resources available and the difficulty of managing the levels of demand experienced, in determining the amount of performance pay for its staff.

Tá sé tábhachtach saincheist na n-easnamh a dhealú ó shaincheist pá de réir feidhmithe aonair. Sa dá bhliain airgeadais dheireannacha is mó a tháinig easnamh Iontaobhas chun solais mar fhadhb, agus tharla an chuid is mó de na heasnamh sna hiontaobhais ghéarospidéal. Tá roinnt fáthanna leis na heasnamh seo, lena n-áirítear an méadú atá ar ráchairt ar sheirbhísí agus fosta nach bhfuil maoiniú SSPS ag coinneáil coise leis an éileamh mhéadaitheach seo. Is rudaí iad seo nach bhfuil faoi stiúir dhíreach bainisteoirí.

Tá sé d'aidhm ag an phá de réir feidhmithe bainisteoirí a chúiteamh le dea-fheidhmiú i gcoinne na gcuspóirí don duine aonair agus don eagraíocht. Tá coinne agam go gcuirfidh an eagraíocht iomlán na bhfachtóirí iomchuí san áireamh, lena n-áirítear an staid airgeadais, agus i ag cinneadh ar mhéad na pá de réir feidhmithe dá foireann.

Reduction in Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to her statement of 13 December 2000, to detail what progress has been made

towards a sustainable, long-term reduction in hospital waiting lists. (AQO 1068/00)

Ms de Brún: I have made the development of a firm foundation for sustainable progress on waiting lists a top priority for the next three years. The Framework I issued in September last set out a strategic context for action on waiting lists and comprehensive plans have been drawn up by Boards and Trusts as a result. An extra £5 million was allocated this year to support the implementation of these plans. *Priorities For Action*, which I issued last week, sets a target of cutting in-patient waiting lists to 39,000 in three years' time, from their present level of around 50,000.

A further £8 million has been earmarked for next year for action on waiting lists. On top of that, this year's non-recurrent allocation of £5 million will be made recurrent, bringing the total additional resources available next year to £8 million.

Rinne mé barrthosaíocht de dhúshraith a leagan do chur chun cinn inbhuanaithe ar liostaí feithimh do na chéad trí bliana eile. Leag an Chreatlach a d'eisigh mé i Meán Fómhair na bliana anuraidh amach comhthéacs straitéiseach le haghaidh gníomhaíochta ar liostaí feithimh. Dá bharr seo, dhréachtaigh Boird agus Iontaobhais pleananna cuimsitheacha. Leithroinneadh £5 mhilliún sa bhreis i mbliana le tacú le cur i bhfeidhm na bpleananna seo. Leagann 'Tosaíochtaí do Ghníomhaíocht', a d'eisigh me an tseachtain seo chuaigh thart, amach sprioc de liostaí feithimh d'othair chónaitheacha a laghdú go 39,000 óna leibhéal reatha de thart ar 50,000 faoi cheann trí bliana.

Cuireadh £8 milliún eile de bhreis in áirithe don bhliain seo chugainn le haghaidh gníomhaíochta ar liostaí feithimh. Mar bharr air sin, déanfar £5 mhilliún de leithroinnt neamhathfhillteach na bliana seo athfhillteach, rud a ardóchas iomlán na n-acmhainní breise a bhéas ar fáil sa bhliain seo chugainn go £8 milliún.

Palliative Care

Mr R Hutchinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail her plans to increase the availability of palliative care for patients with terminal illnesses who wish to be cared for within their own homes especially for those living in rural areas. (AQO 1023/00)

Ms de Brún: The report on Cancer Services 'Investing for the Future' recommended a regional review of palliative care services. Subsequently the Chief Nursing Officer chaired a group to review the current provision of palliative care and to make recommendations on the future provision of these services.

'Partnerships in Caring' was published and circulated in May 2000. The report recommends a way forward for palliative care services here. The review highlights the

need for partnership with patients and their families, between the variety of care providers and with service planners and commissioners 'as it is only in working together in a co-ordinated way that we can hope to provide consistently high quality services'.

The Chief Nursing Officer met with Board and Trust representatives on 19 December 2000 to review progress on implementing the recommendations contained within the report. At this meeting a range of initiatives were outlined, aimed at developing palliative care in the community, a service which was until recently primarily provided by the voluntary sector. There is now an emphasis on partnership between statutory, independent and voluntary sectors to develop palliative care services in the community. At the meeting it was decided that the local group of the National Council for Hospice and Specialist Palliative Care should take the lead in developing regional standards and guidelines for palliative care.

This group will be assisted by the DHSSPS and Campbell Commissioning Group and will meet again in six months to further review progress.

Mhol an tuairisc ar sheirbhísí aille 'Ag Infheistiú don Todhchaí' aithbhreithniú réigiúnach ar sheirbhísí cúraim mhaolaithigh. Ina dhiaidh sin bhí an Príomh-Oifigeach Altranais ina chathaoirleach ar ghrúpa le soláthar reatha an chúraim mhaolaithigh a aithbhreithniú agus le moltaí a dhéanamh ar sholáthar na seirbhísí seo sa todhchaí.

Foilsíodh agus scaipeadh 'Páirtíochtaí sa Chúram' i mí Bealtaine 2000. Molann an tuairisc bealach chun tosaigh do sheirbhísí cúraim mhaolaithigh anseo. Tarraingíonn an t-aithbhreithniú aird ar an riachtanas le páirtíochtaí le hothair agus lena dteaghlaigh idir soláthraithe cúraim éagsúla agus coimisinéirí "mar is trí oibriú le chéile amháin ar dhóigh chomhordaithe a thig linn súil a bheith againn leibhéal leanúnach seirbhísí ardcháilíochta a chur ar fáil".

Bhuail an Príomh-Oifigeach Altranais le hionadaithe Bord agus Iontaobhas ar 19 Nollaig 2000 leis an dul chun cinn ar chur i bhfeidhm mholtaí na tuairisce a aithbhreithniú. Ag an chruinniú seo rinneadh breac-chuntas ar réimse tionscnamh arbh aidhm dóibh an cúram maolaitheach a fhorbairt sa phobal, seirbhís a chuir an earnáil dheonach ar fáil don chuid is mó go dtí le deireannas. Tá béim á cur anois ar pháirtíocht idir na hearnálacha reachtúla, neamhspleácha agus deonacha le seirbhísí cúraim mhaolaithigh a fhorbairt sa phobal. Cinneadh ag an chruinniú gur chóir ghrúpa áitiúil de chuid na Chomhairle Náisiúnta do Chúram Ospice agus Maolaitheach Speisialtóra bheith i dtús cadhnaíochta ag forbairt caighdeán réigiúnacha agus treoirilínte don chúram mhaolaitheach.

Gheobhaidh an grúpa seo cuidiú ón RSSSPS agus an Campbell Commissioning Group agus tiocfaidh sé le chéile arís i gceann sé mhí le dul chun cinn a aithbhreithniú.

Long Term Care of the Elderly

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline when she intends to implement the resolution on long term care of the elderly passed by the Assembly on 27 February 2001. (AQO 1046/00)

Ms de Brún: It is my intention to bring the resolution on free personal care to the attention of the Executive as soon as possible so that they may consider it at the earliest opportunity. It will then be for the Executive, in the light of available resources, to decide if and when free personal care for the elderly can be introduced. It is my intention to bring forward amendments to the Health and Personal Social Services (NI) Order 1972 to pave the way for the introduction of free nursing care from April 2002.

Tá sé de rún agam aird an Choiste Feidhmiúcháin a tharraingt ar an rún ar chúram pearsanta saor in aisce chomh luath agus is féidir le go mbeidh sé in ann é a bhreathnú an chéad áiméar a gheobhaidh sé. Fágfar faoin Choiste Feidhmiúcháin, agus é ag cur na n-acmhainní atá ar fáil san áireamh, cinneadh más féidir cúram pearsanta saor in aisce do na sean a thabhairt isteach. Tá sé de rún agam leasuithe ar an Health and Personal Social Services (NI) Order 1972 a thabhairt chun tosaigh leis an bhealach a réiteach le cúram altránais saor in aisce a thabhairt isteach ó Aibreán.

HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

Skills Shortages

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail his plans to counter skills shortages. (AQW 2164/00)

The Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Dr Farren): The recent Skills Monitoring Report, commissioned by the NI Skills Task Force, provides the essential focus for more detailed research on priority skills.

It informs programme managers in government of industry sectors and occupations requiring attention and targeting of resources to counter skills shortages.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A8 Improvements

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail what funding has been allocated towards

safety improvements to the junctions on the A8 at Millbrook and Antiville for the years 2001/2002 and 2002/2003. (AQW 2084/00)

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Campbell): The funding available to my Department for major road schemes is managed on a programme rather than a scheme by scheme basis. In other words, funds are not allocated to individual schemes in advance of their construction being contractually committed.

The package of proposed improvements for the A8 Belfast to Larne road comprises discrete schemes, one of which is the construction of the roundabouts at Millbrook and Antiville (estimated to cost some £1.9M). The statutory procedures for each scheme are being progressed separately so that any difficulty in one does not affect the others. The roundabouts can therefore be constructed independently of the other schemes when the statutory procedures pertaining to them are completed successfully, subject to the availability of funding at that time.

School Crossing Patrols

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the steps he is taking to enable school-crossing patrols to assist senior citizens and disabled persons to cross roads. (AQW 2091/00)

Mr Campbell: As this is a matter for the Department for Regional Development's Roads Service your question has been passed to me for reply. The Department intends to introduce amending legislation to enable adults as well as children to use school crossing patrols. This amendment, together with other proposed amendments in the pipeline, will be taken forward when the Department next amends the Road Traffic Regulation (Northern Ireland) Order 1997. The timing will be dependent on the resources available and other legislative priorities.

B90: Road Safety Improvements

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (a) what funding is available and (b) what schemes have been approved to improve road safety on the B90 between Carrickfergus and Larne Road junction for the year 2001/02. (AQW 2118/00)

Mr Campbell: Within the overall funding available to it in 2001/02, my Department's Roads Service plans to invest around £13M on a range of minor improvement schemes at various locations across the entire network of some 15,000 miles of roads and footways. Much of this will be directed to improving safety, particularly where there is scope to improve sites with a poor accident history.

In relation to the B90 between Carrickfergus and its junction with the A2 Larne Road near Whitehead, Roads Service is developing a scheme to provide a pedestrian refuge and right-turning pocket at the petrol station on the Middle Road section of the B90. The timing of this scheme depends on its priority compared with other schemes competing for the limited funds available, but the Divisional Roads Manager is hopeful it can proceed in 2001-02 if at all possible. He is also considering other improvement schemes on that route in future years.

“Tidal Flow” Traffic Schemes

Mr Neeson asked the Minister for Regional Development if he has any plans to introduce “tidal flow” traffic schemes. (AQW 2130/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department’s Roads Service has no plans at present to introduce tidal flow traffic schemes.

Most congested commuter routes tend to be relatively narrow with frontage development and are unsuitable for tidal flow techniques. Management and safety issues are also a major concern and make the idea impractical in most situations.

Adopting Roads and Services from Developers

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development to provide a list of all new developments, by District Council Area, which commenced over five years ago and have yet to have their roads and services formally adopted by his Department. (AQW 2136/00)

Mr Campbell: A list of those developments, which commenced over 5 years ago and where all of the associated roads and services have not yet been formally adopted by my Department, has been placed in the Assembly Library.

I should point out that in many cases, roads and services within developments are adopted in stages as the work progresses. Some of the developments listed have therefore been partially adopted.

Ballyheather Road, Strabane

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development to give his assessment of the current state of repair of the Ballyheather Road in the Strabane District Council area and to make a statement. (AQW 2141/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department’s Roads Service has advised me that, whilst there is some damage to roadside verges, the overall condition of Ballyheather Road is satisfactory when compared to similar rural roads across the country. The road received surface dressing treatment over its entire length in 1998.

Free Travel for Pensioners

Mr Gibson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the estimated cost of providing the free travel scheme for pensioners and when this scheme will be introduced. (AQW 2165/00)

Mr Campbell: I intend to introduce a free travel scheme for men and women aged 65 and over from 1 October 2001. I have been able to secure £3 million for 2000-02 and further indicative allocations of £6 million in 2002-03 and 2003-04 to enable the scheme to go ahead. This will be in addition to some £4 million per annum currently being spent to fund half-fare travel for older people. The actual cost of free travel will depend upon the extent to which our senior citizens make use of the scheme.

Cargie Road, Cullyhanna, Co Armagh

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his plans to maintain and improve the Cargie Road, Cullyhanna, County Armagh. (AQW 2175/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department’s Roads Service carries out cyclical maintenance of all roads which includes the cleaning of drainage outlets, gullies and back channels and grass cutting on roadside verges. In addition, all roads are routinely inspected so that essential response maintenance work is identified and completed as necessary.

Cargie Road is maintained in line with the above procedures. Arising from routine road inspections a section of the road has been included in a programme of surface dressing works to be carried out this summer. At present, Roads Service has no plans to carry out any improvement work.

Free Travel Scheme

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he has any plans to extend the free travel scheme to groups other than pensioners. (AQW 2182/00)

Mr Campbell: The existing scheme provides free travel on public transport for people who are registered blind and half-fare travel for war disabled pensioners, people aged 65 and over and children up to age 16. People aged 65 and over will qualify for free travel from 1 October 2001. I should like to extend the concessionary fare scheme further to include additional categories of disabled people but this would require additional funding.

Verge Cutting in Rural Areas

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his policy regarding verge cutting in rural areas. (AQW 2213/00)

Mr Campbell: The policy of my Department's Roads Service is to cut roadside verges on public roads up to twice a year in rural areas and up to 5 times a year in urban areas.

I should explain that, in cutting grass on its lands, the Roads Service objective is to prevent overgrowth onto carriageways and footway surfaces and the obstruction of sightlines and traffic signs. Grass cutting operations are therefore carried out for road safety reasons and not for cosmetic or amenity purposes.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Domestic Energy Efficiency Scheme

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of homes which received insulation grants under the Domestic Energy Efficiency Scheme (DEES) within the parliamentary constituency of Mid Ulster. (AQW 2098/00)

The Minister for Social Development (Mr Morrow): Based on information provided by the Scheme Manager for the Domestic Energy Efficiency Scheme (DEES), from January 1995 to 31 December 2000, 6,280 homes have received insulation grants under the Scheme within the parliamentary constituency of Mid Ulster.

As I have made clear in earlier replies, my Department does not fund DEES on a constituency basis as the Scheme is demand led. Funding is provided to the Scheme Manager who responds to requests from individual clients for the installation of energy efficiency measures in their properties.

Housing Development: Edenvale Avenue, Carrickfergus

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (a) at what stage is the proposed new housing development at Edenvale Avenue, Carrickfergus and (b) what funding is available for this development. (AQW 2120/00)

Mr Morrow: This project is being undertaken by Fold Housing Association and is currently programmed to start in autumn 2001. Fold is at present discussing decanting options with the residents of the 18 existing orlit dwellings, which will be replaced by 34 new family homes.

Provision for the scheme has been made in the Housing Association development programme for 2001-02. At this early stage estimated costs only are available. The

total cost of the project is likely to be in the region of £2m and of this total my Department will contribute around £1.2m by way of Housing Association Grant.

Charities Legislation

Mr Ford asked the Minister for Social Development to detail his plans to update legislation with regard to charities in Northern Ireland, particularly the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 1964 and the Charities (Northern Ireland) Order 1987. (AQW 2122/00)

Mr Morrow: The Department for Social Development is presently monitoring developments in England and Wales and elsewhere with a view to deciding whether changes to the existing Northern Ireland charity legislation would be desirable. Any proposed changes will, of course, be the subject of public consultation as well as consultation with interested bodies.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the circumstances in which an applicant for Jobseeker's Allowance would compromise their entitlement to benefit by (a) undertaking an academic course and (b) undertaking voluntary work. (AQW 2178/00)

Mr Morrow: The basic conditions of entitlement for the receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance are that a person should be available for and actively seeking work each week. Full-time students undertaking a course of study are not eligible for Jobseeker's Allowance as they are not considered to be available for work. Student couples who have a dependent child can claim Jobseeker's Allowance during the summer vacation period subject to the normal conditions of entitlement. Also, in the case of married couples where one partner is a student, the other partner can claim benefit in the normal way all year round.

Unemployed people may undertake a course of study as a part-time student and continue to get Jobseeker's Allowance, provided they remain available for and actively seeking work, and are prepared to rearrange or, if necessary, give up the course if a suitable job opportunity arises.

There is no limit on the number of hours a person may undertake voluntary work whilst in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance as long as they are actively seeking work and available to accept offers of work at 48 hours' notice. This represents a concession from the normal requirement that they should be available immediately for employment. They must also be willing and able to give up or rearrange their voluntary work in order to take up employment.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 23 March 2001

Written Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Victims Groups

Mrs Nelis asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail (a) the number of victims groups by geographical area (b) the amount of funding allocated to each group from the budget of the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister and (c) the amount of funding allocated to each group from the budget of the Community Relations Unit.

(AQW 2092/00)

Reply: [holding answer 12 March 2001]: There are 34 main victims groups known to the Victims Unit of the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister and there may be other smaller groups which have not yet approached the Unit. The 34 groups are distributed by County as follows:

- 15 are situated in Antrim,
- 4 in Armagh,
- 4 in Down,
- 2 in Fermanagh,
- 5 in Londonderry and
- 4 in Tyrone.

The Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister has allocated £420,000 in the current financial year to assist victims. Decisions on the allocation of this funding are currently being finalised.

The Community Relations Council has allocated funding to victims groups and projects as follows:

Not Victims Any More (NOVA)	£1,500
West Tyrone Voice	£2,500
Institute for Counselling & Personal Development	£3,953
The Victims & Survivors Trust	£1,470
Widows Against Violence Empowered (WAVE)	£2,300
Support, Training, Education, Employment and Research (STEER)	£2,100

Widows Against Violence Empowered has also received core funding of £35,807 for each of the last 3 years and An Crann was granted a total of £165,000 through the European Peace Programme. The Community Relations Council also administered a Victim Support Grant Scheme funded by the Northern Ireland Office with a total budget of £225,000.

Special Advisers

Mr Douglas asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail (a) who has been employed by the Office as special adviser(s) (b) the qualifying criteria used for the appointment and (c) the remit of the special adviser(s). (AQW 2103/00)

Reply: [holding answer 12 March 2001]: The following are employed as special advisers in the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister: Mr David Campbell, Dr Graham Gudgin, Mr David Kerr, Mr Brian Barrington, Mr Colm Larkin and Mr Hugh Logue. The latter two are on secondment from the European Commission.

All of the advisers were selected on the basis of their ability to carry out the functions of the post.

The remit of special advisers is set out in Part 1 of Schedule 2 to the standard contract of employment for such advisers. A copy of the model contract has been placed in the Assembly Library.

Discrimination Against Teachers

Ms McWilliams asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister whether it has any plans to review the exclusion from statutory protection against religious and political discrimination of teachers employed in grant-aided schools in Northern Ireland, consequent to section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

(AQW 2181/00)

Reply: [holding answer 21 March 2001]: The Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 which prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religious belief or political opinion is the responsibility of the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.

The European Union Framework Directive will require the introduction of measures throughout the EU to outlaw discrimination in employment on the grounds of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. It will be necessary to amend the 1998 Order to reflect the exception in the Directive regarding recruitment of teachers.

This exception will be reviewed in the context of the development of the Single Equality Bill. Views will be sought in the consultation on that Bill and the Bill will be subject to an Equality Impact Assessment.

Cancelled Events Due to Foot and Mouth Disease

Mr Hilditch asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to provide financial assistance to enable groups, funded by the Community Relations Unit, to reschedule events which have had to be cancelled as a result of the Foot and Mouth crisis. (AQW 2274/00)

Reply: No such requests have been received by the Community Relations Unit. Where an event has been funded as a discrete item by the Community Relations Unit, additional costs incurred will be considered on their merits. However, where groups are provided with an annual budget, they would normally be expected to manage within that budget, since the Community Relations Unit has no funding available for this purpose over and above its existing financial provision.

Northern Ireland Bureau in Washington

Mr Fee asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to outline progress made in strengthening and reorganising the structure of the Northern Ireland Bureau in Washington. (AQO 1131/00)

Reply: The Northern Ireland Bureau in Washington represents the interests of the Northern Ireland Administration in the United States. The office is staffed by four people, one of whom is employed on a part-time basis.

An additional member of staff at middle management level has been engaged locally. The Bureau will relocate in the near future and this will provide an opportunity to review its functions, structure and relationship with other bodies promoting Northern Ireland in the United States.

Inter-Departmental Committee: Foot and Mouth Disease

Mr McFarland asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, pursuant to the statement issued following the meeting of the Executive Committee of 2 March 2001, whether the interdepartmental committee of officials, established to co-ordinate action on Foot and Mouth Disease, includes officials from the Department for Regional Development. (AQO 1139/00)

Reply: We can confirm that the inter-Departmental Committee of officials includes an official from the Department for Regional Development.

Community Relations Council: Tackling Sectarianism

Ms Hanna asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail what steps are being

taken by the Community Relations Council to combat sectarianism. (AQO 1133/00)

Reply: The Community Relations Council is an independent organisation which receives financial support from the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.

The Council gives support and assistance to numerous community and voluntary bodies which are directly tackling sectarianism in a variety of ways.

The Community Relations Council also works in partnership with other organisations, including many public authorities to combat sectarianism.

Full details of the Community Relations Council's activities are published in its Annual Report. I am arranging to have copies of the most recently published edition of this placed in the Library.

Northern Ireland Affairs Committee: Inquiry into the Parades Commission

Mr Savage asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister if evidence was given by the Office to the House of Commons Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs on its inquiry into the Parades Commission. (AQO 1128/00)

Reply: We have not jointly presented evidence to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee for the inquiry into the Parades Commission.

Policing Board Nominations

Mr J Wilson asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail any discussions with the Secretary of State on nominations of Assembly Members to the Policing Board. (AQO 1125/00)

Reply: We have not jointly discussed the nomination of Assembly members to the Policing Board with the Secretary of State or his predecessor.

New Targeting Social Need

Mr McGrady asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail what arrangements have been made to ensure the implementation of the New Targeting Social Need. (AQO 1132/00)

Reply: Each Department has a New TSN Action Plan showing how it is targeting its efforts and available resources towards people, groups and areas in greatest social need.

Departments are now implementing these Action Plans.

The Executive will keep a close watch on progress on the New TSN Action Plans across all Departments - Ministers will provide regular progress reports.

Every Department will thoroughly review its Action Plan every year – and update it to take account of progress; building in new targets to follow those completed.

In addition, each Department in its Public Service Agreement commits itself to implementing its New TSN Action Plan.

The New TSN Action Plans will be published later this month. We will publish annual progress reports – so that people can see for themselves what we have achieved during each year.

New TSN will be evaluated by the end of 2002. The outcome of the evaluation will feed into future thinking on New TSN.

Discussions with the Government of the USA

Mr Leslie asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail any discussions with the Government of the United States of America.

(AQO 1138/00)

Reply: During their visit to the United States last week, the First Minister and Deputy First Minister met President Bush and Secretary of State Powell. In these discussions, the US Administration made clear their close interest in Northern Ireland affairs. The day to day contacts with the US Administration are conducted through the Northern Ireland Bureau.

Disability Rights Taskforce

Ms Lewsley asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail what arrangements have been made to take forward the work of the Disability Rights Taskforce.

(AQO 1130/00)

Reply: The Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister is currently working with all other Northern Ireland Departments to produce a response / consultation document on the Task Force's recommendations concerning devolved matters.

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland has been asked to work in tandem with the Disability Rights Commission on those issues already remitted to the Disability Rights Commission.

The recommendations giving disabled people new protections against discrimination in education are being implemented in Great Britain through the Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill. In Northern Ireland these recommendations are being considered jointly by the Department of Education and the Department

of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment.

European Week Against Racism

Mrs E Bell asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail any plans to mark the European Week Against Racism.

(AQO 1108/00)

Reply: The European week against Racism and the United Nations day against racism was launched at an event organised by the Equality Commission and hosted by the Multi-Cultural Resource Centre on 15th March.

Mr Haughey spoke at this event and launched a poster campaign.

Mr Haughey has accepted an invitation to speak at an event organised by Traveller Movement (NI) being held on the UN day against Racism on 21st March. He will launch the 'Anti-discriminatory Practice with Travellers' training pack.

Combating Social Exclusion and Poverty

Mr McMenamin asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to outline what steps are being taken to develop the cross-cutting theme of combating social exclusion and poverty as outlined in the Programme for Government.

(AQO 1134/00)

Reply: The Programme for Government sets out the Executive's specific commitments in terms of tackling the problems of poverty and their causes. These include: New TSN Action Plans to be implemented by all Departments, work to tackle the problems of unemployment, including a new Taskforce on Employability and Long term Unemployment, action to improve the delivery of social security services to vulnerable groups and a strategy to encourage up-take of benefits, programmes to regenerate disadvantaged urban and rural areas, to improve access to decent, affordable housing and to address fuel poverty, Executive Programme funds, particularly the Social Inclusion/Community Regeneration and Children Fund.

Departments are working hard to fulfil these commitments. We will report regularly on progress to the Assembly.

US Administration

Mr Dallat asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to outline plans to develop relations with the new administration in the United States of America.

(AQO 1129/00)

Reply: During their visit to the United States last week, the First Minister and Deputy First Minister met

President Bush and Secretary of State Powell. In these discussions, the US Administration made clear their close interest in Northern Ireland affairs.

The Holocaust

Mr A Maginness asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to outline what arrangements are in place to commemorate the Holocaust.

(AQO 1122/00)

Reply: The inaugural United Kingdom Memorial Day national ceremony to commemorate the Holocaust took place at Westminster Central Hall on 27 January 2001. The Deputy First Minister attended on behalf of the devolved administration.

Representing Departmental Ministers

Mr Ford asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister whether there is any provision in place for Ministers to represent other Departmental Ministers in the Assembly when they are unavailable.

(AQO 1110/00)

Reply: While there is no particular provision in place Departmental Ministers can and have made arrangements for other Ministers to speak on their behalf in the Assembly when it is appropriate to do so.

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Importing Animals

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she could confirm that (a) lorries bringing livestock into Northern Ireland are no longer emptied and the exact number of animals ascertained and (b) Departmental officials are not permitted to board lorries to confirm the number of livestock on board.

(AQW 2223/00)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers): I can confirm that since the advent of the Single European Market in 1993, lorries are no longer routinely emptied on entry into Northern Ireland and the animals counted. However, Department inspectors still have the authority to inspect consignments if they suspect an offence has been committed and spot checks are carried out on animal numbers.

In respect of trade from Great Britain, the Diseases of Animals (NI) Order 1981 contains powers allowing an inspector to enter any vehicle to ensure compliance with the Order or any legislation made under it.

In respect of intra-community trade, checks are normally conducted at the point of destination rather than at the point of entry. However, where there is the suspicion of disease or non-compliance of the regulations, checks can be performed at point of entry.

Fishing Industry

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail, in respect of the Northern Ireland fishing fleet, the number of (a) vessels (b) people employed (c) current vacancies for young people and (d) people thought to be dependent on the fishing industry and to outline the steps she is taking to sustain the viability of the industry.

(AQW 2261/00)

Ms Rodgers: Latest information collected by Officials in Fisheries Division would indicate:

- There are 344 locally licensed vessels of which 177 are over 10 metres in length.
- Some 686 people both full time and part time are employed in the catching sector.
- Information on current vacancies for young people is not available but there are indications that some fishing vessels are short of crew members.
- It is estimated there are some 1339 people both part time and full time employed in processing and marketing and in other fishery related work such as harbour jobs, boat building and chandlery supplies.

Steps on various fronts are being made to assist the sustainability of the fleet. As you will be aware priority is being given to the introduction of a fishing vessel decommissioning scheme, and steps are being taken to seek to restore last year's nephrops TAC. In addition, I am pressing for the removal of the payment of light dues by fishermen, and I have asked my officials to consider the possibility of a tailored training for fishermen in the near future. In the longer term I would intend to undertake an assessment of this year's closures and to consult the other Fisheries Ministers on future arrangements.

European Union Rules and Regulations on Packaging

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail what meetings she has had with representatives of the Horticultural industry to discuss the impact to that industry, of European Union rules and regulations on packaging.

(AQW 2291/00)

Ms Rodgers: I have had no meetings with representatives of the horticultural industry to discuss the impact to that industry of European rules and regulations on packaging, nor have I been asked for any meetings on that subject.

I have however had discussions recently with the industry about the difficult trading conditions being experienced by growers and have concluded that some elements of the horticulture sector in Northern Ireland appear to offer potential for growth, both in home and export markets. I have therefore taken steps to initiate a study, which will be developed in consultation with the industry. Identification of business opportunities and market requirements will clearly be important elements of any such study.

Meantime my Department will continue with its ongoing programme to support companies in improving the promotion of their products. This is done through initiatives such as the Northern Ireland Garden Centre Awards, the Nursery Trade Directory and exhibits at trade shows such as the Kildare Growers and Four Oaks Shows.

Sheepmeat Exports

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the value of sheepmeat exports to the European Union in the last three months.
(AQW 2304/00)

Ms Rodgers: Unfortunately the information you request is not available. The most recent statistics on sheepmeat exports relate to the period up to August 2000.

Woodland Cover

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the action she is taking to increase woodland cover.
(AQW 2306/00)

Ms Rodgers: I have set a target of 700 hectares of new planting this year, to be achieved through a combination of public and private planting. I have made provision in the Northern Ireland Rural Development Plan 2000-2006 for measures to support the creation of private woodland at a rate of about 600 hectares per annum of new planting on agricultural land. The balance of new planting is carried out by the Forest Service.

Integrated Administrative Control Systems

Mr McHugh asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail her contingency plans, in the event of a prolonged foot and mouth outbreak, to deal with the need by farmers to complete Integrated Administrative Control Systems (IACS) forms for European Union agricultural area payments.
(AQO 1095/00)

Ms Rodgers: Applications for the 2001 Integrated Administrative and Control System issued to farmers within the last few days in the normal way. The closing date for receipt of applications is 15 May 2001 with late applications accepted with penalties up to 9 June 2001.

At this stage there is no impact on 2001 IACS applications arising from the Foot and Mouth outbreak and movement restrictions. The scheme rules and normal arrangements for the completion and return of applications continue to apply.

We are monitoring the situation closely and will respond quickly and positively where it becomes apparent that farmers are encountering difficulty because of the emergency either in submitting application forms or complying with IACS or other scheme rules. My Department has published guidance to assist farmers on questions they may have and to explain the special arrangements already in place to deal with difficulties they may be encountering in complying with requirements under the major livestock schemes. This material will be reviewed and updated as necessary as the situation develops.

Subsidy payments will not be delayed because of circumstances arising from the Foot and Mouth movement restrictions.

European Council of Agriculture Ministers

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to confirm the outcome of the meeting of the European Council of Agriculture Ministers of 26 February 2001 and to make a statement.
(AQO 1114/00)

Ms Rodgers: The Council reviewed the main decisions on BSE which had been taken at recent meetings, underlining the importance of effective implementation of these measures, as well as the need to avoid national measures. It also endorsed the Commission's proposals on scrapie testing and surveillance and undertook to keep the science under review.

The Council considered the Commission's proposed seven-point plan in response to the crisis in the European beef market. A wide range of reactions emerged. The UK supported the need for urgent measures to restore consumer confidence and remove unwanted beef from older animals from the market, while querying the suitability of some of the measures designed to rebalance the beef market in the medium term. We expressed particular concern about the proposals to require suckler cow premium claims to include a minimum of 20 per cent heifers, the introduction of individual quotas for beef special premium and restoration of the 90 head limit on beef special premium claims.

The UK also provided the Council with details of the foot and mouth disease outbreak, the measures being taking to contain the disease and, in collaboration with the Commission, to prevent its spread to other Member States. There was great sympathy for UK farmers and an appreciation of the comprehensive measures we are taking.

Jointly with the Italian delegation, the UK called for a review of the EU's food labelling policy to satisfy

consumers demands for more information, including, for example, how food is produced and what it contains. This initiative was given strong support by Germany and Austria.

Movement of Ewes

Rev Dr William McCrea asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to permit, under Departmental supervision, sheep farmers to move ewes about to lamb from one non-restricted farm to another.

(AQO 1144/00)

Ms Rodgers: The single most important factor in the spread of this disease is the movement of animals. It was for this reason that I imposed the controls I did on the movement of animals.

However, I do appreciate that welfare problems can develop with ewes at lambing time. In recognition of that, I have announced some judicious easing of the relevant controls, not only in sheep, but on the other susceptible animals as well. Sadly, sheep in the 3km protection zone will still not be able to go off their holdings except to slaughter on emergency welfare grounds. However, in the 10km surveillance zone, my Department will permit some movement of sheep back to home premises for lambing, under a number of conditions including the need for prior clinical examination of the herd and supervised transport. Movement may only be within the surveillance zone. In the rest of NI, DARD will license sheep movements for lambing back to the home premises for lambing, provided that the movement does not exceed 5km and subject to other conditions. I would stress that all these arrangements will require prior DARD licence which will only be forthcoming where genuine welfare grounds exist.

Review of Forest Policy - Felling Licences

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she intends to include the re-introduction of tree felling licences as part of the review of forest policy.

(AQO 1102/00)

Ms Rodgers: I intend as part of the review of forest policy to consider the need for the reintroduction of felling licences.

Licence for Sending Animals to Abattoirs

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the criteria for awarding a licence to enable farmers to send animals to local abattoirs.

(AQO 1115/00)

Ms Rodgers: Individual producers can obtain a licence from their local Divisional Veterinary Office or

they can contact their local abattoir and the abattoir will apply for the licence on the applicant's behalf. Whichever method is used

- the animals must be from farms outside the infected area and be moving to a slaughterhouse which is also outside the infected area;
- the producer must supply their name and address, their herd number or flock mark, the number of animals they intend to send for slaughter and the address of their farm premises.
- the producer must agree a date with the abattoir to take the animals and this date must be supplied to the local DVO.
- The movement licence must travel with the animals, and be surrendered to a DARD official on arrival at the abattoir.
- The movement must take place on the date shown on the licence and it will be valid for up to 1 working day after the date of the expected slaughter.
- All the normal movement documents that would accompany animals in transit must also be submitted. Examples of this would be MC2 documents for cattle or Aujeszky's Disease documents for pigs.

Business and Environmental Training Places

Mr Carrick asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail what programme structure she has identified to deliver the 5,000 business and 5,000 environmental training places by 31 March 2002 as outlined in the Programme for Government.

(AQO 1097/00)

Ms Rodgers: Due to the current foot and mouth outbreak, delivery of all DARD's training programmes have been suspended for the immediate future. The structures to deliver the initiative have, however, been put in place and will be re-activated as soon as the disease situation permits.

The Business component of the training consists of an Introductory Programme delivered over 4 three hour sessions. This will be supplemented by a series of optional Intermediate workshops with a strong enterprise focus.

The Environment component also consists of an Introductory Programme which in this case will concentrate on the key elements of Good Farming Practice. This lasts for 2 x 3 hour sessions and will be supplemented by additional optional workshops on specific topics of relevance to the individual business.

In all cases it is intended that the programmes will be delivered in local areas and in the case of the Environment Programme will be centred on 16 host farms. Delivery will take place in the evening and at times to suit participants.

Foot and Mouth Disease

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she has any plans to review procedures for responding to outbreaks of diseases such as Foot and Mouth Disease. (AQO 1120/00)

Ms Rodgers: We had a clear emergency disease control plan in place to allow us to respond to an outbreak of a range of diseases, of which Foot and Mouth is only one, and that emergency plan has worked very well.

As with any major incident, it is important, after the event, to review the whole response so that emergency plans can be refined to take account of the latest experiences and I will be doing so in this case. However the priority at the moment is to continue to contain the disease and in due course eradicate it.

Co-operation Within the Agri Food Chain

Mr Kane asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline her plans to improve and encourage greater co-operation within the Agri Food Chain. (AQO 1143/00)

Ms Rodgers: There are currently some forty-five co-operatives registered in Northern Ireland. Officials from my Department have worked with producers, processors and retailers to encourage the principles of collaboration and integration along the food supply chain. They will continue to do this across all sectors of the agri-food industry in Northern Ireland building on the successes to date. Financial assistance is also provided and since 1995 £1 million has been awarded to 16 projects approved under the Marketing Development Scheme for activities involving producer co-operation and I am seeking to increase the funding available under this scheme.

Fishing Vessel Decommissioning Scheme

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to give her assessment on the prospects of the introduction of a decommissioning scheme and a 'tie-up' scheme for the Northern Ireland fishing fleet. (AQO 1105/00)

Ms Rodgers: The pursuit of a fishing vessel decommissioning scheme is a high priority and work continues in its development. It is not however possible to make any announcement on the scheme, as it is part of the fisheries measures contained in the Northern Ireland Transitional Objective 1 Programme which awaits approval from Brussels.

It has not been policy to provide compensation, including tie up schemes, because of reductions in fish quotas or closures, nor indeed is it feasible for this year's closures.

Foot and Mouth Disease

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the current situation on Foot and Mouth Disease. (AQO 1107/00)

Ms Rodgers: I very pleased to report that there has still only been one confirmed case of Foot and Mouth Disease in Northern Ireland. We continue to have quite a number of suspected cases reported, which is understandable given that farmers are particularly anxious about any unusual signs in their animals at this time. However all of these have so far proved to be negative.

There has been much media interest in the so called missing sheep – in other words the possibility that the consignment of infected sheep which led to our outbreak, may have been larger than we had first thought. As I said in my Statement to the Assembly on 12 March, there is no certainty at all that there were any such sheep. However, we did receive anecdotal reports that there could be, and I am duty bound to follow those reports up. My Department is of course pursuing this with the utmost vigour, but there is as yet no evidence that the sheep ever existed and we do have to consider the possibility that this suggestion is simply wrong.

I would however appeal to anyone who has any information to come forward with it. Until we know the full circumstances we can not be assured that Foot and Mouth Disease has been beaten.

In the meantime the biggest single threat is the virus getting past the farm gate to susceptible animals so all farmers must remain vigilant and make sure that they maintain their "Fortress Farm" procedures.

Livestock Ear Tags

Mr Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to carry out an investigation into the durability of livestock ear tags currently being marketed in Northern Ireland. (AQO 1089/00)

Ms Rodgers: My Department is currently engaged with the other UK Agriculture Departments in a Working Group set up recently to review approval of cattle ear tags in the United Kingdom.

The remit of the Group will include investigation of the durability or loss rate associated with tags approved for use in the United Kingdom.

My Department has not carried out any investigations into the durability or loss rate of tags used for other livestock.

Foot and Mouth Disease

Mr P Doherty asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline measures she has taken to

communicate with farmers during the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease in Armagh and other areas.

(AQO 1113/00)

Ms Rodgers: My first action was to set up a telephone Helpline which operates between 8.30am and 9.00pm to ensure farmers, importers and the general public were able to have their own particular queries answered as soon as possible. There have been some 19,000 calls to the Helpline since it was set up on 21 February.

I have taken part in numerous interviews on the television, on the radio, in the major Northern Ireland daily papers, in all of the Northern Ireland weekly papers and in the specialist agricultural press right from the start of the current crisis.

I also arranged for my Department to issue information leaflets on Foot and Mouth Disease to every livestock keeper in Northern Ireland and I have also passed these leaflets to the two main farming Unions to ensure that they bring them to the attention of their members. We also placed an advert in all the major Northern Ireland daily and weekly papers and all the agricultural press setting out the measures farmers should take to combat the disease.

In addition to using all of the traditional methods I have already mentioned, we have also made sure that as much information as possible has been made available on the Department's Internet Website. This has become a major contact point for the public with some 25,000 visits per day being recorded compared with around 1,000 before FMD.

I have had numerous meetings with the Industry, and have had a series of bilateral meetings with various sectoral interests within the Industry. I am in continual contact with the farming unions.

CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Promotion of Ulster-Scots Culture and Heritage

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the level of funding made available to promote the culture and heritage of the Ulster-Scots community in comparison to that made available to promote Irish culture and language in North Antrim.

(AQW 2077/00)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McGimpsey): Funding of £1.3m stg will be available to Tha Boord o Ulster Scotch in 2001/2002. DCAL will provide £0.97m of this. Funding available to Foras na Gaeilge in the same period is £10.1m DCAL will provide £2.53m of this.

Under direct rule the funding for Ulster-Scots was £118,000. Funding of £667,000 is available for Tha Boord o Ulster Scotch in 2000/2001. This is a fivefold increase on the predevolution figure.

The funding of £1.3m stg for Tha Boord in 2001/2002 represents almost a tenfold increase since devolution.

The Ulster-Scots language and culture are at a different stage of development to Irish, Gaidhlig or Welsh for example.

The North/South Language Body is charged with promoting the Irish and Ulster-Scots languages and culture throughout the island of Ireland. Both Foras na Gaeilge and Tha Boord o Ulster Scotch prepare their corporate and business plans on that basis. Neither Foras na Gaeilge nor Tha Boord o Ulster Scotch allocate funding by reference to specific geographical areas per se within the island of Ireland.

Linguistic Diversity Branch

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail when a person with Ulster-Scots expertise will be appointed to the Linguistic Diversity Branch.

(AQW 2107/00)

Mr McGimpsey: I recognise fully the need to ensure that my Department has direct access to Ulster Scots expertise. I cannot at present specify when an appointment will be made but I am reviewing this in the light of the development of policy on the Ulster Scots language.

We are able to call for advice on language matters from Tha Boord o Ulster Scotch and academics, consultants, community or voluntary sector organisations with expertise in the field.

Fish Caught by Anglers in Inland Waterways

Mr Close asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (a) the number of fish caught by anglers in Inland Waterways and (b) where this information is published.

(AQW 2146/00)

Mr McGimpsey: Information on the total number of wild rod caught salmon, sea trout, brown trout and coarse fish species caught in inland waterways in any year is not available. The only information available relating to the number of fish caught by anglers in inland waterways within the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission's (FCILC) area of responsibility is based on catch returns completed by licence holders. However only around 3-5% of anglers complete catch returns and therefore no accurate figures on the number of fish caught in this area are available. Information on catch returns will be contained in the Loughs Agency's Annual Report when it is published.

There is no statutory requirement in the Fisheries Conservancy Board (FCB) area that requires anglers to make a catch return. Some catch statistics on rod caught salmon are available from a few fisheries such as the River Bush, the Bann System Fishery on the Lower Bann and a partial return from the Ulster Angling Federation for some rivers in the Lough Neagh system. These figures are published in the FCB's Annual Report.

The FCILC and FCB plan to introduce Fisheries Tagging and Logbook Regulations later this year. These Regulations will require anglers to tag all salmon and large sea trout that are retained and to record details in a logbook. These Regulations will provide for the first time accurate information on rod caught salmon and large sea trout.

Funding Disability Sports

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the funding allocated to Disability Sports in Northern Ireland in each of the last two financial years for which figures are available. (AQW 2197/00)

Mr McGimpsey: Responsibility for the distribution of funding for sport lies with Sports Council for Northern Ireland (SCNI) who have advised that the following amounts were allocated to Disabled Sport in NI, through their Exchequer and Lottery funding schemes, in the past two financial years.

Exchequer Funding

SCNI fund four disability governing bodies in addition to Disability Sport Northern Ireland (the umbrella organisation for disability sport in the province). Each body has been offered a yearly development grant as follows (for the last two financial years):

Disability Sport Northern Ireland	£30,000
Northern Ireland Blind Sports	£2,000
Ulster Deaf Sports Association	£1,500
NI Sports Association for People with Learning Difficulties	£1,500
Northern Ireland Paraplegic Association	£2,500

Lottery Funding

The Sports Council for Northern Ireland introduced a new range of Lottery Capital and Revenue programmes in February 2000. These programmes were designed to meet the needs of sport, as defined within the *Strategy for the Development of Sport in NI, 1997-2005*, and to complement other SCNI funded investments in sport in Northern Ireland. The figures provided reflect the awards (only) from the start of these programmes to date, though sports for the disabled did attract £218,100 lottery funding through the previous Lottery Programme (Jan 95 - Feb 00).

Capital Programme

While the recent rounds of funding under the Capital Programme made no awards for projects with a special focus on disability sport, awards were made to a number of "mainstream" projects which have included a specific disabled element. These were (full costs of the project provided - the disability element represents only a part of total project costs):

St Mary's GAC, Ballymena	Disabled Toilet	£70,000
Con Magees GAC, Ballymena	Facilities for disabled	£25,000
Forthriver Bowling/Tennis	Ramps and Changing Facilities	£70,000
Brantwood Football Club	Disabled Toilets	£70,000
Kilmore Recreation Football	Disabled Toilets	£65,000

Many applications received and funded by the Lottery Fund have significant elements to service the members of the population who have a disability. While some of these elements are little more than disabled access to buildings other projects have addressed the need for full integration for people with a disability in their sporting programme. Given this, it is not possible to determine specifically the total of Capital Funding allocated to sport for the disabled.

Revenue Programmes

The Sports Council have made various recent awards through their Revenue Programmes. These include Major International Event sponsorship (Willi Brinkman Basketball Cup - £6,200) and various offers of awards to talented athletes:

Sharon Rice (Athletics)	£3,000
Mary Rice (Athletics)	£5,000
Michael Smyth (Athletics)	£3,000
Janet Gray (Water-skiing)	£16,500
Aubrey Bingham (Wheelchair Tennis)	£2,500
Jason Black (Wheelchair Tennis)	£2,500

The Sports Council have also made various recent awards to events which have a significant disabled element through their Millennium Community Awards programme (£26,170).

Funding Allocated by the Sports Council for Northern Ireland

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the funding allocated by the Sports Council for Northern Ireland by each parliamentary constituency for each of the last two financial years for which figures are available. (AQW 2198/00)

Mr McGimpsey: I am afraid the information you have requested is not available. Revenue funding, both Exchequer and Lottery, is made to the Governing Bodies of sport whose remit is Northern Ireland wide. Lottery Capital grant is allocated to each project but these are not classified into parliamentary constituency areas and the information could only be collated at disproportionate cost.

Equality Obligations of the Sports Council for Northern Ireland

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the steps being taken by the Sports Council for Northern Ireland to implement their obligations on equality of opportunity. (AQW 2201/00)

Mr McGimpsey: Following consultation, the Sports Council has drawn up an Equality Scheme which has been approved by the Equality Commission and a succession of awareness and training initiatives has been undertaken within the Council. An internal screening of the Council's policies has now been completed and this will be the subject of further consultation, following which relevant views will be taken into account. Further consultation will be carried out over a five year period to assess the impact of the Council's policies.

Sport Played by Disabled Athletes

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (a) the types of sports being played by disabled athletes (b) the numbers involved in the administration of these sports and (c) the numbers participating in these sports. (AQW 2217/00)

Mr McGimpsey: Sport for the disabled is represented, in the main, by Disability Sport Northern Ireland (DSNI). DSNI is the umbrella organisation for the four Sports Council for Northern Ireland (SCNI) recognised governing bodies of disabled sport: Ulster Deaf Sports Association (UDSA); NI Sports Association for People with Learning Difficulties (NISAPLD); Northern Ireland Blind Sports (NIBS) and Northern Ireland Paraplegic Association (NIPA).

Administration

Each one of the four governing bodies is administered by a traditional administrative structure of Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer and supported by a small committee. Disability Sport Northern Ireland is staffed by a full-time Development Officer with an additional officer providing administrative support.

Participation

People with disabilities participate in sport through their respective governing bodies, as well as through 'mainstream' sporting organisations. Each governing

body is required to return statistical information each year as part of their exchequer development grant application. The figures below reflect the participation figures for disability governing bodies for the last 4 years:

	97/98	98/99	99/00	00/01
NIPA	65	67	67	52
NISAPLD	-	370	370	370
UDSA	8	-	-	-
NIBS	200	206	100	-

(- indicates no figures provided)

The Sports Council do not hold figures for people with a disability participating in sport through 'mainstream' sporting organisations.

Sports Played

People with a disability participate in a wide range of 'mainstream' sporting activity. Essentially the extent of a persons disability determines the type of sporting activity that they may engage in. Though the Sports Council do not monitor the range of this sporting activity, they have indicated that some governing bodies have made significant efforts to integrate and make full provision for people with a disability i.e. swimming, tennis, athletics and sailing.

The Sports Council have also indicated that the most popular sports played by people within the SCNI recognised disability sports governing body family is as follows:

Deaf Sports: Badminton, Soccer, Ten Pin Bowling

Blind Sport: Sailing, Golf, Swimming, Running, Walking, Bochia

Learning Difficulties Sport: Basketball, Bowling, Swimming, Soccer, Snooker

Paraplegic Sport: Bowls, Archery, Basketball, Tennis

Funding for Disability Sports

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether he has any plans to increase funding for Disability Sport. (AQW 2218/00)

Mr McGimpsey: The Sports Council for Northern Ireland is responsible for the distribution of funding to sport, including disability sport. I understand that in 2001-02, the Council is providing a number of opportunities within which disability sport will be able to bid for increased funds. These include:

- the launch of a new Lottery programme which will enable disability sport interests to bid for funding for a full-time appointment to further the development of disability sport;

- the addition of an 'equality fund' as part of grant to Governing Bodies of sport, against which they may bid for specific programmes relating to disability sport;
- an increase in the scale of grant-in-aid to Governing Bodies which include disability organisations;
- a strategic planning initiative which will provide cash support to assist organisations, including disability organisations, to engage in a formal strategic planning process.

In addition, the Council's strategic programmes relating to facility provision, Youth Sport, Coach Education and performance progression, all have significant disability components which are capable of further growth.

Culture, Arts and Leisure Venues Due for Audit

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the 40 culture, arts and leisure venues due for audit by May 2001, as outlined in his Department's Public Service Agreement. (AQW 2238/00)

Mr McGimpsey: I have listed below the 40 culture, arts and leisure venues selected for audit to assess accessibility by May 2001.

An Cregan Visitor centre - Omagh
 Antrim Forum
 Ballearl Art and Leisure Centre - Newtownabbey
 Ballymoney Town Hall
 Belfast Central Library
 Burnavon Centre - Dungannon
 Calgach Centre - Londonderry
 Clogher Rural Community Centre - Dungannon
 Clotworthy Arts Centre - Antrim
 Craigavon Watersports Centre
 Crossmaglen Community Centre
 Divis Community Centre - Belfast
 Down Leisure Centre - Downpatrick
 Ebrington Centre - Londonderry
 Elmwood Hall - Belfast
 Flowerfield Arts Centre - Coleraine
 Gortalowry House - Cookstown
 Granaghan Resource Centre - Swatragh
 Heritage Plaza - Carrickfergus
 Irish Linen Museum - Lisburn
 Island Resource Centre - Lisburn
 Laganvalley Leisureplex - Lisburn
 Lakeland Forum - Fermanagh
 Londonderry Central Library
 Market Place Theatre - Armagh
 Maysfield Leisure Centre - Belfast
 Movanager Coarse Fishery - Ballymoney Council
 North Down Heritage Centre - Bangor
 Odyssey Arena - Belfast
 Old Town Hall - Banbridge
 Pinebank Community Centre - Craigavon

The Disability Arts Studio - Dungannon
 The Players Station - Belvoir Estate - Belfast
 The Playhouse - Londonderry
 The Ulster History Park - Omagh
 Town Hall Arts Centre - Newtownards
 Ulster College of Music - Belfast
 Ulster Hall - Belfast
 Ulster Museum - Belfast
 Verbal Arts Centre - Londonderry

Library Provision: Queen's Parade, North Down

Mrs E Bell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail any discussions which have taken place with the developer of the Queens Parade development in North Down regarding the provision of a Library. (AQW 2285/00)

Mr McGimpsey: Responsibility for the provision of public libraries is a matter for the Education and Library Boards. As yet no proposal has been put to my Department about the provision of a library with the Queen's Parade development. I am aware however that an exploratory meeting was held in June 2000 between the South Eastern Education and Library Board and the Chief Executive of North Down Borough Council regarding the SEELB's intentions to develop a new library provision in Bangor. At this meeting the Board's attention was drawn to the development on the Queen's Parade site. A representative from the Board's Library Service subsequently met with the Architects and a representative of the developer when the possibility of library provision in the development was discussed. No further discussions have taken place.

History of the Irish Parliament: Publication

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether he is providing funding to support the publication of a history of the Irish Parliament and to outline the criteria by which he considers such requests. (AQW 2359/00)

Mr McGimpsey: I can confirm that my Department is providing funding to support the publication of a History of the Irish Parliament. This publication was previously the responsibility of the Department of the Environment which, in 1989, invited the Ulster Historical Foundation to include the History of the Irish Parliament, on which Professor Edith Johnston-Liik had then been working for some years, in its programme of publications. The Department regarded this as an important work of scholarship and recognising that it would represent a substantial commitment for the Foundation, agreed that government funding would be available. With devolution on 2 December 1999 responsibility for the Foundation

passed from the DoE to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure.

The Ulster Historical Foundation was established over 40 years ago as an integral part of the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) with the twin purpose of developing a centre of excellence in genealogy for the benefit of the Ulster Diaspora around the world and of publishing historical works that would be unlikely to attract the patronage of a commercial publisher. It is in this context that my Department will consider future requests for funding to support publication costs.

Foot and Mouth Disease

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail what action he has taken in conjunction with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to combat the spread of Foot and Mouth disease.

(AQO 1099/00)

Mr McGimpsey: I have taken a number of steps to help combat the spread of Foot and Mouth disease.

On 28 February I announced that my Department was closing all fisheries within the Public Angling Estate. I also advised permit distributors not to sell permits until further notice and that private fishery owners should not operate their fisheries until further notice and on 2 March I called for complete suspension of all sports events until further notice.

OSNI withdrew all field staff from working in rural areas on 26 February 2001 and have been in contact with the Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development who has approved the action we have taken.

No further field work in rural areas will be carried out until OSNI receive clearance from DARD.

OSNI have also supplied emergency digital mapping to MAFF in London to help them co-ordinate the UK Emergency response. Agricultural Environmental Science Division within DARD already hold some of our digital data and OSNI are ready to supply or assist as required.

I have arranged for disinfected mats to be placed where feasible at the car park and pedestrian entrances to DCAL controlled accommodation.

I have reviewed my diary engagements and withdrawn from some events.

My department has circulated guidance to NDPB'S for information and dissemination to other bodies.

My Department is also represented on the Interdepartmental Group meeting under the Chairmanship of my colleague Brid Rodgers to help in the management of this crisis.

Fish Production: River Bush

Mr Kane asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the steps he is taking to increase fish production and river enhancement on the Bushmills section of the River Bush.

(AQO 1126/00)

Mr McGimpsey: The Department manages three angling beats at Bushmills on the River Bush - the Town stretch and the New stretch which lie downstream of the Salmon hatchery and the Leap stretch lying upstream of the hatchery. The Department stocks up to 500,000 salmon fry annually in the upper Bush catchment to boost returns of adult fish to the lower river where they are available for anglers. In addition a significant number of tagged Salmon smolts are released annually to monitor marine survival and this further increases the numbers of returning fish available for anglers in the lower two beats. The Department has also removed all of the nets from the sea near the river mouth which has allowed more fish to enter the river. Furthermore river enhancement works on the New stretch were completed in 2000 providing additional angling pools on this popular stretch of the river.

A programme of fisheries rehabilitation works is also being carried out within the Bush catchment which will further enhance the stocks of fish available. Finally we will shortly be appointing a river warden for the Bush and this should help to reduce poaching.

Improved Water Quality in Rivers

Mr Carrick asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail what representations he has made to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Minister of Environment to improve water quality in rivers for the benefit of fishing and other recreational sporting activities.

(AQO 1096/00)

Mr McGimpsey: I have spoken to my Ministerial colleagues on a number of occasions indicating my concern about the number of pollution incidents particularly involving fish kills.

Officials from my Department participate in the Department of the Environment's Water Quality Management Committee which has a wide remit in relation to achieving water quality targets in Northern Ireland and on the Department of Agriculture's Farm Waste Group which considers measures to try and reduce the number of agricultural pollution incidents. The Department is also liaising with the Environment and Heritage Service in the implementation of the new EU Water Framework Directive which will require an integrated catchment based approach to water quality issues.

Soccer Strategy

Mr Molloy asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the level of funding which is allocated

by his department to the Irish Football Association and the Soccer Strategy in comparison to other sports.

(AQO 1094/00)

Mr McGimpsey: My Department does not directly fund Governing Bodies of sport. Governing Bodies such as the IFA are funded through the Sports Council for Northern Ireland, which is responsible for the development of sport within the Province, including the allocation of funding. I understand the total amount of funding allocated by the Sports Council to the IFA in the past year was £162,386, including £42,500 for Women's Football.

In view of the particular problems facing soccer at the present time, such as run down stadia and dwindling crowds, my Department made funding of around £105k available this year for the development of a Soccer Strategy. This funding facilitated comprehensive research on the difficulties facing the game, the convening of a major Conference Work Shop to consider what might be done to tackle problems in local football and covers the administration costs associated with the project.

The Soccer Strategy process has been led by my Department.

EDUCATION

Free School Meals

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 1655/00, to detail, by parliamentary constituency, (a) those schools which provide free meals and (b) the number of pupils entitled to receive free meals at each school.

(AQW 2032/00)

The Minister of Education (Mr M McGuinness): All grant-aided schools make arrangements for the provision of free school meals to those pupils entitled to receive them.

A table detailing, by parliamentary constituency, the number of pupils entitled to receive free school meals at each school in October 1999 has been placed in the Assembly Library.

Educational Needs of Autistic Children

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail (a) the number of autistic children with a statement of special educational need (b) what facilities are available for such children and (c) the number of teachers who specialise in this field.

(AQW 2152/00)

Mr M McGuinness: As I indicated in my Answer to the Member on 8 March, the October 2000 school census show a total of 179 children in nursery, primary and secondary schools, presenting as autistic according

to their statements of special educational needs. I will also provide information on the numbers in special schools when these become available.

Many autistic children with severe learning difficulties attend special schools where there are appropriate staff and facilities to meet their special educational needs. Depending on the severity of their needs, some of those at mainstream schools may have classroom assistance and be supported either by a peripatetic teacher or an outreach teacher attached to a special school.

The number of teachers in each Education and Library Board area trained to cater for the needs of autistic children are as follows:

Belfast	Western	North Eastern	South Eastern	Southern
25	12	7	25	15

British Sign Language

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Education to detail the steps he is taking to ensure that British Sign Language is taught to deaf children in schools.

(AQW 2208/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Local special educational provision for hearing impaired children may be made in mainstream classes in primary and secondary schools, in special education units for the hearing impaired attached to certain of those schools and in Jordanstown Special School for the hearing and visually impaired. Jordanstown is the only local school where sign language is used on a regular basis, although it is provided by teachers and classroom assistants in special units where appropriate. There are several forms of sign language in common use, other than British Sign Language; Jordanstown School uses British Signed English.

Council for Catholic Maintained Schools: Members

Mr Taylor asked the Minister of Education to detail (a) the number of persons from outside Northern Ireland who presently serve as Members of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (b) the date on which the Chairman of the Council signed the Annual Accounts for the year ending 31 March 2000 and to make a statement.

(AQW 2210/00)

Mr M McGuinness: One person from outside Northern Ireland presently serves as a Member of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools.

The Accounts were signed by the Vice-Chairperson on 14 November 2000. The delay was due to the illness and subsequent death of the Chairman, Bishop Michael Dallat.

Council for Catholic Maintained Schools: Rent and Rates

Mr Taylor asked the Minister of Education to detail why the item "Rent and Rates" in the Accounts of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools increased from £25,409 to £126,010 in the years ending 31 March 1999 and 31 March 2000 respectively and to make a statement.
(AQW 2211/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The office accommodation for Down and Connor Education Committee and the Clogher Diocesan Education Committee was relocated in 1998-99 and 1999-2000 respectively. The additional rent and rates costs in the year ended 31 March 2000 can be attributed to the full year rental costs of £25,000 for Down and Connor, a one-off payment of £80,000, in lieu of rent for a 25 year period, for Clogher and the remainder for rates for the Armagh Office.

Premises for the Council and the five Diocesan Education Committees were provided free of charge by the Church Authorities to fulfil their commitment to make a significant contribution to the accommodation requirements of the Council during its establishment. In 1995 the Department accepted that the Church Authorities had met their initial commitment and any future accommodation requirements of the Council would be eligible for grant aid.

Maintenance Work at Schools

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Education to detail the backlog of high priority maintenance work in respect of schools in the Parliamentary Constituency of East Antrim.
(AQW 2237/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Information in the form requested is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Teachers: Employment and Retirement

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of (a) teachers employed in each education and library board area (b) teachers who have taken early retirement in each of the last five years and (c) teaching vacancies that remain unfilled over the past twelve months.
(AQW 2248/00)

Mr M McGuinness: (a) The following table details the numbers of teachers currently employed in each Board area:

Board Area	Total Teachers
BELB	3934
WELB	3687
NEELB	4175
SEELB	3779
SELB	4420

(b) The following table details the total number of teachers who have left teaching during each of the last five academic years on grounds of either Efficient Discharge, Redundancy or Ill-health.

Academic Year	Total Teachers
1995/96	423
1996/97	508
1997/98	636
1998/99	561
1999/00	513

(c) The information requested is not held by the Department of Education, nor is it collated by the relevant employing authorities.

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Unemployment Statistics: Upper Bann

Dr O'Hagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail, by electoral ward, the unemployment rates for the parliamentary constituency of Upper Bann.
(AQW 2270/00)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Sir Reg Empey): Unemployment statistics at Parliamentary Constituency and ward level are only available from the claimant count. While rates are available at Parliamentary Constituency level, they are not available at ward level.

Upper Bann Parliamentary Constituency is made up of all of Craigavon District Council and eight of the fifteen wards from Banbridge District Council. Details of the number and rate of claimant count unemployment in Upper Bann Parliamentary Constituency at February 2001 is given in Table 1 and the number of claimants for each ward within this Constituency is given in Table 2.

TABLE 1: NUMBER AND RATE OF CLAIMANT COUNT UNEMPLOYED IN UPPER BANN PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY AT FEBRUARY 2001.

Parliamentary Constituency	Total Number Unemployed	% Of the Workforce
Upper Bann	1,914	3.9

TABLE 2: NUMBER OF CLAIMANT UNEMPLOYED IN UPPER BANN PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY WARDS AT FEBRUARY 2001.

District Council	Ward	Number
Craigavon	Aghagallon	55
Craigavon	Annagh	76

District Council	Ward	Number
Craigavon	Ballybay	62
Craigavon	Ballyoran	59
Craigavon	Bleary	39
Craigavon	Brownstown	42
Craigavon	Church	44
Craigavon	Corcrain	119
Craigavon	Court	77
Craigavon	Drumgask	63
Craigavon	Drumgor	85
Craigavon	Drumnamoe	93
Craigavon	Edenderry	41
Craigavon	Kernan	37
Craigavon	Killycomain	29
Craigavon	Kinnegoe	59
Craigavon	Knocknashane	28
Craigavon	Magheralin	48
Craigavon	Mourneview	43
Craigavon	Parklake	38
Craigavon	Taghnevan	86
Craigavon	Tavanagh	52
Craigavon	The Birches	38
Craigavon	Tullygally	89
Craigavon	Warringstown	41
Craigavon	Woodville	110
Banbridge	Ballydown	50
Banbridge	Banbridge West	48
Banbridge	Edenderry	56
Banbridge	Fort	41
Banbridge	Gilford	57
Banbridge	Lawrencetown	30
Banbridge	Loughbrickland	27
Banbridge	Seapatricks	52

ENVIRONMENT

Areas of Townscape Character

Mrs E Bell asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the criteria for boundaries adopted within the guidelines for areas of townscape character as stipulated in his Department's Supplementary Planning Guidance.

(AQW 2189/00)

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Foster): Areas of Townscape Character (ATC) will, where appropriate, be designated within development plans. In establishing the boundary for any such ATC it is of paramount importance to recognise firstly its own distinctive characteristics, normally based on an architectural or historic built form or layout, and also the extent of area to which the control of development afforded by such

designation would be necessary in order to respect these characteristics. The proposed boundary of any ATC put forward in a draft development plan would be established from survey work undertaken.

The development plan process involves public consultation and following draft plan publication there is opportunity for people to object and the possibility of further consideration through a Public Inquiry.

Failure to Display Vehicle Excise Duty

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of people who were sent a notification of intended prosecution for failure to display a vehicle excise licence in the last year for which figures are available and how much revenue was recovered as a result of this action.

(AQW 2228/00)

Mr Foster: The collection and enforcement of Vehicle Excise Duty (VED) are excepted matters. They are carried out in Northern Ireland by DVLNI under the terms of a formal agreement between DOE and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR).

The Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994 specifically states that the offences for which the Secretary of State for DETR may institute proceedings. Failure to display a licence is not included in these offences but is an offence under Section 33 of the Act.

Enforcement for this offence is a matter for the RUC and I have no information on the number of prosecutions for failure to display a Vehicle Excise Duty licence or the revenue recovered.

Road Safety Council of Northern Ireland

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of the Environment to detail his plans for future funding of the Road Safety Council of Northern Ireland and if future funding levels will be linked to inflation.

(AQW 2230/00)

Mr Foster: The Department provided £93k to fund the activities of the Road Safety Council and its local road safety committees in 2000-01. In addition the Department provided £50,000 to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents to provide administrative support for the Council. The level of funding is not linked to inflation but is related to an annual programme of activity by the Council agreed with the Department.

As with all government programmes, the work and funding of the Road Safety Council is subject to review at five yearly intervals and a review is to be carried out later this year. The level of funding for the Council will form part of that review and I will consider at that time whether to link this to inflation.

Planning Applications: High Voltage Overhead Power Lines

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the criteria used when assessing planning applications for new high-voltage overhead power lines.

(AQW 2243/00)

Mr Foster: My Department's planning policy on overhead cables is set out in Policy PSU 11 of the publication entitled "A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Briefly, planning applications for high-voltage overhead power lines are assessed under land use and visual impact criteria.

My Department is progressively replacing parts of the policy framework contained in the Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland with a series of new and revised Planning Policy Statements (PPS). When published, the policies in these PPS's will apply across all of Northern Ireland. Of particular relevance is a proposed PPS on Public Services/Utilities which will provide an opportunity to review policy aspects in relation to the matter of overhead power lines. This is not contained with the PPS programme at present.

When undertaking all the essential considerations including comprehensive consultation in the zoning of land for new housing within a development plan, my Department would consider the existence of high voltage overhead power lines as both a physical and environmental constraint. The significance of this constraint would clearly depend on the extent of impact on any given site and there would be circumstances where it would be material in any decision not to zone an area for housing development.

Planning Applications: High Voltage Overhead Power Lines

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of the Environment to re-assess the planning criteria used to determine the siting of high voltage power lines. (AQW 2244/00)

Mr Foster: My Department's planning policy on overhead cables is set out in Policy PSU 11 of the publication entitled "A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Briefly, planning applications for high-voltage overhead power lines are assessed under land use and visual impact criteria.

My Department is progressively replacing parts of the policy framework contained in the Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland with a series of new and revised Planning Policy Statements (PPS). When published, the policies in these PPS's will apply across all of Northern Ireland. Of particular relevance is a proposed PPS on Public Services/Utilities which will provide an

opportunity to review policy aspects in relation to the matter of overhead power lines. This is not contained with the PPS programme at present.

When undertaking all the essential considerations including comprehensive consultation in the zoning of land for new housing within a development plan, my Department would consider the existence of high voltage overhead power lines as both a physical and environmental constraint. The significance of this constraint would clearly depend on the extent of impact on any given site and there would be circumstances where it would be material in any decision not to zone an area for housing development.

Planning Applications: High Voltage Overhead Power Lines

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of the Environment whether the existence of high voltage overhead power lines are considered when zoning land for new housing developments. (AQW 2245/00)

Mr Foster: My Department's planning policy on overhead cables is set out in Policy PSU 11 of the publication entitled "A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Briefly, planning applications for high-voltage overhead power lines are assessed under land use and visual impact criteria.

My Department is progressively replacing parts of the policy framework contained in the Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland with a series of new and revised Planning Policy Statements (PPS). When published, the policies in these PPS's will apply across all of Northern Ireland. Of particular relevance is a proposed PPS on Public Services/Utilities which will provide an opportunity to review policy aspects in relation to the matter of overhead power lines. This is not contained with the PPS programme at present.

When undertaking all the essential considerations including comprehensive consultation in the zoning of land for new housing within a development plan, my Department would consider the existence of high voltage overhead power lines as both a physical and environmental constraint. The significance of this constraint would clearly depend on the extent of impact on any given site and there would be circumstances where it would be material in any decision not to zone an area for housing development.

Carrickfergus Castle: Running Costs

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the running costs of Carrickfergus Castle in each of the last five years. (AQW 2273/00)

Mr Foster: I refer the Member to the answer I gave to AQW 2061-00.

Retrospective Planning Approvals

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQO 1006/00, whether he will undertake to publish at regular intervals, by district council area, the number of retrospective planning approvals being recorded by the Planning Service. (AQW 2275/00)

Mr Foster: As indicated in my previous answer, I have asked officials to start recording this information on the existing database in respect of future cases.

This information will be published each year in the Planning Service's Annual Report and Accounts.

Planning Regulations: New Shop Fronts

Mr McFarland asked the Minister of the Environment to detail what planning regulations exist to ensure that new shop fronts being constructed in a given town adhere to the character of existing shops.

(AQW 2286/00)

Mr Foster: The relevant policies are set out in:

- 'Planning Policy Statement 1 - General Principles'.
- 'A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland' and
- 'Planning Policy Statement 6 - Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage'.

Planning Policy Statement 1 states that applicants for planning permission will have to be able to demonstrate how they have taken account of the need for good design in their development proposals and that they have had regard to relevant development plan policies and supplementary design guidance. This should be done in a manner appropriate to the nature and the scale of the proposals.

The 'Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland' states that it is the Department's policy to promote high standards of siting and design within towns and villages. Development proposals in towns and villages are required to make a positive contribution to townscape and be sensitive to the character of the area surrounding the site in terms of design, scale and use of materials.

Policies for shop fronts for specific town centres may be included in Town Centre Local Plans.

Policy BH8 of Planning Policy Statement 6 states that in the case of an extension or alteration of a listed building, the Department will only grant consent to proposals for the extension or alteration of a listed building where all the following criteria are met;

- the essential character of the building and its setting are retained and its features of special interest retained intact and unimpaired;
- the works proposed make use of traditional and/or sympathetic building materials and techniques

which match or are in keeping with those found on the building; and

- the architectural details match or are in keeping with the building.

It also states with regard to conservation areas that the Department will normally only permit development proposals for new buildings, alterations, extensions and changes of use in, or which impact on the setting of, a conservation area where all the following criteria are met:

- the development preserves or enhances the character and appearance of the area;
- the development is in sympathy with the characteristic built form of the area;
- the scale, form, materials and detailing of the development respects the characteristics of adjoining buildings in the area; and
- the development conforms with the guidance set out in conservation area designation documents.

Designated Areas of Townscape Character

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of the Environment to outline what plans he has to expand the number of designated townscape areas within the parliamentary constituency of East Londonderry. (AQW 2311/00)

Mr Foster: I have no immediate plans to increase the number of designated Areas of Townscape Character in the East Londonderry Constituency. However, my Department has commenced the statutory process leading to the preparation of a new Area Plan, to be known as the Northern Area Plan, for Ballymoney, Coleraine, Limavady and Moyle Council areas.

This process will provide an opportunity for my Department, in consultation with District Councils and the public, to consider what additional areas might merit being designated as Areas of Townscape Character in the four Districts including Coleraine and Limavady in the East Londonderry constituency.

Areas of Townscape Character

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the criteria used to designate townscape areas. (AQW 2312/00)

Mr Foster: Areas of Townscape Character (ATC) will, where appropriate, be designated within development plans. In establishing the boundary for any such ATC it is of paramount importance to recognise firstly its own distinctive characteristics, normally based on an architectural or historic built form or layout, and also the extent of area to which the control of development afforded by such designation would be necessary in order to respect these characteristics. The proposed boundary of any

ATC put forward in a draft development plan would be established from survey work undertaken.

The development plan process involves public consultation and following draft plan publication there is opportunity for people to object and the possibility of further consideration through a Public Inquiry.

Industrial Waste: Belfast Lough

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment to give his assessment on the level of industrial waste currently being deposited into Belfast Lough from the parliamentary constituency of East Antrim.(AQW 2320/00)

Mr Foster: My Department does not hold the information requested.

However, my officials have made enquiries with councils in the Parliamentary Constituency of East Antrim, namely Larne BC, Carrickfergus BC and Newtownabbey BC.

In terms of solid industrial waste only Carrickfergus has a licensed disposal operation for disposal to Belfast Lough. This is at Kilroot Power Station where some 1500 tonnes of furnace bottom, ash, oil grits and soot is disposed of weekly into a purpose built lagoon.

Belfast City Council operates and regulates the municipal waste disposal site at Dargan Road. It accepts some 55,000 tonnes of commercial and industrial waste per annum at the facility from various private sources, including sources from within the East Antrim Parliamentary constituency.

However, the Council cannot provide a breakdown of this figure which would identify the tonnage specific to the East Antrim Parliamentary constituency.

Planning Applications: Telecommunications Masts

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of planning applications for the erection of telecommunications masts in each parliamentary constituency, that have been (a) approved and (b) refused in each of the last three years for which figures are available.
(AQW 2340/00)

Mr Foster: The Planning Service does not record details of planning applications on a parliamentary constituency basis.

Details of planning applications by calendar year, including applications for Prior Approval, for telecommunications masts in all district council areas throughout Northern Ireland are set out in the attached schedule.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS DECISIONS

District Council Area	1998		1999		2000		Total	
	APP	REF	APP	REF	APP	REF	APP	REF
Antrim	2	0	6	0	20	2	29	2
Ards	5	2	13	9	17	5	35	16
Armagh	6	0	10	0	23	7	39	7
Ballymena	3	0	3	0	26	0	32	0
Ballymoney	0	0	4	0	5	2	9	2
Banbridge	4	0	5	0	10	1	19	1
Belfast	0	0	27	0	39	15	66	15
Carrickfergus	2	0	1	0	3	0	6	0
Castlereagh	0	0	4	0	12	0	16	0
Coleraine	2	0	4	0	11	4	17	4
Cookstown	2	0	4	0	8	3	14	3
Craigavon	5	0	4	0	17	3	26	3
Derry	0	0	4	0	17	1	21	1
Down	4	0	4	1	17	7	25	8
Dungannon	6	0	9	1	31	8	46	9
Fermanagh	23	0	19	1	28	10	70	11
Larne	4	0	3	1	9	1	16	2
Limavady	3	0	4	0	14	3	21	3
Lisburn	0	0	8	2	28	1	36	3
Magherafelt	2	0	2	0	7	1	11	1
Moyle	4	0	5	0	9	1	18	1
Newry & Mourne	4	0	9	0	19	5	32	5
N'abbey	2	0	2	0	16	5	20	5
North Down	0	0	7	3	19	7	26	10
Omagh	9	0	4	0	10	3	23	3
Strabane	3	0	4	0	9	0	16	0
Total	96	2	169	18	424	95	689	115

* APP = APPROVED / REF = REFUSED

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Rating Policy

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether his review of rating policy will consider (a) rating agricultural land and (b) water rates for domestic properties.
(AQW 2231/00)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan): I can confirm that the review will be comprehensive and in that context both areas will be among the many issues to be considered.

Barnett Formula

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail what recent discussions he has had with Treasury Ministers about the operation of the Barnett formula.
(AQW 2263/00)

Mr Durkan: While I personally have not met Treasury Ministers recently, my officials have had a series of meetings with their counterparts in Treasury and have registered my concerns about the appropriateness of the Barnett Formula in its current format and particularly under the new Resource Accounting and Budgeting regime.

The Executive will, particularly in context of the next Spending Review, continue to seek changes in relation to the Barnett Formula and press for funding allocations which fully reflect the higher levels of need in Northern Ireland.

2001 Census

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail what arrangements have been made to review the procedures for safeguarding the security and confidentiality of information to be collected in the 2001 Census and to make a statement. (AQW 2335/00)

Mr Durkan: The White Paper on the 2001 Census, published in March 1999, gave assurances that the well-established traditions of maintaining the confidentiality of information collected in the census would be upheld for the 2001 Census, and that the Census Offices would undertake reviews of the confidentiality and security arrangements for the 2001 Census and would publish the outcome of such reviews before the Census.

Independent reviews of the physical security arrangements for processing the 2001 Census information and the measures to protect the statistical confidentiality of the data were undertaken last year. The outcome of the reviews and the recommendations of the Review Teams, including a joint statement from the Registrars General for Northern Ireland, England, Wales and Scotland, are being published today by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, the Office for National Statistics and the General Register Office for Scotland.

Copies of the Report have been deposited in the Assembly Library. It can be accessed from the Northern Ireland Census web site (www.nicensus2001.gov.uk) and copies will shortly be available on request from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Identifiable Total Managed Expenditure Per Head

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assessment she has made of the differential in Health expenditure per head of population in Northern Ireland compared to that in Wales and Scotland. (AQW 2170/00)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms de Brún): [holding answer 13 March 2001]: The Chancellor's Public Expenditure Statistical analysis, customarily published in conjunction with his Budget, contains a series of figures on "Identifiable total managed expenditure per head" in each of the administrations. The 2001 edition of the Analysis is to be published very shortly. The relevant table in the 2000 Analysis shows 1998-99 HPSS expenditure per head as follows:

	£
Scotland	1,197
Wales	1,116
Locally	1,098

I will write to the Member with the information on 1999-2000 when it becomes available.

Istigh in Anailís Staitistiúil an tSeansailéara ar Chaiteachas Poiblí, foilsithe mar is gnáth in éineacht lena Cháinainnéis, tá sraith figiúirí ar "chaiteachas iomlán inaitheanta caite de réir an duine" i ngach Roinn Rialtais. Tá eagrán 2001 den Anailís le foilsiú ar ball beag. Léiríonn an tábla cuí seo a leanas in Anailís 2000 caiteachas SSSP 1998-99 de réir an duine:

	£
Albain	1,197
An Bhreatain Bheag	1,116
Go hÁitiúil	1,098

Scriobhfaidh mé chuig an Bhall leis an eolas ar 1999-2000 nuair a chuirfear ar fáil é.

Community Care Packages

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) the number of community care packages allocated in each of the last three years and (b) how many of these were allocated to pensioners in each Board area. (AQW 2185/00)

Ms de Brún: [holding answer 13 March 2001]: The number of new community care packages delivered in each of the calendar years 1998, 1999 and 2000 is shown according to Board area in the tables below. Such information is not available for pensioners; however, the number of new care packages delivered to persons in the Elderly Care Programme of Care is also shown in the tables below. Care packages already in existence are not included in the figures shown in the tables.

(a) 1998

Board Area	New Care Packages Delivered:	
	Total	Elderly Care POC
Eastern	2160	1811
Northern	1565	1270

Board Area	New Care Packages Delivered:	
	Total	Elderly Care POC
Southern	1151	777
Western	809	720
Total	5685	4578

(b) 1999

Board Area	New Care Packages Delivered:	
	Total	Elderly Care POC
Eastern	2369	2031
Northern	1565	1277
Southern	1269	859
Western	677	594
Total	5880	4761

(c) 2000

Board Area	New Care Packages Delivered:	
	Total	Elderly Care POC
Eastern	2580	2283
Northern	1452	1164
Southern	1318	1026
Western	579	524
Total	5929	4997

Léirítear méid na mbeart nua cúraim phobail tugtha sna blianta 1998, 1999 agus 2000 de réir ceantair Bhoird sna táblaí thíos. Níl a leithéid d'eolas ar fáil ar phinsiníirí; ach léirítear méid na mbeart nua cúraim tugtha do dhaoine sa Chlár Cúraim (CC) do Chúram Seandaoine sna táblaí thíos fosta. Ní chuirtear bearta cúraim atá ann cheana féin leis na figiúirí a léirítear sna táblaí.

(a) 1998

Ceantar Boird	Nua Bearta Cúraim Tugtha:	
	Iomlán	CC do Chúram Seandaoine
Oirthear	2160	1811
Tuaisceart	1565	1270
Deisceart	1151	777
Iarthar	809	720
Iomlán	5685	4578

(b) 1999

Ceantar Boird	Nua Bearta Cúraim Tugtha:	
	Iomlán	CC do Chúram Seandaoine
Oirthear	2369	2031
Tuaisceart	1565	1277
Deisceart	1269	859
Iarthar	677	594
Iomlán	5880	4761

(c) 2000

Ceantar Boird	Nua Bearta Cúraim Tugtha:	
	Iomlán	CC do Chúram Seandaoine
Oirthear	2580	2283
Tuaisceart	1452	1164
Deisceart	1318	1026
Iarthar	579	524
Iomlán	5929	4997

Improved Co-operation with the Republic of Ireland

Mr McFarland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what steps have been taken since 1998 to improve co-operation between her Department and health organisations in the Republic of Ireland in (a) Accident and Emergency services (b) planning for major emergencies (c) high-tech equipment usage (d) cancer research and (e) health promotion.

(AQW 2203/00)

Ms de Brún: Under the Good Friday Agreement, co-operation on health matters was identified as an area suitable for consideration under the aegis of the North/South Ministerial Council. Two meetings of the NSMC have taken place in sectoral format on food safety and health matters and I have reported progress to the Assembly in my statements of 12 June 2000 and 11 September 2000 respectively. A sectoral meeting on Health and Food Safety scheduled for 3 November was cancelled as a result of a breach by the First Minister of his statutory duty under Section 52, NI Act 1998 to make the necessary Ministerial nominations for the meeting. This action by the First Minister, which has since been ruled unlawful by the High Court, continues to hamper further progress. However, a bi-lateral meeting at Ministerial level took place on the 3 November when Ministers endorsed the following:

- with regard to accident and emergency services, CAWT to make further proposals for developing local collaborative projects.
- the Regional Hospital Services Group to initiate work immediately on scoping the development of collaborative arrangements covering renal transplantation and radiotherapy services.
- the establishment of Working Groups on ambulance services and emergency planning.
- the establishment of a joint High Technology Assessment Group to draw up protocols for the assessment/evaluation of emerging new technology.
- the launch of a joint campaign on Folic Acid.

Faoi Chomhaontú Aoine an Chéasta, aithníodh comhoibriú ar chúrsaí sláinte mar réimse fóirsteanach le machnamh faoi choimirce na Comhairle Aireachta

Thuaidh Theas. Bhi dhá chruinniú i bhfoirm earnála ag an CATT ar shábháilteacht bhia agus ar chúrsaí sláinte agus chuir mé dul chun cinn in iúl don Tionól i mo ráitis ar an 12ú Meitheamh 2000 agus ar an 11ú Meán Fómhair 2000 faoi seach. Cuireadh cruinniú earnála ar Shláinte agus ar Shábháilteacht Bhia a socraíodh don 3ú Samhain ar ceal mar gheall ar shárú an Chéad Aire ar a dhualgas reachtúil de réir Míre 52 d'Acht TÉ 1998 le hAiri cuí a ainmniú don chruinniú. Cuireann an gníomh seo a rinne an Chéad Aire, agus ar tugadh breith air mar mhídhleathach, bac go fóill ar dhul chun cinn breise. Bhí cruinniú déthaobhach ag leibhéal Aireachta ar an 3ú Samhain áfach, áit ar chomhaontaigh Airí na moltaí seo a leanas:

- Maidir le seirbhísí timpistí agus éigeandálaí, tá an TCOC le tuilleadh moltaí a mholadh chun scéimeanna áitiúla comhoibrithe a fhorbairt.
- Go gcuirfidh an Grúpa Sheirbhísí Otharlainne Réigiúnacha tús láithreach le tabhairt ligin d'fhorbairt socruithe comhoibrithe ag cumhdach aistrithe duánaigh agus seirbhísí raiditeiripe.
- Bunú Grúpaí Oibre ar sheirbhísí otharcharr agus ar phleanáil éigeandálaí.
- Bunú Comh-Ghrúpa ar Mheasúnú Ardteicneolaíochtaí le prótacail do mheasúnú/mheas teicneolaíochtaí nua a dhréachtú.
- Seoladh comhfheachtais ar Aigéad Fóilic.

Provision of Health Care

Mr McFarland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 1828/00, to detail what arrangements exist for the provision of health care between each of the four Health Boards and health authorities in the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 2204/00)

Ms de Brún: Under European Community law urgent health care treatment is available for visitors between North and South. Cross border workers who register with a GP in either jurisdiction are also eligible to avail of the full range of medical services. In addition to this, the relevant Health Boards, North and South, already collaborate on the provision of health care under the auspices of CAWT (Co-operation and Working Together Initiative). They are also involved in the work being taken forward under the Good Friday Agreement to improve coordination and cooperation in accident and emergency services, planning for major emergencies, the provision of high-tech equipment, cancer research and health promotion.

De réir dlíthe An Aontais Eorpaigh, tá cóireáil chúraim shláinte phráinneach ar fáil do chuairteoirí sa Tuaisceart agus sa Deisceart araon. Tá oibrithe trasteorann a chláraíonn le gnáthdhochtúir i gceachtar den dá limistéar i dteideal an réimse iomlán seirbhísí leighis a fháil fosta. Ina theannta sin, comhoibríonn na Boird Shláinte chuí,

Thuaidh agus Theas cheana féin ar sholáthar cúraim shláinte faoi choimirce an TCOC (Tionscnamh Comhoibrithe agus Obair le Chéile). Tá siad páirteach san obair atá á déanamh de réir Chomhaontú Aoine an Chéasta fosta le comhordú agus comhoibriú a fheabhsú i seirbhísí timpistí agus éigeandálaí, i bpleanáil d'éigeandálaí tábhachtacha, i soláthar trealamh ardteicneolaíochta, i dtaighde ailse agus i gcur chun cinn sláinte.

Rate of Morbidity

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the rate of morbidity and how this compares with Great Britain.

(AQW 2206/00)

Ms de Brún: Information is not available in the form requested.

Níl eolas ar fáil san fhoirm a iarradh.

Infertility Treatment

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) the number of patients receiving infertility treatment, by Board area, in each of the last two years (b) the number of counsellors employed to counsel these patients (c) the advice she has issued to general practitioners on infertility in the last two years (d) the number on the waiting list for such treatment and (e) the time for initial and subsequent consultations.

(AQW 2207/00)

Ms de Brún: (a) The number of patients receiving sub-fertility treatment, by Board area, in each of the last two years is set out in the table below.

Eastern Board		Northern Board		Southern Board		Western Board	
98/99	99/00	98/99	99/00	98/99	99/00	98/99	99/00
476	497	236	255	212	208	158	151

(b) There is one independent counsellor at Church of Ireland House, Donegal Street, Belfast.

(c) The Department has not issued any advice to GPs on fertility services within the last 2 years.

(d) The number of patients waiting for sub-fertility treatments, at February 2001, was 850.

(e) The waiting time for initial consultations varies from approximately two to four months, depending on the consultant. The waiting time for subsequent consultations also varies from two to four months, depending on the consultant and the nature of the review.

- (a) Léirítear líon na n-othar ag fáil cóireála fothoirchithe de réir ceantair Bhoird sa dá bhliain is deireanaí sa tábla thíos.

Bord an Oirthir		Bord an Tuaiscirt		Bord an Deiscirt		Bord an Iarthair	
98/99	99/00	98/99	99/00	98/99	99/00	98/99	99/00
476	497	236	255	212	208	158	151

- (b) Tá lia neamhspleách amháin ag Teach Eaglais na hÉireann, Sráid Dhún na nGall, Béal Feirste.
- (c) Níor thug an Roinn comhairle ar bith do ghnáthdhochtúirí ar sheirbhísí toirchithe le dhá bhliain anuas.
- (d) 850 ab ea líon na ndaoine ag fanacht ar chóireáil fhothoirchithe, ag Feabhra 2001.
- (e) Athraíonn an t-am feithimh do chéadchomhairlithe go idir thart fá 2-4 mhí, ag brath ar an lia. Athraíonn an t-am feithimh do chomhairlithe i ndiaidh sin go idir 2-4 mhí ag brath ar an lia agus ar ghné an athbhreithnithe.

Heart Attacks

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) the number of people suffering heart attacks and (b) the number of people on medication for heart related illness in the Eastern Health and Social Services Board area in the years 1998/99 and 1999/2000. (AQW 2219/00)

Ms de Brún: (a) In the financial year 1998/99, 1,744 people were admitted to Eastern Health and Social Services Board hospitals with a diagnosis of myocardial infarction. The equivalent figure for the financial year 1999/00 was 1,644.

- (b) This information is not collected.

(a) Sa bhliain airgeadais 1998/99, glacadh 1,744 dhuine isteach in otharlanna Bhord Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta an Oirthir le fáthmheas infáircithe mhíocairdiach. 1,644 an figiúr a bhí ann don bhliain airgeadais 1999/00.

- (b) Ní chruinnítear an t-eolas seo.

Misuse of Drugs

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the steps she is taking to address the increasing misuse of drugs in Northern Ireland. (AQW 2220/00)

Ms de Brún: Our Drug Strategy encompasses four over-arching aims in relation to young people, communities, treatment and availability and there is a substantial programme of action to implement the Strategy and

reduce the harm caused by drug misuse. The measures include education and awareness raising in schools and community groups; drugs education for parents; improved and expanded treatment, rehabilitation and counselling services for drug users; and action to reduce drug use in prisons and among offenders. A public information campaign targeting young people is also being developed.

Four local Drug Co-ordination Teams have been established and each of them has produced, and is putting into effect, an action plan tailored to the circumstances and priorities in its respective area. In addition a dedicated Drug Strategy Team has recently been created in my Department to strengthen further our capacity to drive forward the implementation of the Strategy. Through the Department's Drugs Information and Research Unit, a specialised information and research programme is being developed to support the Strategy.

In addition to the continuing expenditure of the many agencies involved, our £4.5 million in extra resources has been allocated to a range of projects to help deliver on the objectives of the Strategy. Following the Chancellor's Budget announcement that over £9 million extra would be allocated here to tackle drug misuse over the three-year period beginning in April 2002, discussions are underway to determine how these resources can be deployed most effectively.

Tá ceithre phríomhchuspóir ag ár Straitéis Drugaí maidir le daoine óga, le pobail, le cóireáil agus le hinfhaighteacht, agus tá clár tábhachtach gníomhaithe aici leis an Straitéis a chur i bhfeidhm agus leis an dochar a dhéanann mí-úsáid drugaí a laghdú. I measc na mbeart tá oideachas agus cur ar eolas daoine i scoileanna agus i ngrúpaí pobail, oideachas ar dhruaí do thuismitheoirí, cóireáil, athshlánú agus seirbhísí comhairle níos fearr agus níos mó d'úsáideoirí drugaí; agus beart le húsáid drugaí i bpríosúin agus i measc ciontóirí a laghdú. Tá feachtas eolais phoiblí ag díriú ar dhaoine óga á fhorbairt fosta.

Bunaíodh ceithre Fhoireann Chomhordaithe Drugaí agus chruthaigh gach ceann díobh, agus tá siad ag cur i bhfeidhm gníomhphlean fóirsteanach do thoscaí agus do thosaíochtaí ina réimse faoi seach. Ina theannta sin, cuireadh Foireann Chomhordaithe Drugaí dhíograiseach le chéile sa Roinn s'agamsa le déanaí lenár n-ábaltacht le cur i bhfeidhm na Straitéise a neartú. Trí Ionad Eolais agus Taighde na Roinne ar Dhruaí, tá clár speisialtóireachta eolais agus taighde á fhorbairt chun tacú leis an Straitéis.

I dteannta chaiteachas leanúnach na coda móire gníomhaireachtaí bainteach léi, dáileadh ár £4.5 milliún d'acmhainní breise ar réimse scéimeanna chun cuidiú le baint amach cuspóirí na Straitéise. I ndiaidh fógra Cáinainse an tSeansailéara go ndáilfí breis agus £9 milliún breise anseo le dul i ngleic le mí-úsáide drugaí thar tréimhse trí bliana ag toiseacht in Aibreán 2002, tá

caibidlí ag dul ar aghaidh le cinneadh a dhéanamh ar an dóigh is éifeachtaí leis na hacmhainní seo a úsáid.

Accident and Emergency Units: Drug Related Problems

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of people admitted to Accident and Emergency Units with drug related problems in the Eastern Health and Social Services Board area in the years 1998-99 and 1999-2000.

(AQW 2221/00)

Ms de Brún: The information requested is not available.

Níl an t-eolas a iarradh ar fáil.

General Practitioner Fund Holders

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline her policy in relation to (a) the ability of General Practitioner fund holders to commission services and (b) the internal market in the Health Service.

(AQW 2225/00)

Ms de Brún:

- (a) Each year, fundholding practices are offered budgets which contain a number of elements – a prescribing budget, a budget for commissioning hospital and community services, a management allowance and a budget for practice staffing. Budget offers will be made to GP fundholders for the year 2001-02 in the usual way.
- (b) The divisive and competitive nature of the internal market diverted attention and badly needed resources away from frontline services. In setting my priorities for the HPSS in the coming year, I have made it clear that I want to see the last vestiges of competitive behaviour removed from the system. I want to see an integrated and cohesive approach to the planning and delivery of services that will result in gain for individuals and local communities.
- (a) Gach bliain, tairgtear buiséid do chlinicí ciste-shealbhaíochta ina bhfuil roinnt gnéithe – buiséad d'orduithe, buiséad do choimisiúnú seirbhísí otharlainne agus pobail, liúntas bainisteoireachta agus buiséad d'fhoireann clinic. Tairgfear buiséid do chiste-shealbhóirí GD don bhliain 2001-02 sa ghnáthdhóigh.
- (b) Thóg an ghné dheighilteach agus iomaíoch den mhargadh inmheánach iúl de, agus d'atreoraigh sí acmhainní fíor-riachtanacha ó sheirbhísí tosaigh. In ag leagadh mo thosaíochtaí amach do na SSSP don bhliain seo chugainn, chuir mé in iúl go soiléir gur mhian liom na rianta deireanacha d'iompar iomaíoch a bhaint den chóras. Ba mhian liom cur chuige imeasctha agus comhtháite do phleanáil agus do

chur ar fáil seirbhísí a fheiceáil a dtiocfaidh tairbhe do dhaoine aonair agus do phobail áitiúla as.

Helicopter Rescue Service

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the steps she is taking to ensure that a helicopter rescue service is maintained for the South Down area.

(AQW 2227/00)

Ms de Brún: Responsibility for the co-ordination of local inland rescue, including the use of any helicopter rescue service is not a transferred matter.

Ní ceist fhreagracht duinn í comhordú lucht tarrthála áitiúil intíre, úsáid sheirbhíse tarrthála ingearáin ar bith san áireamh.

Differential in Health Expenditure Per Head of Population

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to give her assessment of the differential in health expenditure per head of population in each of the Board areas.

(AQW 2229/00)

Ms de Brún: The actual expenditure per head of population in each Health and Social Services Board area is a function of the age/gender structure and needs profile of the population. Per Capita expenditure comparisons which do not take such factors into account are flawed. The factors are taken into account in the weighted capitation formula, which is kept under regular review and seeks to fund each Board on an equitable basis, taking account of differential need. The per capita allocation per head for 2000-01 for each Board is as follows:

Board	Weighted Population	Revenue Allocation £'000	Allocation Per Weighted Capita £
NHSSB	396,848	312,051	786.32
SHSSB	299,020	235,174	786.48
EHSSB	705,264	554,875	786.76
WHSSB	276,870	217,766	786.53
Total	1,678,002	1,319,866	786.57

Is feidhm é an fíorchaiteachas a dhéantar ar gach ball den daonra i limistéar gach boird de na Boird Shláinte agus Sheirbhísí Sóisialta den struchtúr aois/inscne agus tá próifíl den daonra de dhíth air. Tá comparáidí caiteachais *per capita* nach nglacann fachtóirí mar sin san áireamh lochtach. Tugtar na fachtóirí san áireamh san fhoirmle thromaithe cheannsráithe, a ndéantar athbhreithniú uirthi go rialta agus a dhéanann iarracht gach Bord a mhaoiniú ar bhonn cothrom, ag tabhairt difríochtaí i leibhéal an ghanntanais san áireamh. Seo thíos an liúntas de réir oiread seo an duine do 2000-01 do gach Bord:

Bord	Daonra Tromaithe	Liúntas Stáitchiosa £'000	Liúntas An Duine Thromaithe £
BSSSI	396,848	312,051	786.32
BSSSD	299,020	235,174	786.48
BSSSO	705,264	554,875	786.76
BSSSI	276,870	217,766	786.53
IOMLÁN	1,678,002	1,319,866	786.57

Malicious False Alarm Calls

Mr McFarland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 1838/00, to detail the number of malicious false alarms calls which were received by each fire station. (AQW 2232/00)

Ms de Brún: The information requested for the year 2000 is as follows:

Station Name	False Alarms Malicious	Total False Alarms
Central Fire Station	115	749
Westland Fire Station	175	467
Glengormley Fire Station	65	405
Springfield Fire Station	184	798
Knock Fire Station	121	715
Cadogan Fire Station	144	922
Whitla Fire Station	63	254
Bangor Fire Station	61	324
Hollywood Fire Station	11	123
Downpatrick Fire Station	40	211
Newcastle Fire Station	26	110
Carryduff Fire Station	3	66
Ballywalter Fire Station	6	23
Donaghadee Fire Station	7	56
Newtownards Fire Station	28	183
Portaferry Fire Station	1	36
Lisburn Fire Station	62	380
Ballynahinch Fire Station	11	66
Comber Fire Station	10	77
Portadown Fire Station	29	239
Banbridge Fire Station	7	73
Lurgan Fire Station	36	268
Dromore Fire Station (Co Down)	0	21
Newry Fire Station	116	386
Crossmaglen Fire Station	3	8
Warrenpoint Fire Station	11	92
Kilkeel Fire Station	16	56
Rathfriland Fire Station	1	17
Armagh Fire Station	43	210
Newtownhamilton Fire Station	5	19
Keady Fire Station	4	32
Crescent Link Fire Station	57	559
Strabane Fire Station	24	109

Station Name	False Alarms Malicious	Total False Alarms
Castleberg Fire Station	9	19
Limavady Fire Station	21	74
Dungiven Fire Station	7	13
Northland Road Fire Station	153	696
Coleraine Fire Station	58	222
Portrush Fire Station	33	117
Portstewart Fire Station	1	42
Ballymena Fire Station	50	341
Camrrough Fire Station	1	4
Larne Fire Station	35	136
Carrickfergus Fire Station	119	301
Whitehead Fire Station	2	24
Ballymoney Fire Station	9	58
Kilrea Fire Station	4	13
Ballycastle Fire Station	10	82
Magherafelt Fire Station	5	58
Maghera Fire Station	10	30
Cushendall Fire Station	1	6
Antrim Fire Station	33	441
Crumlin Fire Station	2	34
Ballyclare Fire Station	2	47
Rathlin Fire Station	0	0
Omagh Fire Station	44	274
Newtownstewart Fire Station	3	22
Fintona Fire Station	0	6
Enniskillen Fire Station	19	285
Clogher Fire Station	2	25
Lisnaskea Fire Station	7	68
Irvinestown Fire Station	1	51
Belleek Fire Station	3	15
Dromore Fire Station (Co Tyrone)	2	14
Dungannon Fire Station	25	146
Cookstown Fire Station	5	85
Pomeroy Fire Station	1	8
Total	2162	11811

Is mar a leanas atá an t-eolas a iarradh don bhliain 2000:

Ainm an Stáisiúin	Bréagrabhaidh Mhailíseacha	Bréagrabhaidh Iomlána
Príomhstáisiún Dóiteáin	115	749
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Westland	175	467
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Ghleann Ghormlathie	65	405
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Springfield	184	798
Stáisiún Dóiteáin an Chnoic	121	715
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Cadogan	144	922
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Whitla	63	254
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Bheannchair	61	324
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Ard Mhic Nasca	11	123

Ainm an Stáisiúin	Bréagrabhaidh Mhailíseacha	Bréagrabhaidh Iomlána
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Dhún Pádraig	40	211
Stáisiún Dóiteáin an Chaisleáin Nua	26	110
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Cheathrú Aodha Dhuibh	3	66
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Bhaile Bháltair	6	23
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Dhomhnach Daoi	7	56
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Bhaile Nua na hArda	28	183
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Phort an Pheire	1	36
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Lios na gCearrbhach	62	380
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Bhaile na hInse	11	66
Stáisiún Dóiteáin an Chomair	10	77
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Phort an Dúnáin	29	239
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Dhroichead na Banna	7	73
Stáisiún Dóiteáin na Lorgan	36	268
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Dhroim Mór	0	21
Stáisiún Dóiteáin an Iúir	116	386
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Chrois Mhic Linnáin	3	8
Stáisiún Dóiteáin an Phointe	11	92
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Chill Chaoil	16	56
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Ráth Fraoileann	1	17
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Ard Mhacha	43	210
Stáisiún Dóiteáin an Bhaile Úir	5	19
Stáisiún Dóiteáin an Chéide	4	32
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Nasc an Chorráin	57	559
Stáisiún Dóiteáin an tSraha Báin	24	109
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Chaisleán na Deirge	9	19
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Léim an Mhadaidh	21	74
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Dhún Geimhin	7	13
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Bhóthar Northland	153	696
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Chúil Raithín	58	222
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Phort Rois	33	117
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Phort Stiobhaird	1	42
Stáisiún Dóiteáin An Bhaile Mheánaigh	50	341
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Charnlaigh	1	4
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Latharna	35	136
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Charraig Fhearghais	119	301
Stáisiún Dóiteáin an Chinn Bháin	2	24
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Bhaile Monaidh	9	58
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Chill Ria	4	13

Ainm an Stáisiúin	Bréagrabhaidh Mhailíseacha	Bréagrabhaidh Iomlána
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Bhaile an Chaistil	10	82
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Mhachaire Fíolta	5	58
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Mhachaire Rátha	10	30
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Bhun Abhann Dalla	1	6
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Aontroma	33	441
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Chromghlinne	2	34
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Bhealach Cláir	2	47
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Reachlainn	0	0
Stáisiún Dóiteáin na hÓmaí	44	274
Stáisiún Dóiteáin an Bhaile Nua	3	22
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Fhionntamhnaí	0	6
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Inis Ceithleann	19	285
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Chlochair	2	25
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Lios na Scéithe	7	68
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Bhaile an Irbhinigh	1	51
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Bhéal Leice	3	15
Stáisiún Dóiteáin an Droma Mhoir	2	14
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Dhún Geanainn	25	146
Stáisiún Dóiteáin na Coirre Críochaí	5	85
Stáisiún Dóiteáin Pomeroy	1	8
Iomlán	2162	11811

Expenditure on Consultancy Services

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 1955/00, to detail when the information will become available. (AQW 2235/00)

Ms de Brún: Details of expenditure on consultancy services in 2001-02 will be available at the end of that financial year.

Beidh eolas mionchruinn ar an chaiteachas ar sheirbhísí comhairleacha i 2001-02 ar fáil ag deireadh na bliana airgeadais.

Income from Siting of Telecommunications Masts

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) any income generated from the siting of telecommunications masts on land or property occupied by her Department (b) the length of contract for the siting of each mast and (c) if she will consider removing the masts. (AQW 2236/00)

Ms de Brún: Those HSS Trusts that have telecommunications masts on their property are presented in

the table below, with details of the annual income and length of contract for each Trust.

ANNUAL INCOME AND LENGTH OF CONTRACT FOR HSS TRUSTS

HSS Trust	Income	Length of Contract
Belfast City Hospital HSS Trust	£10,000	10 years
Ulster Community and Hospital HSS Trust	£7,500	No stipulated contract term with 6 month notice from either parties to terminate
United HSS Trust	£1,400	10 years
Down Lisburn HSS Trust	£4,700	10 years

I shall continue to review the safety implications of the siting of mobile communications base stations on hospital property in consideration of the findings of the research programme now in place as recommended in the Stewart report.

Léirítear na hIontaobhais SSS a bhfuil crainn theileachumarsáide ar a n-áitribh sa tábla thíos, le sonraí an ioncainm bhliantúil agus fad an chonartha do gach Iontaobhas.

IONCAM BLIANTÚIL AGUS FAD CONARTHA D'IONTAOBHAIS SSS

Iontaobhas SSS	Ioncam	Fad conartha
Iontaobhas SSS Ospidéal Chathair Bhéal Feirste	£10,000	10 mbliana
Iontaobhas SSS Phobal agus Ospidéil Uladh	£7,500	Gan téarma sainráite don chonradh le fógra 6 mhí ó cheachtar den dá pháirtí le críochnú
Iontaobhas Aontaithe SSS	£1,400	10 mbliana
Iontaobhas SSS An Dún-Lios na gCearrbhach	£4,700	10 mbliana

Leanfaidh mé de bheith ag déanamh athbhreithnithe ar na himpleachtaí sábháilteachta atá ag bunstáisiúin cumarsáide soghluaiste a bheith suite ar áitreabh ospidéil ag cuimhneamh ar thorthaí an chláir thaighde atá ag dul ar aghaidh faoi láthair de réir mholtaí Thuairisc Stewart.

Development of Hospital Services - EHSSB

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the steps she is taking to provide additional funding to increase the number of beds and medical staff within the Eastern Health and Social Services Board. (AQW 2240/00)

Ms de Brún: Most of the additional £161 million allocated to my Department for 2001-02 will be directed at maintaining and consolidating existing services, but £41 million has been earmarked for service developments. Of this, some £11 million is targeted at the

further development of hospital and related services. The Eastern Health and Social Services Board has been allocated an equitable share of these additional resources and the detailed deployment of these resources will be a matter for the Board to take forward with local Trusts.

Beidh an chuid is mó den £161 milliún sa bhreis a dáileadh ar mo Roinn do 2001-02 dírithe ar sheirbhísí atá ann faoi láthair a choinneáil agus a neartú, ach cuireadh £41 milliún i leataobh faoi choinne forbairtí seirbhíse. Den mhéid seo, tá tuairim is £11 milliún dírithe ar fhorbairt bhreise a dhéanamh ar sheirbhísí ospidéal agus seirbhísí a bhaineann leo. Dáileadh sciar cothrom de na hacmhainní breise seo ar Bhord Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta an Oirthir agus fágtar faoin Bhord úsáid mhionchruinn na n-acmhainní seo a thabhairt chun tosaigh le hIontaobhais áitiúla.

High Voltage Power-lines: Public Safety Concerns

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to give her assessment of the health and/or public safety concerns regarding the siting of high voltage power-lines. (AQW 2242/00)

Ms de Brún: On 6 March the Advisory Group on Non-Ionising Radiation (AGNIR) published a report entitled “ELF* Electromagnetic Fields and the Risk of Cancer”. The report took account of a wide range of studies both scientific and epidemiological. In the light of this report and others before it, the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) does not believe that there is a basis for quantitative restrictions in respect of exposure of the public to EMFs from overhead lines or other electricity supply apparatus. At the same time the Board recognises that the question whether exposure to electromagnetic fields can influence the development of cancer cannot be completely resolved.

I am aware of the concern on this issue and I fully support the view that there is a need for continuing research in relation to ELF exposure.

Ar 6 Márta d'fhoilsigh an Grúpa Comhairleach ar an Radaíocht Neamhianach (GCRN) tuairisc dar teideal “ELF* Electromagnetic Fields and the Risk of Cancer”. Thug an tuairisc aird ar réimse leathan taighde idir thaighde eolaíoch agus thaighde eipidéimeolaíoch. Ag teacht le torthaí na tuairisce seo agus tuairiscí eile a bhí ann roimhe, ní chreideann Bord Náisiúnta na Cosanta Raideolaíochta (BNCR) go bhfuil aon ghá le teorainní cainníochta maidir le nochtadh an phobail do réimsí leictreamhaighnéadacha ó línte lastuas nó aon trealamh soláthar leictreachais eile. Ag an am céanna, aithníonn an Bord nach féidir réiteach iomlán a dhéanamh ar an cheist an féidir le nochtadh do réimsí leictreamhaighnéadacha tionchar a imirt ar fhorbairt aile.

Tuigim go bhfuil inní ann faoin cheist seo agus tacaím go hiomlán leis an dearcadh go bhfuil gá le taighde leanúnach maidir le nochtadh RL.

Nursing Home and Residential Places

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) the number of nursing home and residential home places that have been lost in each of the last five years (b) the number of private residential homes that have closed in each of the last five years and (c) the steps she has taken to address this situation. (AQW 2247/00)

Ms de Brún: It is not possible to provide information in respect of the last five years, as information for 1995 is no longer available for all Health and Social Services Board areas. The number of nursing home and residential places that have been lost or gained in each of the last four years, and the number of private residential homes that have closed in each of the last four years for which information is available, are shown in the tables below.

(a) Change in number of places

	Year	Nursing Homes	Residential Homes	Total
Number of Places	1996	9782	5659	15441
	1997	9905	5618	15523
	1998	9817	5730	15547
	1999	9603	5796	15399
	2000	9541	5447	14988
Annual Change	1996-1997	+123	-41	+82
	1997-1998	-88	+112	+24
	1998-1999	-214	+66	-148
	1999-2000	-62	-349	-411

(b) Private residential home closures¹

Year ending	Number of closures
1997	6
1998	8
1999	12
2000	17

¹ Information relates to private sector homes only, and excludes any closures in the statutory and voluntary sectors

(c) Steps taken to address this situation

I would refer the Member to the answer given in respect of AQO 532/00.

Ní féidir eolas a thabhairt maidir leis na cúig bliana deireanacha mar nach bhfuil eolas do 1995 ar fáil a thuilleadh ar gach ceantar Boird Shláinte agus

Sheirbhísí Sóisialta. Léirítear sna táblaí thíos líon na n-áiteanna i dtithe banaltrachta agus cónaithe a cailleadh nó a fuarthas i ngach bliain de na ceithre bliana deireanacha, agus líon na dtithe príobháideacha cónaithe a dhruid i ngach bliain de na ceithre bliana deireanacha a bhfuil eolas ar fáil orthu.

(a) Athrú i líon na n-áiteanna

	Bliain	Tithe Banal-trachta	Tithe Cónaithe	Iomlán
Líon na n-Áiteanna	1996	9782	5659	15441
	1997	9905	5618	15523
	1998	9817	5730	15547
	1999	9603	5796	15399
	2000	9541	5447	14988
Athrú Bliantúil	1996-1997	+123	-41	+82
	1997-1998	-88	+112	+24
	1998-1999	-214	+66	-148
	1999-2000	-62	-349	-411

(b) Tithe príobháideacha cónaithe druידte¹

Bliain ag críochnú	Líon na dTithe druידte
1997	6
1998	8
1999	12
2000	17

¹ ála príobháidí amháin agus ní chuireann sé tithe ar bith sna hearnálacha reachtúla agus deonacha a druידeadh san áireamh.

(c) Bearta déanta le dul i gceann na staide seo.

Luaim don Bhall an freagra a tugadh ar AQO 532/00.

Respite Care

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) what services are available in each board area for those requiring respite care (b) the cost of providing respite care and (c) the number of places available in the (i) voluntary and (ii) statutory sector for respite care. (AQW 2250/00)

Ms de Brún: (a) Respite care is provided in a range of ways across each Board area and is specific to the different programmes of care. Respite care for adults and children with learning disabilities includes placement in specialist residential facilities, overnight and day care placements in Host Families and seasonal schemes such as adult training centre holidays and daytime activity schemes during summer holidays. Enhanced domiciliary support and sitting services are also used to provide respite care in the home. In the Elderly Care programme

respite care is provided by way of nursing and residential home places, day centres, drop in projects and support in the home through enhanced domiciliary and sitting services. Respite care provision for the physically disabled includes residential placements, day care, domiciliary respite and leisure and recreational breaks.

(b) This information is not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

(c) This information is not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

(a) Soláthraítear cúram faoisimh ar dhóigheanna éagsúla trasna gach ceantar Boird agus tá sé sainiúil do na cláracha éagsúla cúraim. Cuimsíonn cúram faoisimh do dhaoine fásta agus do pháistí le míchumais fhoghlamtha socrú in áiseanna speisialtachta cónaithe, socrúithe thar oíche agus cúraim lae le Teaghlaigh Ósta agus i scéimeanna séasúracha le linn saoire an tsamhraidh ar nós saoire ionad oiliúna dhaoine fásta, agus scéimeanna gníomhaíochtaí lae. Úsáidtear tacaíocht chónaithe agus seirbhísí feighle méadaithe fosta le cúram faoisimh a sholáthar sa teach. Sa chlár do Chúram Seandaoine, soláthraítear cúram faoisimh trí áiteanna i dtithe banaltrachta agus cónaithe, ionaid lae, scéimeanna buailte isteach agus trí thacaíocht sa teach trí sheirbhísí cónaithe agus feighle méadaithe. Cuimsíonn soláthar cúraim faoisimh do dhaoine le míchumas fisiciúil socrúithe cónaithe, cúram lae, faoiseamh cónaithe agus sosanna suaimhnis agus bisigh.

(b) Níl an t-eolas seo ar fáil go réidh agus níorbh fhéidir é a chur ar fáil ach ar chostas díreireach.

(c) Níl an t-eolas seo ar fáil go réidh agus níorbh fhéidir é a chur ar fáil ach ar chostas díreireach.

Elderly Day Care Places

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of voluntary and statutory elderly day care places available in each board area. (AQW 2251/00)

Ms de Brún: The information requested is not available.

Níl an t-eolas a iarradh ar fáil.

Fire Authority for Northern Ireland: New TSN

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline her plans to provide additional resources to the Fire Authority for Northern Ireland to ensure that they can meet new Targeting Social Need requirements without any detrimental effect to their service delivery. (AQW 2257/00)

Ms de Brún: The aim is that Targeting Social Need should be a theme running through the Fire Authority's

range of policies and programmes, so that the available funding can be used in ways which bring enhanced benefit to people, groups and areas in greatest social need. I do not consider that this necessarily requires additional funding nor that it is detrimental to service delivery.

Is é an cuspóir atá ann ná gur chóir do Dhíriú ar Riachtanas Sóisialta bheith mar théama trí réimse polasaithe agus cláracha an Údaráis Dóiteáin ar fad, sa dóigh gur féidir an maoiniú a chuirfear ar fáil a úsáid ar dhóigheanna a rachaidh sé chun sochair do dhaoine, ghrúpaí agus do cheantair is mó riachtanais sóisialta. Ní shílím go gciallaíonn sé seo go bhfuil maoiniú breise de dhíth air nó go ndéanann sé dochar do chur ar fáil na seirbhíse.

Elective Surgery

Mr Fee asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average waiting time for elective surgery in each Health Board area.

(AQW 2258/00)

Ms de Brún: Information is not available in the form requested.

Information on completed waits for inpatient admission to the surgical specialties for the quarter ending 30 September 2000 (the latest date for which information is available) is detailed in the table below.

COMPLETED INPATIENT WAITS FOR THE SURGICAL SPECIALTIES BY BOARD, 30 SEPTEMBER 2000 ¹

Board	Time waiting in months				
	0-2	3-5	6-8	9-11	12-14
EHSSB	8,672	2,019	964	706	367
NHSSB	2,163	662	275	149	91
SHSSB	2,177	587	216	178	53
WHSSB	2,403	627	331	161	102
Total	15,415	3,895	1,786	1,194	613
Board	Time waiting in months				
	15-17	18-20	21-23	24+	Total
EHSSB	207	115	86	118	13,254
NHSSB	78	60	20	36	3,534
SHSSB	48	26	15	36	3,336
WHSSB	84	31	3	15	3,757
Total	417	232	124	205	23,881

¹ These figures include patients who had self-deferred, medically deferred or who had not attended a previous appointment.

Níl an t-eolas ar fáil san fhoirm a iarradh.

Mionléirítear eolas ar fheithemh le glacadh isteach othair chónaithe chuig na speisialtachtaí máinliachta déanta don ráithe ag críochnú an 30 Meán Fómhair 2000 (an dáta is deireanaí atá eolas ar fáil), sa tábla thíos.

**FEITHEAMH OTHAIR CHONAITHIGH LEIS NA
SPEISIALTACHTAÍ MÁINLIACHTA DÉANTA DE RÉIR BOIRD,
AG AN 30 MEÁN FÓMHAIR 2000.¹**

Bord	Am ag feitheamh i míonna				
	0-2	3-5	6-8	9-11	12-14
BSSSO	8,672	2,019	964	706	367
BSSST	2,163	662	275	149	91
BSSSD	2,177	587	216	178	53
BSSSI	2,403	627	331	161	102
Iomlán	15,415	3,895	1,786	1,194	613
Bord	Am ag feitheamh i míonna				
	15-17	18-20	21-23	24+	Iomlán
BSSSO	207	115	86	118	13,254
BSSST	78	60	20	36	3,534
BSSSD	48	26	15	36	3,336
BSSSI	84	31	3	15	3,757
Iomlán	417	232	124	205	23,881

¹ Ní chuireann na figiúirí seo othair a rinne féin-atreorú, atreorú leighis nó nár fhreastail ar choinne roimhe sin san áireamh.

Unnecessary Emergency Calls to the Fire Service

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) the number of unnecessary emergency calls to the fire service in each of the last five years and (b) the steps she is taking to reduce these numbers. (AQW 2259/00)

Ms de Brún: The information required for the years 1996-2000 is as follows:

Year	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	Total
Unnecessary Emergency Calls	10,075	10,654	11,103	11,705	11,811	55,348

The Chief Fire Officer has advised me that the Fire Brigade has a number of measures in place to deal with malicious and unnecessary calls. These include:

- Control Room staff being able to hold telephone mobile and land lines open when repeated calls are made so that these can be reported.
- Revised procedures have been introduced whereby Fire Safety officers visit and advise premises owners where false alarms have been raised due to apparatus failure.
- A Fire Safety initiative has recently been launched, aimed principally at schoolchildren aged 10 to 13 years, to raise awareness of the consequences of arson and malicious fire calls.

Mar seo a leanas an t-eolas atá de dhíth do na blianta 1996-2000:

Bliain	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	Iomlán
Scairteanna Éigeandála gan Chúis	10,075	10,654	11,103	11,705	11,811	55,348

Tá an Príomh-Oifigeach Dóiteáin i ndiaidh a thabhairt le fios dom go bhfuil roinnt beart curtha in áit ag an Bhriogáid Dóiteáin chun déileáil le scairteanna urchóideacha gan chúis. Orthu tá:

- An Fhoireann Sheomra Rialúcháin bheith ábalta línte teileafóin soghluaiste agus talaimh a choinneáil oscailte nuair a dhéantar scairteanna i ndiaidh a chéile, sa dóigh gur féidir tuairisc a thabhairt orthu.
- Tugadh isteach gnáis athbhreithnithe le go dtabharfadh Oifig Shábháilteacht Dóiteán cuairt, agus go gcuirfeadh siad comhairle, ar úinéirí áitribh nuair a thiocfadh rabhadh bréige mar gheall ar fhearas lochtach.
- Seoladh tionscnamh Sábháilteacht Dóiteán le déanaí, dírithe go háirithe ar pháistí scoile idir 10 agus 13, a mhéadódh a dtuiscint ar thorthaí tine agus scairteanna urchóideacha dóiteáin.

Tuberculosis

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) the number of cases of tuberculosis, in each of the last five years, diagnosed in (i) children (ii) adults and (b) the steps she is taking to address this situation. (AQW 2260/00)

Ms de Brún:

(a) This information is detailed in the table below.

CASES OF TUBERCULOSIS NOTIFIED, 1995 - 1999

	Age		
	Under 16	16 and over	Total
1995	16	68	84
1996	10	69	79
1997	11	54	65
1998	13	48	61
1999	9	52	61

(b) There has been enhanced surveillance for TB here since 1991-92. In March 1997, the Department issued guidelines on TB control and prevention to HSS Boards and Trusts here. In June 2000, guidelines on drug-resistant TB were issued. The Schools BCG Immunisation Programme, which was suspended in September 1999 due to a severe shortage of vaccine here and in England, Scotland and Wales, will restart in the very near future.

- (a) Mionléirítear an t-eolas seo sa tábla thíos.

CÁSANNA EITINNE CURTHA IN IÚL, 1995 - 1999

	Aois		
	Faoi 16	16 agus thairistí	Iomlán
1995	16	68	84
1996	10	69	79
1997	11	54	65
1998	13	48	61
1999	9	52	61

- (b) Tháinig méadú i bhfaire ar eitinn anseo ó 1991-02. I Márta 1997, thug an Roinn treoirilnte ar smachtú agus ar chosc eitinne do Bhoird agus d'Iontaobhais SSS anseo. I Meitheamh 2000, eisíodh treoirilnte ar eitinn fhrithbheartach drugaí. Atosóidh An Clár Imdhíonta BCG do Scoileanna, a cuireadh ar fionraí i Mí Mheán Fómhair 1999 mar gheall ar ghéarghanntanas vacsaíne anseo, i Sasana, in Albain agus sa Bhreatain Bheag, ar ball.

Ambulance Service: East Antrim

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the steps she is taking to improve the ambulance service in the parliamentary constituency of East Antrim. (AQW 2271/00)

Ms de Brún: The Report on the Strategic Review of the Ambulance Service set out options for the improvement of ambulance response times for the benefit of all communities. One of the project groups established to look more closely at how the Report's recommendations could be implemented and the costs of doing so is considering ways of improving A&E Services, including ambulance response times in rural areas.

Leagann An Tuairisc ar Athbhreithniú Straitéiseach na Seirbhíse Otharcharr roghanna amach do fheabhsú amanna freagartha otharcharr ar mhaithe leis na pobail go léir. Tá ceann de ghrúpaí na scéime, a bunaíodh le scrúdú níos géire a dhéanamh ar an dóigh a bhféadfaí moltaí na Tuairisce a chur i bhfeidhm agus ar a chostas, tá sé ag déanamh machnaimh ar dhóigheanna le Seirbhísí T&É a fheabhsú, amanna freagartha otharcharr i gceantair tuaithe san áireamh.

Anti-drug Strategy

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what recent discussions she has had with the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister in relation to the anti-drugs strategy. (AQW 2289/00)

Ms de Brún: The Ministerial Group on Drugs met for the first time on 10 October 2000 and again on 31 January 2001. Following both meetings, I circulated a paper to the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister updating them on the work of the Ministerial Group and reporting progress with the implementation of the Drug Strategy.

Bhuail an Grúpa Aireachta ar Dhrugaí le chéile den chéad uair ar an 10ú Deireadh Fómhair 2000 agus arís ar an 31ú Eanáir 2001. I ndiaidh an dá chruinniú, chuir mé páipéar chuig Oifig an Chéad-Aire agus an Leas-Chéad Aire ag cur obair an Ghrúpa Aireachta agus ag tuairisciú an dul chun cinn i gcur i bhfeidhm na Straitéise Drugaí in iúl dóibh.

Neurosurgery for Patients Suffering from Parkinson's Disease

Mr McMenamin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what provision there is for neurosurgery for patients suffering from Parkinson's Disease. (AQW 2293/00)

Ms de Brún: The Royal Group of Hospitals provides neurosurgery services in the North. If a patient requires neurosurgery specifically to treat Parkinson's Disease, a consultant neurologist will refer them to a recognised centre, usually Bristol or Oxford.

British and Irish neurosurgeons are currently considering whether surgery should be provided locally or whether it is clinically preferable to provide a small number of centres with a higher degree of expertise in the surgery.

I will of course give careful consideration to any proposal put forward by the specialists in this complex field.

Soláthraíonn Grúpa Ríoga na nOtharlann seirbhísí néarmháinliachta sa Tuaisceart. Má tá néarmháinliacht ar leith de dhíth ar othar le Galar Parkinson a chóireáil, atreoróidh néareolaí comhairleach chuig ionad aitheanta, i mBriostó nó in Oxford de ghnáth, é/í.

Tá néarmháinlianna Briotanacha agus Éireannacha ag déanamh machnaimh faoi láthair ar cé acu ba chóir máinliacht a sholáthar go háitiúil nó nár chóir nó cé acu a bheadh sé níos fearr go cliniciúil roinnt bheag ionad a sholáthar le caighdeán saineolais níos airde sa mháinliacht nó nach mbeadh.

Ar ndóigh, déanfaidh mé machnamh cúramach ar mholadh ar bith a mholfaidh saineolaithe sa réimse coimpléascach seo.

Orthopaedic Services

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of (a) orthopaedic patients on waiting lists in each of the last

three years and (b) orthopaedic consultants and surgeons currently employed. (AQW 2309/00)

Ms de Brún:

- (a) Numbers of persons waiting for inpatient admission in the Trauma and Orthopaedics specialty are detailed in Table 1 below. Numbers of persons waiting for their first outpatient appointment in the Trauma and Orthopaedics specialty are detailed in Table 2 below.

TABLE 1. NUMBERS WAITING FOR INPATIENT TREATMENT IN THE TRAUMA & ORTHOPAEDICS SPECIALTY

Quarter Ending	
31 December 2000	5,151
31 December 1999	5,050
31 December 1998	5,500

TABLE 2. NUMBERS WAITING FOR FIRST OUTPATIENT APPOINTMENT IN THE TRAUMA & ORTHOPAEDICS SPECIALTY

Quarter ending	
31 December 2000	11,762
31 December 1999	9,633
31 December 1998	6,905

- (b) At 30 September 2000 (the latest date for which information is available) there were 35 orthopaedic consultants employed in local hospitals. The number of orthopaedic consultants who are also surgeons is not held centrally.
- (a) Léirítear líon na ndaoine ag fanacht ar ligean isteach mar othair chónaitheacha sa speisialtacht Tráma agus Ortaipéide i dTábla 1 thíos. Léirítear líon na ndaoine ag fanacht ar an chéad choinne eisothair sa speisialtacht Tráma agus Ortaipéide i dTábla 2 thíos.

TÁBLA 1. LÍON NA NDAOINE AG FANACHT AR CHÓIREÁIL MAR OTHAIR CHÓNAITHEACHA SA SPEISIALTACHT TRÁMA AGUS ORTAIPÉIDE

Ceathrú a chríochnaíonn	
31 Nollaig 2000	5,151
31 Nollaig 1999	5,050
31 Nollaig 1998	5,500

TÁBLA 2. LÍON NA NDAOINE AG FANACHT AR A GCÉAD CHOINNE EISOTHAIR SA SPEISIALTACHT TRÁMA AGUS ORTAIPÉIDE.

Ceathrú a chríochnaíonn	
31 Nollaig 2000	11,762
31 Nollaig 1999	9,633
31 Nollaig 1998	6,905

- (b) Faoi 30 Meán Fómhair 2000 (an dáta deireanach a bhfuil eolas ar fáil dó) bhí 35 dhochtúirí

comhairleacha ortaipéideacha fostaithe in ospidéal áitiúla. Níl líon na ndochtúirí comhairleacha ortaipéideacha ar máinlianna iad ar fáil go lárnach

Antrim Area Hospital Accident and Emergency Unit

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of patients, from the parliamentary constituency of East Antrim, who could not be admitted to Antrim Area Hospital for emergency treatment and were subsequently taken to either Mid Ulster Hospital, Magherfelt or Coleraine Hospital during the last 12 months. (AQW 2323/00)

Ms de Brún: Between 1 March 2000 and 28 February 2001, three patients from the Larne, Carrickfergus and Newtownabbey Borough Councils were transferred from Antrim Area Hospital A&E Department to either Mid-Ulster or Coleraine hospitals.

Idir 1 Márta 2000 agus 28 Feabhra 2001, aistríodh 3 othar ó Bhuirgchomhairlí Latharna, Charraig Fhearghusa agus Bhaile Nua na Mainistreach ó Roinn Taisme agus Éigeandála Ospidéal Cheantar Aontroma chuig ospidéal Lár Uladh nó ospidéal Chúil Raithin.

Screening Programme for Prostate Cancer

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if she intends to initiate a screening programme for prostate cancer in men over 40 years and to make a statement. (AQW 2344/00)

Ms de Brún: The National Screening Committee which advises Health Ministers does not currently recommend prostate cancer screening based on the prostate specific antigen (PSA) test. However the matter is being kept under review and will be revisited when any new research evidence becomes available. With the current test, false positives are a major problem. Prostate surgery can cause unnecessary harm, including impotence and incontinence, to healthy men.

Ní mholann an Coiste Náisiúnta Scagtha a chomhairlíonn Airí Sláinte faoi láthair go ndéantar scagadh ailse den fhaireog phrostátach bunaithe ar an teist do shainaintigin na faireoige prostátaí (SFP). Bíodh sin mar atá, tá an t-ábhar seo á choinneáil faoi athbhreithniú agus fillfear air nuair atá aon fhianaise thaighde úr ar fáil. Leis an teist atá ann faoi láthair, is fadhb ollmhór iad na bréagthorthaí deimhneacha. Is féidir leis an mháinliacht phrostátach a lán dochair a dhéanamh gan ghá d'fhir shláintiúla, éagumas agus neamhchoinneálacht san áireamh.

HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

Gender and Religious Composition

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail the gender and religious composition of (a) students enrolled at Newry and Kilkeel Institute for Further and Higher Education for the years 1998-99, 1999-2000 and 2000-01 (b) teaching staff employed at Newry and Kilkeel Institute for Further and Higher Education for the years 1998-99, 1999-2000 and 2000-01. (AQW 2188/00)

The Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Dr Farren): I attach a table detailing the number of enrolments by gender at Newry and Kilkeel Institute for Further and Higher Education. This Department does not release the religious composition of individual colleges. Information on teaching staff employed at the college is not collected in the format requested.

	Males	Females	Total
1997/1998	1,849	3,653	5,502
1998/1999	1,785	3,820	5,605
1999/2000	1,957	3,618	5,575

Data for 2000/2001 are not currently available.

Special Facilities for Statemented Children

Mr Bradley asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment whether he intends to review the guidelines which prevent children who have a statement of special educational need from accessing special facilities if they transfer to a Higher and Further Education College. (AQW 2209/00)

Dr Farren: My Department does not have a policy that prevents students with special needs from accessing facilities in further and higher education. Indeed, significant action has already been taken by my Department to improve the rights of and access by students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Proposals are also going forward in respect of new legislation that will provide comprehensive and enforceable rights to further and higher education for disabled people on the same basis as the rest of the UK.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Private Contractors: Severe Weather Conditions

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of occasions on which private contractors have been engaged to assist Roads Service

in the parliamentary constituency of East Antrim during severe weather conditions since November 2000.

(AQW 2214/00)

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Campbell): Since November 2000, my Department's Roads Service has engaged private contractors to assist during periods of severe weather conditions in the constituency of East Antrim on the following occasions:

- in late December 2000, two contractors were employed for three days and, in late February 2001, three contractors were employed for three days in the Larne area; and
- in late February/early March 2001, three contractors were employed for seven days in the Boroughs of Newtownabbey and Carrickfergus.

As regards the latter, approximately half of the work undertaken by the contractors was in the East Antrim constituency.

Traffic Flow - A2

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the latest figures regarding daily traffic flow on the A2 Shore Road between Silverstream and Ravenhill. (AQW 2216/00)

Mr Campbell: The latest available figures for the A2 are from the Roads Services automatic counting site near the Trooperslane junction, which is just to the north-east of the section referred to. This indicates average weekday traffic flows of 27,500 vehicles per day (total for both directions).

Gritting of Rural Roads

Mr Bradley asked the Minister for Regional Development to amend the daily traffic criteria for the gritting of rural roads to one that reflects the volume of traffic in any one hour in a 24-hour period. (AQW 2276/00)

Mr Campbell: As I indicated in the Assembly on Monday 15 January 2001, I have initiated a review of my Department's current policy on the salting of roads. The review will examine the criteria for determining which roads should be included in the salting schedule.

I hope that the review will be concluded to enable me to report to the Assembly's Regional Development Committee by June 2001.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Independent Appeal Tribunal: Disability Living Allowance

Mr Gibson asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of appeals which are upheld by

the Independent Appeal Tribunal in respect of Disability Living Allowance in each of the last two years.

(AQW 2252/00)

The Minister for Social Development (Mr Morrow):

In the year from 1 January 1999 to 31 December 1999, 980 components of Disability Living Allowance were allowed on appeal and during the period 1 January 2000 through to 31 December 2000, a total of 998 components were allowed at tribunal.

Tackling Benefit Fraud

Mr Gibson asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the progress he has made in tackling benefit fraud and to make a statement. (AQW 2253/00)

Mr Morrow: I welcome this opportunity to reiterate my commitment to combating benefit fraud. The Social Security Agency has a comprehensive anti-fraud and security strategy based on prevention, detection and sanctions.

In the current year to date:

- some 56,000 Interventions have been carried out resulting in a change to benefit entitlement totalling £1.67 million;
- nearly 10,500 cases of suspected fraud have been investigated with a success rate of 46% amounting to a monetary value of some £1.27 million;
- sanctions have been applied to some 559 cases, of which 518 were prosecutions and 41 Administration penalties; and
- £3.32 million debt has been recovered.

Winter Fuel Allowance

Mr Gibson asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the total amount of winter fuel allowance paid in this financial year to date. (AQW 2254/00)

Mr Morrow: To date in this financial year Winter Fuel Payments totalling just over £43 million have been paid to people in Northern Ireland.

Child Poverty

Mr Gibson asked the Minister for Social Development to detail his plans to increase financial support for families on low incomes with the emphasis of reducing child poverty. (AQW 2255/00)

Mr Morrow: My Department will continue to contribute to the aim of eradicating child poverty in 20 years and halving it in 10.

There will be further reform of the tax and benefit system through the introduction of a new Integrated

Child Credit building on the foundation of universal Child Benefit.

Under the New Deal for Lone Parents, work-focused interviews will be introduced and there will be additional help with childcare and training costs.

As part of the reform of the Child Support System, a child maintenance premium will enable lone parents on Income Support to keep up to £10 a week of their child maintenance.

From April 2001, entitlement to the higher rate mobility component of Disability Living Allowance will be extended to three- and four-year-olds with severe disabilities.

Minimum Income Guarantee

Mr Gibson asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of (a) pensioners in receipt of the minimum income guarantee and (b) eligible pensioners who have not applied. (AQW 2256/00)

Mr Morrow: Nearly 74,000 Pensioners receive the Minimum Income Guarantee. The Department does not hold figures for the number of eligible pensioners who have not applied for the Minimum Income Guarantee but continues to actively encourage uptake to ensure that all pensioners claim and receive all the help they are entitled to.

Administration of the Housing Benefit System

Mr Gibson asked the Minister for Social Development to give his assessment on the administration of the housing benefit system. (AQW 2264/00)

Mr Morrow: The Housing Executive's performance is assessed by comparing its performance against targets and objectives agreed with the Department. Where possible, comparisons are also made with local authorities administering housing benefit in Great Britain.

The latest available figures, for the six-month period ended September 2000, indicate that the Executive should meet all of its targets for the current year. In particular, for the six-month period ended September 2000 the Executive determined 94.5% of housing benefit claims within the statutory timescale of 14 days. This compared with an overall figure of 80.5% in English authorities. Of the larger authorities only Leeds, with a figure of 96%, bettered the Executive's performance. During the period the Executive achieved an assessment accuracy rate of 95.3 %.

During 1999/2000 the Executive's costs for administering housing benefit were compared with a sample of local authorities in Great Britain. This exercise concluded that the Executive's costs per claim were some 31% lower than the average.

Housing Benefit

Mr Gibson asked the Minister for Social Development to detail what plans he has to reform the administration of housing benefit. (AQW 2265/00)

Mr Morrow: With effect from 2 July 2001 the arrangements for decision making on Housing Benefit claims will be brought into line with those applying in all other social security benefits. These arrangements will include a right of appeal to an appeal tribunal administered by the Appeals Service, with a further right of appeal, on a point of law, to the Social Security Commissioners, and from there to the higher courts. These procedures will replace the current Housing Benefit Review Board system.

There are no other current plans to reform the administration of Housing Benefit.

Child Support Agency: Complaints

Mr Gibson asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of complaints he has received regarding the operation of the Child Support Agency in the last 12 months and to make a statement. (AQW 2266/00)

Mr Morrow: The Northern Ireland Child Support Agency has received a total of 291 complaints during the last 12 months. I set the Agency a target to reduce the number of complaints, as a percentage of live caseload, and I am pleased to say it has exceeded my expectations.

Complaints are defined as any expressed dissatisfaction where a client feels aggrieved, unreasonably or unfairly treated and they now stand at 0.04% of the caseload. The Agency will continue to endeavour to improve its standard of service.

Northern Ireland Housing Executive: Rent Arrears Owed

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development to detail, by parliamentary constituency, the amount of rent arrears owed to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in each of the last five years for which figures are available. (AQW 2299/00)

Mr Morrow: The information is not available in the form requested, however, I would refer you to the reply to a similar question raised by Mrs Iris Robinson on this subject (AQW 1258/00 answered on 23 January 2001, [Official Report, Vol 8, No 5, page WA180]).

Regeneration of Armagh City

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Social Development to outline what initiatives he will put in place to stimulate the regeneration of Armagh City. (AQO 1178/00)

Mr Morrow: It is still too early to detail plans to regenerate any of our urban centres. Officials from my Department have been working with representatives from other Departments to draw up proposals which will need to be considered by relevant Ministers. I can say that in addition to any specific proposals my Department will provide guidelines for the reinvigoration of town centres. These guidelines will of course recognise the need to allow local people flexibility to adopt policies which best meet their needs. I also intend that the Department will continue on with its use of existing regeneration tools such as Environmental Improvement Schemes and Comprehensive Development Schemes where these are necessary and finance is available.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 30 March 2001

Written Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Achieving Full Employment

Mr Gibson asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to give its assessment of the prospects of achieving full employment in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 2135/00)

Reply: *[holding answer 21 March 2001]*: Whilst the Northern Ireland economy is still somewhat short of full employment, growth in the employment rate combined with a significant fall in unemployment during the 1990s suggests that we are moving firmly in the right direction. Political progress should of course help to improve our prospects for achieving full employment.

Executive Programme Funds: Social Inclusion

Mr Shannon asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail (a) what provision has been made for social inclusion within Executive Programme Funds (b) whether action on social inclusion will include bringing communities together through participating in sport and (c) the timetable for implementation.

(AQW 2239/00)

Reply: The Executive places great importance on the need to address disadvantage and social exclusion and all of the Executive Programme Funds will have regard to and be fully consistent with the Executive's commitment to equality and New TSN.

One of the Funds is specifically for social inclusion/community regeneration. The Fund will support actions against poverty, and the development of effective community measures as well actions on community relations and cultural diversity.

The Executive is currently considering the large number of proposals, which have been received from all Depart-

ments, across the range of their responsibilities. It is planned that decisions will be made in the next few weeks to enable Departments to begin implementation of successful projects and programmes early in the new financial year.

Targeting Social Need: Upper Bann

Dr O'Hagan asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to list the electoral wards in the parliamentary constituency of Upper Bann which are designated as (a) Targeting Social Need and (b) New Targeting Social Need areas.

(AQW 2277/00)

Reply: Indicators of multiple deprivation are used to identify the most deprived areas. However, there is no single list of either TSN or New TSN electoral wards towards which all departments must target their programmes.

In some cases targeting on an electoral ward basis, as opposed to on a larger geographical basis, would not be practicable. In other cases, the areas appropriate to one type of programme may not be the same as the areas appropriate to another type of programme.

Central Community Relations Unit: Group Funding

Mr Ford asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail those groups that received funding from the Central Community Relations Unit in the financial year 1997-98, and the amount of each grant awarded.

(AQW 2328/00)

Reply: The Central Community Relations Unit provided the following funding to groups during the financial year 1997/98.

COMMUNITY RELATIONS PROGRAMME

Group	Grant £
Ballymoney Borough Council (Rasharkin)	117,500
Belfast Central Mission (Forth Spring)	181,390
Chinese Welfare Association	38,215
Comhaltas Uladh	27,125
Co-operation North	120,000
Corrymeela Community	116,000
Community Relations Council	2,555,000
European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages	587
FAIT	31,628
Gael Linn	45,000
Glenavy Community Support Group	25,000
Larne Borough Council (Camlough)	90,125
Laurencetown, Lenaderg and Tullylish Community Association	44,784
Markethill District Enterprises Ltd	67,500

Group	Grant £
Multi-Cultural Resource Centre	48,302
Oideas Gael Uladh	6,000
Protestant and Catholic Encounter	4,245
Preas an Phobail	24,000
Somme Heritage Centre	20,000
Ulster Peoples College	33,943
Ulster Scots	52,664
Ultach Trust	92,000
WAVE	2,866

EU SPECIAL SUPPORT PROGRAMME FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

Group	Grant £
An Ceathru Poili	9,996
An Crann / The Tree	6,320
Corrymeela Community	622,059
Glencairn Peoples Project	13,934
Counteract	35,382
Naiscoil na Rinne	16,631
Peace & Reconciliation Group (Londonderry)	4,680
Project Portadown	46,168
Rathfriland & District Regeneration Co Ltd	130,000
St Columb's Reconciliation Park	28,122
Understanding Conflict Trust	63,973
Ulster Peoples College	78,903
Peace People Farm Ltd	462

The Community Relations Council was also an Intermediary Funding Body responsible for administering the Promoting Pathways to Reconciliation Measure of the above Programme. In this role it received funding channelled through CCRU totalling £1,059,888.

Single Equality Bill

Mrs Carson asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQO 928/00, to confirm that provision to prevent discrimination in employment on grounds of age will be included in the Single Equality Bill. (AQO 1187/00)

Reply: The Single Equality Bill will harmonise existing anti-discrimination law as far as practicable. It will also take account of the recently agreed European Framework Directive for anti-discrimination law on a range of categories including discrimination on the grounds of age. A consultation paper on the scope of the Single Equality Bill will be published shortly.

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Income of Hill Farmers

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the steps she is taking to increase the income of hill farmers and to make a statement. (AQW 2305/00)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers): The Northern Ireland Rural Development Regulation Plan 2000-2006 approved by the EU Commission is a £266 million package providing for the expansion of agri-environment and forestry measures over the next six years.

The centrepiece of the Plan, accounting for over 60% of the budgeted expenditure, is the LFA Compensatory Allowances Scheme. I was able to secure an additional £32 million of funding from Treasury over the period to 2004 which represents a very significant improvement for Northern Ireland hill farmers and places the financing of hill support onto a much more secure footing than had been the case for the last number of years.

On 15 March I announced a substantial increase of over 18% in 2001 Less Favoured Area Compensatory Allowance payments due to the hill farmers.

I am pleased that 90% of these payments, worth over £22 million, have now been paid as I know farmers have major cashflow problems during the present Foot and Mouth Disease restrictions.

Organic Farming: Research and Development

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the level of funding allocated to research and development into organic farming methods in the last 12 months. (AQW 2307/00)

Ms Rodgers: The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) has not conducted any direct research on organic farming in the last 12 months. However, a number of the Department's research programmes have elements that are pertinent to organic systems.

For instance, two projects relate to a comparison of Norwegian and Holstein Friesian Cattle. These projects are examining the potential for using the Norwegian Cattle, which are specifically bred for improved health/fertility, on Northern Ireland dairy farms. While this work is relevant to all Northern Ireland dairy producers, it is particularly relevant to organic producers where there is less opportunity for veterinary intervention. One component of the study is being carried out on 20 dairy farms across Northern Ireland and four of these are organic dairy units.

Another project is concerned with assessing the potential benefit of using the Norwegian Cattle for beef production. Again the objective is very much about developing systems with less reliance on veterinary treatments and hence is most appropriate to organic production systems.

These are new projects and an assessment of the organic element costs associated with this work will not be available until later in the year.

Ongoing plant breeding research programmes for potatoes and grass varieties for innate pest and disease resistance, yield, sward densities, etc are also relevant to organic systems.

I can assure you that the Department keeps research opportunities under constant review and will consider, in the light of current information and developments in Great Britain and in the Republic of Ireland, likely future research needs and priorities relevant to Northern Ireland organic farming.

Milk Collection

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the steps she is taking to compensate farmers where the daily milk collection did not take place due to severe weather conditions.
(AQW 2321/00)

Ms Rodgers: I understand that relatively small amounts of milk were not collected and that at least one purchaser paid producers for any such milk. In the circumstances I am not taking any steps to compensate producers whose milk was not collected due to severe weather conditions.

Beef Labelling Regulations

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to confirm that German beef imported as carcasses may lawfully be described as British produce after it has been processed.
(AQW 2347/00)

Ms Rodgers: Under EU Beef Labelling Regulations 1825/2000 and 1760/2000 beef must be labelled to show Member State or third country of slaughter and of cutting. Beef which was derived from carcasses sourced in Germany may not lawfully be described as British produce. The rules apply to beef but not to beef products such as sausages, pies, canned beef etc.

Native Woodland

Mr A Doherty asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the steps being taken to conserve the countryside by encouraging landowners and farmers to develop areas of new native woodland.
(AQO 1239/00)

Ms Rodgers: Farmers and landowners are encouraged to conserve the countryside by planting woodland on agricultural land through incentives offered under the Woodland Grant Scheme and the Farm Woodland Premium Scheme. Both schemes seek to enhance the environment by improving the landscape, providing new habitats and increasing biodiversity. Broadleaf woodland, most of which consists of native trees, receives higher rates of grant at establishment and also attracts annual premium payments over a longer period, compared with conifer woodland.

CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Linguistic Diversity Projects

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the proposed allocation of the £94,000 grant set aside for Linguistic Diversity Projects and to make a statement.
(AQW 2338/00)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McGimpsey): The £94,000 allocated to subhead

Grant to the Ulster Historical Foundation to meet Northern Ireland's contribution towards the cost of the publication of the History of the Irish Parliament. This is being jointly funded by the ROI.	£34,000
Irish Language Broadcasting Pilot Project	£25,000
Grant to the Columba Project. This is also funded by ROI, Scotland and Northern Ireland.	£35,000
Total	£94,000

EDUCATION

Telecommunications Masts

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Education to detail (a) the level of income generated from the siting of telecommunications masts on education and library board property (b) the length of contract for the siting of each mast and (c) if he will consider removing the masts.
(AQW 2234/00)

The Minister of Education (Mr M McGuinness): I understand from Education and Library Boards that there are currently three masts on education and library board property. The erection and removal of masts on board property is a contractual matter for each Board. The details are as follows:

Board Property	Income	Length of Contract
Ballyclare Secondary School	£1,250 pa	10 years from July 1994

Board Property	Income	Length of Contract
Carrickfergus Grammar School	£2,500 pa	10 years from September 1996
Killinchy Primary School	£2,250 pa	Termination due 31 July 2001

My Department has arranged for the Radio-communications Agency to carry out an independent audit of telecommunications masts at these schools.

School Budget Information

Mr O'Neill asked the Minister of Education to explain (a) the late release of the school budget information and (b) why it took so long to reach schools and to give an assurance that this will not recur in future years.

(AQW 2246/00)

Mr M McGuinness: My Department has apologised to education and library boards and other school authorities for the late notification of school budgets and I reiterate that apology. Final calculations on school budgets could not be completed until the Executive Budget was formally approved by the Assembly in January. Subsequent delays were caused by pressures within my Department arising from validation of relevant school information and consideration of arrangements for additional funding. These factors were quite exceptional and I do not anticipate any recurrence in future years.

Classroom Assistants

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of pupils who currently have a classroom assistant by (a) each education and library board area (b) each school in Northern Ireland and to outline what reviews have been carried out regarding such provision.

(AQW 2295/00)

Mr M McGuinness: I understand from Education and Library Boards that the numbers of pupils in controlled and maintained schools in each Board area with a statement of special educational needs, who have a classroom assistant, are as follows:

Belfast	Western	North Eastern	South Eastern	Southern
99	416	388	546	466

Figures are not available for grant-maintained integrated and voluntary grammar schools.

The numbers of schools where classroom assistants have been appointed as a result of children's statements of special educational needs in each Board area are as follows:

Belfast	Western	North Eastern	South Eastern	Southern
45	171	177	194	210

Statements of special educational needs, and therefore the needs of individual children for classroom assistance, are reviewed annually.

Special Education Units

Ms Ramsey asked the Minister of Education to outline what guidelines are in place to ensure that money allocated for Moderate Learning Difficulty (MLD) special units is spent wholly on those units. (AQW 2302/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The financial allocations made by Education and Library Boards to special education units attached to primary and secondary schools are made up of two elements, ie those costs held centrally by Boards and those included in schools' delegated budgets. Within delegated budgets, it is for each school to determine priorities. Boards hold centrally teachers' and classroom assistants' salaries and the costs of specialist equipment for pupils in units, which make up by far the greatest part of unit expenditure, and are thus able to ensure that these resources are spent on the unit provision.

I am not aware of any difficulties regarding expenditure on special units. I will, however, ask officials to make enquiries and, if it appears that there may be a problem with the funding of individual units, I will take action to address this.

Temporary and Full-Time Teaching Posts

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Education to detail (a) the number of temporary teachers in post and (b) the number of full-time teaching posts currently vacant in the parliamentary constituency of East Antrim

(AQW 2318/00)

Mr M McGuinness:

- During the month of January 2001 there were 191 temporary teachers employed in schools in the East Antrim parliamentary constituency.
- The Department does not hold details of teaching vacancies, nor is this information collated by the Education and Library Boards.

Vandalism in Schools

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost of vandalism at each school in the parliamentary constituency of East Antrim in the last 12 months.

(AQW 2319/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The cost of vandalism at controlled and maintained schools over the period April 2000 to

February 2001 has been provided by the North Eastern Education and Library Board and is set out below. Information in respect of voluntary grammar and grant-maintained integrated schools is not available.

School	Cost (£)
Antiville Primary	3,551
Ballycarry Primary	112
Carnlough Primary	387
Carrickfergus Central Primary	407
Carrickfergus College	5,035
Carrickfergus Grammar	2,071
Carrickfergus Model Primary	951
Downshire School	4,614
Eden Primary	582
Glenarm Primary	10
Glynn Primary	327
Greenisland Primary	396
Hollybank Primary	2,397
Jordanstown Special	250
King's Park Primary	4,448
Larne and Inver Primary	19
Larne High	6,865
Larne Nursery	654
Linn Primary	526
Monkstown Community High	1,575
Monkstown Nursery	171
Moyle Primary	473
Oakfield Primary	142
Olderfleet Primary	77
Roddensvale Special	532
Rosstulla Special	245
Silverstream Primary	906
St Anthony's Nursery	707
St Anthony's Primary	517
St Comgall's College	2,294
St Jame's Primary	542
St MacNissi's Primary	297
St Nicholas's Primary	163
Sunnylands Nursery	1,334
Sunnylands Primary	1,481
Thornfield House Special	143
Victoria Primary	994
Whiteabbey Primary	242
Woodburn Primary	268
Woodlawn Primary	158

Staff Development Performance Review and Teachers' Pay

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister of Education to give an undertaking to the recognised teachers' unions that there

will not be a link between Staff Development Performance Review and teachers' pay and to make a statement.

(AQW 2324/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The Agreement on the new pay system reached between Management Side and Teachers' Side of the Teachers' Salaries and Conditions of Service Committee (Schools) on 23 January 2001 provides for Staff Development and Performance Review to become Staff Development and Performance Management. The revised arrangements will build on existing practice and operate within schools' development plans so that teachers will benefit through professional discussions about their work and their professional development.

Although the arrangements apply to all teachers, teachers will, as before, move up the main pay scale annually unless they are subject to the procedure for teachers whose work is unsatisfactory. In the case of the leadership group (principals, vice-principals and assistant vice-principals) and teachers who cross the threshold to the upper pay scale, decisions on their subsequent progression up the pay scales will be informed by each end of year review under the Staff Development and Performance Management arrangements.

Staff Development and Performance Management is not, therefore, linked exclusively with the threshold assessment and pay progression, but it is an integral part of the overall approach to school management and school improvement.

Performance-Related Pay For Teachers

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister of Education to give his assessment of the introduction of Performance-Related Pay for teachers in Northern Ireland. (AQW 2325/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The Agreement on the new pay system reached between Management Side and Teachers' Side of the Teachers' Salaries and Conditions of Service Committee (Schools) on 23 January 2001 provides the opportunity for teachers on the maximum of the main pay scale, for qualifications and experience, to move to an upper pay scale with an immediate uplift of £2,001 by applying for threshold assessment. The employing authorities are working hard to put in place the threshold assessment arrangements so that payment can be made to successful teachers at the earliest possible date.

Teachers' Conditions of Service

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister of Education to confirm that there have been no substantive changes to teachers' conditions of service since the Jordanstown Agreement of 1987. (AQW 2326/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The Agreement on the new pay system reached between Management Side and Teachers' Side of the Teachers' Salaries and Conditions of Service Committee (Schools) on 23 January 2001 modifies teachers' conditions of service to provide for Principals to operate the threshold assessment arrangements. It also replaces the phrase "performance review" with "performance management".

St Mary's University College: Student Places

Mr J Kelly asked the Minister of Education whether, in view of the growing volume of students coming from Irish-Medium schools, he intends to increase the number of places available for students wishing to study Irish at St Mary's University College. (AQW 2351/00)

Mr M McGuinness: I would refer the Member to the reply given to a question by Mrs Mary Nelis on 13 October 2000 (AQW 254/00).

Northern Ireland Regional Centre for Performance Management

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister of Education to confirm that funds have been set aside for the establishment and running costs of the proposed Northern Ireland Regional Centre for Performance Management. (AQW 2355/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Funds have been set aside to meet the costs of the Regional Manager and Deputy Regional Manager posts, which have responsibility for the introduction of the arrangements for threshold assessments, the leadership group and performance management. Financial provision is also being made available for the external threshold assessors and the external advisers to Boards of Governors on principals' pay. As the workload will reduce significantly after the initial year's threshold applications have been dealt with, fewer staff will then be required so appointments are being made for fixed periods. Although the staff will work on a regional basis, their employer will be one of the Education and Library Boards.

Disparity in Funding Between Primary and Secondary Schools

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Education whether he has any plans to address the disparity of funding between primary and secondary schools in England and Wales compared to that in Northern Ireland, as reported in the Second Report of the House of Commons Education Committee [Session 1993-94] entitled 'The Disparity in Funding Between Primary and Secondary Schools' and to make a statement. (AQW 2362/00)

Mr M McGuinness: I believe primary and post-primary schools here are under funded compared to England and Wales and I will continue to argue for additional resources for education.

The differential in funding between the primary and post-primary sectors here has been steadily reduced over recent years. Between 1993/94 and 2000/01 primary sector funding increased by 32% compared to 24% for the post-primary sector.

The differing scope and method of curriculum delivery in each sector requires different organisational arrangements and levels of funding. Nevertheless, I believe there is a case for further reduction in the current funding differential and the distribution of the recent £20.4 million Budget Addition on an equal basis to the primary and post-primary sectors is evidence of my commitment to addressing this issue. The Consultation Document on the LMS Common Formula, which I shall be launching next week, also contains proposals to give primary schools a fairer share of available resources.

Information and Communications Technology: Funding

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education whether he intends to fund Information and Communication Technology training for teachers from the New Opportunities Fund and will he make alternative funding available for those teachers or schools who object in principle to the use of lottery money. (AQW 2365/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Arrangements have already been put in place for the costs of information and communications technology training to be met from Departmental funds where teachers disapprove of the use of lottery money because of their genuine convictions. In all other cases the training costs are being met by the New Opportunities Fund.

Primary School Places: Newtownabbey

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of children of primary school age in Newtownabbey who have failed to find a place in (a) the school of first choice (b) the school of second choice and (c) the school of third choice and to make a statement. (AQW 2386/00)

Mr M McGuinness: In relation to applications for admission to the 26 primary schools in the Newtownabbey District Council area for September 2001, I understand from the North Eastern Education and Library Board that 98% of children obtained admission to their first-preference primary school; 34 children were unsuccessful in obtaining their first-preference primary school; 16 children were unsuccessful in obtaining their second-preference primary school; and three children were unsuccessful in obtaining

their third-preference primary school. It is for the Board of Governors of each primary school to determine admissions criteria and apply them if they receive more applications to the school than there are places available.

Education and Library Boards: Funding

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail (a) the level of funding to each of the Education and Library Boards for the financial year 2001/02 and (b) how this compares to the actual cost as assessed by each Education and Library Board. (AQW 2388/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The total allocations of recurrent and capital budgets to the Education and Library Boards from the Department of Education for the 2001-02 financial year are as follows:

	£m
Belfast	162,594
North Eastern	199,978
South Eastern	190,805
Southern	213,963
Western	176,839
Total	944,179

As the core funding of Education and Library Boards is based on an assessment of relative needs and Boards are required to contain their expenditure within the budgets allocated, the comparison sought is not practical. A total of £89.459 million of funding earmarked for special initiatives etc remains to be allocated to the Education and Library Boards during 2001-02.

Vacant Places in Primary Schools: Newtownabbey Area

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of vacant places currently available in primary schools in the Newtownabbey area. (AQW 2390/00)

Mr M McGuinness: A comparison of approved enrolment numbers with enrolments recorded for each primary school in the October 2000 school census indicates that there are 2,211 places currently available in the Newtownabbey Council area.

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Producing Energy from Waste Projects

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to his statement on energy to the Assembly on 5 March 2001, to give his assessment on

producing energy from waste projects and to make a statement. (AQW 2278/00)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Sir Reg Empey): The Northern Ireland Waste Management Strategy indicates that the development of Energy from Waste (EfW) facilities will be necessary to meet the waste diversion targets specified in the Landfill Directive.

The development of EfW facilities is a matter for consideration within the framework of Waste Management Plans, which are currently being prepared by district councils. Plans that propose to include incineration capacity are required to show how they will meet sustainable recycling targets and maximise energy recovery in the form of heat and electricity.

The July 1999 report 'Renewable Energy in the Millennium – The Northern Ireland Potential' estimated that the maximum electricity generation contribution from EfW projects by the years 2010 and 2025 was 28 MW and 64 MW respectively. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment plan to issue a consultation paper by the end of April seeking views on how best to develop within the context of an all-island and European energy market Northern Ireland's renewables potential including that from EfW projects.

Promoting Northern Ireland Overseas

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail when he next plans to meet with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board to discuss the promotion of Northern Ireland overseas. (AQW 2290/00)

Sir Reg Empey: As Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, I play a proactive role in the promotion of Northern Ireland as a tourism destination in overseas markets. In this regard I meet regularly with officials and recent meetings have included:

- The evaluation of Tourism Brand Ireland consumer advertising campaign
- Maximising Northern Ireland outputs from Tourism Ireland Ltd (TIL)
- Media profile in recent trade mission to France
- The first of a series of meetings on managing the impact of foot and mouth disease in international markets
- Future meetings on maximising the development of Tourism Ireland are planned including a meeting with the Board of Tourism Ireland Ltd (the NITB are represented on this Board).

Ageism in the Workforce

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the steps he is taking to address ageism within the workforce. (AQW 2297/00)

Sir Reg Empey: I am very aware of the significance of this issue. Following representations from Age Concern my Department is fully committed to supporting the work of the Northern Ireland Ageing Population Panel. With my Department's support the Panel is organising a major conference in March on ageism within the workforce, and will issue a report in June 2001.

Unemployment Statistics: 50 to 65 Age Bracket

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of people, in the age bracket 50 to 65 years, who are unemployed.
(AQW 2298/00)

Sir Reg Empey: The Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey figures for the period Winter 1999-2000 to Autumn 2000 indicate that there were on average 7,000 unemployed persons, in the 50 to 65 age bracket, according to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) definition. This represents 14.1% of the total ILO unemployed for this period. The other major source of unemployment information is the claimant count. The latest claimant count data refers to February 2001. At that date, the number of claimants, in the 50 to 65 age bracket, who were unemployed stood at 6,753 (16.5% of total claimant unemployed).

Unemployed People: Partially or Totally Deaf

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of unemployed people who are registered as either partially or totally deaf and to outline the steps he is taking to have them placed in the workforce.
(AQW 2336/00)

Sir Reg Empey: The main source of unemployment information is from the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey (LFS). Information pertaining to the number of unemployed people registered as partially or totally deaf is not collected by the LFS.

The other source of unemployment information is from the claimant count and, like the LFS, it is not possible to obtain data on the number of unemployed people registered as partially or totally deaf from this series.

Measures to assist those with partial or total deafness into employment fall to Dr Farren, the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment.

Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line

Mr Tierney asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the expected roll out-time for broadband data communications infrastructure (e.g.

Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line) to the Derry City Council area.
(AQW 2368/00)

Sir Reg Empey: The roll-out of Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line (ADSL) is a commercial matter for the telecommunications companies. However the Executive will encourage the companies to make it available as widely as possible across Northern Ireland in the shortest possible time.

Present published plans by the telecommunications companies do not indicate that ADSL will be available in Londonderry during 2001, but I understand that other broadband services such as leased lines and private circuits are currently available in the Derry City Council area

Telecommunications Infrastructure: West Tyrone

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to give his assessment on the level of Information Technology infrastructure in West Tyrone and how this compares with Great Britain. (AQO 1160/00)

Sir Reg Empey: The provision of telecommunications infrastructure, which I understand the hon Member to mean, is a matter for the private sector. Recent studies by my department and the CBI indicate that telecommunications infrastructure across Northern Ireland is on a par with national and international best practice and sufficient to meet current demand.

Future of the Textile Industry

Ms Armitage asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (a) the number of jobs lost due to the closure of clothing manufacturers and (b) his plans to protect the remaining jobs in the textile industry.
(AQO 1145/00)

Sir Reg Empey: In the year to March 2001, there were 1,543 redundancies. In June Kurt Salmon Associates was appointed to work with the IDB and an industry steering group to produce a plan for sustainable growth. Recommendations have been put to the industry and an implementation team appointed to take them forward.

THE ENVIRONMENT

D5 Development

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to confirm that permission has been granted for the D5 shopping complex, Knocknagoney, to proceed and to give his assessment of the implications for other similar developments.
(AQW 2339/00)

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Foster): The recent Court ruling upheld the Department of the Environment's decision that planning permission should be granted for the D5 development. The formal decision notice on the application is expected to issue shortly.

There are no implications for other similar developments in terms of the application of retail planning policy as a result of the D5 decision. The policy framework for determining major retail applications as set out in the Planning Policy Statement – Retailing and Town Centres, remains unchanged.

The Department will, however, take into account the likely cumulative effects of D5 in assessing the impact of any future major retail development proposals on the vitality and viability of existing centres, where appropriate.

Mutual Recognition of Driving Licences

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment to detail his plans to amend legislation to enable an individual, resident in Northern Ireland, to change a South African driving licence to a Northern Ireland driving licence. (AQW 2345/00)

Mr Foster: I intend to bring forward legislation at the earliest opportunity, subject to the requirements of the legislative process, to enable a Northern Ireland licence to be issued to drivers who have passed a driving test in South Africa or have obtained their South African driving licence in exchange for one from a country whose licensing standards are recognised in Northern Ireland.

I am not in a position to say at this stage how long it will take to introduce the necessary legislative changes through the Assembly.

However, my Department will explore the possibility of including these provisions in proposed legislation to achieve the mutual recognition of driving disqualifications, penalty point endorsements and endorsable fixed penalties between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, on which we are currently undertaking public consultation.

Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (ch 37)

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of the Environment to introduce legislation reflecting the provisions of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (ch 37). (AQW 2364/00)

Mr Foster: On 2 March 2001, I published a consultation paper entitled 'Partners in Protection'. The paper seeks views on possible changes to the existing legislation for the protection and management of Areas of Special Scientific Interest. The deadline for replies is 31 May 2001.

After my Department has received and analysed the consultation responses, I shall decide what steps need to be taken to improve our management and protection of these important sites. This could include changes to the legislation on Areas of Special Scientific Interest and will take into account those provisions of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act which relate to the equivalent sites in England and Wales.

The current consultation does not relate to the rights of way or other provisions in the CROW Act.

Rural Rate Relief Scheme

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of the Environment to list the 510 settlements defined by Planning Services as a "Rural Settlement", with a population of not more than 3,000, for the purpose of any Northern Ireland Rural Rate Relief Scheme. (AQW 2379/00)

Mr Foster: A copy of the Annex has been placed in the Assembly Library.

This is compiled by Council Area and sets out the settlements within the population groups; less than 2,000; and 2,000-3,000, as estimated at 1999. I would emphasise that any such referred to definition of "Rural Settlement" is applicable here only in specific relation to the Northern Ireland Rural Rate Relief Scheme.

Legal Sanctions for Breaches of European Union Environmental Law

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of the Environment to give his assessment of the possible impact and implications for his Department of the European Commission's adoption of a proposal for a directive that for the first time would introduce legal sanctions for breaches of environmental law at European Union level. (AQW 2381/00)

Mr Foster: Environmental law in Northern Ireland has created a number of criminal offences for actions that lead to pollution of the environment or damage to species and habitats. The penalties for these offences can range from various levels of fine to imprisonment for up to two years in the case of the most serious offences. My Department seeks to ensure that Courts, in determining penalties, are aware of the seriousness of the offences.

I am aware that the European Commission has recently published a proposal for a Directive relating to protection of the environment through the criminal law. It is too early yet to assess the detail of the proposal and the extent to which any Directive may involve matters within the competence of the Assembly.

Member States now have the opportunity to form a view on the Commission's proposal, including the issue of any Community competence in the field of criminal law. I shall ensure that as the UK response to the EC proposal is

being developed and agreed, the implications for Northern Ireland are fully assessed and taken into account.

Special Areas of Conservation

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of the Environment to detail his plans to designate, as special areas of conservation within the West Tyrone area (a) Cranny Bog (b) Deroran Bog (c) Tonnagh Beg Bog (d) Tully Bog and to extend the boundary of the Fairywater Special Area of Conservation to include Envagh and Derranscultagh raised bogs. (AQW 2415/00)

Mr Foster: I have no plans at present to add Cranny Bog, Deroran Bog, Tonnagh Beg Bog or Tully Bog to the UK list of Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), nor to extend the boundary of the Fairywater Bogs SAC to include Envagh and Derranscultagh raised bogs.

The UK Government proposes to submit to the European Commission a total of 43 sites that include raised bog habitat. Nine of these sites are in Northern Ireland.

The Joint Nature Conservation Committee, which is the UK Government's conservation adviser, considers that these 43 raised bog sites include the top ranked sites, provide adequate geographical coverage across the UK and represent a sufficient proportion of the total habitat resource.

Cranny, Deroran, Tonnagh Beg and Tully Bogs are afforded protection through their designation as Areas of Special Scientific Interest, as are the individual bogs that comprise the Fairywater Bogs composite SAC

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the total amount raised through vehicle excise duty during the last financial year. (AQW 2419/00)

Mr Foster: The collection of Vehicle Excise Duty (VED) is an excepted matter and carried out in Northern Ireland by DVLNI under the terms of a formal agency agreement between DOE and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

A sum of £124 million in VED was collected in the financial year 1999/2000. VED is an unhypothecated tax and the revenue collected is paid into the UK Consolidated Fund.

Tree Preservation Orders

Mr A Doherty asked the Minister of the Environment to detail what steps are being taken to strengthen the enforcement of Tree Preservation Orders. (AQW 2420/00)

Mr Foster: My Department issued a consultation paper outlining a range of amendments to planning legislation, including the legislation on Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs). The proposals included increased fines, and allowing offences to be taken to the High Court for prosecution.

It was further proposed to make it an automatic requirement, unless considered otherwise by my Department, to replace trees removed or destroyed that are under the protection of a TPO. In addition, it was proposed to afford the same protection to trees in a conservation area as is currently afforded to trees covered by a TPO.

However, as a result of representations made to me, I have asked officials to consider if additional amendments are needed.

I hope to introduce this legislation by way of a Planning Amendment Bill during the next session of the Assembly.

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Allegations of Harassment

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (a) the number of allegations of harassment made by members of the Northern Ireland Civil Service against other members of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (b) how many of these were upheld (c) how many cases resulted in disciplinary action being taken against the accuser for having made the allegation carelessly, recklessly or for malicious purposes and (d) the range of disciplinary measures taken, in each of the last three calendar years. (AQW 2334/00)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan): The information requested is set out below.

	1998	1999	2000
The number of allegations of harassment made by members of the Northern Ireland Civil Service against other members of the Northern Ireland Civil Service	46	52	53
Of these cases the following were upheld	14	15	10
The number of cases that resulted in disciplinary action being taken against the accuser for having made the allegation carelessly, recklessly, or for malicious purposes	0	0	0

The range of disciplinary measures taken have included:

- Informal (oral) warning
- Formal written warning
- Demotion
- Transfer
- Dismissal
- Loss of increment

Retirement Policy

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he intends to review retirement policy within the Northern Ireland Civil Service in respect of older workers and those with short service records. (AQW 2342/00)

Mr Durkan: The policy is currently under review and consideration of a range of business and equality issues is ongoing. The independent team reviewing appointment and promotion procedures to the Senior Civil Service will consider, within their terms of reference, the age of retirement as it affects the Senior Civil Service. The way forward will be considered in the light both of the Review Team's findings and the ongoing review.

Bullying

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (a) the number of civil servants claiming to be bullied at work (b) the relative cost of bullying to Departments and (c) the number of working days lost as a result of bullying. (AQW 2363/00)

Mr Durkan: Some 12.6% of civil servants who responded to a survey in 1998 reported that they had been bullied in the previous two years. Information on (b) and (c) is not maintained by Departments.

Rural Buses: Additional Funding

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline any representations he has made to HM Treasury for additional funding consequential to the Deputy Prime Minister's announcement, on 19 February 2001, of an extra £62 million for rural buses and to make a statement. (AQW 2376/00)

Mr Durkan: Under the Funding Rules for Devolved Administrations, Northern Ireland automatically receives its population share of changes in planned spending on comparable programmes in England through the Barnett Formula. This applies to the Deputy Prime Minister's recent announcement of extra funding for rural buses.

Northern Ireland's Barnett share of this additional funding was included in the 2000 Spending Review settlement announced in July last year which set Northern Ireland's Department Expenditure Limit for the period 2001-02 to 2003-04.

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Home Help Service

Mr Fee asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) the number of people on

waiting lists for the home help service in each Health Trust area and (b) the average waiting time to obtain the home help service in each Health Trust area in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

(AQW 2279/00)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms de Brún): The information requested is not available.

Níl an t-eolas a iarradh ar fáil.

Speech and Language Therapist

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of speech and language tutors currently employed by each Health Trust. (AQW 2282/00)

Ms de Brún: There is no grade of speech and language tutor within the Health and Personal Social Services. The number of speech and language therapists employed by each Trust is shown in the following table:

SPEECH & LANGUAGE THERAPISTS BY TRUST AT 30 SEPTEMBER 2000

	Full Time	Part Time
Belfast City Hospital Trust	7	1
Green Park Trust	8	2
South & East Belfast Community	18	15
Ulster Community & Hospitals Trust	14	12
Royal Group Hospital Trust	4	2
North & West Belfast Community	14	12
Lisburn & Down	16	9
Causeway	8	5
Homefirst Community	28	26
Armagh and Dungannon	10	3
Newry & Mourne	7	2
Craigavon/Banbridge Community	13	9
Foyle HSS Trust (Community)	21	2
Sperrin/Lakeland HSS Trust	14	1
Total	182	101

Source: Human Resource Information System

Níl aicme ar bith de mhúinteoirí labhartha agus teanga sna Seirbhísí Sláinte agus Sóisialta Pearsanta. Léirítear líon na dteiripithe labhartha agus teanga fostaithe ag gach Iontaobhas sa tábla seo a leanas:

TEIRIPITHE LABHARTHA AGUS TEANGA DE RÉIR IONTAOBHAIS AG AN 30 MEÁN FÓMHAIR 2000

	Lánaimse artha	Páirtaimse artha
Iontaobhas Otharlann Chathair Bhéal Feirste	7	1
Iontaobhas na Páirce Glaise	8	2
Pobal Bhéal Feirste Theas & Thoir	18	15
Iontaobhas Phobal & Otharlann Uladh	14	12

	Lánaimse artha	Páirtaíms eartha
Iontaobhas Ghrúpa Ríoga na nOspidéal	4	2
Pobal Bhéal Feirste Thuaidh & Thiar	14	12
An Dúin & Lios na gCearrbhach	16	9
An Clochán	8	5
Pobal Homefirst	28	26
Ard Mhacha & Dún Geanainn	10	3
An Iúir & an Múrn	7	2
Pobal Craigavon & Dhroichead na Banna	13	9
Iontaobhas SSS an Fheabhail (Pobal)	21	2
Iontaobhas Loch-cheantar Shliabh Speirín	14	1
Total	182	101

Foinse: Córas Eolais Acmhainní Daonna

Speech Therapy: Adult Waiting Lists

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) the number of adults currently assessed in need of speech therapy and (b) the number currently awaiting treatment. (AQW 2283/00)

Ms de Brún: Information on the number of adults currently assessed in need of speech therapy is not available. Information on the number of adults currently awaiting treatment is shown in the table below for those Trusts which provide such a service.

Trust	Number of Adults Awaiting Speech Therapy
Belfast City Hospital	31
Down Lisburn	25
Green Park	4
Mater Infirmorum	8
North & West Belfast	0
Royal Group of Hospitals	40
South & East Belfast	30
Ulster Community & Hospitals	45
Causeway	41
Homefirst	83
Armagh & Dungannon	10
Craigavon & Banbridge	24
Craigavon Hospitals Group	73
Newry & Mourne	29
Foyle	268
Sperrin Lakeland	0

Níl eolas ar fáil ar líon na ndaoine fásta a measúnaítear faoi láthair teiripe labhartha a bheith de dhíth orthu. Léirítear sa tábla thíos líon na ndaoine fásta ag fanacht ar chóireáil faoi láthair sna hIontaobhais a sholáthraíonn a leithéid den tseirbhís sin.

Iontaobhas	Líon na ndaoine Fásta ag fanacht ar Theiripe Labhartha
Otharlann Cathrach Bhéal Feirste	31
An Dún/Lios na gCearrbhach	25
An Pháirc Ghlas	4
Mater Infirmorum	8
Béal Feirste Thuaidh & Thiar	0
Grúpa Ríoga na nOtharlann	40
Béal Feirste Theas & Thoir	30
Otharlanna & Pobal Uladh	45
An Clochán	41
Homefirst	83
Ard Mhacha & Dún Geanainn	10
Craigavon & Droichead na Banna	24
Grúpa Otharlanna Craigavon	73
An tIúr & An Múrn	29
An Feabhal	268
Loch-cheantar Shliabh Speirín	0

Speech Therapy: Children's Waiting List

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) the number of children currently assessed in need of speech therapy and (b) the number currently awaiting treatment.

(AQW 2284/00)

Ms de Brún: Information on the number of children currently assessed in need of speech therapy is not available. Information on the number of children currently awaiting treatment is shown in the table below for those Trusts which provide such a service.

Trust	Number of Children Awaiting Speech Therapy
Down Lisburn	272
Green Park	30
Mater Infirmorum	0
North & West Belfast	481
Royal Group of Hospitals	0
South & East Belfast	153
Ulster Community & Hospitals	103
Causeway	166
Homefirst	966
Armagh & Dungannon	10
Craigavon & Banbridge	585
Craigavon Hospitals Group	9
Newry & Mourne	15
Foyle	1,295
Sperrin Lakeland	476

Níl eolas ar fáil ar líon na bpáistí a measúnaítear faoi láthair teiripe labhartha a bheith de dhíth orthu. Léirítear sa tábla thíos líon na bpáistí ag fanacht ar chóireáil faoi láthair sna hIontaobhais a sholáthraíonn a leithéid den tseirbhís sin.

Iontaobhas	Líon na pPáistí ag fanacht ar Theiripe Labhartha
An Dún/Lios na gCearrbhach	272
An Pháirc Ghlas	30
Mater Infirmorum	0
Béal Feirste Thuaidh & Thiar	481
Grúpa Ríoga na nOtharlann	0
Béal Feirste Theas & Thoir	153
Otharlanna & Pobal Uladh	103
An Clochán	166
Homefirst	966
Ard Mhacha & Dún Geanainn	10
Craigavon & Droichead na Banna	585
Grúpa Otharlanna Craigavon	9
An tÍúr & An Múrn	15
An Feabhal	1,295
Loch-cheantar Shliabh Speirín	476

Ambulance Depots

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to give her assessment of the physical condition of ambulance depots in Northern Ireland and to make a statement. (AQW 2287/00)

Ms de Brún: The Report on the Strategic Review of the Ambulance Service commented on the unsatisfactory state of a number of the 28 locations currently used as ambulance stations. The Ambulance Service is currently carrying out a review of its estate and will produce a priority action plan to address identified problems by summer 2001. In the meantime, developments already under way include new ambulance stations at Coleraine, Ballymoney, Newcastle and Bangor, an outpost station at Carrickfergus and the upgrade of facilities at Larne.

Rinne an Tuairisc ar Athbhreithniú Straitéiseach na Seirbhíse Otharcharr trácht ar riocht míshásúil roinnt de na 28 bhfoirgneamh atá á n-úsáid faoi láthair mar stáisiúin otharcharr. Tá an tSeirbhís Otharcharr ag déanamh athbhreithnithe faoi láthair ar a cuid foirgneamh agus cuirfidh sí gníomhphlean tosaíochta amach le dul i gceann fadhbanna aitheanta faoi shamhradh 2001. Idir an dá linn, i measc na bhforbairtí ar siúl cheana féin, tá stáisiúin nua otharcharr i gCúil Raithin, i mBaile Monaidh, sa Chaisleán Nua agus i mBeannchar, chomh maith le stáisiún for-rochtana i gCarraig Fhearghais agus athchóiriú na n-áiseanna i Latharna.

Assaults on Ambulance Personnel

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of incidents of assault on ambulance personnel while on duty in each of the last five years. (AQW 2288/00)

Ms de Brún: The information available on the numbers of assaults on ambulance personnel is as follows:

1998	1999	2000	2001
28	43	71	11(<i>to date</i>)

Prior to 1998 the Ambulance Service did not collect this information.

Tá an t-eolas atá ar fáil faoi líon na n-ionsaithe ar bhaill fhoirne otharchairr mar a leanas:

1998	1999	2000	2001
28	43	71	11(<i>chun dáta</i>)

Roimh 1998 ní bhíodh Seirbhís na nOtharcharr ag cruinniú an eolais seo.

Autism: Additional Funding

Mr Dalton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 1891/00, to detail (a) the specific areas in which the additional funding of £2.5 million will be spent (b) the amount allocated to children with autism and (c) if this spending will be at her discretion or that of the Boards and Trusts. (AQW 2294/00)

Ms de Brún: The additional £0.5 million allocated in 2000-01 was designed to assist the Health and Social Services Trusts to deal with the level of demand for mental health and learning disability services in that year. Half of the additional allocation of £2 million in 2001-02 is being made available to the Health and Social Services Boards to use to address the increased level of demand for services for people with a learning disability, including those with autism. It is for the Boards to decide how best to allocate these additional funds, and no specific amount has been allocated for autism. The remaining £1.0 million has been earmarked, as set out in my Priorities for Action, for the resettlement of 35 long-stay hospital patients with a learning disability.

Beartaíodh go n-úsáidfí an £0.5m sa bhreis a dáileadh i 2000-01 le cuidiú leis na hIontaobhais Shláinte agus Sheirbhísí Sóisialta déileáil le leibhéal an éilimh ar sheirbhísí sláinte mheabhrach agus míchumais fhoghlamtha an bhliain sin. Tá leathchuid den liúntas breise de £2m i 2001-02 á cur ar fáil do na Boird Shláinte agus Sheirbhísí Sóisialta le tabhairt faoin éileamh níos airde ar sheirbhísí do dhaoine a bhfuil míchumas foghlamtha orthu, iad siúd leis an uathachas san áireamh. Tá sé faoi na Boird cinneadh a dhéanamh maidir leis an dóigh is fearr leis an airgead breise seo a dháileadh, agus níor dáileadh aon chuid de go sainiúil ar an uathachas. Tá an fuilleach de £1.0m curtha i leataobh, de réir mar a leagadh amach i mo Thosaíochtaí Chun Gnímh, chun na 35 othar cónaitheach fadtéarmach ospidéal a bhfuil míchumas foghlamtha orthu a athlonnú.

Orthopaedic Consultants

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to (a) detail the ratio of

orthopaedic consultants per 100,000 of the population (b) state what reviews she has had with regard to orthopaedic services and (c) outline her future plans to develop these services. (AQW 2310/00)

Ms de Brún: At present there are 2.08 orthopaedic consultants per 100,000 of the population. I have not commissioned any specific reviews with regard to orthopaedic services. The future development of orthopaedic services will be built around an expansion in the number of orthopaedic surgeons. Additional trainees have been funded with a view to substantially increasing the number of surgeons over the next 5 to 6 years. This expansion is crucial to any further development and decentralisation of fracture services

Faoi láthair, tá 2.08 lia comhairleach ortapéideacha de réir 100,000 den daonra. Níor choimisiúnaigh mé athbhreithnithe ar leith ar sheirbhísí ortapéideacha. Déanfar forbairt sheirbhísí ortapéideacha amach anseo ar mhéadú i líon na máinlianna ortapéideacha. Maoiníodh printísigh bhreise le líon na máinlianna a mhéadú go mór thar na 5-6 bliana seo chugainn. Tá an méadú seo fíorthábhachtach do thuilleadh forbartha agus dláraithe seirbhísí briste ar bith.

Elective and Routine Orthopaedic Operations

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of (a) operations cancelled each month since December 2000 for each hospital and (b) elective and routine orthopaedic operations cancelled since January 2000.

(AQW 2322/00)

Ms de Brún: This information is not collected centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Ní chruinnítear an t-eolas seo go lárnach agus níorbh fhéidir é a fháil ach ar chostas díréireach.

Review of Family Planning Services

Ms Hanna asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline when she intends to publish the findings of the review of family planning services.

(AQW 2329/00)

Ms de Brún: The review of family planning services entitled 'Quality in Family Planning in Northern Ireland' is expected to be published in summer 2001.

Táthar ag súil go bhfoilseofar an tAthbhreithniú ar Sheirbhísí Pleanála Clainne dar teideal 'Cáilíocht i bPleanáil Clainne i dTuaisceart Éireann' i samhradh 2001.

Family Planning Clinics

Ms Hanna asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of family planning clinics held during the year 2000, broken down by Trust and Health Board area. (AQW 2330/00)

Ms de Brún: This information is detailed in the table below.

FAMILY PLANNING CLINICS HELD BY TRUST AND BOARD IN 2000

North & West Belfast	2,656
EHSSB	2,656
Causeway	242
Homefirst	762
NHSSB	1,004
Armagh & Dungannon	214
Craigavon & Banbridge	292
Craigavon Area	41
Newry & Mourne	231
SHSSB	778
Foyle	387
Sperrin Lakeland	298
WHSSB	685
Total	5,123

Mionléirítear an t-eolas seo sa tábla thíos.

CLINICÍ PLEANÁLA CLAINNE TIONÓLTA DE RÉIR IONTAOBH AIS AGUS BOIRD I 2000

Béal Feirste Thuaidh & Thiar	2,656
BSSSO	2,656
An Clochán	242
Homefirst	762
BSSST	1,004
Ard Mhacha & Dún Geanainn	214
Craigavon & Dhroichead na Banna	292
Ceantar Craigavon	41
An Iúir & an Múrn	231
BSSSD	778
An Feabhal	387
Loch-cheantar Shliabh Speirín	298
BSSSI	685
Iomlán	5,123

Family Planning Clinics: Cancellation

Ms Hanna asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of family planning clinics cancelled during the year 2000, broken down by Trust and Health Board area. (AQW 2331/00)

Ms de Brún: This information is detailed in the table below.

FAMILY PLANNING CLINICS CANCELLED BY TRUST AND BOARD IN 2000

North & West Belfast	14
EHSSB	14
Causeway	n/a
Homefirst	n/a

NHSSB	n/a
Armagh & Dungannon	1
Craigavon & Banbridge	0
Craigavon Area	5
Newry & Mourne	1
SHSSB	7
Foyle	0
Sperrin Lakeland	0
WHSSB	0
Total	21

Mionléirítear an t-eolas seo sa tábla thíos.

CLINICÍ PLEANÁLA CLAINNE CURTHA AR CEAL DE RÉIR IONTAOBHAIS AGUS BOIRD I 2000

Béal Feirste Thuaidh & Thiar	14
BSSSO	14
An Clochán	n/fh
Homefirst	n/fh
BSSST	n/fh
Ard Mhacha & Dún Geanainn	1
Craigavon & Droichead na Banna	0
Ceantar Craigavon	5
An Iúir & an Múrn	1
BSSSD	7
An Feabhal	0
Loch-cheantar Shliabh Speirín	0
BSSSI	0
Iomlán	21

Ambulance Fleet

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail her plans to improve the ambulance fleet. (AQW 2337/00)

Ms de Brún: Five million pounds has been made available over the past two years to enable the Ambulance Service to modernise its fleet. This money has contributed to the purchase of over 80 new A&E and Patient Care Service Vehicles. The Ambulance Service plan to replace a further 10 A&E vehicles and a further 15 Patient Care Service Vehicles during 2001, bringing to over 100 the total number of new vehicles brought into service since 1999.

Le dhá bhliain anuas tá £5m curtha ar fáil le cur ar a chumas do Sheirbhís na nOtharcharr a feithiclí a thabhairt suas chun dáta. Chuidigh an t-airgead seo leo níos mó ná 80 feithicil nua Seirbhís Chúraim Othair agus Taisme agus Éigeandála a cheannach. Tá plean ag Seirbhís na nOtharcharr 10 bhfeithicil Taisme agus Éigeandála agus 15 Fheithicil Sheirbhís Chúraim Othair eile a fháil le

linn 2001 le háit feithiclí atá ann anois a ghlacadh, ag tabhairt líon iomlán na bhfeithiclí nua a cuireadh ag obair ó 1999 go dtí níos mó ná 100.

Domiciliary Care: Training Requirements

Mr McGrady asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to give her assessment of the training requirements of those involved in domiciliary care and to make a statement. (AQW 2361/00)

Ms de Brún: The training requirements of those involved in providing domiciliary care is a matter that is currently being explored within the Personal Social Services Training Strategy 2000-2003 and through the development of National Occupational Standards.

As part of the Training Strategy, employers will be working to agree training targets for domiciliary care. This issue will continue to be given further consideration with the establishment of the NI Social Care Council (NISCC) in October 2001 and subsequent regulation of the social care workforce.

A key priority for the NISCC will be to develop a strategy to ensure the large numbers of staff involved in domiciliary care can obtain an appropriate qualification within an agreed time frame.

Tá riachtanais oiliúna an mhuintir sin a chuireann ar fáil cúram baile á scrúdú i láthair na huaire i Straitéis Oiliúna na Seirbhísí Sóisialta Pearsanta 2000-2003 agus trí fhorbairt na gCaighdeán Náisiúnta Saothair.

Mar chuid den Straitéis Oiliúna, beidh fostóirí ag obair i dtreo aontú ar spriocanna oiliúna sa chúram baile. Beidh an cheist seo á meas tuilleadh nuair a bhunófar Comhairle Chúraim Shóisialta TÉ (CCSTÉ) i nDeireadh Fómhair 2001, agus rialú an líon saothair cúram baile dá bharr sin.

B'eochairthosaíocht ag CCSTÉ straitéis a fhorbairt lena chinntiú go bhfaighidh an fhoireann mhór oibre a bhaineann le cúram baile cáilíocht oiriúnach taobh istigh de chreatlach aontaithe ama.

Air Ambulance Bases

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the permanent bases of existing air ambulances in neighbouring regions of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland and their distances from Northern Ireland should they be required to provide support for health and public safety matters in Northern Ireland. (AQW 2366/00)

Ms de Brún: Information on the distances of all the air ambulance locations is not available, but the nearest locations are at Glasgow, which would involve some 45 minutes' flying time, and Blackpool, which would take

around 70 minutes' flying time. There are at present no air ambulance bases on the island of Ireland.

Níl eolas ar achair láithreán aerothar-ingearán uile ar fáil, ach is i nGlaschú agus i mBlackpool atá na láithreáin is cóngaraí, a bhfuil amanna eitle 45 agus 70 nóiméad faoi seach i gceist. Níl bunáit aerothar-ingearán ar bith ar oileán na hÉireann.

Air Ambulances: Scottish Executive

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the dates of any discussions she has had with the Scottish Executive on the shared use of air ambulances. (AQW 2367/00)

Ms de Brún: I have not had any discussions with the Scottish Executive on the shared use of air ambulances.

Ní raibh caibidlí ar bith agam ar chomhúsáid aerothar-ingearán leis an Fheidhmeannas Albanach.

Enbrel: Prescription

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to direct that the drug Enbrel be made available on prescription for acute sufferers of chronic arthritis and other severe conditions. (AQW 2371/00)

Ms de Brún: Enbrel is a new prescription-only drug for adults with active Rheumatoid Arthritis and for children with Juvenile Chronic Arthritis. It is only prescribed for those who have had an inadequate response to other anti-rheumatic drugs. To date those who have received Enbrel here have been carefully selected, managed and monitored in accordance with the British Society for Rheumatology guidelines.

Is druga úr nua é Enbrel nach bhfuil ar fáil, ach tré oideas, do dhaoine fásta a bhfuil Airtríteas Réamatóideach gníomhach orthu, agus do pháistí a bhfuil Airtríteas Ainsealach Aosanach orthu. Ní mholtar é ach do dhaoine nár éirigh drugaí frithréamatóideacha eile go rómhaith leo. Go dtí an lá inniu, toghadh go cúramach iad siúd a fuair Enbrel anseo. Ionramháladh iad agus rinneadh monatóireacht orthu, agus seo uile de réir treoirilínte an Chumainn Shasanaigh Réamaiteolaíochta.

Speech and Language Therapy: Rosstulla Special School

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail her plans to review the funding available to the Speech and Language Therapy section at Rosstulla Special School, Jordanstown. (AQW 2393/00)

Ms de Brún: I refer the Member to my answer to AQW 2055/00.

Luaim don Bhall an freagra a thug mé ar AQW 2055/00.

HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

Referrals to Industrial Tribunals

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail the number of referrals that were made to industrial tribunals in each of the last three years for which figures are available.

(AQW 2301/00)

The Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Dr Farren): The number of referrals made to industrial tribunals from 1998 to 2000 inclusive is as follows:

1998 – 4,022

1999 – 5,053

2000 – 5,106

Post-Graduate Students: Information Technology

Mr Tierney asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail the number of taught post-graduate students studying Information Technology-related subjects at each of the campuses of the University of Ulster, distinguishing between full-time and part-time students. (AQW 2313/00)

Dr Farren: Enrolments on taught post-graduate courses in Information Technology and related subjects at the University of Ulster by campus and mode of study, 1999-2000:

	Full-time	Part-time	Total
Coleraine	16	2	18
Jordanstown	138	247	385
Magee	140	120	260
Total	294	369	663

Full-time Academic Staff

Mr Tierney asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail the number of full-time equivalent academic staff in each of the faculties at (a) Magee College and (b) all campuses of the University of Ulster in the current academic year, distinguishing between research active and non-research staff. (AQW 2314/00)

Dr Farren: The full-time equivalent academic staff employed at the University of Ulster (as at 31 July 2000) are detailed overleaf.

		Campus				
		Belfast	Coleraine	Jordanstown	Magee	Total
Faculty of Science	Research Active		54.3	11.0		65.3
	Not Research Active		29.0	19.0		48.0
	Not known		63.1	8.0		71.1
	Total	0.0	146.4	38.0	0.0	184.4
Faculty of Engineering	Research Active			46.2	4.0	50.2
	Not Research Active			47.0		47.0
	Not known			28.8	1.0	29.8
	Total	0.0	0.0	122.0	5.0	127.0
Faculty of Business & Management	Research Active		7.0	52.0	6.0	65.0
	Not Research Active		16.5	71.0	16.0	103.5
	Not known		2.0	9.0	6.0	17.0
	Total	0.0	25.5	132.0	28.0	185.5
Faculty of Health, Social Sciences & Education	Research Active		25.4	48.0	12.0	85.4
	Not Research Active		19.0	60.6	9.1	88.7
	Not known		20.7	60.8	14.5	96.0
	Total	0.0	65.2	169.4	35.6	270.1
Faculty of Art, Design & Humanities	Research Active	35.0	36.0	20.5	10.5	102.0
	Not Research Active	12.5	9.0	7.5	5.0	34.0
	Not known	6.2	19.0	5.6	4.0	34.8
	Total	53.7	64.0	33.6	19.5	170.8
Faculty of Informatics	Research Active		6.0	30.0	3.0	39.0
	Not Research Active		9.0	30.5	11.0	50.5
	Not known		6.0	21.0	10.9	37.9
	Total	0.0	21.0	81.5	24.9	127.4
All Faculties	Research Active	35.0	128.7	207.7	35.5	406.9
	Not Research Active	12.5	82.5	235.6	41.1	371.7
	Not known	6.2	110.8	133.2	36.4	286.6
	Overall Total	53.7	322.1	576.5	113.0	1065.2

Note: "Research Active" is defined as academic staff who were actively involved in research activities in the latest Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), which took place in 1996.

"Not Research Active" applies to academic staff employed by the university but who were not active in the 1996 RAE.

Full-time Academic Student Places

Mr Tierney asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail the increase in the number of full-time equivalent student places at each of the campuses of the University of Ulster, for each year from 1995 to 2001, distinguishing between full-time and part-time, sub-degree, degree and post-graduate courses. (AQW 2315/00)

Dr Farren: Information on student enrolments is not yet available for 2000-01.

FULL-TIME EQUIVALENT STUDENTS ENROLLED AT THE BELFAST CAMPUS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER 1995-96 TO 1999-2000

		1995-96	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000
Post-graduate	Full-time	49	46	56	57	63
	Part-time	20	24	19	15	15
	Total	69	70	75	72	78
First Degree	Full-time	697	674	660	635	665
	Part-time	0	0	0	0	0
	Total	697	674	660	635	665
Sub-degree	Full-time	182	155	189	172	175
	Part-time	0	0	0	0	26
	Total	182	155	189	172	201
Total	Full-time	928	875	905	864	903
	Part-time	20	24	19	15	41
	Total	948	899	924	879	944

FULL-TIME EQUIVALENT STUDENTS ENROLLED AT THE COLERAINE CAMPUS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER 1995-96 TO 1999-2000

		1995-96	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000
Post-graduate	Full-time	380	390	404	434	480
	Part-time	224	191	153	184	279
	Total	604	581	557	618	759
First Degree	Full-time	3,798	3,521	3,459	3,456	3,446
	Part-time	39	57	83	91	61
	Total	3,837	3,578	3,542	3,547	3,507
Sub-degree	Full-time	354	355	330	305	298
	Part-time	11	3	6	3	3
	Total	365	358	336	308	301
Total	Full-time	4,532	4,266	4,193	4,195	4,224
	Part-time	274	251	242	278	343
	Total	4,806	4,517	4,435	4,473	4,567

FULL-TIME EQUIVALENT STUDENTS ENROLLED AT THE JORDANSTOWN CAMPUS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER 1995-96 TO 1999-2000

		1995-96	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000
Post-graduate	Full-time	542	510	776	567	614
	Part-time	1,064	1,104	986	990	1,037
	Total	1,606	1,614	1,762	1,557	1,651
First Degree	Full-time	4,893	4,768	4,952	5,199	5,339
	Part-time	722	848	851	938	922
	Total	5,615	5,616	5,803	6,137	6,261
Sub-degree	Full-time	1,186	1,092	996	857	876
	Part-time	338	271	295	228	245
	Total	1,524	1,363	1,291	1,085	1,121
Total	Full-time	6,621	6,370	6,724	6,623	6,829
	Part-time	2,124	2,223	2,132	2,156	2,204
	Total	8,745	8,593	8,856	8,779	9,033

FULL-TIME EQUIVALENT STUDENTS ENROLLED AT THE MAGEE CAMPUS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER 1995-96 TO 1999-2000

		1995-96	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000
Post-graduate	Full-time	160	198	297	310	334
	Part-time	199	230	186	222	237
	Total	359	428	483	532	571
First Degree	Full-time	1,231	1,236	1,302	1,293	1,414
	Part-time	164	183	166	176	188
	Total	1,395	1,419	1,468	1,469	1,602
Sub-degree	Full-time	209	186	196	179	186
	Part-time	100	95	119	98	89
	Total	309	281	315	277	275
Total	Full-time	1,600	1,620	1,795	1,782	1,934
	Part-time	463	508	471	496	514
	Total	2,063	2,128	2,266	2,278	2,448

Full-time Students

Mr Tierney asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail the number of full-time equivalent students in each faculty in (a) Magee College and (b) all campuses of the University of Ulster in the current academic year, distinguishing between sub-degree, degree and post-graduate courses.

(AQW 2316/00)

Dr Farren: Information on students enrolled at Higher Education institutions is not collected by faculty and is presented by broad subject area.

FULL-TIME EQUIVALENT STUDENTS ENROLLED ON HE COURSES AT THE MAGEE CAMPUS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER, BY LEVEL OF STUDY AND SUBJECT GROUP, 1999-2000

	Post-graduate	First Degree	Sub-degree	Total FTE
Biological Sciences	0	98	0	98
Mathematical Sciences & Informatics	1	0	0	1
Information Technology	209	193	22	424
Engineering & Technology	5	0	0	5
Architecture	1	71	0	72
Social Studies	161	165	35	361
Law	0	54	0	54
Business & Administrative Studies	77	534	61	672
Humanities	13	89	0	102
Creative Arts & Design	0	95	21	116
Education & Leisure	72	0	0	72
Combined	33	303	135	471
Total	572	1,602	274	2,448

FULL-TIME EQUIVALENT STUDENTS ENROLLED ON HE COURSES AT ALL CAMPUSES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER, BY LEVEL OF STUDY AND SUBJECT GROUP, 1999-2000

	Post-graduate	First Degree	Sub-degree	Total FTE
Subjects Allied to Medicine	430	1,763	4	2,197
Biological Sciences	100	909	49	1,058
Agriculture & Related Subjects	18	90	0	108
Physical Sciences	86	384	16	486
Mathematical Sciences & Informatics	2	94	34	130
Information Technology	529	820	331	1,680
Engineering & Technology	86	564	185	835
Architecture	56	794	0	850
Social Studies	303	617	192	1,112
Law	29	54	0	83
Business & Administrative Studies	641	2,617	548	3,806
Mass Communication & Documentation	94	338	1	433
Languages & Related Disciplines	89	313	33	435
Humanities	25	284	4	313
Creative Arts & Design	61	879	202	1,142
Education & Leisure	413	186	4	603
Combined	97	1,329	295	1,721
Total	3,059	12,035	1,898	16,992

Mean Average Student Number Places

Mr Tierney asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail the number of Mean Average Student Number (MASN) places allocated to each of the campuses of the University of Ulster in each of the years from 1997 to 2001. (AQW 2317/00)

Dr Farren: The MaSN, which stands for the Maximum Student Number, is the total number of Home and EC students on full-time undergraduate or on initial teacher training courses which a university may enrol in a particular academic year. It is not allocated between university campuses. For the University of Ulster, the MaSNs allocated in each of the years from 1997 to 2001 are as follows:

Academic Year	MaSN
1997-98	11,150
1998-99	11,241
1999-2000	12,095*
2000-01	12,384

* Owing to changes in student support arrangements, the definition of the MaSN changed in 1999-2000 to include students not previously covered by the MaSN. The figures for 1997-98 and 1998-99 are therefore not directly comparable with those for 1999-2000 onwards.

Employment Law

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail (a) how many of the workforce are covered by basic employment law and (b) what significant changes have taken place in respect of employment law over the last decade. (AQW 2358/00)

Dr Farren: There are approximately 612,000 persons in the Northern Ireland workforce at present, taking the workforce in this context to mean persons in paid employment, and these persons are covered by basic employment law such as protection against unfair discrimination and unfair dismissal.

Over the past decade the most significant changes in respect of employment law have been those relating to protection against unfair dismissal in various circumstances, rights in relation to trade union membership, protection against discrimination on grounds of race and disability, improvements in health and safety measures, restrictions on average weekly working time and the provision of rest breaks, introduction of a national minimum wage, extension of maternity leave and provision of parental leave, and the prevention of less favourable treatment for part-time workers.

Women Involved in Skills-based Training

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail, in respect

of the parliamentary constituency of Lagan Valley, (a) the number of women currently involved in skills based training and (b) the number of women involved in training for non-traditional trades. (AQO 1179/00)

Dr Farren: I attach tables giving information on the number of women in the Lagan Valley parliamentary constituency area who were participating in the major Training and Employment Agency Programmes at the end of January 2001, and the breakdown of those women involved in training for particular trades. The programmes for which information on the types of training being undertaken that are relevant and readily available, are the Jobskills programme, and the Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland 1995-99 under the Employment Sub-Programme, where trainees are undertaking Modern Apprenticeships. The data given includes trainees in all occupational areas.

TABLE A: NUMBER OF WOMEN INVOLVED IN TRAINING IN MAJOR TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT AGENCY PROGRAMMES AND SSPPR IN THE LAGAN VALLEY CONSTITUENCY AREA, END JANUARY 2001.

Programme	Number of Women
Jobskills*	112
New Deal	23
Enterprise Ulster**	6
SSPPR	697

Notes:

*Based on location of training provider

**Based on residence of participant, using BT27 and BT28 postcodes as a proxy for the Lagan Valley constituency area

Student Qualifications: Higher Education Institutions

Mr McMenamin asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to comment on the numbers of Northern Ireland students gaining qualifications at higher education institutions. (AQO 1150/00)

Dr Farren: Northern Ireland students continue to perform extremely well in higher education.

In 1999/00, 14,095 NI students gained Higher Education qualifications at Higher Education institutions in the UK.

Student Finance

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to outline how his proposals on student finance will target people who have been under-represented in third-level education and to make a statement. (AQO 1154/00)

Dr Farren: I refer the members to the details of my statement made earlier this morning. I have put in place a series of proposals which members I am sure agree will:

- Widen access to further and higher education;
- provide greater equality of opportunity and greater equity of treatment by reducing the barriers to participation and retention for those from less well off backgrounds;
- increase the contribution which HE and FE make to regional economic development; and
- promote lifelong learning.

In relation to the specific questions, I do not believe that my proposals in respect of fees in further education will disadvantage the future prospects of students. On the contrary, the provision of this incentive to full-time students over 19 undertaking vocational qualifications will be to their advantage.

In respect of the costs of additional administration, it is not yet possible to quantify these in detail since negotiations over the changes to the administration of student support are at an early stage but I will, of course, seek to constrain such costs. I have, however, set aside £300k to fund the necessary changes to the relevant IT systems.

The Member for Lagan Valley has asked how my proposals will target people who have been under-represented in third level education. This is a key element of my proposals. The introduction of ILAs for part-time students in certain vocational areas in FE and HE; the introduction of a childcare grant to assist students in HE on low incomes with dependant children; the raising of the threshold for fee payment and the £½m increase in Access Funds in FE will all assist in attracting and retaining such students to FE and HE. However, I am sure that the introduction of bursaries in FE and HE deliberately targeted at those whose families or spouses earn less than £15,000 residual income will be central in establishing greater equality of opportunity for students from less well off backgrounds who have been traditionally under-represented.

Third-Level Education in West Tyrone

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail the steps he is taking to ensure the availability of third-level education in West Tyrone. (AQO 1158/00)

Dr Farren: Third-level education is available in West Tyrone through Omagh College.

Springvale Campus

Mr B Hutchinson asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail what progress has been made between the University of

Ulster, the Belfast Institute for Further and Higher Education and his Department in relation to the proposed Springvale Campus and to make a statement.

(AQO 1164/00)

Dr Farren: Since Ministerial approval for Springvale was announced in February 2000; grant conditions have been met by the Institutions and a Departmental Letter of Grant will issue very shortly; the Institutions are currently setting up a PFI project board to take forward the construction of the main campus; consultations have been held on the academic plan for the campus; building work has commenced on the Community Outreach Centre; and tenders have been invited for the design of the Applied Research Centre.

Rapid Reaction Service

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to outline what arrangements are in place to provide a rapid reaction service in areas where large scale redundancies are announced.

(AQO 1171/00)

Dr Farren: The Training and Employment Agency responds immediately in redundancy situations to help redundant workers find alternative employment, offer careers guidance, and advise on training opportunities. Advice can also be given on redundancy payments issues and staff from the Social Security Agency may also be involved to advise on benefit entitlements.

Skill Shortage: Craft Related Occupations

Mrs E Bell asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail what measures are in place to tackle the skills shortage in craft-related occupations. (AQO 1170/00)

Dr Farren: The Training and Employment Agency addresses craft level shortages through the Traineeship and Modern Apprenticeship provision of its Jobskills programme. Higher rates of funding are payable for training in priority skill areas. The Agency works with Sector Training Councils to tackle craft level shortages via industry-led Modern Apprenticeships.

Cross-Departmental Taskforce on Employability and Long-term Unemployment

Mr McGrady asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to outline what progress has been made with the establishment of a cross-departmental taskforce on employability and long term unemployment as described in the Programme for Government. (AQO 1147/00)

Dr Farren: I chaired the first meeting of the inter-departmental Taskforce on Employability and Longterm Unemployment on 20 March. This initial meeting focused on developing our draft terms of reference and mechanisms for engaging with those outside Government. We also considered the initial findings from the independent Scoping Study which I have commissioned to review existing evidence on employability.

New Entrants to the Labour Market

Mrs Courtney asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail the initiatives he has undertaken to attract new entrants to the labour market. (AQO 1151/00)

Dr Farren: The Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment helps new entrants to the labour market by providing quality careers guidance and employment services to Schools, Colleges and Training Organisations, and to unemployed young people. The Department also helps to improve their employability through participation in programmes such as Jobskills for the unemployed and Business/Education activities for those in full-time education.

Science Research Investment Fund Programme

Dr Birnie asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to give his assessment of the allocation of research funds under the Science Research Investment Fund programme. (AQO 1186/00)

Dr Farren: The £1 billion Science Research Investment Fund running over the period 2002-04, aims to enhance UK science research. Within the overall total, the Office of Science and Technology was allocated £375 million, for distribution UK-wide, from which NI has been allocated £7 million. This is a welcome contribution to our drive to strengthen the university research base here.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Salting: School Bus Routes

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he plans to include all routes taken by school buses on the schedule for gritting/salting in the event of severe weather and to make a statement. (AQW 2176/00)

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Campbell): The review of the Department's current policy on the salting of roads, which I have initiated, will examine the implications of salting school bus routes.

I hope that the review will be concluded to enable me to report to the Assembly's Regional Development Committee by June 2001.

Belfast to Larne Railway Line: Maintenance Work

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the maintenance works carried out on the Belfast to Larne railway line during the current financial year. (AQW 2215/00)

Mr Campbell: Translink has provided the following details of maintenance work carried out on the railway line between Belfast and Larne during the period April 2000 to March 2001.

- At Cloghan Point, between Kilroot and Whitehead, 600m of jointed track was converted to Continuously Welded Rail with new rails and 400m of side worn rails were turned round.
- Some 590 broken sleepers were replaced between Whiteabbey and Larne Harbour and broken crossing timbers were replaced at Bleach Green, Whiteabbey and Magheramorne.
- Some 960 tonnes of ballast was used on track works between Whiteabbey and Magheramorne.
- Formation repairs were carried out between Whiteabbey and Kilroot and fishplate bolts were changed between Whiteabbey and Carrickfergus.
- Switches, crossing noses and insulated joint plates, were replaced on the Cross Harbour Bridge.
- Tamping, lining and ballast regulating was performed at various locations along the line. Ultrasonic testing for rail defects, maintenance work on signalling and vegetation clearance and weedspraying also took place along the line.
- In addition to required repairs to stockproof fencing, 1600m of palisade security fencing was erected at Fortwilliam, Whitehouse, Greenisland and Larne.
- Work to repair and maintain sea defences between Saltmines and Cloghan Point as well as between Whitehead and the Whitehead tunnel was performed.
- Bridge deck on a bridge at Eden was replaced and scour protection work at another bridge near Eden remains ongoing.

M1/Westlink: Public Inquiries

Mr Adams asked the Minister for Regional Development to indicate the timescale for the publication of the outcome of both phases of the M1/Westlink Public Inquiries and to make a statement. (AQW 2233/00)

Mr Campbell: The Inspector who conducted the Public Inquiries into the Environmental Statements for

Stages 1 and 2 of the M1/Westlink project has submitted his reports to my Department. These reports are both lengthy and complex and require further consideration to be given to a number of aspects of the proposals.

Officials are currently considering the Inspector's findings and I expect to be in a position to announce by September 2001 my decision on whether or not the Department will proceed to the next stage of the project planning process. At that time, a notice will be published in the local press indicating where documentation detailing my decision, and the reasons and considerations on which it is based, may be inspected.

Road Improvements: Strangford Constituency

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (a) the number of road improvements in the parliamentary constituency of Strangford in each of the last three years and (b) what cost benefit analyses have been carried out in respect of these improvements. (AQW 2249/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service carried out the following numbers of road improvements, comprising traffic management, accident remedial and other minor works schemes, within the Strangford constituency during the last three years:

- 1998/99 – 16 schemes
- 1999/00 – 8 schemes
- 2000/01 – 14 schemes

Formal cost benefit analyses are only carried out for major road schemes costing in excess of £500K. No such schemes were carried out in the Strangford constituency during the last three years.

Maintenance: Albert Road, Carrickfergus

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the outstanding maintenance work on the Albert Road in Carrickfergus, County Antrim and the estimated date when this work will be completed. (AQW 2269/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service completed a road improvement scheme at Albert Road in 1999. Following meetings with Carrickfergus Borough Council, a package of additional works was undertaken. These works were completed on 18 April 2000. Some minor defects in the scheme have been identified and will be rectified before the end of the maintenance period on 18 April 2001.

While the initial improvement works were in progress, Roads Service became aware that Phoenix Natural Gas Ltd intended to lay a service pipe in the carriageway and make service connections. As an interim measure, Roads

Service surfaced the footways on Albert Road in bitumen macadam rather than asphalt, with the intention of asphaltting them when the service connections were completed.

Phoenix Natural Gas Ltd have not yet completed their service connections and, as the current footway surface is in a satisfactory condition, Roads Service has no proposals to carry out further work at this time.

Sewerage Infrastructure: Whitehead

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to give his assessment of the current state of the sewerage system in Whitehead, County Antrim and to make a statement. (AQW 2272/00)

Mr Campbell: Whitehead is served by a combined storm and foul sewerage system which gravitates to a pumping station, where it is macerated, located at the eastern end of the town. The wastewater is then pumped to Blackhead and discharged to sea. Flows in excess of the pumping capacity are discharged directly to Belfast Lough through two storm overflows.

In common with other areas of Northern Ireland, the sewerage infrastructure in Whitehead has suffered from significant under investment in the past and is of considerable age. Although it has adequate capacity to cope with normal weather conditions, a number of areas are prone to out of sewer flooding during periods of heavy and prolonged rainfall.

Water Service has initiated a number of detailed assessments of the sewerage infrastructure in Whitehead to identify the extent and cost of improvements necessary to meet modern standards. These involve:

- (a) a Drainage Area Study of the sewerage network. This started recently and is due to be completed in October 2002. However, given current funding levels and other priorities, it is unlikely that any general ungrading of the network identified will start before 2006;
- (b) an investigation of the areas susceptible to flooding to determine if cost effective interim solutions are possible in advance of general network upgrading. The areas under investigation are Marine Parade, Lumford Avenue/Ford Cottages, Donegal Avenue and Ransevyn Estate. The consultants involved are due to report next month and it is intended that any solutions identified will be implemented by the end of 2003; and
- (c) an appraisal of wastewater treatment in the Islandmagee area, including Whitehead, to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Urban Wastewater Treatment Regulations (NI) 1995. The appraisal should be completed by late summer this year. The proposals will be carefully evaluated by Water Service and the Department of the Environment's Environment and Heritage Service, which sets and monitors the standards for all effluent discharges. It is, however, expected

that work on wastewater treatment for Islandmagee, including Whitehead, will commence in 2003 at a cost of some £2.3 million, subject to completion of all the necessary procedures, including planning approval.

Private Housing Developments

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Regional Development if there is a statutory time-limit within which the builder of a private housing development is required to have completed the provision of roads, footpaths and street-lighting. (AQW 2281/00)

Mr Campbell: There is no statutory time limit within which the builder of a private development is required to have completed the provision of roads and footpaths. However, where satisfactory completion of a street is not effected within a reasonable period from the date of occupation of houses, the Department has enforcement powers under the Private Streets (NI) Order 1980, as amended, to enable it to complete the necessary work at the expense of the builder. Such action is normally only initiated after efforts to persuade the builder to meet his obligations have proved unsuccessful, with each case being carefully considered on its merits.

The provision of street lighting in a new development is not currently a matter for the builder.

Bus Lanes

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development to confirm that the Roads Service is reviewing the use of bus lanes and if he intends to amend current legislation to allow greater use of bus lanes by other road users during peak traffic periods. (AQW 2346/00)

Mr Campbell: In support of the Government's sustainable transportation policy, my Department is considering how to make best use of available road space where bus lanes are provided. At present, buses and pedal cycles are permitted to use with-flow bus lanes in Belfast and this may not be the most efficient use of the limited road infrastructure.

Taxis provide a valuable public transport service and, arising from its on-going considerations, my Department intends to advertise its intention to admit certain classes of public hire taxis to bus lanes on those roads where they are licensed to operate. Such a change in use of bus lanes will require amendments to be made to subordinate legislation.

Pay and Display Car Parks

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the income generated by pay and display car parks in the towns of (a) Larne and (b) Carrickfergus. (AQW 2348/00)

Mr Campbell: The income generated from pay and display car parks for the period from January to December 2000 for the towns of Larne and Carrickfergus is as follows:

- Larne - £76,521
- Carrickfergus - £107,975

Traffic Congestion: A2/Station Road, Greenisland Junction

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail what steps he is taking to alleviate severe traffic congestion at the A2/Station Road, Greenisland junction. (AQW 2349/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service has long-term proposals to widen the A2 Shore Road between Shore Avenue and Island Park, Greenisland, which include the upgrading of the signalised junction at Station Road. These proposals will be considered, along with other major road schemes on arterial routes into Belfast, as part of the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan.

In the meantime, my Department's Roads Service has considered a number of stand alone options for improving the A2 Shore Road/Station Road junction. These improvement options involve the acquisition of residential land, substantial accommodation works and service alterations, all of which would be relatively expensive. In addition, much of the work would be nugatory if the A2 widening scheme were to proceed.

In the circumstances, there are no immediate plans to improve the junction, although Roads Service will continue to monitor carefully its signalling arrangements.

"Safer Routes to Schools" Funding

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail what funding has been set aside for "Safer Routes to Schools" in 2001-02 and 2002-03. (AQW 2352/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service, in conjunction with some of its partners on the Northern Ireland School Advisory Group, has set aside £30K to fund the preparation of draft plans for the "Safer Routes to Schools" pilot projects during 2001-02.

The plans will identify the nature and extent of the proposed works involved in the pilot projects. No specific funds have yet been set aside in 2001-02 or 2002-03 for implementation of these works.

Vehicle Occupancy

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development to initiate research into the proportion of peak

traffic estimated to consist of vehicles occupied only by the driver. (AQW 2353/00)

Mr Campbell: The level of vehicle occupancy has already been identified by my Department as an area where further information is required. It is hoped that the necessary surveys will be carried out in the near future.

Safer Routes to Schools

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development to list the powers he can invoke in establishing safer routes to schools. (AQW 2354/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department has powers under The Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 and The Road Traffic Regulation (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 to implement measures which, collectively, would form the basis of a "Safer Route to School" project. These measures could include the provision of traffic calming features, cycle facilities, footways, pedestrian crossings and waiting restrictions.

Translink: Protection of Revenue

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the steps Translink is taking to prevent passengers travelling for free on the Belfast to Dublin bus route. (AQW 2369/00)

Mr Campbell: The Belfast to Dublin express coach service is a joint operation between Ulsterbus and Bus Eireann. The licence for operating the cross border service is an international one granted to Ulsterbus and Bus Eireann together. There are no problems with the Ulsterbus operation of the service or the service provided by official Bus Eireann buses. Translink has discussed its concerns with Bus Eireann for the protection of revenue when Bus Eireann use private operators, an infrequent occurrence. Translink has been assured that steps are in place to collect the proper fares from every passenger using this service. These steps include fitting southern registered private operator vehicles with ticketing equipment and ensuring that any existing buses without such equipment are boarded by ticketing staff during the journey.

Translink: Estimated Loss in Revenue

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Regional Development to give a breakdown of the estimated loss in revenue suffered by Translink on its Belfast to Dublin bus route. (AQW 2370/00)

Mr Campbell: The only potential for revenue loss on the Belfast-Dublin route is whenever Bus Eireann is required to engage a private operator to provide a scheduled service on the route and whenever the private operator does not have ticketing equipment. Bus Eireann has advised Translink that steps are in place to ensure that it

collects the proper fare from every passenger using the service on those buses that do not have ticketing equipment. Bus Eireann has assured Translink that there has been no material financial loss to Translink in the generation of revenue on this route. The licence for operating the cross border service is an international one granted to Ulsterbus and Bus Eireann together. Translink is satisfied that there is currently no revenue loss because of the steps taken to eradicate the potential for loss.

Children and Adult Concession Fares

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the procedure used to assess the number of children and adult concession fares issued for rail and bus passengers. (AQW 2372/00)

Mr Campbell: Under the Concessionary Fares Scheme, bus operators provide from their records details of the numbers of the concession fares issued to adults and children on their services.

Northern Ireland Railways is dealt with separately under the Scheme. The railways ticketing system is not yet able to provide a breakdown of fares issued to different concession groups. The numbers of adult and child concession fares are assessed by regular passenger surveys carried out by independent consultants. However, any over or under payment to Northern Ireland Railways under the Scheme is balanced by an equivalent under or over payment under the Public Service Obligation subsidy. With the introduction of a new integrated ticketing system, Northern Ireland Railways will be able to determine accurately the number of concessionary fare tickets issued.

Average Journey Times (7.30 am)

Mr Tierney asked the Minister for Regional Development to give the average journey time for traffic travelling by road from (a) Coleraine (b) Derry (c) Strabane (d) Armagh (e) Portadown (f) Newry to Belfast where the journeys begin at 7.30 am. (AQW 2374/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service monitors journey times on routes included in the country's Key Strategic Network annually. The table overleaf shows average journey times to and from Belfast for the locations that are listed in respect of 1999-2000.

No information is available in relation to journey times for Armagh and Portadown as they are not included in the Key Strategic Network. Also, the times listed below were compiled on the basis of average journey times during the morning peak period 07.30 to 09.15 hours (that is, not specifically beginning at 07.30 hours) and during the evening peak period 16.30 to 18.15 hours (ie, not specifically beginning at 17.30 hours).

AVERAGE JOURNEY TIMES (IN MINUTES)

To/From	Coleraine	Londonderry	Strabane	Newry
To Belfast	73	80	110	45
From Belfast	67	77	107	48

Average Journey Times (5.30 pm)

Mr Tierney asked the Minister for Regional Development to give the average journey time for traffic travelling by road from Belfast to (a) Coleraine (b) Derry (c) Strabane (d) Armagh (e) Portadown (f) Newry where the journeys begin at 5.30 pm. (AQW 2375/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service monitors journey times on routes included in the country's Key Strategic Network on an annual basis. The table below shows average journey times to and from Belfast for the locations that are listed in respect of 1999/2000.

No information is available in relation to journey times for Armagh and Portadown as they are not included in the Key Strategic Network. Also, the times listed below were compiled on the basis of average journey times during the morning peak period 07.30 to 09.15 hours (ie, not specifically beginning at 07.30 hours) and during the evening peak period 16.30 to 18.15 hours (ie, not specifically beginning at 17.30 hours).

AVERAGE JOURNEY TIMES (IN MINUTES)

To/From	Coleraine	Londonderry	Strabane	Newry
To Belfast	73	80	110	45
From Belfast	67	77	107	48

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**Housing for Elderly and Disabled in Newry**

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Social Development to detail any plans to increase the provision of housing for the elderly and disabled in Newry town by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. (AQW 2280/00)

The Minister for Social Development (Mr Morrow): The Housing Executive's current assessment of demand for additional accommodation for the elderly and disabled in Newry Town over the next 5 years, indicates a fairly low level of need. The following projects have however been identified and supported:

In 2001/02, BIH Housing Association is programmed to provide 14 new homes at Ashgrove Road for people with special needs.

In 2002/03, Fold Housing Association is programmed to provide 4 new bungalows at Cleary Crescent. These will be built to mobility standard.

In 2005/06, a Housing Association yet to be confirmed will provide 12 new bungalows at a site yet to be identified in Newry. Again all will be built to mobility standard.

In 2001/02 the Housing Executive will be refurbishing 3 vacant bungalows in Fathom Park.

In addition, adaptations to allow tenants with disabilities to remain in their own homes, will be undertaken on demand to Housing Executive and Housing Association properties. Plans are already in place to extend 17 homes, change the heating in 28 homes, install a lift in 1 home and carry out other minor works to 2 homes.

The Housing Executive will continue to support people with disabilities through private sector grants. These are demand led, but to give an indication of the possible extent of the commitment for future years, 69 grants to the value of £441k were approved in the Newry and Mourne Council area in the current year.

**Northern Ireland Housing Executive
Office: Newtownards**

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the steps he is taking to address the staff shortage in the Northern Ireland Housing Executive office in Newtownards and to outline the timescale of fill the vacancies. (AQW 2300/00)

Mr Morrow: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive whose Chief Executive has advised that offers of employment have been sent out for all 7 vacant post in this office, with expected commencement dates of 1 April 2001 for one post and 1 May 2001 for the remainder.

**The Carrickfergus Maritime Area
Partnership Board**

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Social Development to give his assessment of the Maritime Area Partnership Development in Carrickfergus and to make a statement. (AQW 2350/00)

Mr Morrow: The Carrickfergus Maritime Area Partnership Board was established in 1995 to take forward the Comprehensive Development Scheme for the town which had been badly affected by the closure of 3 main factories in the 1980s. The Board included representatives from Carrickfergus Borough Council, Planning Service and officials from my Department.

The Scheme involves approximately 13.8 hectares of land being developed for a wide range of uses including housing, commercial, leisure and high-tech offices. There

are included over 2 hectares for public and private open space. The scheme is seen as an extension to the adjacent town centre and high standards of design have been imposed.

The end value of the scheme currently exceeds £40m, with hundreds of construction jobs being generated. At the completion of the scheme up to 500 full-time and part-time jobs will have been created, and up to 500 people will live within the Waterfront Area. An additional rates income of £250,000 per annum will be generated.

The Council has also played its part in the development of the area. It is creating a new public square with its new Administration building and has also refurbished Legg Park as a civic amenity.

The development of the Maritime Area has produced some real and tangible improvements for Carrickfergus and has enhanced the quality of life and increased civic pride for all the citizens of the Borough.

Northern Ireland Tenants Action Project

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (a) the role of the Northern Ireland Tenants Action Project (b) who funds the project and (c) the composition of the Project Board. (AQW 2360/00)

Mr Morrow: The Northern Ireland Tenants Action Project (NITAP) is an independent, voluntary sector body, whose aim is to increase the awareness of residents as to their rights and responsibilities, in order to facilitate their effective participation in addressing their communities' housing related needs. NITAP fulfils this role by ensuring that tenant and community groups are nurtured and developed, so that they can:

- i. contribute in a meaningful way to the consultation process when legislation and strategic policies are being formulated; and
- ii. participate fully with the Housing Executive in the development and monitoring of those operational housing policies, programmes, services, standards etc. which affect their lives.

It provides groups with appropriate training, advice on sources of funding and support in their formative years and further as required.

My Department and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive provide core funding on a 50/50 basis. On occasion, the organisation has obtained funds from other sources for special projects.

The composition of the Management Committee is as follows:

- two officials from the Department for Social Development's Housing Management Branch;

- two officials from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive;
- one official from the NI Federation of Housing Associations; and
- three nominees from the Central Community Advisory Group, which itself, comprises representatives from tenant and community groups.

Housing Benefit

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Social Development what is the maximum level of Housing Benefit available to an eligible private sector tenant in each District Council area in each of the last five years. (AQW 2397/00)

Mr Morrow: There are many factors taken into account when determining an appropriate level of Housing Benefit, the size of household, the type of property and whether or not it is considered suitable in terms of size for the household, the amount of rent charged and the local reference rent. In view of all these variables it is simply not possible to give an overall maximum figure for Housing Benefit in each District Council area.

Job Grant

Mr Carrick asked the Minister for Social Development if the Job Grant is to be introduced in Northern Ireland and what arrangements are being made to fund it. (AQW 2470/00)

Mr Morrow: As in Great Britain, the Job Grant, which was announced by the Chancellor in his Spring 2000 Budget, will be introduced in Northern Ireland from April 2001. The Grant will be a non-taxable single £100 transitional payment for people who move from welfare to work, provided they meet certain conditions. Funding of £410,000 has been made available by HM Treasury to meet the costs of the Grants in 2001-02.

In Northern Ireland, as in Great Britain, the benefit systems will be used to make the Grant payments. However, since the broad powers to make such payments are, under current legislation, vested in Northern Ireland in the Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment, my Department will be taking the necessary steps to bring the Grant under social security legislative provisions. Authority to pay the Grants will therefore rest on the forthcoming Budget Act which will cover 2001-02 Main Estimates. In the meantime an amount has been secured through the Vote on Account process to make the Grant payments from April 2001.

Low Energy Light Bulbs

Mr O'Connor asked the Minister for Social Development to give assistance to low income families for the

provision of Low Energy Light Bulbs in an attempt to reduce their electricity costs. (AQO 1146/00)

Mr Morrow: Under the existing Domestic Energy Efficiency Scheme, every qualifying household receives 2 low energy light bulbs. I plan to increase this to 4 under new energy efficiency scheme. Other organisations, such as NIE, also offer low energy light bulbs either free or at discounted rates.

Eradication of Fuel Poverty

Mr Cobain asked the Minister for Social Development to detail what progress has been made towards the eradication of fuel poverty. (AQO 1184/00)

Mr Morrow: I and my officials have already explained in some detail to members of the Social Development Committee, and in response to previous Assembly Questions, the measures that are being taken and are proposed to be taken to tackle fuel poverty.

However, I wish to advise the Assembly that I will be making a public announcement tomorrow that the new initiative to address fuel poverty will be known as the "Warm Homes" scheme. From 1 April 2001 there will be a three-month-lead in period before physical installation measures to the homes of the fuel poor commence on 1 July 2001. During this time the new Scheme Manager, which I am pleased to announce is the Eaga Partnership, will undertake steps to put in place the scheme infrastructure. Applications from eligible householders will also be accepted and home assessments carried out.

Warm Homes will provide low-income householders with improvements in their insulation and heating standards. I appreciate that there has been concern about the inadequacy of the grant levels but I have allowed some flexibility in the grant to ensure that no householder is disadvantaged, particularly in the rural communities where contractors' costs can be higher.

Northern Ireland has joined with other UK regions to bring an end to fuel poverty, as far as practicable by the year 2010. This will be a formidable undertaking for Northern Ireland. However, Warm Homes is a sign of our commitment to address this very serious situation.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Social Development Committee, Assembly Members and all those organisations that took the time to write to my Department for their support in implementing the new Scheme.

Cross-Community Participation

Mr Douglas asked the Minister for Social Development to detail what procedures and checks are in place to ensure that adequate cross-community participation is

achieved within bodies funded by his department, both at employee and management board level.

(AQO 1162/00)

Mr Morrow: My Department's policy is to promote and encourage cross-community participation where this is practicable. The Department funds a wide range of organisations and various checks and procedures are followed to ensure cross-community participation both at employee and management board level. If the Member is aware of any particular case I will of course investigate it.

Pilot Housing Scheme for Travellers

Mrs Nelis asked the Minister for Social Development to (a) explain the delay in the implementation of the Pilot Housing Scheme for Travellers and (b) outline when the expected transfer of sites from local Councils to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive will commence.

(AQO 1167/00)

Mr Morrow: In relation to the 4 Group Housing Schemes it had originally been intended to commence work on these by the end of the current financial year. However because of difficulties with regard to the acquisition of the necessary land and the completion of the statutory processes, matters which were entirely outside my control, it has been necessary to revise this target.

It is my Department's intention, as set out in the report – New Policy on Accommodation for Travellers – that responsibility for council owned Traveller sites should transfer to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. However, this requires legislation and the necessary provisions will therefore be included in the proposed new Housing Bill.

I wish to make it clear however that my Department remains committed to fulfilling its obligations as regards the provision of Group Housing schemes and the transfer of responsibility for serviced sites from District Councils to the Housing Executive.

Northern Ireland Strategy for Tackling Drugs Misuse

Mr B Hutchinson asked the Minister for Social Development to outline his developed action plans for regeneration and community development in relation to the inter-departmental drugs strategy and to make a statement. (AQO 1165/00)

Mr Morrow: The Northern Ireland Strategy for Tackling Drugs Misuse recognises the importance of involving local communities in addressing drugs misuse, particularly for people living in the most disadvantaged areas of Northern Ireland. The forthcoming strategies for regeneration and community development which I will be issuing for consultation over the next few weeks

will identify the importance of supporting at neighbourhood level action to tackle the problems associated with drugs and alcohol abuse.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr Molloy asked the Minister for Social Development to explain how cold weather payments are determined in relation to any given post code area. (AQO 1177/00)

Mr Morrow: Cold Weather Payments are made when the average temperatures in an area are, or are forecast to be, at or below zero degrees Celsius for a period of seven consecutive days. Information on average temperatures is provided by the Meteorological Office in relation to weather stations which are linked to postcodes.

The postcodes and the weather station to which they are linked are set out in the Social Fund Cold Weather Payment Regulations. The allocation of weather stations to post code areas is decided by the Department after thorough consultation with the Meteorological Office to ensure that weather stations are as representative as possible of the conditions in the areas they cover.

Winter Fuel Payment

Mr McGrady asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the steps he will take to extend the Winter Fuel Payment to other groups apart from those in receipt of Retirement Pension and to make a statement. (AQO 1148/00)

Mr Morrow: Winter Fuel Payments are not related to receipt of benefits. They are intended to help other people with their additional costs and need for fuel. The scheme has been extended this winter to include both men and women aged 60 and over and the need to be in receipt of a qualifying benefit has been removed. There are no plans to extend the scheme further.

Sunday Racing and On-course Betting

Ms Gildernew asked the Minister for Social Development, in the light of recent difficulties facing the racing industry, whether he will reconsider his decision not to introduce Sunday racing and on-course betting. (AQO 1163/00)

Mr Morrow: My main priority at this time is the reform of legislation on housing as included in the legislative programme for the current Assembly session. In view of this, and taking account of the ongoing gambling review in Great Britain, which may have implications for Northern Ireland, I have no plans to bring forward proposals to amend the gambling legislation to allow Sunday on-course betting at this time.

Deaths from Hypothermia

Mr Gibson asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the steps he is taking to prevent deaths from Hypothermia among the aged and disabled in view of the high costs of fuel and energy in Northern Ireland. (AQO 1159/00)

Mr Morrow: I am concerned about the number of deaths annually as a result of cold related illness. For my part, I am introducing a new energy efficiency scheme, which will provide a comprehensive package of energy efficiency measures, including thermostatically controlled heating systems, for those on low incomes. In addition, the Housing Executive's Disabled Facilities Grant will provide adaptations, including heating, for qualifying householders and NIE is running a scheme for cavity wall insulation for the disabled. Furthermore, the Housing Executive's fuel heating policy will, in due course, replace all inefficient heating systems, such as solid fuel roomheaters and Economy 7, which tend to be costlier than natural gas or oil.

Social Security Appeal Tribunal Hearings

Mr Poots asked the Minister for Social Development if he has any plans to make social security tribunals/hearings more user friendly. (AQO 1172/00)

Mr Morrow: Responsibility for Social Security Appeal Tribunal Hearings rests entirely with the Office of the President of Appeal Tribunals, and the member may wish to write to the President with details of his concerns. However, if the Member has any particular concerns about the administration of the Social Security System, I will be very happy to investigate them.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 6 April 2001

Written Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Office of the Northern Ireland Executive in Brussels

Mr Taylor asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail (a) the address of the proposed office for the Northern Ireland Executive in Brussels (b) when it is expected to be ready for occupation (c) when it will be available to Northern Ireland businesses to promote their products and to make a statement.

(AQW 2159/00)

Reply: The premises of the Executive Office are at 50 Rue Wiertz, immediately adjacent to the new European Parliament building, and in the vicinity of the offices of the main European Commission institutions, the United Kingdom Permanent Representation, and other regional offices. These will provide the main contacts for the staff of the Office.

The accommodation is expected to be ready for occupation as soon as the fitting out work is completed, estimated as late May.

The Office will be part of the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, though staff from the Industrial Development Board will also be based there. It will serve the interests of the Executive, ie. Northern Ireland Ministers and their departments.

The Office will benefit Northern Ireland generally. Its primary function is to liaise with EU and other relevant bodies to meet the policy needs of the Executive. It will also be used to assist the Industrial Development Board to market Northern Ireland to potential inward investors.

Community Relations Council: Appointments

Mr Ford asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQO 863/00, to detail the date or dates on which the 16 shortlisted

applicants were interviewed for appointment to the Community Relations Council and to confirm if those interviewed have been informed yet of the outcome of the selection process.

(AQW 2173/00)

Reply: [*holding answer 16 March 2001*]: The short-listed candidates were interviewed on 7 and 21 February 2000. They have not yet been advised of the outcome of the selection process.

In our answer to AQO 863 on 19 February, we indicated that appointments would be made shortly from the 16 shortlisted applicants who were interviewed.

However, in view of the lengthy delay in making appointments we subsequently decided to review the matter.

We are conscious of the fact that the regular triennial evaluation of the Community Relations Council is under way and is expected to report shortly. In addition, we will be initiating the strategic review of community relations policy signalled in the Programme for Government as a matter of priority.

In these circumstances, we consider that it would not be appropriate to make further appointments to the Community Relations Council.

Officials have written today to the chairman of the Community Relations Council and the shortlisted candidates to explain the position.

Lisburn Women's Centre

Ms Lewsley asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail any plans to assist the Lisburn Women's Centre or other community groups within the parliamentary constituency of Lagan Valley who are currently facing financial difficulties.

(AQW 2356/00)

Reply: There are a range of sources to which women's voluntary organisations can apply for support for projects and services, including Health and Social Services Trusts, the Training and Employment Agency, the National Lotteries Board and charitable trusts.

The Community Relations Council under the Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation have funded the following community groups within the Lagan Valley Constituency:-

Lisburn Interchurch project	- £128,042.50
Greater Twinbrook and Poleglass Community Forum	- £28,000

Regarding European Funding, the Executive has agreed that Departments should be authorised to make advance payment to projects where they judge that there is a very strong likelihood that a project will be eligible for funding and successful in an application under the new round of

EU Operational programmes. The allocation of funding under these proposals will not depend upon geographic area.

Ministerial Special Advisers

Mr Gibson asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail the total cost of Ministerial Special Advisers in the last financial year.

(AQW 2454/00)

Reply: The total cost of Ministerial Special Advisers across all Departments for the financial year 2000/01 amounted to £569,998.90.

Northern Ireland Bureau: Washington DC

Mr Fee asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to outline what progress has been made on the Programme for Government commitments concerning the Northern Ireland Bureau in Washington.

(AQO 1250/00)

Reply: We are pleased to report that a number of steps have been undertaken to meet our commitments in respect of the Northern Ireland Bureau, in order that it may better serve the Executive and raise the profile and image of Northern Ireland.

The Bureau's resources have been strengthened by engaging an additional member of staff at middle management level. The forthcoming relocation of the Bureau will provide the opportunity for a review of its functions, structure, and relationship with other bodies promoting Northern Ireland in the U.S.

Community Relations: Larne Area

Mr Beggs asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail what steps have been taken to improve community relations in the Larne area and to make a statement on current developments.

(AQO 1236/00)

Reply: With the support of the Community Relations Unit, Larne District Partnership Board has had meetings with Larne Borough Council officials, the Community Relations Council, and the Mediation Network.

As a result, a proposal has been put forward for an initial assessment process to be taken forward by the Mediation Network. Mediation Network is anxious to be sensitive to locally based individuals and agencies already engaged with the situation. It is understood that local MLAs were briefed on this in more detail on Friday last and put forward a number of helpful suggestions.

Civic Forum: Draft Programme for Government

Mrs E Bell asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister what consideration was given to the submission from the Civic Forum on the Draft Programme for Government prior to the publication of the final document.

(AQO 1220/00)

Reply: The Civic Forum provided a detailed and very constructive response to the draft Programme for Government.

This was considered carefully as were all of the responses received, and a number of changes were made to the Programme for Government to reflect suggestions made by the Civic Forum and others.

The Civic Forum's response also contained many suggestions that could not be adopted in time for this year's Programme for Government. We are looking carefully at these as we take forward work to develop the Programme. Mr Nesbitt and Mr Haughey met with Dr Gibson on the 12 March 2001 to discuss the Civic Forum input to the Programme.

British Irish Council: Work Programmes

Dr Birnie asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to make a statement on the work in progress of the British Irish Council.

(AQO 1231/00)

Reply: In the British-Irish Council the administrations are progressing work programmes on the topics which were agreed at the first summit meeting on 17 December 1999, namely, environment, transport, drugs, social inclusion and knowledge economy. Two Ministerial sectoral meetings have taken place, one on Environment in October 2000 and the other on Transport in December 2000. The British Government were in the lead at the Environment meeting and an initial programme of work was agreed which included waste management, climate change and radioactive waste from Sellafield.

The Northern Ireland Administration took the lead at the Transport meeting held in Belfast on 19 December 2000. At that meeting it was agreed that senior officials would examine options and prepare detailed recommendations for work in a number of priority areas.

Work at official level is continuing on social inclusion led by the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales and knowledge economy led by Jersey in preparation for Ministerial sectoral meetings on these topics.

The topic of drugs on which the Irish Government is in the lead will be the main item for discussion at the second plenary meeting of the British-Irish Council. This meeting was cancelled and attempts are now being made to reschedule this meeting.

Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

Mr Savage asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail any discussions with the Secretary of State regarding the role of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission. (AQO 1230/00)

Reply: We have not jointly discussed this matter with the Secretary of State. However, our respective parties have made representations on a number of occasions.

Disability Rights Task Force

Ms Lewsley asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail plans to advance the work of the Disability Rights Task Force. (AQO 1249/00)

Reply: We refer to our letter of 20 March in reply to your AQO 1130/00. The position remains unchanged.

Visit to Washington DC: March 2001

Mr Davis asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to make a statement on the recent visit to Washington D.C. (AQO 1232/00)

Reply: The main objective of our visit to the US in March was to develop contacts with the new administration in the US.

Our visit was favourably received and provided an opportunity to brief President Bush, Secretary of State Colin Powell and members of Congress on the work of the Executive.

President Bush reaffirmed his interest in Northern Ireland and the development of a more stable future for the people of Northern Ireland. The administration also indicated its intention to continue co-operation and partnership between the US and the Northern Ireland Executive in areas of mutual interest.

Rural Women's Networks: Funding

Ms Gildernew asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to outline any plans to fund Rural Women's Networks. (AQO 1223/00)

Reply: There is a range of sources to which women's voluntary organisations, whether urban or rural, can apply for support for projects and services. These include Health and Social Services Trusts, the Training and Employment Agency, the National Lotteries Charities Board and charitable trusts.

We understand that the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is working with the Rural Women's Network on an Economic Appraisal (including a Needs Analysis), of the Rural Women's sector within the context of the new Rural Development Programme

(2001-06). Appropriate future actions will be considered pending the outcome of this.

The Executive has agreed that departments should be authorised to make advance payments to projects where they judge that there is a very strong likelihood that a project will be eligible for funding and successful in an application under the new round of EU Operational Programmes.

Community Relations Council: Appointments

Mr Ford asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to confirm that interviews for the candidates shortlisted for appointment to the Community Relations Council were held in January 2000 and that appointments have not yet been made. (AQO 1222/00)

Reply: The shortlisted candidates were interviewed on 7 and 21 February 2000. They have not yet been advised of the outcome of the selection process.

In our answer to AQO 863 on 19 February, we indicated that appointments would be made shortly from the 16 shortlisted applicants who were interviewed.

However, in view of the lengthy delay in making appointments we subsequently decided to review the matter.

We are conscious of the fact that the regular triennial evaluation of the Community Relations Council is under way and is expected to report shortly. In addition, we will be initiating the strategic review of community relations policy signalled in the Programme for Government as a matter of priority.

In these circumstances, we consider that it would not be appropriate to make further appointments to the Community Relations Council.

Officials have written today to the chairman of the Community Relations Council and the shortlisted candidates to explain the position.

Victim Support: Upper Bann

Mr Carrick asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to confirm the level of financial assistance provided for victim support within the parliamentary constituency of Upper Bann and to detail the unsuccessful applications. (AQO 1203/00)

Reply: The Victims Unit recently allocated £6,000 to the Southern Board Trauma Advisory Panel. To date, all other funding for victims organisations in Upper Bann has come from the core-funding scheme which is funded by the Northern Ireland Office and administered by the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust. Details of funding allocations under that scheme should be sought from either of those bodies.

Commissioner for Senior Citizens

Mr McMenamin asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to consider the appointment of a Commissioner for senior citizens, similar to the setting up of a Commissioner for Children, as a result of the increasing number of attacks on these innocent victims.

(AQO 1197/00)

Reply: Attacks on vulnerable senior citizens are cowardly and must be deplored by all. The Executive and Assembly will wish to give every possible support to the criminal justice system in making those responsible for such attacks answerable to the law for their crimes.

Arising from the Belfast Agreement, a statutory equality duty was introduced under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 which requires public authorities, in carrying out their functions, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity.

Under this new equality duty, persons of different age – which includes senior citizens, is one of the categories to be considered.

Visit to Washington DC

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to make a statement on the visit to Washington D.C. in March 2001. (AQO 1192/00)

Reply: The main objective of our visit to the US in March was to develop contacts with the new administration in the US.

Our visit was favourably received and provided an opportunity to brief President Bush, Secretary of State Colin Powell and members of Congress on the work of the Executive.

President Bush reaffirmed his interest in Northern Ireland and the development of a more stable future for the people of Northern Ireland. The administration also indicated its intention to continue co-operation and partnership between the US and the Northern Ireland Executive in areas of mutual interest.

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Cod Recovery Plan: Tie Up

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to (a) confirm that, as a result of the Cod Recovery Plan, fishing boats involved in white fishing have to tie up for five/six weeks and (b) state what assistance is being given to these fishermen. (AQW 2404/00)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers): It is not true that fishing vessels targeting

whitefish are required to tie up as a result of the closures from the Cod Recovery Plans. Whilst the closures will curtail their traditional activities in the sea areas affected they are free to seek to fish elsewhere, or change gear to target nephrops in the derogated areas within the closures or outside the closed areas. These are of course subject to the normal quota restrictions. To assist the industry action is being taken on a number of fronts. These include seeking to retrieve the 10% nephrops Total Allowable Catch cut imposed at the December Fisheries Council; the bringing forward of a fishing vessel decommissioning scheme; possible additional training related to the needs of the industry; and seeking to obtain relief for the industry from the payment of light dues.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Slaughter Charges

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she intends to compensate farmers for slaughter charges at abattoirs as a direct result of Foot and Mouth Disease. (AQW 2409/00)

Ms Rodgers: I do not intend to compensate farmers for slaughter charges because the Diseases of Animals (Northern Ireland) Order 1981, limits the conditions under which I can pay compensation for Foot and Mouth.

Payment is for animals affected by the disease or for those which have been in contact with affected animals or have been exposed to the infection. It can also be paid for a limited range of other materials, such as carcasses, fodder or feedingstuffs which have been directly implicated as a disease risk.

Slaughter charges, which are a normal part of the meat industry's business, do not fall into any of these categories.

EDUCATION

Special Education Units: Funding

Ms Ramsey asked the Minister of Education to detail (a) how much money is given to Moderate Learning Difficulty (MLD) special units in each education and library board area and (b) if this money is ring fenced.

(AQW 2303/00)

The Minister of Education (Mr M McGuinness): The financial allocations in respect of special education units for pupils with moderate learning difficulties attached to primary and secondary schools in each Education and Library Board area in the current financial year are as follows:-

Belfast	Western	North Eastern	South Eastern	Southern
£190,512	£138,000	£1,588,853	£2,950,000	£2,837,000*

* classroom assistant costs in this Board area are not available and therefore not included

The amounts allocated by each Board depend on the number of special education units and the number of pupils in each unit within their areas. The Belfast and Western Boards, each have one unit, with a correspondingly larger number of MLD special schools, while the North-Eastern, South-Eastern and Southern Boards have 16, 17 and 26 units respectively. All MLD provision in the Southern Board area takes the form of unit provision.

Teachers' and classroom assistants' salaries and special equipment for pupils in units are ring-fenced since these are held centrally by Boards.

I am not aware of any difficulties regarding expenditure on special units. I will, however, ask officials to make enquiries and, if it appears that there may be a problem with the funding of individual units, I will take action to address this.

Chancellor of the Exchequer: Education Funding

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail (a) the number of announcements made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer concerning the provision of additional money for education since 1997 (b) the amounts allocated to Northern Ireland and (c) the amount actually allocated to education. (AQW 2383/00)

Mr M McGuinness: I understand that seven announcements have been made in the period since May 1997. The amounts available to Northern Ireland and the amounts allocated to education here are set out below. Figures exclude the announced outcomes of the 1998 Comprehensive Spending Review and the 2000 Spending Review as the different Department of Education structures in Northern Ireland and England mean that figures are not readily available for services for which the Northern Ireland Department is responsible.

ADDITIONS ATTRIBUTABLE TO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION SERVICES

	£000						
Announcement	1997/98	1998/99	1999/2000	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04
1997 Budget							
Sum available (a)		27,623					
Sum available (a)	2,600(b)	7,799(b)					
Sum allocated		27,623(c)					
Sum allocated	2,600	7,799(c)					
1998 Budget							
Sum available (a)		6,239					
Sum allocated		6,239(c)					
Chancellor's Initiative (d) (May 1998)							
Sum available			12,700	8,600	700		
Sum allocated			12,700	8,600	700		
1999 Budget							
Sum available (a)		2,952					
Sum allocated		2,628					
2000 Budget							
Sum available (a)				22,025			
Sum allocated				14,665(c)			
Pre-Budget Statement (Nov. 2000)							
Sum available (a)				5,560			
Sum allocated				5,560			
2001 Budget							
Sum available (a)					8,092	9,166	10,482
Sum allocated					To be decided	To be decided	To be decided

(a) Sum notionally available for education under the Barnett formula.

(b) New Deal for Schools.

(c) Included in subsequent years' education budget.

(d) Chancellor's Initiative applies to Northern Ireland only.

Children With Hearing Difficulties

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of (a) children with hearing difficulties that have a classroom assistant in each Education and Library Board and (b) children with hearing difficulties currently awaiting this service. (AQW 2384/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The number of children with hearing difficulties who have an individual classroom assistant in each Education and Library Board area is as follows:-

Belfast	Western	North Eastern	South Eastern	Southern
2	7	11	15	5

Classroom assistance may also be provided on a class basis for those in special schools or special education units for the hearing impaired attached to primary and secondary schools. The number of such children in schools or units with a classroom assistant is as follows:-

33	25	50	25	17
----	----	----	----	----

The Boards have informed me they are not aware of any children with hearing difficulties currently awaiting classroom assistance.

New Targeting Social Need

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education to outline his plans to ensure that the introduction of new policies, such as New Targeting Social Need, will not hinder those schools that have previously and consistently delivered high standards of educational achievement. (AQW 2387/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Raising standards in all our schools is one of my Department's key objectives. In developing and planning new policies we seek to ensure that there are no implications which would adversely affect the performance of any school.

New TSN has a significant contribution to make to the education service and schools in particular. It does not mean that entitlement to statutory education will be affected. It means changing the way we target the money we have so that more of it can be used to benefit those who are most disadvantaged.

School Transport: Funding

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail (a) the level of funding for school transport in each Education and Library Board for the financial year 2001/02 and (b) how this compares with the Board's estimated cost to provide this service. (AQW 2389/00)

Mr M McGuinness: No specific recurrent and capital funding is allocated to the Education and Library Boards for school transport. Within their overall budget allocations Boards are required to make provision for the estimated costs of their school transport service within their Resource Allocation Plan for 2001/02 which is submitted to the Department for approval.

Special Educational Provision: Asperger's Syndrome

Mr Fee asked the Minister of Education to detail what provisions have been made by each Education and Library Board to education of children with Asperger's Syndrome. (AQW 2394/00)

Mr M McGuinness: I am advised by the Education and Library Boards that the special educational provision made by each Board for children with Asperger's Syndrome is as follows: -

BELFAST - Most attend mainstream schools where they may have a differentiated curriculum and some may have classroom assistance. Others with an additional learning difficulty attend special schools or units. Additional support in school may be provided by a teacher from a special school.

WESTERN - Most are in mainstream schools and some have classroom assistance. Foyleview Special School provides additional support for those in the northern part of the Board's area.

NORTH EASTERN - Most attend mainstream schools and some have classroom assistance. A field officer provides additional support for schools.

SOUTH EASTERN - Most attend mainstream schools and some have classroom assistance. Additional support in school is provided by the Board's Peripatetic Teaching service.

SOUTHERN - Most attend mainstream schools and some receive classroom assistance. Some with additional learning difficulties attend special schools or units. Additional support in school is provided by a peripatetic teacher and an Assistant Advisory Officer. Training may be provided for the class teachers.

Teacher Vacancies

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education whether the education and library boards have notified him of a shortage of teachers in the current financial year and what steps are being taken to address this situation. (AQW 2406/00)

Mr M McGuinness: There has been no indication from the Education and Library Boards that they are experiencing problems in filling teacher vacancies.

Drugs Education: 'Michael Young Campaign'

Ms Ramsey asked the Minister of Education whether he has plans to introduce the 'Michael Young campaign' into the school curriculum. (AQW 2429/00)

Mr M McGuinness: There are no plans to introduce the 'Michael Young campaign' specifically into the school curriculum. However, it has always been recognised that schools have a major preventative role to play in addressing the problems of the misuse of drugs and other substances such as solvents, and for this reason the teaching of drugs education is a statutory requirement within the school curriculum. It is taught within the context of health education, and is one of the objectives of the Health Education cross-curricular theme which is compulsory for all pupils aged 4 - 16. At subject level, science, Religious Education and personal and social education programmes are the most common areas through which the topic is covered.

Nursery School Places

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Education to give his assessment on the take-up rate of nursery school places in the last academic year. (AQW 2453/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Comparing approved and actual enrolments in the nursery school sector in the 2000/01 school year, the take-up rate of places was 91%.

Raising Standards in Secondary Schools

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Education to outline his plans to raise standards in secondary schools. (AQW 2455/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Raising standards in all schools is one of my key objectives and I am taking forward a range of initiatives with this aim firmly in sight. This includes:

- a massive capital investment in our schools;
- the abolition of the school performance tables;
- the School Improvement Programme which is designed to raise standards in all schools by addressing issues such as literacy and numeracy, discipline, target setting, school development planning and low and under-achievement;
- a pilot initiative to provide flexibility for an increased focus on work related learning at Key Stage 4;
- our investment in Information and Communications Technology (ICT);
- ongoing work to maintain and enhance the quality of teaching; and the three major reviews of aspects of our education system;
- the post-primary review;

- the curriculum review; and
- the consultation on LMS commonality.

Literacy and Numeracy Strategy

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Education to detail the evidence he has collated on the effectiveness of his literacy and numeracy strategies. (AQW 2457/00)

Mr M McGuinness: A range of information including school inspection findings, Key Stage Assessment outcomes and reports from Education and Library Boards is used to monitor the literacy and numeracy strategy. My officials, in consultation with the Boards and CCMS, are reviewing progress and how the strategy can be strengthened and developed further.

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

National Minimum Wage

Mr Adams asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to identify the number of staff within his Department and its associated agencies currently receiving (a) the National Minimum wage and (b) less than £5.00 per hour. (AQW 219/00)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Sir Reg Empey): *[supplementary answer]*: Pursuant to my original answer on Monday 9 October I would now confirm the following:

The number of staff within the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and its associated agencies currently receiving (a) the National minimum wage is NIL and (b) less than £5.00 per hour is 170.

IDB: Level of Expenditure

Dr O'Hagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the level of expenditure by the Industrial Development Board (IDB), Local Economic Development Unit (LEDU) and Industrial Research and Technology Unit (IRTU) by electoral ward and parliamentary constituency during each of the last three years. (AQW 1216/00)

Sir Reg Empey: *[supplementary answer]*: Pursuant to the answer given on Wednesday 24 January 2001 I would inform you that the table referring to Selective Financial Assistance Expenditure from the Industrial Development Board contained incorrect information.

Please find the correct information in the attached table.

INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT BOARD

Parliamentary Constituency	Selective Financial Assistance Expenditure (£'000)		
	1997/98	1998/99	1999/2000
Belfast East	5,891	4,243	7,633
Belfast North	7,279	970	3,809
Belfast South	507	1,388	2,169
Belfast West	6,878	6,772	2,258
East Antrim	10,073	11,562	12,282
North Antrim	2,379	7,817	5,246
South Antrim	4,355	6,482	6,011
East Londonderry	11,982	13,375	5,300
Foyle	10,789	26,956	19,224
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	11,090	7,598	5,265
Lagan Valley	3,399	6,613	4,840
Mid Ulster	4,754	1,710	5,694
Newry & Armagh	1,042	837	3,301
North Down	411	718	826
South Down	648	1,723	749
Strangford	902	1,121	1,499
Upper Bann	10,516	10,496	7,186
West Tyrone	4,908	919	1,324

NOTE: Payments of SFA are made to the NI headquarters of the company concerned and are therefore recorded against the constituency in which the HQ is located.

Where a company has a number of production units in different constituencies, this may not offer a true reflection of which constituencies actually benefited from the expenditure.

GoDigital Initiative

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline what similar regional programmes are available in Northern Ireland, into which the new European Commission communications “GoDigital” initiative, aimed at small and medium-sized enterprises (SME’s), can link as part of the wider e-Europe action plan.
(AQW 2382/00)

Sir Reg Empey: The Information Age Initiative’s Strategic Framework and Action Plan, “Leapfrog to the Information Age”, identified 25 actions aimed at supporting:

- (i) the increased use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) by all NI businesses;
- (ii) the development of NI’s ICT sector ; and
- (iii) the knowledge-based economy environment.

These actions are being progressed by the Information Age Initiative in close conjunction with DETI, its Agencies and the T&EA. These organisations manage a wide range of schemes aimed at stimulating companies to make greater use of the latest ICTs, and especially to exploit e-commerce and e-business opportunities. These programmes are consistent with the objectives of the GoDigital initiative which will be launched on 6 April 2001.

Recruitment Trends: Manufacturing/Service Sector

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to give his assessment of (a) decreasing recruitment in the manufacturing sector and increasing recruitment in the service sector (b) the implications of this trend to the Northern Ireland economy with particular regard to those areas with a high manufacturing dependency and (c) the measures being taken to address the issue.
(AQW 2385/00)

Sir Reg Empey: Manufacturing employment in Northern Ireland has been relatively stable over the last five years during which time the sector has enjoyed strong output and productivity growth. The overall stability of manufacturing employment has however resulted from strong growth in some sectors offsetting declines in others, mainly the more traditional sectors. Although the manufacturing sector has, as a whole, performed well, we must continue to encourage and facilitate the growing sectors while helping to minimise the adverse effects on those sectors which face restructuring.

Service sector employment in Northern Ireland has risen sharply over the last five years and this is to be welcomed. Many of these jobs, which have arisen through the activities of DETI and its agencies, are in areas such as software development and financial services. These are quality jobs that are making a significant contribution to growth in our economy.

Within the context of the Programme for Government, my Department will continue to promote the knowledge-based economy in order to realise our vision of securing for Northern Ireland an economy that is fast growing, competitive and innovative. This will involve supporting enterprise and innovation in all sectors as well as taking into account the need to manage the restructuring that has to take place in some of our traditional industries.

Economic Growth Rate

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the economic growth rate for each of the last ten years.
(AQW 2400/00)

Sir Reg Empey: Northern Ireland’s real economic growth rates for the last ten years for which official estimates exist were:

1990:	Zero
1991:	3.0%
1992:	2.5%
1993:	4.2%
1994:	6.1%
1995:	4.9%
1996:	1.0%
1997:	4.0%
1998:	0.9%
1999:	1.1%

Over the above ten year period, the Northern Ireland economy grew in real terms by 31%, yielding an average annual rate of increase of 2.7%. Over the same period, the UK economy expanded by 22.6% giving an annual average real growth rate of 2.1%.

Job Creation

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of jobs created in each of the last ten years. (AQW 2401/00)

Sir Reg Empey: Information on the number of jobs created is not available. However, figures from the Quarterly Employment Survey (QES) can be used to estimate the net change in employee job levels during the last ten years.

Latest figures from the QES show that in December 2000 there were 639,570 employee jobs in NI. This represents an increase of 92,810 (17%) from the December 1990 figure of 546,760. The net change in employee job levels in NI for each of the last ten years can be found in the attached table.

NORTHERN IRELAND EMPLOYEE JOBS*, DECEMBER 1990 – DECEMBER 2000

Quarter Date	Total Employee Jobs	Annual Change
Dec-90	546,760	
Dec-91	545,200	-1,560
Dec-92	544,370	-830
Dec-93	554,950	10,570
Dec-94	571,530	16,580
Dec-95	581,000	9,470
Dec-96	591,820	10,820
Dec-97	611,330	19,510
Dec-98	623,980	12,650
Dec-99	633,990	10,010
Dec-00	639,570	5,580

* Figures are rounded to the nearest 10 and may not sum due to rounding

Source : Quarterly Employment Survey, DETI

Inward Investment

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the total amount of investment attracted in each of the last ten years. (AQW 2402/00)

Sir Reg Empey: I understand the member is referring to inward investment when he refers to investment attracted in the last ten years. Information on the levels of investment planned by new and existing externally-owned companies in relation to projects secured by the Industrial Development Board is set out in the attached table.

PLANNED INVESTMENT IN EXTERNALLY-OWNED PROJECTS SECURED BY IDB DURING THE PERIOD APRIL 1990 TO MARCH 2000

	New Inward (£M)	Expansions And Competitiveness (£M)
90/91	9	198
91/92	1	109
92/93	129	152
93/94	232	101
94/95	55	197
95/96	64	373
96/97	122	373
97/98	27	503
98/99	33	116
99/00	78	288

Unemployment Figures: District Council Areas

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the current unemployment figures for each district council area and to make a statement. (AQW 2418/00)

Sir Reg Empey: The information requested is available in the DETI monthly publication, Northern Ireland Labour Market Statistics (Section 3, Table 3.8), copies of which are placed in the Assembly Library.

Tourism: Visitors From Republic of Ireland

Dr Birnie asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (a) the number of Republic of Ireland tourists who visited Northern Ireland in each of the last three years for which figures are available (b) the projected figures for 2001, 2002 and 2003 and (c) the total promotional spending by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board on the Republic of Ireland market.

(AQW 2435/00)

Sir Reg Empey: There were 360,000 visitors from the Irish Republic to Northern Ireland in 1998, 384,000

in 1999 and forecasts for 2000 indicate 357,000 visitors. Targets set for the Republic of Ireland market for 2001, 2002 and 2003 are 368,000, 379,000 and 390,000 respectively, representing an average annual growth of around 3%. The total promotional spend by NITB on the Republic of Ireland market in the last three years was £1,467,073.

IDB: Investment in West Tyrone

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to give his assessment of the impact created by the Industrial Development Board for Northern Ireland last year in (a) Strabane District Council area (b) Omagh District Council area and to detail what plans the Industrial Development Board for Northern Ireland has to attract investment to West Tyrone. (AQW 2442/00)

Sir Reg Empey: In providing this answer I have reviewed IDB's activity in West Tyrone from January 2000 to date. I believe that the summary below indicates that IDB has been making an impact in the two council areas and that it is seeking to improve on that performance by actively engaging with appropriate representatives from the region.

IDB has been proactive in implementing initiatives to help boost the attractiveness of the West Tyrone area to inward investors. In March 2000, IDB held a regional event in Londonderry at which representatives from the Strabane, Derry, Limavady and Donegal council areas were given the opportunity to meet with the IDB Board and Senior Management to discuss issues affecting their areas. A similar event was held in Omagh in September 2000 which covered Omagh, Cookstown, Dungannon, Fermanagh and Magherafelt areas.

IDB continues to work closely with Strabane and Omagh Councils to market these areas, and the wider region in which they sit, to potential inward investors. In a regional context IDB and the IDA have agreed a marketing strategy - Invest North West- covering the council areas of Strabane, Derry, Limavady and Donegal; and have developed a joint marketing database and process for handling visits to the region. In addition, work is underway with the Into-The-West Council grouping, which includes Omagh, to identify a US location to be targeted for a regional marketing approach.

In December I had the pleasure of announcing a £1.3m investment by Fabplus Ltd who have decided to locate in IDB's former advance factory in Strabane with the transfer and expansion of its ROI-based sprinkler systems fabrication operation, which is expected to create 30 new jobs. Following on from this IDB is actively exploring ways to procure more accommodation in Strabane and is also working towards finding a suitable tenant for the advance unit at the Doogary West

site in Omagh to which there have been seven visits by potential investors since January 2000.

National Minimum Wage

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to give his assessment of the effects of raising the national minimum wage on the economy of Northern Ireland and to make a statement.

(AQW 2450/00)

Sir Reg Empey: The national minimum wage is a reserved matter and is applied in the same way across the whole of the UK. In its third report (volume 1), the Low Pay Commission concluded that the national minimum wage had not adversely affected the economy, that gender and regional pay gaps had narrowed and that employment effects of the increase are likely to be small.

The increase in the national minimum wage to £4.10 from 1 October 2001 will be of direct benefit to around 50,000 workers in Northern Ireland, some seven per cent of the working population.

The increase from £3.70 to £4.10 is broadly consistent with the overall level of wages growth experienced across the UK economy since the initial introduction of the national minimum wage. As the introduction of the NMW was not associated with any significant adverse labour market impacts in Northern Ireland, and because the labour market has further tightened, it is unlikely that the proposed new rate will generate any significant adverse employment effects.

A copy of the Low Pay Commission's report, which contains a thorough assessment of the impact across the UK of the national minimum wage so far and of the likely impact of the increase, has been placed in the Assembly Library.

Local Economic Development

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to give his assessment of the growing role for District Councils in relation to promoting local economic development in response to Peace II delivery and other European Union developments. (AQO 1244/00)

Sir Reg Empey: With the assistance of EU Structural Funds, District Councils have played an important role in the delivery of local economic development over the past number of years. Their knowledge, growing expertise and commitment in this area is widely acknowledged and is being built upon with a view to taking forward further local economic development activities through the new Building Sustainable Prosperity and Peace II Programmes. The evolution of a local partnership approach through which these EU Programmes are to be delivered will also require the full participation of District Councils.

Contact is currently being made with all 26 District Councils so that local workable delivery mechanisms can be agreed and proper complementarity achieved.

ENVIRONMENT

Ards and Down Area Plan

Mr Wells asked the Minister of the Environment to detail when the draft Down/Ards Area Plan will be published. (AQW 2426/00)

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Foster): The Draft Ards and Down Area Plan is scheduled for publication during 2001/02. Preparation of the Draft Plan is on target as set out in the Planning Service's current Corporate and Business Plan.

Environment Protection Agency

Dr Birnie asked the Minister of the Environment to give his assessment of the desirability and feasibility of an independent Environment Protection Agency for Northern Ireland. (AQW 2436/00)

Mr Foster: Operational responsibility for environmental issues currently rests with the Environment and Heritage Service, an Agency within my Department. As such, environmental regulation is carried on under the control and direction of a locally elected Minister directly accountable to this Assembly. These arrangements, therefore, have important advantages, which will need to be balanced alongside any advantages which might accrue from having an environmental regulator independent of the Executive. I will be considering these matters in conjunction with my Executive colleagues.

Northern Area Plan: Consultation

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of the Environment to outline what plans he has to consult with District Councils and the public in the preparation of the Northern Area Plan. (AQW 2437/00)

Mr Foster: It is my Department's intention that during the course of preparing the Northern Area Plan, views, attitudes and aspirations of residents within the area, as reflected by Councillors, community groups and individual representation will be taken into account. Planning Service representatives have now completed a first round of meetings with the four Councils involved at which a format to facilitate Planning Service/Council Consultation over the Draft Plan preparation was discussed and agreed. Additionally the start to plan preparation has recently been advertised in the press, inviting representation.

It is intended to offer the opportunity for wider and more effective public participation in the preparation of the Draft Plan by publishing an Issues Paper in place of the more traditional Preliminary Proposals Publication. A comprehensive and wide-ranging public and community consultation programme will be implemented at the Issues Papers stage.

The purpose of this Area Plan is to set out the broad planning framework for the physical development of the entire area including all the urban settlements and also the rural hinterland within the four Council Areas for the period up to the year 2016. The Plan will provide a planning policy framework to guide future development by public and private sectors and provide a basis for the control of this development. In preparing the Area Plan, my Department will take into account the overall policy framework, primarily set by the provisions of the Regional Development Strategy (once published in final form) together with Planning Policy Statements as existing and also programmed for preparation. The Plan must also embrace the principles established by a number of government objectives and initiatives such as those relating to Equality of Opportunity, New Targeting Social Need, Sustainability, Biodiversity and Transportation.

The programme for preparation of this Plan is to produce the Issues Paper by the end of 2001, a Draft Plan by the end of 2002 and to Adopt the Plan by Spring 2004.

Northern Area Plan

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the scope of the Northern Area Plan. (AQW 2438/00)

Mr Foster: It is my Department's intention that during the course of preparing the Northern Area Plan, views, attitudes and aspirations of residents within the area, as reflected by Councillors, community groups and individual representation will be taken into account. Planning Service representatives have now completed a first round of meetings with the four Councils involved at which a format to facilitate Planning Service/Council Consultation over the Draft Plan preparation was discussed and agreed. Additionally the start to plan preparation has recently been advertised in the press, inviting representation. It is intended to offer the opportunity for wider and more effective public participation in the preparation of the Draft Plan by publishing an Issues Paper in place of the more traditional Preliminary Proposals Publication. A comprehensive and wide-ranging public and community consultation programme will be implemented at the Issues Papers stage.

The purpose of this Area Plan is to set out the broad planning framework for the physical development of the entire area including all the urban settlements and also the rural hinterland within the four Council Areas for

the period up to the year 2016. The Plan will provide a planning policy framework to guide future development by public and private sectors and provide a basis for the control of this development. In preparing the Area Plan, my Department will take into account the overall policy framework, primarily set by the provisions of the Regional Development Strategy (once published in final form) together with Planning Policy Statements as existing and also programmed for preparation. The Plan must also embrace the principles established by a number of government objectives and initiatives such as those relating to Equality of Opportunity, New Targeting Social Need, Sustainability, Biodiversity and Transportation.

The programme for preparation of this Plan is to produce the Issues Paper by the end of 2001, a Draft Plan by the end of 2002 and to Adopt the Plan by Spring 2004.

Northern Area Plan

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the proposed timetable for the publication of the Northern Area Plan. (AQW 2439/00)

Mr Foster: It is my Department's intention that during the course of preparing the Northern Area Plan, views, attitudes and aspirations of residents within the area, as reflected by Councillors, community groups and individual representation will be taken into account. Planning Service representatives have now completed a first round of meetings with the four Councils involved at which a format to facilitate Planning Service/Council Consultation over the Draft Plan preparation was discussed and agreed. Additionally the start to plan preparation has recently been advertised in the press, inviting representation. It is intended to offer the opportunity for wider and more effective public participation in the preparation of the Draft Plan by publishing an Issues Paper in place of the more traditional Preliminary Proposals Publication. A comprehensive and wide-ranging public and community consultation programme will be implemented at the Issues Papers stage.

The purpose of this Area Plan is to set out the broad planning framework for the physical development of the entire area including all the urban settlements and also the rural hinterland within the four Council Areas for the period up to the year 2016. The Plan will provide a planning policy framework to guide future development by public and private sectors and provide a basis for the control of this development. In preparing the Area Plan, my Department will take into account the overall policy framework, primarily set by the provisions of the Regional Development Strategy (once published in final form) together with Planning Policy Statements as existing and also programmed for preparation. The Plan must also embrace the principles established by a number of government objectives and initiatives such as

those relating to Equality of Opportunity, New Targeting Social Need, Sustainability, Biodiversity and Transportation.

The programme for preparation of this Plan is to produce the Issues Paper by the end of 2001, a Draft Plan by the end of 2002 and to Adopt the Plan by Spring 2004.

Somerton/Chichester Conservation Area

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the progress he has made to report on the review of the boundaries of the Somerton/Chichester Conservation Area in Belfast. (AQW 2440/00)

Mr Foster: The review of the boundaries of existing Conservation Areas within the Belfast Metropolitan Area is being undertaken as part of preparation of the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP).

Consultants are being recruited to advise on the appropriateness of existing Conservation Area boundaries within the Plan area.

Special Area of Conservation: Aughnadarragh Lough, County Down

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to designate Aughnadarragh Lough, County Down a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) given that a survey of the Marsh Fritillary butterfly showed a higher population at that location as opposed to Montaiags Moss, County Antrim, which is a designated SAC. (AQW 2458/00)

Mr Foster: The Member will be aware from my letter of 6 February 2001 that I was not persuaded at that time that Aughnadarragh Lough was of such importance to justify its selection as a Special Area of Conservation. This remains my view.

Sites selected as SACs for Marsh Fritillary, both in Northern Ireland and elsewhere in the UK, are ones which support long-established and well-documented colonies of this species. They tend to be much larger than Aughnadarragh Lough and include extensive areas of suitable breeding habitat, which are necessary to accommodate a sustainable population.

Montiaghs Moss was identified as being suitable for selection through a survey undertaken in 1999 which was commissioned by my Department. The area of breeding habitat and numbers of Marsh Fritillary together justified SAC designation.

Numbers were determined through larval web counts, rather than the less reliable method of counting flying adults. The survey revealed 48 larval webs at Aughnadarragh Lough, compared to 89 at Montaiags Moss. Aughnadarragh Lough also has a limited area of suitable habitat.

It was concluded that Aughadarragh Lough did not qualify as an SAC on the grounds of its Marsh Fritillary population.

Listed Buildings: Grant Aid

Mr Hay asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the steps he is taking to address grant funding for historic buildings in the current financial year.

(AQO 1228/00)

Mr Foster: My Department will continue to pay grant-aid to owners of listed buildings in the financial year just begun.

Some £2 million has been allocated for historic buildings grant-aid for 2001/2002.

This will be used to meet grant commitments on those eligible schemes for which applications were received prior to the introduction of the suspension on 29 October 1999.

New applications for grant-aid will be accepted from this month.

Any grant will be offered on the understanding that payment may not be made until the 2002/2003 financial year.

I was able to obtain a significant increase in resources in the financial year just ended which has eased the situation. I will continue to look for opportunities for additional resources to enable applications approved this year to be paid on completion of the work.

Water Quality

Mr M Murphy asked the Minister of the Environment to undertake to introduce legislative amendments on the impact of discharges on water quality. (AQO 1246/00)

Mr Foster: My Department published two Consultation Papers on 21 November 2000 proposing amendments to the system of consents for discharges to waterways.

One paper dealt with the Department's implementation of the pollution prevention powers in the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999. This included measures to update the consents system to take account of scientific advances and the requirements of various EC Directives, including the Water Framework Directive.

The second paper outlined the Department's proposals for the introduction of a fees and charges scheme to recover the costs it incurs in operating the discharge consents system.

The consultation period has ended and the responses received, including those of the Assembly Environment Committee, are being considered. I expect to be in a position to lay the necessary regulations shortly, with a view to an operational date of June this year. Any changes

to the original proposals will be notified to the Committee in advance of the draft regulations being laid.

School Transport: Hazard Warning Lights

Mr McHugh asked the Minister of the Environment if he will consider introducing legislation to make it compulsory for school transport to display flashing warning lights when children are alighting or boarding.

(AQO 1221/00)

Mr Foster: Dedicated school buses are required when carrying school children to and from school to display special signs front and rear indicating that school children are on board. However, Education and Library Board vehicles which have a distinctive yellow and white colour scheme are exempt from this provision.

Regulations currently permit drivers of dedicated school buses to use hazard warning lights when the bus is stopped and children are boarding or alighting. There are no current plans to make this provision compulsory.

It has been accepted in the past that, on balance, drivers are best placed to take account of relevant traffic conditions and to judge when the use of hazard lights is likely to be most effective in alerting other road users to the presence of children without causing confusion.

However, the Assembly Environment Committee is currently undertaking a public inquiry into school transport. The Committee may bring forward recommendations relevant to this issue. I will wish to give any recommendations by the Committee on this and other matters very careful consideration.

Road Safety Council

Mrs E Bell asked the Minister of the Environment to confirm that he has no plans to abolish the Road Safety Council. (AQO 1219/00)

Mr Foster: The Road Safety Council of Northern Ireland is a voluntary organisation which I have no powers to abolish.

However, the Council does receive the bulk of its funding each year from my Department. In 2000/01 this amounted to almost £150,000.

As with all government-funded programmes, the work of the Council is subject to regular review to ensure that its activities represent good value for money and that public resources are being used effectively and efficiently.

The work of the Road Safety Council will be reviewed during the course of this financial year. This will include an assessment of the appropriate level of funding for its work.

I believe it is important that Northern Ireland has an effective voluntary road safety movement. This provides

a vital link between the statutory agencies and local road safety interests. I should like to express my appreciation of the efforts of volunteers in the area of road safety and would encourage more to participate.

Sellafield Discharge Limit: Lough Foyle

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister of the Environment to confirm that the levels of nuclear residue found at the mouth of the River Foyle are due to the fact that British Nuclear Fuels at Sellafield has had its discharge limit increased from ten terabecquerels (TBq) per annum to two hundred TBqs in 1994 and to detail what representations he has made regarding this issue and to make a statement. (AQO 1245/00)

Mr Foster: A collaborative monitoring study was undertaken by my Department's Environment and Heritage Service, the Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland and University College, Dublin in 1992. This showed that the quantities of radioactivity detected in Lough Foyle could be attributed to past discharges from Sellafield but were of negligible radiological significance.

Following the authorised increase of the technetium 99 discharge limit from Sellafield in 1994, increased levels were found in fish, shellfish and seaweed throughout the Irish Sea.

The authorised limit was reduced to 90 terabecquerels in 1999 and a marked reduction in contamination levels followed. The dose implications to the Northern Ireland public as a result of increased technetium 99 discharges have been minimal.

The Environment Agency in Great Britain has just completed a consultation exercise on options for further reducing the limit.

Local Government (Payment to Councillors) Regulations (NI) 1999

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of the Environment pursuant to the "Local Government (Payments to Councillors) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999" to introduce a change that will allow payment of travel allowance in respect of site visits. /R/ (AQO 1213/00)

Mr Foster: The Local Government (Payments to Councillors) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999 introduced a new system for payment of allowances to councillors. Regulation 4 provides for a council to pay attendance allowance to councillors in respect of the performance of any approved duty. However, in the interpretation of approved duty, site visits are excluded.

Travel allowances recompense councillors for expenditure necessarily incurred when performing an approved duty.

The "basic allowance" paid to councillors is intended to cover costs such as travel expenses related to site visits.

A review of councillors' allowances is currently under way and, while I can not pre-empt the outcome of the review, I intend to examine this aspect of the present arrangement.

Brownfield Sites: Rural Areas

Mr Bradley asked the Minister of the Environment to outline his policy in relation to identifying brown field sites in rural areas. (AQO 1196/00)

Mr Foster: As regards rural towns, the Department for Regional Development is considering a target of 40% for accommodating new housing on brownfield sites. This target, if it remains in the final Regional Development Strategy will be reflected by my Department in the provision of future housing and development plans. At that time, sites will have to be identified in these Plans.

Brownfield development has little relevance outside these towns, but where they are identified in smaller rural settlements, this can also be provided for through the development plan process.

In the rural countryside, my Department will not normally identify brown field sites, but will instead consider each application for development on its own merits, and against prevailing plans and policies.

In order to facilitate the proper consideration of this in forthcoming Development Plans, the Planning Service is currently undertaking an urban capacity database compilation project. This, in effect, is an inventory of sites that might be considered as having potential for housing development in association with this strategic regional target.

Environmental Crime

Mr Carrick asked the Minister of the Environment to detail what new steps he proposes to take in the fight against environmental crime. (AQO 1205/00)

Mr Foster: Environmental law in Northern Ireland has created a number of criminal offences for actions that lead to pollution of the environment or damage to species and habitats. The penalties for these offences can range from various levels of fine to imprisonment for up to two years in the case of the most serious offences. My Department seeks to ensure that the Courts, in determining penalties, are aware of the seriousness of the offences.

I am also aware that the European Commission has recently published a proposal for a Directive relating to the protection of the environment through the criminal law. It is too early yet to assess the detail of the proposal

and the extent to which any Directive may involve matters within the competence of this Assembly.

Member States now have the opportunity to form a view on the Commission's proposal including the issue of any Community competence in the field of criminal law. I shall ensure that, as the UK response to the EC proposal is being developed and agreed, the implications for Northern Ireland are fully assessed and taken into account.

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Private Sector House Rents

Mr Fee asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the average private sector rents in each District Council Area for (a) a 3-bedroom house (b) a 2-bedroom house and (c) a 1-bedroom house in each of the last five years. (AQW 2395/00)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan): I regret that, given the limited number of private sector rental transactions that take place, the comprehensive information which you have requested for each of the last five years does not exist.

I am, therefore, unable to supply the information as requested, however, I can confirm that the Department of Finance and Personnel does hold comprehensive information on *estimates* of the rental values.

Private Sector Apartment Rents

Mr Fee asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the average private sector rents in each District Council area for (a) a 3-bedroom flat (b) a 2-bedroom flat and (c) a 1-bedroom flat in each of the last five years. (AQW 2396/00)

Mr Durkan: I regret that, given the limited number of private sector rental transactions that take place, the comprehensive information which you have requested for each of the last five years does not exist.

I am, therefore, unable to supply the information as requested, however, I can confirm that the Department of Finance and Personnel does hold comprehensive information on *estimates* of the rental values.

Peace II Funding

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to (a) confirm that Peace II funding has been finalised and (b) state what funds have been allocated to each of the eighteen constituencies in Northern Ireland. (AQW 2403/00)

Mr Durkan: The funding to be allocated under the Peace II Programme has been agreed by the Executive and the respective allocations for each Priority and Measure are contained in the Operational Programme which was formally agreed with by the European Commission on 22 March 2001. Details of the eligibility criteria for projects under each Priority and Measure will be contained in the Programme Complement which is currently being drawn up by the Special EU Programmes Body for agreement by the Programme Monitoring Committee. The distribution of funding under this Programme will, therefore, be determined by the extent to which project promoters are able to demonstrate how their projects contribute to the Programme's overall objectives as well as to the relevant Priority and Measure level objectives. Whilst it is anticipated that all parts of Northern Ireland will benefit from funding under Peace II no pre-determined allocations of funding have been made to any of the eighteen constituencies in Northern Ireland.

Rates Paid: H M Prisons/Thiepval Barracks

Mr Close asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the amount of revenue received in rates paid by HMP Maghaberry, HMP Maze and Thiepval Barracks in the last three financial years for which figures are available. (AQO 1217/00)

Mr Durkan: The amount of revenue received in rates paid in respect of HMP Maghaberry, HMP Maze and Thiepval Barracks in the last three financial years is as follows:-

	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01
HMP Maghaberry	£ 714,038.74	£ 690,485.40	£ 594,368.41
HMP Maze	£ 534,859.00	£ 511,691.40	£ 345,106.80
Thiepval Barracks	£ 541,155.79	£ 571,262.63	£ 739,279.32

Parental Reasonable Chastisement

Mr Attwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what action he intends to take in relation to the judgement of the European Court of Human rights in the case of *A v United Kingdom* (Human Rights: Punishment of Child) [1998] 2 FLR 959 and the necessity of the jurisdictions of the United Kingdom reviewing the law in relation to the defence of parental reasonable chastisement. (AQW 2586/00)

Mr Durkan: In the case of *A v United Kingdom* (Human Rights: Punishment of Child) [1998] 2 FLR 959, the European Court of Human Rights found the United Kingdom to be in breach of Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights, in that the defence of parental reasonable chastisement did not adequately protect children from punishment which

amounted to inhuman or degrading treatment. This judgement of the Court of Human Rights does not permit us to maintain the status quo, particularly now that the Human Rights Act 1998 has engrafted the European Convention into our domestic law. Reviews are therefore being carried out in England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to see how matters may be remedied. In Northern Ireland, the lead is being taken by the Office of Law Reform within my Department. Subject to the approval of colleagues on the Executive Committee, I intend to carry out a wide public consultation exercise later this year, and look forward to an informed and evidence-based public debate.

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Speech Therapy: Rosstulla Special School

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail her plans to recruit, as a matter of urgency, a new Speech and Language teacher at Rosstulla Special School, Jordanstown.

(AQW 2391/00)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms de Brún): I refer the Member to my answer to AQW 2055/00.

Luaim don Bhall an freagra a thug mé ar AQW 2055/00.

Speech Therapy: Rosstulla Special School

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail her plans to increase the number of Speech and Language teachers at Rosstulla Special School, Jordanstown.

(AQW 2392/00)

Ms de Brún: I refer the Member to my answer to AQW 2055/00.

Luaim don Bhall an freagra a thug mé ar AQW 2055/00.

Alzheimer's Disease: Free Care for Patients

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if she will make it her policy to provide all services and medications free of charge to those suffering from Alzheimer's Disease in line with that available in Scotland.

(AQW 2399/00)

Ms de Brún: I am aware that consideration is being given in Scotland to the possible extension of the provision of free care to many more older people, including those dementia sufferers with greatest need. However, no decisions have been taken on this yet. Similarly, the

question of free care for patients with Alzheimer's Disease here will be considered in the context of the Executive's deliberations on how personal care for older people should be handled in the future.

Tá a fhios agam go bhfuil machnamh á dhéanamh in Albain ar leathnú soláthar cúraim saor in aisce do níos mó seandaoine, iad siúd a bhfuil an riachtanas is mó de dhíth orthu agus a fhulaingíonn ó ghealtachas san áireamh. Ní dhearnadh cinneadh air seo go fóill áfach. Mar an gcéanna, déanfar machnamh ar cheist an chúraim saor in aisce anseo d'othair le Galar Alzheimer i gcómhthéacs machnamh an Fheidhmeannais ar an dóigh ar chóir cúram pearsanta do sheandaoine a láimhseáil sa todhchaí.

Morning After Pill

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of people who have obtained the "morning after pill" since 1 January 2001.

(AQW 2405/00)

Ms de Brún: The information requested is not available.

Níl an t-eolas a iarradh ar fáil.

Vacant Nursing Posts

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to give her assessment of the number of additional nurses required to meet the needs of the Health Service.

(AQW 2410/00)

Ms de Brún: At 20 March 2001 the number of vacancies in HSS trusts was reported as 477. This figure should reduce as a result of ongoing recruitment exercises, more qualified nursing staff returning to practice and around 400 newly qualified nurses available to enter the workforce in September.

I am aware that there are a number of nursing posts that remain unfilled for longer than 6 months and this situation is being dealt with by commissioning additional nurse training places and offering free training to those nurses who wish to return to practice. The number of nurse training places is currently being reviewed.

Ar 20 Márta 2001 tuairiscíodh go raibh 477 folúntas in iontaobhais SSS. Ba chóir go dtiocfadh laghdú ar an fhiigiúr de bharr cleachtaí leanúnacha earcaíochta, tuilleadh foirne cáilithe banaltrachta ag filleadh ar an chleachtas agus tuairim is ar 400 banaltra nuacháilithe ar fáil le dul sa líon saothair i mí Mheán an Fhómhair.

Tá a fhios agam go bhfuil go fóill líon mór post banaltrachta atá gan líonadh le breis agus 6 mhí, agus táthar ag freastal ar an chás trí choimisiúnú áiteanna oiliúna banaltra breise agus trí thairiscint saoroiúna do na banaltraí sin ar mhaith leo filleadh ar an chleachtas. Tá líon na n-áiteanna oiliúna banaltraí faoi athbhreithniú faoi láthair.

Health Care Strategy for the Elderly

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the steps she has taken to promote a strategy of health care for the elderly based on care within the community. (AQW 2411/00)

Ms de Brún: The community care programme operated by the HSS Boards and Trusts provides a range of care managed packages in the home and in other community settings designed to maintain the health and well-being of the elderly within their own community.

My Department is also involved in a range of initiatives aimed at improving the health and well-being of older people. This includes support for over 50 voluntary community and statutory organisations in the Ageing Well Network. The network has initiated projects such as the cross-community project in Kilrea, which delivers weekly health information and health promotion activities to older people, and the recruitment of senior health volunteers in the Shankill area to bring health information to older people.

My Department, in association with the voluntary sector, provides support and grant aid to the Keep Warm Keep Well campaign, aimed at providing advice on health issues during the colder weather of winter. The Influenza and Pneumococcal Immunisation Programme was extended to include the 65 to 74 age group in its target population for immunisation. Moreover, each GP is required on a yearly basis to invite each person on his/her list of patients who is 75 or over to participate in a consultation either at the surgery or the service user's own home to check on the state of their health.

Soláthraíonn an clár cúraim phobail a fheidhmíonn Boird agus Iontaobhais SSS réimse beart cúraim sa teach agus i suímh phobail eile a bhfuil cuspóir aige sláinte agus leas seandaoine istigh ina bpobal féin a chothú.

Tá an Roinn s'agamsa rannpháirteach i réimse tionscnamh fosta a bhfuil cuspóir acu sláinte agus leas seandaoine a fheabhsú. Ina measc tá tacaíocht ó níos mó ná caoga eagraíocht deonacha, pobail agus reachtúla san Ageing Well Network. Chuir an gréasán tús le scéimeanna amhail an scéim thrasphobail i gCill Ria, a thugann eolas agus gníomhaíochtaí tionscanta sláinte do sheandaoine agus a earcaíonn saorálaithe sinsearach sláinte i gceantar na Seanchille le heolas sláinte a chur ar sheandaoine.

Tugann an Roinn s'agamsa, i gcomhar leis an earnáil dheonach tacaíocht agus deontas-i-gcabhair don fheachtas Keep Warm Keep Well, a bhfuil cuspóir aige comhairle a thabhairt ar cheisteanna sláinte le linn aimsir fhuar an gheimhridh. Leathnaíodh an Clár Imdhíonta Fliú agus Niúmacócaigh leis an aoisghrúpa 65 go 75 a chur san áireamh ina spriocdhaonra d'imdhíonadh. Ina theannta sin, éilítear ar gach gnáthdhochtúir cuireadh a thabhairt ar bhonn bliantúil do gach duine ar a liosta othar atá 75 bliain d'aois nó níos mó páirt a ghlacadh i gcomhairliú

ag an lialann nó ag teach an úsáideora sheirbhíse é/í féin le seiceáil ar riocht a sláinte.

Acute Hospital Provision: South West

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline her proposed timetable for establishing a new hospital in the South West. (AQW 2412/00)

Ms de Brún: The Acute Hospitals Review Group will report on the future development of hospital services. In advance of that report, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the future provision of acute hospital services in any area.

Tabharfaidh Grúpa Athbhreithnithe na nOspidéal Géarmhíochaine tuairisc ar fhorbairt sheirbhísí ospidéil amach anseo. Sula dtiocfaidh an tuairisc sin, níor chuí tagairt do sholáthar seirbhísí géarmhíochaine ospidéil i gceantar ar bith.

Hospital Waiting Times

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to give her assessment of hospital waiting times. (AQW 2413/00)

Ms de Brún: I refer the Member to my response to AQW 2456/00.

Luaim don Bhall an freagra a thug mé ar AQW 2456/00.

Reducing the Incidence of Cancer

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline what progress is being made in improving services to reduce the incidence of cancer and improve cancer survival rates. (AQW 2414/00)

Ms de Brún: We are tackling cancer on three fronts, prevention, screening and improving treatment services. We have in place a melanoma strategy, a smoking strategy and an alcohol strategy to advise people of the dangers of overexposure to the sun, smoking, and excessive alcohol consumption respectively and a food and nutrition strategy advising on the importance of a healthy diet. We have excellent screening programmes in place to reduce the risk of cervical cancer and to detect breast cancer. In addition cancer services are being improved in line with the Report "Cancer Services – Investing for the Future" and additional resources are being provided to support this. Full implementation of the Report is expected to increase the survival rates for people with cancer by around 10%.

Táimid ag dul i ngleic le hailse ar thrí dhóigh, ag cosc, ag scagadh agus ag feabhsú seirbhísí cóireála. Tá

straitéis mheileanóma, chaitheamh tobac agus straitéis alcóil i bhfeidhm againn le comhairle a thabhairt do dhaoine ar na baoil ó ag róchur leis an ghrian, ag caitheamh tobac, agus ó ag ól barraíocht alcóil faoi seach chomh maith le straitéis bhia agus chothaithe ag tabhairt comhairle ar thábhacht aiste bia fholláin. Tá cláir scagtha ar fheabhas i bhfeidhm againn leis an bhaol ó ailse cheirbheacsach a laghdú agus le hailse chiche a fháil amach. Ina theannta sin, tá seirbhísí ailse á bhfeabhsú de réir na Tuairisce “Seirbhísí Ailse – Ag Infheistiú don Todhchaí” agus tá acmhainní breise á soláthar le tacú léi seo. Táthar ag súil go méadóidh cur i bhfeidhm iomlán na Tuairisce na rátaí marthanais do dhaoine le hailse thart faoi 10%.

Recruitment and Retention of Consultants

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to give her assessment of the recruitment and retention of consultants.

(AQW 2422/00)

Ms de Brún: In general, there are no major problems over the recruitment and retention of consultants here. I am aware of difficulties in recruitment of consultants in some specialties and at some sites locally. I am also aware that there are some difficulties in retaining consultants at specific sites. My Department regularly reassesses medical manpower requirements to address these and other problems.

Níl fadhbanna móra ar bith ann maidir le hearcú agus coinneáil lianna comhairleacha anseo i gcoitinne. Tá na deacrachtaí in earcaíocht lianna comhairleacha i roinnt speisialtachtaí agus ag roinnt láithreán áitiúil ar eolas agam. Tá a fhios agam fosta go bhfuil roinnt deacrachtaí ann ag coinneáil lianna comhairleacha ag láithreáin ar leith. Athmheasann an Roinn s’agamsa líon na n-oibrithe míochaine atá de dhíth go rialta le dul i gceann na bhfadhbanna seo agus fadhbanna eile.

Hospital Beds: South West Region

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline her plans for increasing the number of hospital beds in the South West region.

(AQW 2423/00)

Ms de Brún: I refer the Member to the answer I gave on 4 April to Question Number AQW 2412/00.

Luaim don Bhall an freagra a thug mé ar Cheist AQW 2412/00 ar an 4 Aibreán.

Coronary Heart Disease

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what progress is

being made in improving services to reduce the incidence of coronary heart disease.

(AQW 2424/00)

Ms de Brún: The major risk factors for coronary heart disease include smoking, raised blood pressure, high serum cholesterol levels caused by too much saturated fat in the diet and physical inactivity. Strategies on food and nutrition, physical activity, smoking and alcohol have been developed and are being implemented.

I measc na bpríomhfachtóirí baoil do ghalar croí corónach tá ag caitheamh tobac, brú fola ard, leibhéil cholaistéaróil shéirim airde ar iad saill sháithithe ró-ard san aiste bia, agus neamhghníomhaíocht fhisiciúil is cúis leo. Forbraíodh straitéisí ar bhia, chothú, ghníomhaíocht fhisiciúil, chaitheamh tobac agus ar alcól agus táthar á gcur i bhfeidhm.

Mental Illness

Ms Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of people, by Trust Board area, who have suffered mental breakdowns in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

(AQW 2427/00)

Ms de Brún: The information requested is not available.

Níl an t-eolas a iarradh ar fáil.

Cardiac Angiogram Service: Altnagelvin Hospital

Mr Douglas asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to give her assessment of the progress in establishing the new cardiac angiography service at Altnagelvin Hospital and when she expects this service to be operational.

(AQW 2428/00)

Ms de Brún: The cardiac angiogram service planned for Altnagelvin Area Hospital should become operational by Autumn this year. Although there was a slight delay in commissioning the necessary equipment, significant progress has now been made in establishing this new service; the equipment has been selected, staff training arrangements are currently under way and suitable accommodation has been identified within the hospital. This development will provide a combined facility, offering both coronary angiography investigations undertaken by Consultant Cardiologists and peripheral angiography services undertaken by Consultant Radiologists. This will improve the angiography services for people in the Western Board area and have a positive effect on waiting times at the Royal Group of Hospitals, where service users from the North-West are currently seen.

Ba chóir don tseirbhís chairdiach angagraim pleanáilte d’Otharlann Ceantair Alt na nGealbhan bheith i bhfeidhm faoin Fhómhar seo. Cé go raibh moill bheag i gcoimisiúnú an trealaimh riachtanaigh, tá dul chun cinn tábhachtach

déanta anois i mbunú na seirbhíse nua seo; roghnaíodh an trealamh, tá socruithe oiliúna don fhoireann ag dul ar aghaidh faoi láthair agus aithníodh cóiríocht fhóirsteanach istigh san otharlann. Soláthróidh an fhorbairt seo comháis a chuirfidh idir fhiosruithe corónacha angai-eolaíochta déanta ag cairdeolaithe comhairleacha agus sheirbhísí forimeallacha angai-eolaíochta déanta ag Raideolaithe Comhairleacha ar fáil. Feabhseoidh sí seo na seirbhísí angai-eolaíochta do dhaoine i limistéar Bhord an Iarthair agus beidh éifeacht dhearfach aici ar amanna feithimh ag Otharlanna an Ghrúpa Ríoga, áit a dtéann úsáideoirí seirbhísí ón Iarthuaisceart faoi láthair.

Children's Fund

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail her bids to the Children's Fund in the current financial year. (AQW 2434/00)

Ms de Brún: My Department has lodged seven bids, amounting to £14.6 million, for allocations from the first tranche of the Children's Fund money. The bids are as follows:

	£000		
	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04
Disabled Children (Wraparound Support Schemes) Two innovative pilot residential family support schemes with multi-disciplinary support teams to relieve families and provide disabled children with short-term breaks.	1,000	1,500	1,500
Promoting Adoption Range of initiatives, including children's 'champion' posts, to enhance adoption services and increase the number of adoptions.	500	600	600
Educational Facilities for Children's Residential Units To provide IT facilities in residential homes as educational tools (joint project with DE).	100	100	100
Parenting Support Services Two pilot schemes to improve children's social, emotional, physical and intellectual development by providing skills, training and support to parents, targeting children and families who are most marginalized and disadvantaged.	500	500	500
Specialist Residential Units Two innovative specialist residential units to provide regional services to children with a profound disability and children with serious physiological difficulties. This will reduce the need for inpatient hospital treatment for young people with eating disorders and self-harming behaviour.	800	1,300	1,000

	£000		
	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04
Residential Family Assessment Centre Two Residential Family Assessment Centres to enhance the range of assessment facilities, enabling early targeted intervention to meet the assessed needs of children admitted to care.	400	1,000	800
Investing for Healthier Children Variety of pilots aimed at improving the health of children and teenagers at risk, including Health Advice for Parents, Free Fruit for Young Children, Personal Development for Teenagers and the provision of play safe areas.	300	600	900
Total	3,600	5,600	5,400

Rinne an Roinn s'agamsa seacht dtairiscintí a chosnaigh £14.6 milliún san iomlán ar dháiltí ón chéad chuid d'airgead an Chiste Pháistí. Seo a leanas na tairiscintí:

	£000		
	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04
Páistí Míchumasacha (Scéim Tacaíochta Wraparound) Dhá scéim píolóta tacaíochta teaghlaigh le foirne tacaíochta ilhdisciplíneacha chun faoiseamh a thabhairt do theaghlaigh agus chun sosanna gairide a sholáthar do pháistí míchumasacha.	1,000	1,500	1,500
Ag Cur Uchtaithe Chun Cinn Réimse tionscnamh, ina measc, poist páistí 'seaimpín' chun cur le seirbhísí uchtaithe chomh maith le líon na n-uchtuithe a mhéadú.	500	600	600
Áiseanna Oideachasúla d'Ionaid Chónaithe Pháistí Le háiseanna TE a sholáthar i dtithe cónaithe mar ghléasanna oideachasúla (comhscéim le RO).	100	100	100
Seirbhís Tacaíochta do Thuismitheoirí Dhá scéim píolóta chun forbairt shóisialta, mhothúchán, fhisiciúil agus éirimíúil pháistí a fheabhsú tríd ag tabhairt scileanna, oiliúint agus tacaíocht do thuismitheoirí, ag díriú ar na páistí agus ar na teaghlaigh sin atá níos imeallaí agus níos míbhuntáistí.	500	500	500
Sainionaid Chónaithe Dhá sainionad cónaithe nua le seirbhísí réigiúnacha a sholáthar do pháistí le míchumas domhain agus do pháistí le deacrachtaí siceolaíocha tromchúiseacha. Laghdóidh sé seo an gá le cóireáil othair chónaitheigh otharlainne do dhaoine óga le heasláintí ite agus le hiompar féindochrach.	800	1,300	1,000

	£000		
	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04
Ionad Measúnú Teaghlaigh Cónaithe Dhá Ionad Measúnú Teaghlaigh Cónaithe le cur leis an réimse áiseanna measúnaithe ag ligean d'eadráin luath dírithe riachtanais mheasúnaithe pháistí ligthe isteach chuig cúram a chomhlíonadh.	400	1,000	800
Ag Infheistiú do Pháistí Níos Sláintiúla Scéimeanna píolóta éagsúla a bhfuil cuspóir acu sláinte pháistí agus dhéagóirí atá i mbaol a fheabhsú, ina measc tá Comhairle Shláinte do Thuismitheoirí, Torthaí Saor In Aisce do Pháistí Óga, Forbairt Phearsanta do Dhéagóirí agus soláthar áiteanna slána súgartha.	300	600	900
Iomlán	3,600	5,600	5,400

attended an A&E Department, but were asked to return at a later date to undergo a minor procedure. The waiting time for such patients is very short, with most being seen within two weeks. The September 2000 figures represented a short-term increase and the numbers waiting quickly fell back to previous levels. As at the end of February 2001 there were less than ten people on this list. I do not consider that any specific action is required.

Ba iad na 24 duine a bhí ag fanacht ar chóireáil i dT&É i mBord an Deiscirt ag deireadh Mhí Mheán Fómhair 2000 an líon othar a d'fhreastail ar Roinn T&É roimhe sin, ach iarradh orthu le teacht ar ais ar dháta níos moille le mionchóireáil a bheith acu. Bíonn an t-am feithimh do a leithéid d'othair seo iontach gairid, agus téann formhór díobh chuig an dochtúir taobh istigh de choicís. Léirigh figiúirí Mhí Mheán Fómhair 2000 méadú gearrthéarmach ach thit na líonta go gasta ar ais go dtí na leibhéil a bhí ann roimh ré. Ag deireadh Mhí Feabhra 2001 bhí níos lú ná deichniúr daoine ar an liosta seo. Ní shílím go bhfuil gníomh ar leith de dhíth.

Nicotine Replacement Therapy

Mrs Courtney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to make Nicotine Replacement Therapy available on prescription. (AQW 2441/00)

Ms de Brún: Following consultation carried out by my Department in December 2000 and January 2001, I propose to make all nicotine replacement therapies available on health service prescription from GPs. Subject to the legislative will of the Assembly, Regulations to allow this change should come into effect in April 2001.

I enclose, for the Member's attention, a copy of a press release I issued announcing this initiative on 27 March 2001.

I ndiaidh an chomhairlithe déanta ag an Roinn s'agamsa i Mí na Nollag 2000 agus i Mí Eanáir 2001, tá sé ar intinn agam teiripí malartú nicitín a chur ar fáil ar ordú seirbhíse sláinte ó ghnáthdhochtúirí. Faoi réir toil reachtúil an Tionóil, cuirfidh na rialacha an t-athrú seo i bhfeidhm in Aibreán 2001.

Cuirim isteach cóip den phreasráiteas a d'eisigh mé ag fógairt an tionscnaimh ar an 27 Márta, le haghaidh an Bhaill.

Accident and Emergency Waiting Lists

Mrs Carson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the steps she is taking to tackle the doubling of the Accident and Emergency waiting list since 1999 in the Southern Health and Social Services Board and to make a statement. (AQW 2443/00)

Ms de Brún: The 24 people waiting for treatment in A&E in the Southern Board at the end of September 2000 represented the number of patients who previously

Retaining Qualified Staff at the Erne Hospital

Mrs Carson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether there are difficulties retaining qualified staff at the Erne Hospital and to make a statement. (AQW 2444/00)

Ms de Brún: I understand that Sperrin Lakeland HSS Trust and the Erne Hospital have experienced no difficulties to date in retaining nurses or doctors. There have, however, been some difficulties in attracting medical staff in particular specialties and these difficulties have been compounded in some cases by the lack of availability of suitable personnel in these specialties here.

Tuigim nach raibh deacrachtaí ar bith ag Iontaobhas SSS Shliabh Speirín go dtí seo ag coinneáil banaltraí nó dochtúirí. Bhí roinnt deacrachtaí aige áfach foireann mhíochaine a earcú i roinnt speisialtachtaí ar leith agus cuireadh leis na deacrachtaí seo i roinnt cásanna mar gheall ar an easpa foirne fóirsteanáí ar fáil sna speisialtachtaí seo anseo.

Scanning Services: Erne Hospital

Mrs Carson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what scanning services are available for haemorrhage patients in the Gynaecology Department at the Erne Hospital and to make a statement. (AQW 2445/00)

Ms de Brún: Scanning services for haemorrhaging patients in the Gynaecological Department at the Erne hospital are currently available Monday – Friday and are provided by the Radiology Service, at the Erne hospital.

I am informed that the Trust is currently exploring the opportunity to increase the availability of the Service by purchasing a small scanner and arranging appropriate training for medical staff.

Tá seirbhísí scanta d'othair ag rith fola ar fáil faoi láthair Dé Luain- Dé hAoine sa Roinn Liachta Ban ag Otharlann na hÉirne agus soláthraítear ag an tSeirbhís Raideolaíochta ag Otharlann na hÉirne iad.

Cuireadh in iúl dom go bhfuil an tIontaobhas ag scrúdú na deise faoi láthair chun infhaighteacht na Seirbhíse a mhéadú tríd ag ceannach scanóra bhig agus ag socrú oiliúna fóirsteanaí don fhoireann leighis.

Microbiology Services: Erne Hospital

Mrs Carson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the current status of microbiology services in the Erne Hospital.

(AQW 2446/00)

Ms de Brún: I am informed that the Sperrin Lakeland Trust, in conjunction with Altnagelvin Trust, commissioned a review of all Laboratory Services and a number of recommendations were made regarding Microbiology Services. The recommendations included; the appointment of an additional consultant Microbiologist, computerisation of the Microbiology Service and that the Service should be delivered from the new Laboratory at Tyrone County Hospital so that accreditation of the Service could be obtained.

In conjunction with Altnagelvin Hospital, a second consultant Microbiologist is currently being recruited. An enhanced Microbiology Service including increased Consultant input will be available at the Erne Hospital but the tests will be conducted at Tyrone County Hospital.

Cuireadh in iúl dom gur choimisiúnaigh Iontaobhas Shliabh Speirín, i gcomhar le hIontaobhas Alt na nGealbhan, athbhreithniú na Seirbhísí Saotharlainne uile agus moladh roinnt moltaí maidir le Seirbhísí Micribhitheolaíochta. I measc na moltaí bhí ceapadh lia chomhairligh Mhicri-bhitheolaíochta bhreise, ríomhairiú na Seirbhíse Micri-bhitheolaíochta agus moladh gur chóir an tSeirbhís a chur ar fáil ón tSaotharlann nua ag Otharlann Chontae Thír Eoghain sa dóigh gurbh fhéidir creidiúnú a fháil don tSeirbhís.

I gcomhar le hOtharlann Alt na nGealbhan, tá an dara lia comhairleach Micri-bhitheolaíochta á (h)earcú faoi láthair. Beidh Seirbhís Mhicri-bhitheolaíocht méadaithe agus ionchur Lia Chomhairligh méadaithe ar fáil ag Otharlann na hÉirne ach déanfar na scrúduithe ag Otharlann Chontae Thír Eoghain.

Services Available: Erne Hospital

Mrs Carson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to list all services available to the public at the Erne Hospital in (a) 1995 (b) 1997 (c) 1999 and (d) 2001 to date. (AQW 2447/00)

Ms de Brún: Details of all services available to the public at the Erne Hospital in 1995, 1997, 1999 and 2001 to date are set out in the table below.

Specialty	Inpatient	Day Case	Outpatient
ENT			Yes
General Surgery	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fracture Services			Yes
Pain Relief Services	Yes		Yes
General Medicine	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cardiology			Yes
Geriatric Medicine	Yes	Yes	Yes
Obstetrics	Yes		Yes
Paediatrics	Yes	Yes	Yes
Neonatal Services	Yes		
Gynaecology Services	Yes	Yes	Yes
Colposcopy Services			Yes
Visiting Specialties			
Dermatology			Yes
Haematology			Yes
Neurology			Yes
Ophthalmology			Yes
Oral Surgery		Yes	Yes
Orthodontics			Yes
Rheumatology			Yes
Orthopaedics			Yes

The following modifications should be noted:

- From 1998 Inpatient Urology services have been provided at the Tyrone County Hospital.
- From October 1998 CT Scanning Services were introduced at the Erne Hospital.
- From May 1999 all Paediatric Inpatient services have been delivered at the Erne Hospital.
- From May 2000 there has been a dedicated Endoscopy Suite and service development provided at the Erne Hospital.
- From October 2000 Trauma or Fracture services are supervised and managed by visiting Consultants from Altnagelvin Area Hospital.

Leagtar sonraí na seirbhísí uile ar fáil don phobal ag Otharlann na hÉirne i 1995, 1997, 1999 agus i 2001 go dtí seo amach sa tábla thíos.

Speisialtacht	OtharCónaitheach	Cás Lae	OtharSeachtrach
ENT			Tá
Máinliacht Ghinearálta	Tá	Tá	Tá
Seirbhísí Briste			Tá
Seirbhísí Faoisimh Phéine	Tá		Tá

Speisialtacht	Othar Cónaitheach	Cás Lae	Othar Seachtrach
Leigheas Ginearálta	Tá	Tá	Tá
Cairdeolaíocht			Tá
Leigheas Seanliachta	Tá	Tá	Tá
Cnáimhseachas	Tá		Tá
Péidiatraic	Tá	Tá	Tá
Seirbhísí Nua-Naíocha	Tá		
Seirbhísí Liachta Ban	Tá	Tá	Tá
Seirbhísí Calpascóipe			Tá
Speisialtachtaí Cuartaíochta			
Deirmeolaíocht			Tá
Haemaiteolaíocht			Tá
Néareolaíocht			Tá
Oftailmeolaíocht			Tá
Máinliacht Bhéil		Tá	Tá
Ortadóntaic			Tá
Réamaiteolaíocht			Tá
Ortaipéide			Tá

Ba chóir na hathruithe seo a leanas a thabhairt faoi deara:

- Ó 1998 tá Seirbhísí Úreolaíochta Othair Chónaithe á soláthar ag Otharlann Chontae Thír Eoghain.
- Ó Mhí Dheireadh Fómhair 1998 tugadh isteach Seirbhísí Scanta CT ag Otharlann na hÉirne.
- Ó Mhí na Bealtaine 1999, soláthraíodh Seirbhísí Péidiatraice Othair Chónaithe uile ag Otharlann na hÉirne.
- Ó Mhí na Bealtaine 2000, soláthraíodh Seomra agus Seirbhís Ionscúipe ar leith ag Otharlann na hÉirne.
- Ó Mhí Dheireadh Fómhair 2000, is iad Lianna Comhairleacha ar cuartaíocht ó Otharlann Alt na nGealbhan a dhéanann maoirseacht ar agus a stiúirann Seirbhísí Sceimhle agus Briste.

Care for the Elderly

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail measures she has taken to promote improved health care for the elderly consistent with her “care in the community” policy.

(AQW 2448/00)

Ms de Brún: I refer the Member to my response to AQW 2411/00.

Luaím don Bhall an freagra a thug mé ar AQW 2411/00.

Medical Needs of Constituent from West Tyrone

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to examine the handling, by the Health Service, of the medical needs of Mrs Lorraine Irwin, a constituent of the member for West Tyrone.

(AQW 2451/00)

Ms de Brún: If the Member will write to me with full details about the person concerned, I shall ensure that the case is fully examined.

Má scríobhann an Teachta chugam le sonraí iomlána an té lena mbaineann, déanfaidh mé deimhin go ndéanfar mioniniúchadh ar an chás.

Hospital Waiting Times

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline her plans for reducing maximum waiting times between (a) a General Practitioners referral and hospital consultant appointment and (b) a hospital consultant appointment and operation or treatment.

(AQW 2456/00)

Ms de Brún: In *Priorities For Action 2000/2001*, which I issued on 8 March, I set a target of reducing by 50% during the next year the number of those waiting more than 18 months, and the complete elimination of such long waits by March 2003. I also set a target for overall waiting lists to be reduced to 48,000 by March 2002, as a first step towards bringing the numbers down to 39,000 by March 2004. This reduction will have a direct impact on the length of time that people wait for treatment.

In *Tosaíochtaí Chun Gnímh 2000/2001*, a d’eisigh mé ar an 8 Márta, leag mé sprioc síos le líon na ndaoine siúd ag fanacht níos mó ná 18 mí a laghdú faoi 50% le linn na bliana seo chugainn agus le deireadh iomlán a chur lena leithéid d’fheithreamh fada seo faoi Mhárta 2003. Leag mé sprioc eile síos fosta le liostaí feithimh san iomlán a laghdú go 48,000 faoi Mhárta 2002, mar an chéad chéim chuig laghdú na líonta go 39,000 faoi Mhárta 2004. Beidh éifeacht dhíreach aige seo ar an mhéid ama a fhanfaidh daoine ar chóireáil.

HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

Funding Methodology for Courses

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment, pursuant to AQW 1468/00, to (a) confirm that an identical course offered by Further Education Colleges and Universities can attract different funding levels and (b) explain the reason for this inconsistency.

(AQW 2380/00)

The Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Dr Farren): As indicated in my response to AQW/1468/00, students attending similar courses offered by Further Education Colleges

and Universities can attract different funding levels due to the operation of different funding methodologies.

In further education, the funding methodology takes into account various factors including the mode of delivery; the course duration; whether the course is vocational or non-vocational; the subject area; and includes various weighting factors dependent on the category of student. In universities, the methodology is based on costs which have been determined for each full-time equivalent student within four broad groups of subjects.

Omagh College: New Build

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to give his assessment of the business case presented by the governing body of Omagh College for a new build college and to make a statement. (AQW 2466/00)

Dr Farren: The Outline Business Case for the Tyrone Colleges Project, which encompasses new colleges for Omagh and East Tyrone, was presented to my Department on 7 March 2001. Departmental officials are currently assessing the Business Case. Departmental approval to proceed to procurement will be given if the assessment is positive.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Omagh Throughpass

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail a starting date and timescale for the public inquiry into the final stage of the Omagh Through-Pass. (AQW 2417/00)

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Campbell): My Department's Roads Service has made arrangements for the public inquiry for the Environmental Statement for the proposed Omagh Throughpass Stage 3 scheme to commence on Monday 21 May 2001.

This will be followed by the public inquiry in relation to the scheme's Direction Order and subsequently the public inquiry in relation to the Vesting Order, if required. I would expect the Direction Order Inquiry to take place in the Autumn of this year.

Income From Parking Tickets in Mid Ulster

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (a) the income from parking tickets for the constituency of Mid Ulster for each of the past three years and (b) the related administration and operational costs to recover this income. (AQW 2425/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service has no charged car parks in the parliamentary constituency of Mid Ulster. It does not therefore derive any income (nor incur any costs in collecting income) from its car parks in the constituency.

Crown Immunity: Water Service

Dr Birnie asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his assessment of the desirability and feasibility of removing Crown Immunity from the Water Service. (AQW 2452/00)

Mr Campbell: The Public Accounts Committee, in its hearing on the Northern Ireland Audit Office report on River Pollution, raised the matter of the Crown Immunity of the Water Service. The environmental regulation of the Water Service is the responsibility of the Department of the Environment and I will be liaising with the Minister of the Environment on how this issue is to be progressed.

Road Infrastructure Investment

Mr Byrne asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline what steps he is taking to obtain the necessary finances for the immediate capital investment in roads infrastructure. (AQO 1253/00)

Mr Campbell: As I indicated in my reply to a recent similar Assembly Question on this subject, I am very conscious that existing levels of funding to maintain and improve the road network fall short of what is required.

In this context I entered substantial bids for both roads capital and roads structural maintenance in the 2000 Spending Review. While some additional funds were confirmed as a result of that review, the indicative baselines for 2002-03 and 2003-04 continue to be significantly underprovided.

I therefore entered bids for additional funding, in excess of £48m over the next five years, from the newly created Infrastructure Fund.

I will continue to bid for the very necessary additional resources in subsequent Spending Reviews and at every other opportunity.

In the meantime, I can assure the member that my Department will continue to seek to make the best use of the resources currently available to develop and maintain the roads infrastructure.

Asbestos Cement Watermains

Mr Carrick asked the Minister for Regional Development to specify the location and length of any public watermains containing asbestos cement. (AQO 1204/00)

Mr Campbell: There are approximately 1,250 miles of asbestos cement watermains which are located in many parts of Northern Ireland. This represents less than 10% of the total length of watermains.

Laying asbestos cement watermains was common practice throughout the UK water industry until the early 1970s. Most of the asbestos cement watermains in Northern Ireland were laid by the former local water authorities prior to 1973.

Compensation Payments for Sheep Farmers: Silent Valley

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the progress made in discussions between officials from his department and those from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development on compensation payments for sheep farmers in the inner Mourne.

(AQO 1241/00)

Mr Campbell: Two recent meetings have been held between my officials and officials from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. During these meetings officials explored the steps that might be taken to assist the farmers affected by the ban on sheep grazing in the Silent Valley catchment.

I am proposing to have a meeting with the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to discuss these matters. However the focus within DARD at the moment has had to be on the immediate consequences of the foot and mouth outbreak.

Translink: New Trains

Mr Neeson asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline what progress has been made in acquiring new rolling stock for Northern Ireland Railways.

(AQO 1215/00)

Mr Campbell: Translink has advised that Technical Procurement Consultants have now been engaged in order to provide the technical input and support for the procurement of 23 new trains. With input from these consultants, Translink is currently in the process of carrying out a pre-procurement review which will consider the range of rolling stock options available. Following completion of this review, Translink will be in a position to prepare technical performance specifications and invitations to tender.

The Economic Appraisal for the procurement has been approved by the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company Board and is now being considered by my Department and the Department of Finance and Personnel. Indications are that outright purchase is the preferred option over leasing. However, this option would

necessitate major capital expenditure over the next two to three financial years.

Lease options, while not necessitating such initial outlay, represent a greater longer term call on public expenditure.

Unadopted Roads: Londonderry Area

Mr Hay asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of unadopted roads in the Londonderry area.

(AQO 1227/00)

Mr Campbell: Within the Derry City Council area, there are currently 85 roads associated with new housing developments. These are at various stages of construction by the relevant developer and so have not yet been adopted by my Department's Roads Service.

These roads comprise some 19km of roadway, 38km of footway and 6km of shared surface and have a bonded value of approximately £4M.

Road Safety Improvements: A26

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline what progress is being made on road safety improvements to the A26 between Ballymoney and Ballymena.

(AQO 1194/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service has made good progress in implementing road safety improvements on the A26 between Ballymoney and Ballymena. A package of measures costing some £400,000 is to be implemented over 2 years and will be completed by March 2002. Around 50% of the package has already been undertaken **including:**

- the introduction of two stretches of 50 mph speed limit;
- extensive street lighting improvements;
- the provision of pedestrian facilities;
- improvements at a number of key junctions; and
- the introduction of double white lining systems, special cats eyes and central islands.

In addition to the above safety works:

- resurfacing work costing some £100K has been completed at the Dunloy, Seacon Park and Burnquarter junctions; and
- schemes to construct a climbing/overtaking lane from New Buildings to Glenlough and differential acceleration lanes at either side of the Portrush Roundabout (total cost approximately £600K) are underway.

Wastewater Treatment Works: North Down

Mrs E Bell asked the Minister for Regional Development to give an update on the provision of water sewage treatment works in North Down. (AQO 1214/00)

Mr Campbell: A substantial programme of work is under way or is planned to improve wastewater treatment facilities in the North Down area to ensure compliance with regulatory standards including The Urban Wastewater Treatment Regulations (NI) 1995.

The Wastewater Treatment Works at Kinnegar is currently being upgraded under a Private Finance Initiative Scheme. It is due for completion in early summer of 2001 at a capital cost of some £10 million.

A new Wastewater Treatment Works, estimated to cost £35 million, is planned to serve the Bangor, Donaghadee and Millisle areas. Two sites have been shortlisted. I have invited the North Down and Ards Borough Councils to participate in a Working Party to review the suitability of the criteria and processes used in the site selection. I would hope that this review can be completed by the end of June 2001 and will enable a decision to be made on the site for the proposed new Works.

The existing Wastewater Treatment Works at Seahill is to be upgraded at an estimated cost of over £3 million. It is planned to commence work in late 2002. The upgraded Works will also treat the wastewater from the Crawfordsburn and Helen's Bay areas.

Comber Bypass

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail when work will commence on the Comber bypass. (AQO 1235/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service intends to publish the Notice of Intention to Make a Vesting Order (NIMVO) for this scheme in the Spring 2001. The time required to complete the vesting process will depend on whether objections are received to the Notice of Intention to Make a Vesting Order (NIMVO) and, in particular, whether a public inquiry is necessary.

In view of this uncertainty and the continued uncertainty over funding in future years, it is not yet possible to provide a firm date for the commencement of the scheme.

Road Improvements

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the total cost of road improvements in the constituency of Mid-Ulster and Northern Ireland as a whole in each of the last three years. (AQO 1201/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service does not maintain details of expenditure on road improvements on a parliamentary constituency basis. However, I am able to provide statistics for the district council areas of Cookstown and Magherafelt, which form the bulk of the Mid-Ulster constituency.

The table below shows Roads Service expenditure on capital improvements such as minor works, accident remedial schemes, new car parking facilities and new street lighting. It does not include major works expenditure since the benefits of such schemes are not confined to the district council areas or constituencies in which they are located. For example, the Toome Bypass will be of great benefit to the Mid-Ulster constituency.

The figures are given for the three years up to 1998-99. Regrettably, because of changes to internal financial systems arising from the reorganisation of Roads Service in 1999-2000, details of capital works expenditure for that year are not yet available on a district council basis.

CAPITAL WORKS EXPENDITURE ON ROADS (CASH PRICES)

	Capital Spend* (excluding Major Works)		
	1996/7 £k	1997/8 £k	1998/9 £k
Cookstown	233	268	165
Magherafelt	272	486	225
Northern Ireland	12,308	13,878	11,829

* Includes expenditure on minor works, car parks and street lighting.

Upgrade A5 Road: Ballygawley to Omagh

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his plans to upgrade the A5 road from Ballygawley to Omagh. (AQO 1212/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service proposes to carry out the following schemes to upgrade the A5 road between Ballygawley and Omagh:

- construction of the Omagh Throughpass Stage 3. This scheme will complete the Throughpass of the town and will link Great Northern Road to Dublin Road at Doogary. The scheme is included in the Roads Service Major Works Preparation Pool and is subject to satisfactory completion of statutory procedures and the availability of funding;
- an accident remedial scheme at the junction of the A5 Garvaghy Road and Radergan Road. This scheme is programmed to commence in May 2001; and
- improved overtaking opportunities at Tattykeel. This scheme is currently being considered for inclusion in the minor works programme.

The provision of climbing lanes on the A5 at Ballygawley, Blackhill and Gortaclare are currently

being assessed for possible inclusion in the 10-Year Forward Planning Schedule.

Road Schemes: Hannahstown and Glenavy Areas

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the current capital allocation for road schemes in the Hannahstown and Glenavy areas.

(AQO 1248/00)

Mr Campbell: As I indicated in my oral answer to you on 5 March, my Department's Roads Service has no current plans to upgrade roads in the Hannahstown and Glenavy areas. Accordingly, no capital funds have been earmarked for this purpose in the incoming year.

Consideration is being given to resurfacing the Upper Springfield Road and the A26 Moira Road between Glenavy and Ballinderry Road Upper within the next two years but as this is maintenance work it is not classified as upgrading and so is not funded from the capital budget.

The Strategic Railway Review Body

Mr Poots asked the Minister for Regional Development what impact the Report from the Strategic Railway Review Body will have on rail services provided in Northern Ireland.

(AQO 1208/00)

Mr Campbell: The jurisdiction of the Strategic Rail Authority extends to England, Scotland and Wales, but not to Northern Ireland. There will therefore be no impact on rail services in Northern Ireland as result of the Authority's Strategic Plan.

Following the A D Little Review of Railway Safety in Northern Ireland the Railways Task Force was established in April 2000 to produce options for the future of the railway network in Northern Ireland. On 18 December 2000 the Assembly approved funding in the Budget to begin implementing the Task Force's "consolidation" option. This involves upgrading the most heavily used lines and the acquisition of new trains.

Use of Hard Shoulder: M2

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline what plans he has to allow public transport to use the hard shoulders of the M2 during peak travelling times to (a) enhance public transport as an attractive alternative and (b) to protect the environment against harmful exhaust emissions.

(AQO 1237/00)

Mr Campbell: Traffic on the M2 is generally free-flowing, although there are delays during the morning peak period at the southbound approach to Sandyknowes junction.

The idea of allowing buses to use the hard shoulder at that location during the peak period raises a number of difficulties, including:

- the conflict between buses running on the hard shoulder and vehicles leaving or joining the motorway via the slip roads; and
- the problem of insufficient hard shoulder width at an overbridge just downstream of the junction.

For these reasons it seems unlikely that hard shoulder running will be technically feasible.

On-Street Parking Tariffs

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail any plans to introduce on-street parking tariffs in towns currently free of such charges.

(AQO 1207/00)

Mr Campbell: The only on-street charged car parking scheme in Northern Ireland is in Belfast city centre and my Department's Roads Service has no plans to introduce such schemes in other cities and towns in the immediate future.

However, on-street charging does promote a healthy turnover in scarce town centre parking spaces, helping to keep them available for shoppers and other visitors to the town. Its use will therefore be kept under review, but no scheme will be introduced without consulting local people.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The Egan Project

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development whether the Egan Project has any staffing implications for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and outline any discussions he has undertaken with staff and the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance regarding this matter.

(AQW 2407/00)

The Minister for Social Development (Mr Morrow): This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive but I am advised by the Chief Executive that the staffing implications of Egan type contracts cannot be predetermined at this time. However, there has been, and will continue to be, consultation with the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance on the matter.

NIHE Response Maintenance Project: Londonderry

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development to (a) confirm that the response maintenance project for Londonderry is to commence in September 2001 (b)

confirm that the number of contractors carrying out this service is to be reduced from eight to one and (c) outline the criteria to be used to select the contractor.

(AQW 2408/00)

Mr Morrow: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive but I am advised by the Chief Executive that a pilot response maintenance project is programmed to commence in October 2001 for part of Londonderry and that one contractor will be involved.

The criteria used to select the contractor are:

- registration of interest by contractors following a public advertisement;
- completion of a pre qualification questionnaire scored against set criteria;
- submission of a tender by successful applicants; and
- evaluation of tenders based on quality and price.

NIHE: Grass Cutting

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development to ensure that grass cuttings are collected when grass is cut in public areas of Northern Ireland Housing Executive Estates.

(AQW 2416/00)

Mr Morrow: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive but I am advised by the Chief Executive that under their current policy, while grass cuttings are not removed from grass areas, there is a requirement to ensure that cuttings are removed from paths and roads immediately after grass has been cut. Horticultural practice promotes the retention of cuttings on grass areas both as mulch and natural fertiliser.

Contractors have been regularly reminded of the necessity to keep paths and roads clear of cuttings and the Housing Executive has advised they will ensure this requirement of the contract is again made clear to them.

NIHE: Egan Project Team

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to the Egan Project Team, to detail (a) how it has been set up (b) the criteria used to set it up and (c) the input of elected representatives to this process.

(AQW 2430/00)

Mr Morrow: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive but the Chief Executive has advised me:

- a. that the Egan Project Team is a Housing Executive internal group set up in January 2000 and comprising two members of staff. Its terms of reference were to improve relationships with contractors and promote efficiency, best practice and other initiatives.
- b. As part of its ongoing policy of providing the most efficient, effective and economical delivery of its

construction projects the Housing Executive is piloting a scheme in Londonderry in October 2001. It is being taken forward by a Project Team, experienced in project management and contract work.

- c. The Egan methodology was presented to the Housing Council Client Services sub-Committee and the minutes of that meeting were subsequently made available to the full Housing Council, where a Councillor represents each District Council.

NIHE: Egan Project Team

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development, following the recommendations of the Egan Project Team, to outline (a) how the shortlist of contractors will be arrived at and (b) the two main District Council areas involved.

(AQW 2431/00)

Mr Morrow: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive but the Chief Executive has advised me that the criteria to be used to select the contractor are:

- registration of interest by contractors following a public advertisement;
- completion of a pre qualification questionnaire scored against set criteria;
- submission of a tender by successful applicants; and
- evaluation of tenders based on quality and price.

The only District Council area clearly identified is Londonderry.

NIHE: Egan Project

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development to outline (a) how the new electronic link with the single contractor will work within the Egan Project (b) his assessment of the economic viability of such a proposal (c) if it will achieve value for money and (d) how self-certification will work.

(AQW 2432/00)

Mr Morrow: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive but the Chief Executive has advised me:

- a. that the electronic link will work by providing limited access for the contractor to the Housing Executive repairs system;
- b. & c. that this is a pilot scheme which will be evaluated within 6 months of implementation. Full-scale implementation will be based on quality and price criteria; and
- d. any work or payment claimed by a contractor will be subject to audit by selective physical inspection of the properties.

NIHE: Egan Project Team

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development to confirm that, under the Egan Project Team's proposals, contractors once appointed could be responsible for planned external contract maintenance and response maintenance for periods of five to 10 years.

(AQW 2433/00)

Mr Morrow: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive but I am advised by the Chief Executive that it is possible that some of the contracts could be for up to five years but the period of the contract will depend on the nature of the works to be undertaken. Contracts will be let for one year, renewable annually to a maximum of five years, depending on the contractor meeting key performance indicators.

Social Security Agency's Budget: 2001-02

Mr McGrady asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the amount by which the Social Security Agency's budget was increased in the 2001/02 financial year.

(AQW 2491/00)

Mr Morrow: In 2001-02 the Social Security Agency Benefit Programme Resources Budget will increase to £3,256.7 million, an increase of £201 million, which represents a 6.6% uplift.

Child Support Agency: Targets

Mr Carrick asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has plans to publish details of the targets for the Child Support Agency; and if he will make a statement.

(AQW 2615/00)

Mr Morrow: The Child Support Agency will publish its 2001-02 Strategic and Business Plan today. Copies will be placed in the Library.

The key targets that I have set for the Child Support Agency for 2001-02 are set out below:

- Case Compliance, to measure the proportion of cases where the non resident parents are paying child maintenance, a value of 74%.
- Cash Compliance, to measure the proportion of the total amount of child maintenance which is due for payment that is actually being paid, a value of 72%.
- Accuracy, 78% on the last adjudication for all assessments checked.
- A set of Customer Service Standards.

The targets in the Business Plan present the Agency with a challenging but attainable objective which will lead to improvements both in customer service and performance in the lead up to Child Support Reform.

NI Social Fund Discretionary Budget: 2001-02

Mr Carrick asked the Minister for Social Development what the Northern Ireland Social Fund discretionary budget will be for 2001-02.

(AQW 2616/00)

Mr Morrow: I am pleased to announce that the Social Fund gross discretionary budget for 2001-02 will be £49.27 million. £10.26m will be allocated to grants; £38.91m to loans and £0.1m will be held as a contingency reserve. The new allocations represent an increase of £3.32 million over the initial gross budget set at April 2000.

The Community Care Grant (CCG) budget has been increased by £0.2 million to £10.26 million. This will provide more help to Customers, in particular families with children and the disabled.

The loans budget has been increased to £38.91 million, an increase of £3.12 million on the initial 2000-01 loans budget. To improve the fairness of the scheme, budgets will be allocated in a way that will over time achieve greater consistency of outcome for applicants wherever they live.

Details of the individual District budget allocations, together with a note explaining the basis on which they have been made, have been placed in the Northern Ireland Assembly Library today.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 27 April 2001

Written Answers to Questions

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Cattle Killed in Meat Plants

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of cattle killed in meat plants in Northern Ireland in the period 5-10 February 2001 and, of these, how many were (a) Northern Ireland produced, giving farms of origin in each case (b) produced outside Northern Ireland, stating each country and (c) farm quality assured. (AQW 1966/00)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers): *[holding answer 6 March 2001]*: The number of under thirty month cattle killed for human consumption over this period was 9236 of which 8240 were of Northern Ireland origin. The remaining 996 were imported for slaughter and originated as follows: 931 from ROI, 61 from Germany and 4 from GB. Of the total number of 9236 cattle, 7106 were farm quality assured.

I regret that at this time it has been impractical to individually identify the large number of farms of origin of the 8240 Northern Ireland reared cattle.

Membership of Review Panel

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline (a) the membership of the review panel established to assess her Department's links with agricultural colleges and the School of Agriculture and Food Science at The Queen's University, Belfast and (b) the timetable for the review. (AQW 2461/00)

Ms Rodgers:

- (a) I have not yet decided on either the chairmanship or membership of the panel.
- (b) The original timetable for the review, which I announced on 8 February, was that the panel would

commence its work during March 2001 and report by 31 December 2001.

The timetable has been disrupted because of the current outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease, which has prevented me from further consideration of the panel membership. However, I hope to announce the panel membership within a few weeks and to have the report completed around the end of the year.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Precautionary Measures

Mrs Carson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the precautionary measures she has taken along the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in light of Foot and Mouth Disease and to make a statement. (AQW 2465/00)

Ms Rodgers: Precautionary measures along the border were introduced consistent with the level of disease risk coupled with the need to keep disruption to a minimum.

Disinfectant arrangements involving mats and/or pressure spraying are currently in place on all roads on the Armagh/Louth border. This is to reflect the disease risk arising from the outbreak in Co. Louth.

The RUC has had notable success in intercepting consignments of animals being transported illegally, although it would be inappropriate to comment on operational police matters. The Department's staff are also undertaking surveillance work in the border area. In addition, authorities in the North and the South are co-operating closely on all the precautionary measures in place and these will be kept under review as the disease situation progresses.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Precautionary Measures

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to confirm that she has sufficient staff to ensure that adequate control procedures are in place along the border due to the Foot and Mouth outbreak in Co Louth. (AQW 2487/00)

Ms Rodgers: Control of the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease in Co Louth is a matter for the authorities in the ROI. However, I have taken additional precautionary measures along the border, consistent with the level of disease risk, coupled with the need to keep disruption to a minimum. I review the priorities for disease control frequently to make best use of the staff available.

Steering Committee for Cross Border Rural Development

Mr McHugh asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail what progress has been

made by the Steering Group on Cross Border Rural Development set up under the North/South Ministerial Council. (AQW 2511/00)

Ms Rodgers: The Steering Committee for Cross Border Rural Development will be presenting a Progress Report on its Work Programme for the next meeting of NSMC on 8 June 2001.

The Committee has initiated tender action on two Cross Border studies:

1. Education Training and Research Study
2. Co-operation between Cross Border Rural Communities

Advertisements were placed in the local daily newspapers in Northern Ireland and Ireland on 2 March 2001 inviting tenders for two studies. It is anticipated that consultants will be appointed in early May 2001 to undertake these studies.

The studies will be administered and funded jointly by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Northern Ireland and Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Ireland.

North/South Ministerial Council: Aquaculture and Marine Matters

Mr McHugh asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail what progress has been made by the implementation body, Aquaculture and Marine Matters, set up under the North/South Ministerial Council. (AQW 2512/00)

Ms Rodgers: The Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission has made good progress to date in taking forward its work in the Foyle and Carlingford areas.

The Loughs Agency of the FCILC continues to develop its operations in the Carlingford Area and has recently opened a public office in Carlingford and recruited a number of field staff to enable it to carry out its fisheries protection role in the area. The Agency has also recruited a Marine Tourism Officer who will be responsible for developing a marine tourism strategy in the Foyle and Carlingford areas.

The Agency is currently bringing forward regulations to provide for the introduction of a salmon carcass tagging scheme as a means of conserving and protecting fish stocks in the Foyle and Carlingford Area. It is hoped that it will be in a position to introduce the scheme as soon as possible following the making of the regulations.

The Agency is currently working with independent consultants to establish formal consultation arrangements with interested parties in the Foyle and Carlingford Areas. These arrangements will include the establishment of an advisory forum and focus groups to represent the various interests in the loughs.

The Agency also continues to take forward work on the Interpretative Centre at its headquarters in Prehen. On completion, this facility will provide the public with an opportunity to learn about the work of the Agency in the Foyle and Carlingford areas.

My Department and the Department of the Marine and Natural Resources in Dublin, as joint sponsors of the FCILC, continue to progress the legislation that will enhance the functions of the Loughs Agency in line with the North/South Co-operation (Implementation Bodies) (NI) Order 1999 ie in respect of aquaculture licensing. Meantime the Agency is working with interested parties to lay solid foundations to enable it to undertake this role as soon as the relevant powers are obtained.

The functions of the Commissioners of Irish Lights have not yet been transferred to the Lights Agency. The legislative amendments to the Merchant Shipping Act 1995 necessary to effect this transfer have to be made by the UK and Irish Governments.

Castlederg Area Based Strategy Group: Miscellaneous Expenditure

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to the "Financial Summary to 25 May 2000" presented to the Castlederg Area Based Strategy Group, to detail (a) a breakdown of the miscellaneous expenditure figure of £20,000 (b) the criteria adopted relating to the distribution of this amount and (c) whether appropriate accounting procedures were adopted in this case. (AQW 2522/00)

Ms Rodgers:

- (a) The expenditure figure of £20,000 comprises two awards of funding as follows:-

£10,000 towards fixtures and fittings and environmental works at Garvagh Community Hall, promoted by Garvagh and District Community Association.

£10,000 towards the purchase of computer equipment for an IT suite, promoted by MourneDerg Partnership.

- (b) Both of these projects were subjected to the normal application process for funding through the Rural Development Programme. Formal applications are in place for each project, and funding has been awarded subject to the terms and conditions applicable to all projects supported through the Area Based Strategy. Drawdown of funding was contingent on the meeting of usual programme requirements and the provision of appropriate supporting documentation. Additionally, the Strategy has been subjected to the Department's internal financial review procedures. In due course, these projects will be subject to evaluation against pre-determined criteria to assess effectiveness both in their own right and as contributors to the performance of the Area Based Strategy as a whole.

- (c) The Department made these funding commitments as part of the Castlederg Area Based Strategy initiative, one of nine developed by the Department and aimed at targeting resources at the needs of the most disadvantaged areas in Northern Ireland.

The funding commitments outlined above were made at the outset of the Castlederg Area Based Strategy and were aimed at providing a visible example of the type of project, which could be supported by the initiative. The objectives of these projects were entirely consistent with those of the overall Strategy, were delivered within the procedures agreed for area based strategies and the projects themselves have proved to be successful.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Consequential Compensation

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail her policy on the payment of compensation to those businesses which are “countryside dependant” and therefore suffering because of current Foot-and-Mouth restrictions. (AQW 2547/00)

Ms Rodgers: The payment of compensation resulting from the foot-and-mouth outbreak is limited to those who have had livestock slaughtered or feedingstuffs seized because they have been, or are suspected as having been, exposed to the FMD virus. The Government’s current position is that there is no provision or precedent for consequential compensation.

The Executive is closely monitoring developments in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland, including the handling of financial issues. An inter-Departmental group has been established to examine the economic impact of FMD in Northern Ireland. It is considering what practical measures might be feasible and appropriate to support those sectors affected by the crisis, taking local circumstances into account.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Exclusion Zones

Mr McHugh asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to confirm the scientific basis for the use of exclusion zones as an effective means of containing foot-and-mouth disease given the rapid spread of the disease across Great Britain and to identify what lessons can be learnt from this and applied locally. (AQW 2561/00)

Ms Rodgers: Foot and Mouth Disease is very contagious and is spread by animal contact and windborne spread. Exclusion zones act in a similar manner to a firebreak when fighting forest fires and spread is effectively halted as there is then no further means of transmission.

It has proved unnecessary to consider exclusion zones in Northern Ireland at this time as the weight of infection is low. The recent cull of almost 10,000 sheep in south

Armagh took place as the animals may have been exposed to the Foot and Mouth Disease virus.

“Tie-up” Scheme

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (a) all discussions she has had with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food relating to the fishing vessels ‘tie-up’ scheme (b) the dates and times of the discussions and (c) what action is to be taken as a result of these discussions. (AQW 2568/00)

Ms Rodgers: I have not met with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food specifically to discuss ‘tie-up’ schemes. I did however have a meeting on 14 June 2000 with Mr Morley to share positions on a range of sea fisheries policy issues including plans to support the industry through the Structural Funds. I also met with Mr Morley in the run up to and during the Fisheries Council in December 2000. My officials have also met with their GB counterparts on several occasions to discuss such issues as tie-up schemes, decommissioning of fishing vessels, and means of restoring the 10% cut in this year’s nephrops TAC quotas. I am kept fully briefed by my officials on these discussions.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Consequential Compensation

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to specify (a) who will be eligible for financial assistance in view of the foot-and-mouth outbreak (b) which businesses will qualify as being directly dependent on agriculture and (c) if livestock markets will be counted as such. (AQW 2579/00)

Ms Rodgers: Financial assistance resulting from the Foot and Mouth outbreak is limited to those who have had livestock slaughtered or feedingstuffs seized because they have been, or are suspected as having been, exposed to the FMD virus. The Government’s current position is that there is no provision or precedent for financial assistance or consequential compensation.

The Executive is closely monitoring developments in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland, including the handling of financial issues. An inter-Departmental group has been established to examine the economic impact of FMD in Northern Ireland. It is considering what practical measures might be feasible and appropriate to support those sectors affected by the crisis, taking local circumstances into account.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Disposal of Rumen Contents

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to confirm when the controls will be

lifted on the disposal of rumen contents which are presently confined to disposal at landfill sites at considerable cost to the industry. (AQW 2592/00)

Ms Rodgers: Following the recent outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease in Northern Ireland, for disease control purposes, Northern Ireland was declared a “controlled area” on 1st March 2001. At that time controls on disposal of rumen contents, and other refuse from slaughterhouses, were introduced and these are likely to remain in place until the continuing threat of Foot and Mouth Disease has dissipated.

CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Ulster-Scots Culture: Overseas Promotion

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail his plans to promote Ulster Scots culture overseas. (AQW 2468/00)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McGimpsey): The Boord o Ulster Scotch is charged with promoting greater awareness and use of Ullans and of Ulster-Scots cultural issues. In January 2001 tha Boord produced its Corporate Plan which outlines its strategy for promoting the Ulster-Scots language and culture over the period 2001-02 – 2003-04.

On 3 January 2001 an Institute of Ulster-Scots Studies was set up at the Magee campus of the University of Ulster, funded jointly by the Tha Boord o Ulster Scotch and the University. One of the objectives of the new Institute is to promote understanding and awareness of the Ulster-Scots identity within and beyond Northern Ireland.

On 5 April 2001 I attended a reception in Washington DC to celebrate the launch of the Institute of Ulster-Scots Studies Worldwide Academic Network. The network was established to connect international researchers working on issues relevant to understanding the historical, political, and cultural impact of the Ulster Scots people within various regions worldwide. The Institute has established working arrangements with universities in Scotland, Canada, USA and Australia. The launch event was organised by tha Boord o Ulster Scotch and hosted by Congressman Rick Boucher.

Officials from my Department have established links with related centres of expertise in Scotland and elsewhere and will continue to build on those as appropriate.

Sport for the Disabled

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the steps he is taking to encourage groups for the disabled to apply for funding in respect of sporting activities. (AQW 2485/00)

Mr McGimpsey: Responsibility for the distribution of funding for sport lies with the Sports Council for Northern Ireland. With respect to Exchequer funding, the Sports Council, earlier this year, developed an equality programme in their governing body programme which will only fund bids which specifically target under-represented groups. People with a disability are the most obvious groups who will benefit from this fund as all Council Exchequer programmes would have the needs of people with a disability as a core theme.

Furthermore, at its last Council meeting the Sports Council agreed a new procedure regarding the solicitation of applications in line with amendments to the Lottery Directives. Under the new procedure the Sports Council encourages applications from disadvantaged sectors, such as the disabled. The Council Lottery Fund also goes to considerable lengths to ensure that applications to its Capital programmes from under-represented groups attract a higher score and have the opportunity to achieve an enhanced percentage of funding.

Lottery Funding

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the amount of lottery funding allocated by his Department in respect of each constituency in each of the following financial years 1998/1999, 1999/2000 and 2000/2001 to date. (AQW 2486/00)

Mr McGimpsey: At the outset, I should explain that my Department does not allocate lottery funding. The National Lottery etc Act 1993, as amended by the National Lottery Act 1998, provides that the net proceeds of the lottery shall be distributed by the Arts and Sports Councils across the UK, the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Community Fund (previously known as the National Lottery Charities Board), the Millennium Commission and the New Opportunities Fund.

This Department has responsibility for the Arts and Sports Councils in Northern Ireland. The Distributing Bodies are not required to collect data by Constituency although some do. It should be noted however that the Constituencies are derived from the applicants postcodes and therefore could present a misleading picture of the actual beneficiaries of lottery awards.

The information which you requested is available for the Arts Council and is as follows, but again I must emphasise that the constituency is derived from the applicant's postal code.

	1998/99 £	1999/00 £	2000/01 £
East Antrim	0	51,197	0
North Antrim	224,809	30,860	0
South Antrim	22,050	5,735	14,062
East Belfast	18,132	240,902	0

	1998/99 £	1999/00 £	2000/01 £
North Belfast	96,666	161,860	110,584
South Belfast	634,205	494,336	396,475
West Belfast	495,151	119,753	223,684
North Down	54,049	8,328	9,981
South Down	23,825	2,962	15,300
Fermanagh/South Tyrone	361,462	58,248	0
Foyle	101,462	227,392	5,625
Lagan Valley	1,306,477	0	0
Londonderry East	123,413	35,064	630
Newry & Armagh	12,528	58,470	15,266
Strangford	22,890	44,661	0
West Tyrone	4,033,180	42,450	0
Ulster Mid	13,504	59,169	0
Upper Bann	199,371	3,964	0

In relation to the Sports Council, the information requested is not available in the form requested and I would refer you to my answer to written Assembly Question No 2198.

You may wish to contact the other distributing bodies in Northern Ireland, ie the New Opportunities Fund, the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Community Fund and the Millennium Commission to obtain the required information.

GAA

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the steps he is taking to (a) reduce sectarianism in Gaelic sports and (b) lobby the Gaelic Athletic Association to repeal Rule 21. (AQW 2501/00)

Mr McGimpsey: My views on sectarianism in sport are widely known. As recently as 20 March, in response to an Oral question by Patricia Lewsley I pointed out that sectarianism is an obscenity throughout all society and not simply a matter for sport. Unfortunately sport reflects the society in which it is played. I am acutely aware of the problems of sectarianism in sport in Northern Ireland and am committed to seeing this problem eradicated so that people from all traditions can enjoy a diverse range of sporting activity. However, the ultimate responsibility for its elimination rests with the community as a whole and the Governing Bodies of sport.

My views on Rule 21, which bans members of the security forces from the Gaelic Athletic Association, are also widely known. A decision to amend Rule 21 is a matter entirely for the GAA and I know that the Association has been reviewing its policy in recent times. I would regard the deletion of Rule 21 as a welcome step forward as there can be no justification for excluding any section of the population from any sport. The GAA is well aware of my views on this matter. You will recall that on 20

March in response to your supplementary question on this matter, I pointed out that I find Rule 21 offensive and as the process we are in develops I expect that Rule 21 will be dealt with to the satisfaction of everybody in the House.

Lottery Funding: Sport

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the steps he is taking to secure an increase in lottery funding for sport in Northern Ireland. (AQW 2502/00)

Mr McGimpsey: The National Lottery etc Act 1993 as amended provides for 2.6% of the 16.6% overall allocation for sport to be distributed in Northern Ireland. The basis of the allocation is home population adjusted by the Northern Ireland contribution to the UK Sports Council. The Sports Council of Northern Ireland receives about £6.5m annually.

The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure in conjunction with the Scottish and Welsh Offices are currently working on proposals which could lead to a review of percentage Lottery shares for Arts and Sports.

Lottery Funding: City and Rural Areas

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the steps he is taking to source lottery funding for city and rural areas similar to that distributed in Great Britain. (AQW 2504/00)

Mr McGimpsey: The National Lottery is a reserved matter and overall responsibility rests with the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport in London (DCMS). Northern Ireland receives a share of the net proceeds of the Lottery which are distributed by the Arts and Sports Councils, the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Community Fund, the Millennium Commission and the New Opportunities Fund, in accordance with Policy Directions issued to each body. The Directions define how the distributing bodies will distribute lottery proceeds. Government does not interfere with individual lottery applications and it is a matter for the distributing bodies to take account of the needs of city and rural areas in reaching decisions.

You may be aware that the New Opportunities Fund is about to launch a new initiative under the heading of Transforming Communities which aims to enhance the quality of life of local communities by improving the appearance and amenities of specific local environments in urban and rural areas.

North/South Language Body

Mrs Nelis asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail what progress has been made by the

Implementation Body on Language set up under the North/South Ministerial Council. (AQW 2513/00)

Mr McGimpsey: Considerable progress has been made by the North/South Language Body since its inception. The North/South Ministerial Council approved Tha Boord o Ulster-Scotch draft corporate plan for 2001-02 to 2003-04. The plan supported four major themes: supporting Ulster-Scots as a living language and promoting its use and development; acting as a key contribution to the development of Ulster Scots culture; establishing partnerships with the education and community sectors to promote the study of the Ulster- Scots language, culture and history; and developing the public's understanding of the Ulster-Scots language and culture. Specific areas of work included an Ulster-Scots dictionary. In January this year the first Institute of Ulster-Scots Studies was launched by tha Boord in conjunction with the University of Ulster based at Magee College campus. In April the Institute announced in Washington its plan for a worldwide academic network to foster awareness and promote knowledge of the Ulster Scots contribution to the development of specific communities and nations. There are plans for a regional office in Donegal.

The draft Corporate Plan for Foras na Gaeilge will be considered at the next meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in language sectoral format. The plans of the two agencies will together form part of the plan for the Body as a whole.

Under its approved programme of activities for 2001 Foras na Gaeilge has made provision to allocate more than IR£7 million to Irish language organisations and projects. These include funding of an estimated IR£750,000 for a new pre-school organisation and an estimated £400,000 for Irish language newspapers and journals, projects and partnerships run by the Foras, including book publishing and distribution; and administration and personnel. This will also include an increase in staff numbers from 40 to 65 and the establishment of an office in Belfast.

Foras na Gaeilge is undertaking the production of a new English/Irish dictionary which would supersede that edited by Tomás de Bhaldraithe in 1959. It has also drawn up a three-year action plan to ensure that there is an adequate provision of Irish language textbooks and resources for primary and post-primary and colleges. The material will be made available in printed and electronic formats.

North/South Ministerial Council: Inland Waterways

Mrs Nelis asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail what progress has been made by the Implementation body, Waterways Ireland, set up under the North/South Ministerial Council. (AQW 2514/00)

Mr McGimpsey: I made a detailed report to the Assembly on 12 February 2001, following the last meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in Inland Waterways Sectoral Format which took place in Scarriff, Co Clare on 29 January 2001.

The next meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council is scheduled to take place before the Summer although no date has yet been confirmed. A further statement will be made to the Assembly following that meeting.

You may also wish to note that the annual reports and accounts for the Cross-border Implementation Bodies require to be laid before the Assembly before the Summer recess.

These will provide further information on the work of the bodies.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Restrictions on Sport

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail what representations he has received regarding the cancellation of sporting events due to the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease. (AQW 2587/00)

Mr McGimpsey: Most sporting organisations have responded extremely positively over the past few weeks to the Foot and Mouth outbreak by voluntarily cancelling or postponing matches and competitions etc in line with the Northern Ireland Executive guidelines. Restrictions on sport due to Foot and Mouth have recently been relaxed in Northern Ireland and soccer, rugby and other activities are now beginning to get back to normal. Consequently, I have received very little by way of formal representations regarding the cancellation of sporting events because of Foot and Mouth disease.

The only representation to date that I have personally received was from the Irish Football Association (IFA). This was in relation to the impact of the Foot and Mouth restrictions on the IFA's junior soccer programme and I am presently responding to a request from them to encourage local councils to facilitate the completion of fixtures that had been postponed in response to the outbreak.

I can also confirm that my officials and I held discussions with the organisers of this year's Northwest 200, they also met with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, about the position of that event. As you are no doubt already aware, the organisers of the Northwest 200 have since decided to cancel this year's competition.

Apart from these, my Department has been receiving informal inquiries from various sports groups and enthusiasts mainly concerning access to the countryside and to country and forest parks for sporting and leisure purposes. Amongst those who have been in contact with the Department are the Northern Ireland Sports Forum

and some commercial organisers of outdoor pursuit activities. In all cases the Department has referred enquirers to the latest guidelines on Foot and Mouth disease issued by the Northern Ireland Executive.

Northern Ireland Events Company

Mrs Nelis asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline (a) his plans for the future development of the Events Company and (b) his policy for events organised on an all Ireland basis. (AQW 2609/00)

Mr McGimpsey: Following an independent evaluation of the first three years work of the Northern Ireland Events Company, and having considered proposals put to me by the Board of the Company, I have agreed that it should continue beyond the initial five years for which it was originally established. The Company is accordingly in the process of being re-constituted, appointing staff, and refining its future strategy by consulting with other interested bodies such as the Arts Council, Sports Council and Tourist Board.

Each application for funding to the Company is assessed on its merit and on the measurable benefits that it creates for Northern Ireland. To date, only one application has been received for an event organised on an all Ireland basis and the Events Company have offered to provide funding for the stages of the event that are to be held in Northern Ireland. The event organisers are seeking a similar commitment from the relevant organisations in Dublin.

EDUCATION

Bullying: Down Academy, Downpatrick

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education to detail, in relation to alleged bullying at Down Academy, Downpatrick, (a) the number of incidents reported (b) any recommendations of the Educational Welfare Officer for the South Eastern Education and Library Board and (c) the subsequent action taken by Down Academy. (AQW 2460/00)

The Minister of Education (Mr M McGuinness): The information requested is not available. As I indicated in the Written Answers Booklet for Tuesday 6 February 2001, data on incidents of alleged bullying are not collected by my Department, nor by the Education and Library Boards, nor is information collected about recommendations made to individual schools about specific incidents or action taken as a result. Advice provided to schools by Board officers about countering bullying will be in line with current guidance from the Department and from the Board itself and it is a matter for schools to determine whether and how they will act on this advice.

It is, however, my intention to take an early legislative opportunity to provide that all schools must have a whole-school anti-bullying policy and act upon it.

GCSE: Vocational Subjects

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Education to list those vocational subjects taught at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) level. (AQW 2469/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Vocational subjects are not separately classified, but the following subjects of a vocational nature are available at GCSE level:-

- Accounting
- Agriculture and Horticulture
- Business Studies
- Catering
- Electronics
- Law
- Office Applications

In addition the following GNVQ Part 1 courses (equivalent to 2 GCSEs) are also approved for pupils at Key Stage 4:-

- Art and Design
- Business
- Engineering
- Health and Social Care
- Information Technology
- Leisure and Tourism
- Manufacturing

School Maintenance Work: West Tyrone

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Education to detail, in respect of schools in the constituency of West Tyrone, (a) those schools awaiting high priority maintenance work and (b) dates for commencement of such works. (AQW 2494/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Responsibility for maintenance work in controlled and maintained schools in the constituency rests with the Western Education and Library Board. I understand from the Board that it plans to commence the high priority work at the following schools this summer:

Ballycolman Nursery School, Strabane	St Columba's Primary School, Clady
Denamona Primary School, Fintona	St Columbkille's Primary School, Carrickmore
Drumlegagh Primary School, Newtownstewart	St Conor's Primary School, Omagh
Edwards Primary School, Castlederg	St Eugene's Primary School, Victoria Bridge

Erganagh Primary School, Castlederg	St Joseph's Primary School, Fintona
Gortin Primary School	St Lawrence's Primary School, Fintona
Killen Primary School, Castlederg	St Mary's Boys' Primary School, Strabane
McClintock Primary School, Omagh	St Mary's Primary School, Ballymagorry, Strabane
Newtownstewart Primary School	St Mary's Primary School, Drumquin
Omagh County Primary School	St Matthew's Primary School, Ballygawley
Sion Mills Primary School	St Patrick's Primary School, Carrickmore
Sixmilecross Primary School	St Patrick's Primary School, Castlederg
Strabane Primary School	St Patrick's Primary School, Eskra
Barrack Street Primary School, Strabane	St Patrick's Primary School, Gortin
Drumnabey Primary School, Castlederg	St Patrick's Primary School, Newtownstewart
Envagh Primary School, Drumquin	St Patrick's Primary School, Seskinore
Evish Primary School, Strabane	St Teresa's Primary School, Omagh
Knocknagor Primary School, Trillick	Castlederg High School
Loughash Primary School, Donemana	Omagh High School
Loreto Convent Primary School, Omagh	Strabane High School
Our Lady of Lourdes Primary School, Omagh	Dean Brian Maguire High School, Carrickmore
Recarson Primary School, Omagh	Our Lady of Mercy High School, Strabane
Sacred Heart Primary School, Tattyreagh, Omagh	St Eugene's High School, Castlederg
St Brigid's Primary School, Sixmilecross	St John's High School, Dromore
St Brigid's Primary School, Cranagh, Gortin	St Joseph's High School, Plumbridge
St Brigid's Primary School, Mountfield	Sacred Heart College, Omagh
St Caireall's Primary School, Carrycoughan, Castlederg	Heatherbank Special School, Omagh
St Colmcille's Primary School, Omagh	Glenside Special School, Strabane

Promotion of Literacy and Numeracy

Mrs E Bell asked the Minister of Education to give his assessment of the current literacy and numeracy projects and to outline his policy in relation to their future expansion. (AQW 2505/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The wide range of initiatives in the Strategy for the Promotion of Literacy and Numeracy

are contributing to improved standards, especially in primary schools. More needs to be done, particularly in post-primary schools, and my officials, in consultation with the Boards and CCMS, are currently reviewing how the strategy can be strengthened and further developed. The Executive Programme Fund is providing an additional £6.3 million over the next three years to support Reading Recovery in primary schools.

Review of Local Management of Schools: Consultation

Mr B Hutchinson asked the Minister of Education to detail the arrangements for consultation in relation to the Review of local management of schools and to make a statement. (AQW 2531/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The Consultation Document was published on 5 April 2001 and copies distributed to all schools and to a range of other organisations with an interest in education. Copies will also be provided to any individual or organisation on request. The document is available on the Department's website and copies of the full document will be available in Irish and also in large print and audio cassette on request.

A standard response form has issued with each document. Two Briefing conferences have been arranged in each Board area for school Principals and Chairs of Boards of Governors in order to explain the common formula and provide clarification on the proposals in the consultation document.

The consultation period will last for 3 months until 29th June.

Northern Ireland Drug Strategy

Mr B Hutchinson asked the Minister of Education to detail (a) the amount of money he has accessed from the anti-drug strategy and (b) how this money was spent. (AQW 2532/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Under the Northern Ireland Drug Strategy, approximately £800,000 was allocated to the education sector in March 2000 to enable provision in schools and the Youth Service to be strengthened. Each of the 5 Education and Library Boards has appointed two full-time officers to address the development of drug education programmes. Training will be provided for teachers, youth leaders, parents and governors in the preparation of drugs policies in the different settings, to enable them to deliver drug education programmes effectively and to deal with drug related issues as they arise. The North Eastern Board is also offering an education and support awareness programme aimed specifically at parents of teenagers.

Home Tutors: Parity of Salary

Mr Tierney asked the Minister of Education if there is parity of salary between teachers working as Home Tutors in Northern Ireland and their counterparts in England and Wales. (AQW 2539/00)

Mr M McGuinness: There is no nationally agreed system for payment of home tutors in England and Wales, each Local Education Authority being free to decide its own method. Traditionally home tutors here have been paid the same fixed hourly rates of salary as part-time teachers. This continues to be the case since most home tutors are employed on a casual basis when Education and Library Boards become aware of children unable to attend school because of illness etc. In view of the greater flexibility now allowed with the payment of part-time teachers, I will ask my Department to consult Boards about similar flexibility for home tutors.

Performance Related Pay: Grant-aided Schools

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister of Education to detail his policy in relation to the introduction of Performance Related Pay for teachers in grant-aided schools. (AQW 2551/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The introduction of performance management arrangements for teachers is not performance related pay. Performance management facilitates continuing professional development and school improvement through regular feedback between teachers and their senior managers. The focus of performance management is therefore the professional development of all teachers throughout their careers and school improvement.

Annual Funding

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister of Education to detail the annual funding over the next three years to meet the costs of (a) the Regional Manager and Deputy Regional Manager posts (b) proposed employment of external threshold assessors and external advisers and (c) training and administrative arrangements associated with this process. (AQW 2552/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The costs in the first year will be the salaries of the Regional and Deputy Regional Manager posts, which will be in the range £42,902-£56,282 and £37,272-£39,783 per annum respectively. The posts have been advertised on the basis of a 2-year contract with the possibility of extension for a further year. The number of external assessors will depend on the total number of applications, which is not available at this point. However, assuming a high application rate it is estimated that this work will take about 1,950 days at £240 per day inclusive of travelling and subsistence,

which is £468,000. Consideration is being given to the number and fee rates of the external advisers and to the grading of a small administrative support section of 2 staff. The costs of training the external assessors and all principals, including materials will be about £256,000.

In the second and third years, the number of teachers eligible for threshold assessment will fall to about 5% of the peak year with only some residual training required for new principals, so the costs will fall substantially. They will be the salaries of the Regional and Deputy Manager posts, the administrative support overheads, about £23,500 for the part-time external assessors' fees and the costs of external advisers.

Community Nursery School: Eglinton

Mrs Courtney asked the Minister of Education to detail when approval will be given for the construction of the Community Nursery School in Eglinton in the Derry City Council area. (AQW 2555/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The Pre-school Education Advisory Group in the Western Education and Library Board has proposed, as part of its Development Plan, the provision of a pre-school facility in the Eglinton area, to be opened in September 2003. The Plan is subject to approval by my Department, and I envisage that approval in principle will be given shortly. The specific project is, however, subject to the statutory development proposal procedures. A development proposal has been published by the Western Education and Library Board for a new statutory nursery unit at Eglinton Primary School and this is currently under consideration by the Department.

Primary Schools: Exceptional Closure

Mr Bradley asked the Minister of Education to list the number of school days lost, since 1 January 2001, at each of the Primary Schools in the Newry and Mourne and Banbridge District Council areas, due to impassable roads or electricity breakdowns. (AQW 2571/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The occasions on which exceptional closure has been granted by the Department for these reasons between 1 January and 13 April 2001 are as follows:

Newry and Mourne District Council area	Number of days lost
Cortamlet Primary School	1 day
Kilkeel Primary School	4 days
Annalong Primary School	3 days
Brackenagh West Primary School	4 days
Anamar Primary School	1 day
Killeen Primary School	4 days

Newry and Mourne District Council area	Number of days lost
St Joseph's Primary School, Killeavy	2 days
St Joseph's Convent Primary School, Newry	2 days
Convent of Mercy Primary School, Rostrevor	2 days
St Colman's Abbey Primary School, Newry	1 day
Carrick Primary School	2 days
Holy Cross Primary School, Lisnacree	4 days
St Mary's Primary School, Jerrettspass	3 days
St Patrick's Primary School, Mayobridge	2 days
St Mary's Primary School, Annalong	2 days
St Joseph's Primary School, Bessbrook	3 days
St Malachy's Primary School, Carnagat	1 day

Banbridge District Council area	Number of days lost
Dromore Central Primary School	1 day
Abercorn Primary School	1 day
Iveagh Primary School	4 days
Ballydown Primary School	2 days
Milltown Primary School	1 day
Loughbrickland Primary School	1 day
Scarva Primary School	1 day
Edenderry Primary School	1 day
Fairhill Primary School	4 days
Bronte Primary School	3 days
Drumadonnal Primary School	3 days
All Saint's Primary School	4 days
Bridge Integrated Primary School	1 day

Speech Therapy: Mitchell House/Fleming Fulton Special Schools

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education to confirm if speech therapy is provided, on a full time basis, at the Mitchell House and Fleming Fulton Special Schools under Part II of the Education (NI) Order 1996.
(AQW 2639/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The provision of speech therapy is a matter for the Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

Public Access to Information

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister of Education to detail the steps (a) already taken and (b) to be taken, this year to make arrangements for ensuring, and assessing, public access to information and to services provided by the authority as required by Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.
(AQW 2659/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Section 8 of the Department's Equality Scheme sets out the commitment to the provision of information through effective communication within the public.

In addition my Department has given a further commitment to reassess its arrangements for providing information other than in standard form. This will be done during the first year following approval of the Scheme.

My Department will publicise widely the new revised arrangements.

Anti-bullying Policy: Legislation

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education to outline his plans to introduce legislation to address the problem of bullying in schools.
(AQO 1273/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Every school is required to have a written discipline policy which must promote self-discipline among pupils, good behaviour and respect for others. Bullying behaviour, as unacceptable behaviour, should be addressed by schools at the very least as part of their existing discipline policies. Many schools on a voluntary basis have developed a separate anti-bullying policy. I intend to strengthen this position by taking the next legislative opportunity to make it a mandatory requirement upon every school to have an anti-bullying policy in place and to implement it.

North/South Pupil Attendance/Retention Joint Working Group

Ms Gildernew asked the Minister of Education to report on the work carried out by the North/ South Pupil Attendance/Retention Joint Working Group and indicate how it might impact on his Department's New Targeting Social Need Target DE5.
(AQO 1285/00)

Mr M McGuinness: I am unable to provide specific details of the work completed so far by the North/South Pupil Attendance/Retention Joint Working Group as I am bound by the procedures of the Assembly and of the Ministerial Code which require me first to report back progress to the Executive and then by way of a Statement to this Assembly after the next sectoral meeting takes place.

I would stress that I want to hold an education sectoral meeting as soon as possible to enable the Working Groups to report back formally to the sectoral Council and so that decisions can be taken to avoid any further delay in progressing the very important issues which they have been considering.

Until the Working Group reports, it is not possible to indicate the extent to which its recommendations may contribute to the New Targeting Social Need Target D5.

Equality Impact Assessments

Mr J Wilson asked the Minister of Education to confirm that there is an established method of carrying out equality impact assessments within his Department and that staff have received guidance and training on this subject.

(AQO 1271/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The procedure for conducting Equality Impact Assessments is set out in the Equality Commissions Guide to the Statutory Duties.

My Department, in its Equality Scheme, has stated that it will conduct its Equality Impact Assessments in accordance with this guidance and any further guidance that may be developed by the Equality Commission.

All staff within my Department have received a copy of the Equality Scheme. Middle and senior managers within the Department have also received initial equality training. Officials are currently drawing up a detailed training plan which will include more focused training for those involved in the Equality Impact Assessment of policies.

Local Management of Schools: Consultation Period

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Education to explain the cause of the delay in proceeding with the consultation process on a Common Local Management of Schools (LMS) funding formula and if he will extend the consultation period to ensure adequate time for responses to be made.

(AQO 1272/00)

Mr M McGuinness: I do not consider that there was any undue delay in publishing the LMS consultation document. Sufficient time was needed to allow for prior consultation with the Assembly Education Committee in January and I am grateful for the suggestions made by members, many of which were incorporated into the final document.

The Consultation Document was published on 5 April 2001 and, as requested by the Education Committee, consultation will last for 3 months until 29 June. This deadline is dictated by the school summer break and the need to take final decisions in the Autumn to ensure that the necessary operational arrangements can be put in place for implementation by April 2002.

North/South Educational Underachievement Working Group

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education, in the light of the publication of the Department of Education's New Targeting Social Need Action Plan, to detail how the work of the North/South Educational Underachievement

Working Group will be used to assist in implementing the Action Plan.

(AQO 1307/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Until the Working Group reports formally back to the sectoral meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council, it is not possible to indicate the extent to which its recommendations may contribute to the New Targeting Social Need Target Action Plan.

The last education sectoral meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council took place on 3 July 2000. At that time none of the Working Groups, including the Special Education Working Group, had reported back to the Council. I reported this position when I made my Statement to the Assembly on 11 September 2000. A further education sectoral meeting of the Council was planned for late November last but this did not take place and thus no formal reports of the Working Group have yet been made.

I would stress that I want to hold an education sectoral meeting as soon as possible to enable the Working Groups to report back and so that decisions can be taken to avoid any further delay in progressing the very important issues which they have been considering.

North/South Educational Underachievement Group

Mr McNamee asked the Minister of Education to report on the progress made in implementing the recommendations made by the North/South Educational Underachievement Group.

(AQO 1282/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The last education sectoral meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council took place on 3 July 2000. At that time none of the Working Groups, including the Educational Underachievement Working Group, had reported back to the Council. I reported this position when I made my Statement to the Assembly on 11 September 2000. A further education sectoral meeting of the Council was planned for late November last but this did not take place and thus no formal reports of the Working Group have yet been made. Therefore, no progress has been possible in this important area.

I would stress that I want to hold an education sectoral meeting of the Council as soon as possible to enable the Working Groups to report back formally and so that decisions can be taken to avoid any further delay in progressing the very important issues which they have been considering.

Funding for Primary Schools

Mr Poots asked the Minister of Education if he intends to raise the funding for primary schools given the increase in the curricular programme in that sector.

(AQO 1300/00)

Mr M McGuinness: There has been no increase to the curriculum requirements in the primary sector. Since its introduction in 1992, the statutory curriculum for the primary sector has been reviewed and reduced and there is the possibility of further reduction in the level of prescription as a result of the Curriculum Review.

The Consultation Document on the LMS Common Formula, which I launched earlier this month, discussed the balance of funding between the nursery, primary and post-primary school phases and contains proposals to give primary schools a fairer share of available resources.

Funding for Education

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education to confirm the amount allocated by the Chancellor of the Exchequer to education in Northern Ireland in each of the last four financial years. (AQO 1270/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The Chancellor of the Exchequer does not make allocations to education in Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland share of increases on comparable GB or English programmes is not hypothecated and it is a matter for the Northern Ireland administration to decide on the allocation to particular Northern Ireland services. For details of such allocations to education following announcements by the Chancellor of the Exchequer I refer the Member to my answer of 2 April (AQW 2383/2000).

North/South Special Education Working Group

Mr J Kelly asked the Minister of Education if the North/South Special Education Co-ordination Group has discussed mutual accreditation of personnel for the purpose of assessing Special Educational Needs and to make a statement. (AQO 1284/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The mutual accreditation of personnel for the purpose of assessing Special Educational Needs is not included within the work programme of the North South Ministerial Council Special Education Working Group.

The requirements for appointment as an educational psychologist in Northern Ireland are as follows:- an honours degree in Psychology; a recognised teaching qualification; at least two years qualified teaching experience; and an approved postgraduate training qualification in Educational Psychology. The postgraduate training qualification must be obtained on a course validated by the British Psychological Society (BPS). Only one postgraduate training course exists in the South, and so far this course has not obtained BPS accreditation; holders of that qualification would not therefore be eligible to practise here. I understand, however, that many educational psychologists in the Republic do hold a BPS validated qualification and, provided that they met the other requirements, they would be eligible for employment locally. Educational

Psychologists trained at Queen's University are qualified for appointment in the South.

Medical Needs of Pupils in Schools

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Education if he has any plans to introduce guidance for teachers on indemnity when dealing with children's health, similar to that provided in the rest of the United Kingdom.

(AQO 1264/00)

Mr M McGuinness: During 2001/02 my Department intends to review the administrative arrangements relating to the medical needs of pupils in schools. This review will involve consideration of the issue of appropriate guidance to employing authorities and schools, similar to that produced by the Department for Education and Employment for use in England and Wales.

Special Educational Needs: Statementing Process

Mrs E Bell asked the Minister of Education to give his assessment on the effectiveness of the current statementing process for children with special educational needs.

(AQO 1256/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The current system of assessment and statementing of children's special educational needs was first introduced in 1986 and was slightly modified in 1996 and 1998 with the introduction of new special education legislation and the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs. Based on the relatively low number of appeals to the Special Educational Needs Tribunal, I have no reason to believe that there are any problems with the statementing process.

However, although consultation exercises on the new legislation and Code were carried out at the time of their introduction, the views of parents on the assessment and statementing process have never been sought and I intend to rectify this. My Department will be commissioning a research project in the near future which will seek parents' views on the effectiveness of the process.

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Financial Assistance to Tourist Industry

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if he intends to provide financial assistance to those in the tourist industry most affected by the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease similar to that introduced in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 2484/00)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Sir Reg Empey): The impact of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) on the tourism sector is widely acknowledged. Economic consequences are factored into risk analyses constantly reviewed by the Executive Group chaired by Bríd Rodgers. I understand that OFMDFM are researching the position on proposed financial compensation for victims of the FMD outbreak in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland. My Department will be co-operating fully in this research along with other Departments, with a view to contributing to further advice to the Executive Committee on this important issue.

North/South Ministerial Council: Tourism Working Group

Dr O'Hagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail what progress has been made by the Tourism Working Group set up under the North/South Ministerial Council. (AQW 2510/00)

Sir Reg Empey: The new tourism company has been registered as "Tourism Ireland Ltd". Its Board has been appointed by the North/South Ministerial Council and has met on three occasions to take forward the setting up of the company including the arrangements for offices in Dublin and Coleraine, staffing needs, the recruitment of a Chief Executive and future marketing initiatives.

InterTradeIreland: Progress

Dr Dara O'Hagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail what progress has been made by the Implementation body, InterTradeIreland, set up under the North/South Ministerial Council. (AQW 2515/00)

Sir Reg Empey: As I reported to the Assembly on 26 February 2001 in my Statement and subsequent debate, InterTradeIreland is up and running with its headquarters in Newry. It has undertaken already a number of activities to promote cross-border trade and business development throughout the island of Ireland. Examples include a major e-commerce event 'Building Your E-Business' held in June 2000 which has led to a number of projects being hosted and four roadshow events held in November 2000 attracting over 1500 business people.

ENVIRONMENT

Adverse Development of Small Villages

Mrs Carson asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will introduce guidelines for planning applications in order to reduce adverse development of small villages. (AQW 2463/00)

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Foster): I have no plans to introduce such guidelines.

Supplementary guidance on the location of new development is provided by the relevant Area Plan. For small villages, Area Plans indicate a limit of development and local planning policies. Development limits for small villages in new plans will take account of the guidance provided by the emerging Regional Development Strategy.

In assessing development proposals Planning Service also takes account of operational planning policies for specific land uses as set out in Planning Policy Statements and 'The Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland'. Supplementary planning guidance provided by various Development Control Advice Notes, (DCANs) for specific land uses is also a relevant material consideration.

Planning Permission: Licensed Premises

Mrs Carson asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (a) the guidelines used when planning permission is sought for making alterations to licensed premises (b) what form of environmental impact assessment is carried out on the licensed premises (c) what guidance he takes from an approved Area Plan when granting planning permission for alterations to licensed premises; and whether the Planning Office take into account representation by the Local Council when processing a planning application. (AQW 2464/00)

Mr Foster: Development Control Advice Note No 7 – Public Houses provides guidance on the planning criteria applied when applications for this type of development are being considered. A copy of this document is attached.

The Environmental Assessment Regulations are designed to indicate the impact of major developments. Alterations to Licensed Premises do not normally fall within the scope of these regulations. Planning Service assesses the effect of proposals on local amenity through the planning application process. Consultation is undertaken with relevant public bodies as required. In particular, such applications are usually referred to the Environmental Health Department of the District Council for advice and comments.

Area Plans do not specifically address detailed operational matters such as alterations to Licensed Premises which are more appropriately dealt with through the issue of specific planning guidance.

The Planning Service takes account of all representations made in relation to planning applications. Its procedures allow Councils to request deferral of consideration for site or office meetings in order to allow further representations on applications to be made. All matters raised are given very careful consideration before the Council is reconsulted. Further consultation with statutory consultees on specific matters raised is undertaken where necessary.

Development Control Advice Note 7 Public Houses

The purpose of this Advice Note is to give general guidance to intending developers, their professional advisors and agents. It is designed to provide advice on the planning criteria to be applied when an application for this form of development is being considered. It should be stressed that the note is not a specific statement of Departmental policy but rather one of advice and guidance. Each application or appeal is treated on its merits and the application of the guidance given to a particular case is always a matter calling for judgement. Any legal views stated in this note have no statutory force and should not be relied upon as an authoritative interpretation of the law. A list of other current notes in this series can be obtained from Divisional Planning Offices or from Planning Service Headquarters

1. A public house is defined as premises in which the only or principal business carried on is the business of selling intoxicating liquor by retail for consumption either in or off the premises', (Section 3(1)(a) Licensing Act (Northern Ireland) 1971). Such a premises is not within any particular Use Class and requires planning permission whether it is a proposed new building or a change of use from another form of development.
2. Legislation governing the sale of intoxicating liquor in public houses is quite separate from planning legislation. The Licensing Act (Northern Ireland) 1971, makes no requirement for a proposed public house to have planning permission before a licence is granted. However, in practice, the courts insist that there is a planning permission for such an establishment before they will consider granting a licence.
3. The hours of opening specified in the Act are 11.30 am to 11.00 pm with 30 minutes 'drinking-up' time in the evening, with the exception of Good Friday, Christmas Day and Sundays. In addition, a court may grant extension licences for functions held on the premises by charitable bodies or recognised groups, or for functions - not exceeding six in any year organised by the owner.
4. Under Section 28(2)(d)(ii) of the 1971 Licensing Act, the provision of passive entertainment is considered an ancillary use in a public house. Where, however, it is proposed to have live entertainment or a disco in a public house, the premises must be licensed as a place used for public entertainment under Section 31 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1934. The Licensing Authority - the District Council - will then consider the suitability of the premises for the proposed use having regard to possible fire hazards, floor strength, ingress and egress and also possible disturbance to neighbouring properties.
5. In addition, under the Pollution Control and Local Government (Northern Ireland) Order 1978, the District Council has the power to control the occurrence of excess noise.
6. Some public houses contain slot machines, video games and pool or snooker tables. Such entertainments will not require a separate planning application provided it can be clearly established that they are ancillary to the main function of the premises.
7. Public houses are also subject to legislation governing the sale of food and drink, including the Food and Drugs Act (Northern Ireland) 1958, the Food Hygiene Regulations 1964 and the Control of Food Premises Order 1979. The legislation is mainly concerned with ventilation and the sanitary conditions within an establishment, such as washing facilities for staff, and the cleanliness of food and equipment. Such matters are the concern of the Environmental Health Department of the relevant District Council.
8. In recent years there has been a trend towards more diversified trade within a public house. Sometimes a small restaurant may be incorporated. As with entertainments such developments will not require separate planning permission provided they are ancillary to the main function of the premises.
9. The effects of noise and disturbance and traffic safety are the main planning considerations in relation to public houses. There may be a number of suitable locations provided that problems of noise can be minimised and other amenity and traffic considerations are met. For example, a suitable location for a public house may be on the edge of a residential estate, in an area of mixed land uses or within a neighbourhood shopping centre. A public house may also be suitable in a town centre area or, indeed, in a rural area, although regarding the latter location, the proposal would, of course, be subject to the Department's policy for the control of development in rural areas. However, a public house will not generally be acceptable within a wholly residential area. This is because of loss of amenity, including the problems of noise and disturbance which may arise, and also the possible traffic hazards associated with heavy lorries delivering supplies, and customers arriving and leaving by car in the latter part of the evening.
10. The Department's car parking standard for a public house is one car space per 2 square metres of net bar floor area, i.e., non-operational parking to cater for customers, plus one car space per 3 members of staff, i.e., operational parking. Where a dance floor area is part of the premises a standard of one car space per 4 square metres may be applied to this area. Standards depend upon the location of the proposed public house. Within the centre of a large town only operational parking will be required. In the centre of smaller towns and the fringes of the larger town centres a certain proportion of non-operational car parking facilities will also be required dependent upon the availability of off-street public car parking areas and of acceptable local on-street parking. In other areas the full standard of operational and non-operational parking will normally be required. However, a relaxation of the non-operational standard may be permissible where it is apparent that most of the patrons are likely to be within walking distance of the premises.
11. It should be noted that since heavy lorries are likely to be delivering supplies to a public house, rear servicing of the establishment is preferable to on-street delivery.
12. Public houses can be a source of annoyance to the occupants of neighbouring properties due to problems of noise and disturbance and this is a valid planning consideration in terms of loss of amenity. However, it is possible to reduce the likelihood of excess noise emanating from a public house by the use of such measures as sound proofing and self-closing doors on entrance and exits. Where the proposed public house involves a change of use of an existing building, modifications to meet acceptable noise levels may not be possible, or if possible, may not be economic. In such circumstances the applicant may be asked to indicate what feasible measures he proposes to take to reduce noise and the Department will consider these measures in consultation with the Environmental Health Department of the local District Council.

13. Noise from live entertainment and discos in public houses can also be a source of annoyance to neighbours. As stated earlier, the control of such forms of entertainment is the responsibility of the Public Entertainment Licensing Department of the relevant District Council. However, noise from such a source is also a valid planning consideration when determining whether or not to grant permission. The Department will be particularly concerned about such noise where the proposed public house would be in the vicinity of residential property.
14. Any possible loss of amenity due to external noise is also a valid planning consideration, and the problems of noise and disturbance likely to be caused by customers, and the arrival and departure of delivery lorries are more difficult to resolve. For this reason a public house will only in exceptional circumstances be allowed to locate in an area which is 'noise sensitive', for example, opposite or adjacent to residential property.
15. A proposed extension to a public house requires planning permission regardless of the size of that extension. When considering such extensions account will be taken of the likely effects of the intensification of the existing use on the surrounding area. In particular, the suitability of any existing access and parking facilities will be carefully considered as well as any loss of amenity due to an increase in noise and disturbance.

North/South Ministerial Council: Environment Sectoral Group

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister of the Environment to detail what progress has been made by the Environment Working Group set up under the North/ South Ministerial Council. (AQW 2517/00)

Mr Foster: The Environment sectoral group of the Council has met on three occasions, the most recent being at Belle Isle in County Fermanagh on 23 February.

These meetings have been developing and implementing a work programme to address the seven environmental areas for enhanced co-operation mandated by the inaugural plenary meeting of the Council on 13 December 2000.

I am required by the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to make a statement to the Assembly following each meeting. I last reported on the work of the Environment sectoral group on 12 March 2001. The Assembly Official Report for that date contains a transcript of my statement. This remains the most up to date report of progress in taking forward the North/South Ministerial Council work programme of environmental co-operation.

Telecommunications Mast: Corgary, Newry

Mr Bradley asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to a determination of the Planning Service issued on 21 February 2001 (P/2001/0056), to explain why a telecommunications mast is being constructed at Corgary, Newry. (AQW 2546/00)

Mr Foster: This is a very complex case. The background to it is that the developers have implemented a prior approval issued by the Planning Service on 12 June 2000

for a telecommunications mast. A further application for prior approval for additional antennae on this mast was granted on 30 October 2000.

However, when development first started on this site in December 2000, it was brought to the attention of the Planning Service that both applications had been advertised with the wrong address. The approvals which issued also included the wrong address. In order to rectify the situation, the developers were asked to stop work on the site and to submit a fresh prior approval application.

All work on site ceased, and a fresh application was received on 11 January 2001, although the developers' stated position was that they considered the previous approvals to be valid. The fresh application was advertised with the correct address. There was significant opposition to this proposal. It was refused on 21 February 2001 on the grounds that "the proposal is detrimental to the visual amenity of the area, as the proposed site is prominent, open and exposed, and lacks any features which would allow this development to be satisfactorily integrated into the local landscape".

However, the developers recommenced work on the site on 26 March 2001, and a mast has now been erected. The developers' position is, as previously stated, that they have implemented the 12 June 2000 approval.

Legal advice was sought on this matter. The advice received is that the Department has no grounds for challenging the 12 June 2000 approval. However, I have asked officials to consider if other options might be available in this case, and to report back to me as a matter of urgency. I will consider what action may be taken when this further advice is received.

I have also asked for a comprehensive report on all aspects of this case to ensure that lessons are learned from it, and that weaknesses in procedures are identified and corrected.

Mutual Recognition of Driving Penalties: NI/GB

Mr McGrady asked the Minister of the Environment to detail his timetable to introduce legislation for mutual recognition in respect of driving penalties incurred by Northern Ireland licence holders in Great Britain. (AQW 2554/00)

Mr Foster: I am not in a position to provide a definitive timetable for the introduction of legislation for mutual recognition in respect of penalties for driving offences incurred in Great Britain by holders of a Northern Ireland driver's licence.

My Department is currently undertaking public consultation, in conjunction with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions in London, on proposals for mutual recognition of these penalties

between Northern Ireland and Great Britain and the closing date for receipt of comments is 4 May 2001.

Following this, and depending on progress on preparation of equivalent parallel legislation in Great Britain, I would expect to be able to publish legislative proposals for introduction to the Assembly by 31 March 2002.

Road Safety: Speed Cameras

Mr Fee asked the Minister of the Environment to give his assessment of the contribution speed cameras have made to road safety. (AQW 2564/00)

Mr Foster: Speed cameras have proven to be an extremely effective tool for reducing road casualties in high risk areas.

Excessive or inappropriate speed remains a major cause of road collisions and was the principal factor in more than 40 deaths and approximately 350 serious injuries on Northern Ireland's roads last year.

The RUC introduced mobile speed cameras in 1997. Their presence on certain roads, together with associated road signs, and the application of penalty points for speeding offences have had a positive effect on reducing traffic speeds. I have no doubt that use of speed cameras will play an increasingly important part in reducing road casualties.

I have also noted the very positive early results from the pilot scheme which began in Great Britain last year. This allows the installation and operation of speed cameras and associated activities to be funded from speeding fines. My officials will liaise with the RUC and other departments on the application in Northern Ireland of the lessons learned in this pilot scheme.

Coastal Erosion: Newcastle Beach

Mr Wells asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the steps he is taking to prevent further erosion of Newcastle beach. (AQW 2577/00)

Mr Foster: I have no powers to prevent the erosion of Newcastle beach.

Coastal erosion in general can impact on the responsibilities of several Departments, in addition to my own, including the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Department for Regional Development. It can also affect the interests of District Councils, in terms of protecting their promenades, marinas and other amenities.

I understand that studies commissioned by Down District Council have indicated that much of the erosion of sand from the beach at Newcastle has been caused by the progressive rock armouring of the seafront. Although these measures provide flood protection to the promenade

and the Newcastle Centre, they are thought to have contributed to the problems of sand erosion.

I further understand that the Council is proposing to construct groynes at the beach in an effort to redress the problem of sand erosion. These structures are likely to require consents from my Department and may also require planning permission. Although I fully understand why such measures may be proposed, my Department will want to be satisfied that their construction will not have any adverse effects on sand movement elsewhere within the wider Dundrum Bay area.

Reform of Local Government Finance

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of the Environment to outline his policy on the reform of local government finance. (AQW 2626/00)

Mr Foster: My Department is currently reviewing the formula for distribution of the resources element of General Exchequer Grant, payable to district councils, to take account of relative socio-economic disadvantage. An equality impact assessment of a proposed new formula is nearing completion and a consultation paper should issue next month. The Department is also reviewing arrangements for the payment of allowances, pensions and gratuities to councillors. A comprehensive reform of local government finance would have to be associated with the wider review of public administration.

Protection of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of the Environment to detail his plans to give greater protection to areas of outstanding natural beauty. (AQW 2653/00)

Mr Foster: My Department has powers under the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (NI) Order 1985 to designate Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs). AONBs are landscape areas that are recognised as being of distinctive character and special scenic value. They are often popular for recreation and tourism. Designation enables my Department to make proposals for conserving the natural beauty of the area and for promoting its enjoyment by the public.

Since 1985, 4 such areas have been designated, namely: the Mourne; the Causeway Coast; the Antrim Coast and Glens, and the Ring of Gullion.

Other areas of countryside in Northern Ireland, some of them previously designated under earlier legislation that carried no management powers, would also warrant designation as AONBs under the 1985 legislation. However, progress on designating these areas has been slow, mainly because insufficient resources had been allocated to this area of work.

I acknowledge the increasing need to take active steps to manage and co-ordinate recreation, tourism and conservation matters in the areas concerned. This is important in ensuring their long-term sustainability.

I have therefore asked my officials to prepare a report on the issues surrounding the designation of the remaining AONBs. I expect to receive their report shortly. I will also wish to have the benefit of the views of the Assembly Environment Committee in considering the way forward.

I should emphasise that I will not be able to give any commitments on further designations until I am satisfied that sufficient resources will be available to enable those commitments to be met.

Road Safety

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the steps he has taken to reduce the number of road accidents in the last three years. (AQW 2658/00)

Mr Foster: I have held my current responsibilities for road safety since devolution occurred in December 1999. These responsibilities include road safety education publicity as well as strategic co-ordination of the activities of the local road safety agencies. Roads engineering is the responsibility of the Department for Regional Development, while enforcement is principally a matter for the RUC.

Since taking up my responsibilities, I have secured additional funding to allow me to increase the number of Road Safety Education Officers from 11 to 21. This increase will provide additional support for teachers in promoting road safety. The additional Road Safety Education Officers will also allow new initiatives to be introduced, including a pilot Driver Improvement Scheme (as an alternative to conviction for certain types of motoring offence), Practical Child Pedestrian Safety Training at the roadside and monitoring the safe fitting of child safety restraints.

I have also secured a 40% increase in the resources for road safety publicity. This will allow me to intensify my Department's campaigns targeted on the main causes of road fatalities and serious injuries. I have launched two new campaigns - "Slowdownboys" in January 2000 to address the problem of excessive speeding, particularly by young male drivers; and the award-winning "Shame" in November 2000 to reinforce the anti-drink driving message. Indications are that these campaigns are having a beneficial affect on the attitudes of road users.

On 2 May 2001, with the support of the Executive Committee, I published a consultation document seeking views on a new Road Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2010. This was prepared in collaboration with other Departments and the RUC. Consultation will be followed by preparation of a new Strategic Road Safety

Plan for Northern Ireland to 2010 which will set out the long-term targets for reductions in road casualties and detail the measures to be taken to achieve them.

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

European Programmes: Interim Funding

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail what steps he is taking to sustain the activities and functions of community groups and rural community networks until such time as the new European Programmes and Community Initiatives are fully operational. (AQW 2462/00)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan): I announced in a statement to the Assembly on 12 February 2001 that the Executive had agreed that Departments should be authorised to make advance payments to projects where they judge that there is a very strong likelihood that the project will be eligible for funding and successful in an application under the new round of Structural Funds support. An advertisement was placed in the local newspapers on Friday 16 March 2001 with a closing date for applications of 12 April 2001. Interim funding will be provided if the project sponsors undertake to submit a full application for funding to the appropriate EU Programme once the necessary implementation arrangements are in place. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) will also consider applications within the framework of the new round of the Rural Development Programme. Interim funding can be given where that Department is satisfied that there is a very strong likelihood that the project will be successful in an application under the new Programme.

Housing Benefit: Rates Collection Agency Charges

Mr Fee asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the average length of time taken to process applications for Housing Benefit to cover charges by the Rates collection Agency. (AQW 2472/00)

Mr Durkan: The average length of time taken to process new claims, not requiring additional information to allow them to be assessed, in the year 1st April 2000 to date is just under 28 working days (27.86). The Agency is currently meeting the performance target set for this aspect of its work.

Civil Servants: Compulsory Retirement Age

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to confirm (a) that civil servants are required to

retire at the age of 60 (b) that job advertisements state that applications from all suitably qualified people are welcome irrespective of age (c) if both these positions are compatible and (d) whether the compulsory retirement age at 60 breaks section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. (AQW 2480/00)

Mr Durkan: All civil servants are currently required to retire at age 60 with the exception of those with preserved rights, namely those below the Executive Officer grade who were in post on 31 March 1996.

The NICS has established a normal age of retirement and this is stated in the job specifications which are provided to all applicants. Within that policy the NICS seeks to avoid age discrimination and therefore job advertisements state that applications are welcome irrespective of age.

It is not incompatible for an organisation to set a normal age of retirement within which applications for job advertisements are welcome irrespective of age.

Section 75 of the 1998 Act places obligations on Public Authorities, in carrying out their functions, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity across a range of categories of which age is one. Having a compulsory retirement age is not inconsistent with these obligations.

Housing Benefit: Rate Collection Agency Charges

Mr Fee asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he will introduce measures to ensure that an enforcement action is not initiated on a client by the Rate Collection Agency while their Housing Benefit application is still being processed. (AQW 2497/00)

Mr Durkan: The policy of the Rate Collection Agency is not to take enforcement action when a claim for Housing Benefit has been submitted until the application has been assessed. It is therefore regrettable that seven cases out of a total of 15,000 were lodged with the Enforcement of Judgements Office since 1997 while a claim for Housing Benefit was being assessed. The Agency has put procedures in place to ensure that such incidents do not recur.

Women's Centres: Peace I/II

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (a) the number of women's centres that were directly funded by the Peace and Reconciliation Programme (b) that these centres will continue to be funded and (c) if Peace II funding will be made available to these groups. (AQW 2506/00)

Mr Durkan:

(a) Thirteen organisations which identified themselves as women's centres were funded under the EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation

(PEACE I). In addition 218 other women's organisations, not describing themselves as women's centres, received funding for 560 projects under PEACE I.

- (b) The Executive agreed to introduce interim funding arrangements with effect from 1 April 2001 which authorises Departments to make advance payments to projects where they judge that there is a very strong likelihood that the project will be eligible for funding and successful in an application under the new round of Structural Funds support. An advertisement was placed in the local newspapers on 16 March and any organisation which meets the eligibility criteria may submit an application.
- (c) The implementing bodies of PEACE II, ie Departments, Intermediary Funding Bodies and Local Strategy Partnerships will make decisions on funding for projects, including those for women's centres, within the selection criteria specified in the Programme complement and the distinctiveness criteria as set out in the programme document itself.

North/South Ministerial Council: Special EU Programmes Body

Mr Maskey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail what progress has been made by the Special European Union Programme Body set up under the North/South Ministerial Council. (AQW 2518/00)

Mr Durkan: In accordance with its statutory responsibilities under the establishing legislation for North/South Implementation Bodies the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) has made the following progress:-

PEACE II Programme

The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) has been involved in the negotiation of the PEACE II Operational Programme together with the Finance Departments and the European Commission, and has worked closely with the Finance Departments and the Commission to finalise the text of the Operational Programme. It has taken the lead in preparing the draft PEACE II Programme Complement to be submitted to the Programme Monitoring Committee for approval.

The Body has been holding workshops at sub-regional level to develop guidelines for the implementation of the Priority 3 of the PEACE II Programme by the new Local Strategy Partnerships.

A tendering process is currently being overseen by the SEUPB to appoint Intermediary Funding Bodies (IFBs) to distribute and administer grants for particular activities with set objectives under the Programme. The responses to the call to tender are currently being evaluated by the Body and the selection process is scheduled to be completed in May 2001.

The Programme Monitoring Committee, which is chaired by the Chief Executive of the SEUPB, met in

interim format on 20 December 2000. The first meeting of the formally constituted Monitoring Committee will take place on 30 April.

The SEUPB will be the Managing Authority for the PEACE II Programme.

INTERREG III

The SEUPB prepared detailed draft Programme proposals on 15 November for the INTERREG IIIA Programme. These draft proposals were approved by NSMC for submission to the European Commission as a basis for negotiation. The Commission confirmed the admissibility of the proposed Programme on 1 February. The Commission's comments on the Programme proposals are expected soon and the formal negotiation process will begin shortly thereafter. The SEUPB will be directly involved in the negotiation of the Programme proposals with the Finance Departments and the European Commission.

The Body will carry out the functions of both the Paying Authority and Managing Authority for the INTERREG IIIA Programme.

Other Community Initiatives

The SEUPB has also been working with the relevant Lead Departments North and South regarding the draft proposals for EQUAL, LEADER+ and URBAN II Community Initiatives which were approved by NSMC in November 2000 and submitted to the European Commission as a basis for negotiation.

PEACE I and INTERREG II

The Body has been proactive in monitoring the progress of PEACE I and INTERREG II Programmes to ensure that the legal deadline to achieve full spend ie 31 December 2001 is achieved.

Common Chapter

The Body has reviewed all of the EU Programmes contained in the respective Community Support Frameworks North and South to identify areas of North/South activity within the Common Chapter. This exercise will form the base information for the Common Chapter database which will allow the Body to monitor and report on the level of increased co-operation across a wide range of sectors.

Equality Scheme/New Targeting Social Need

In accordance with the requirements of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the SEUPB has recently completed the consultation process and a final draft version of the Body's Equality Scheme was approved by NSMC on 9 April for submission to the Equality Commission for formal approval. The SEUPB has also been developing a New Targeting Social Need Action Plan which was approved by NSMC at its meeting on 9 April.

Corporate Matters

The Special EU Programmes Body has established 3 offices located in Belfast, Omagh and Monaghan.

The Body has produced a Corporate and Business Plan for the period 2000-2003 which was approved by NSMC at the sectoral meeting on EU Programmes on 15 November 2000. The Body has completed the first set of accounts for the period December 1999 to December 2000 which were submitted for joint audit to the respective Comptroller and Auditor General Offices North and South on 1 April 2001.

Staffing

An initial staffing structure and complement of 25 staff was approved for the Body by NSMC in June 2000. This staffing structure is currently under review.

The permanent Chief Executive of the Body, Mr John McKinney, was appointed on 1 February 2001.

Local Economic Development: Financial Allocation

Mr Maskey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (a) the budget in (i) sterling and (ii) euro's allocated to Local Economic Development Initiatives in the objective 1 transitional programme and (b) the priority and measures under which funding allocations are considered. (AQW 2529/00)

Mr Durkan:

- (a) The financial allocation for Local Economic Development under the Northern Ireland Programme for Building Sustainable Prosperity (formerly known as the Transitional Objective 1 Programme) is 40 million euros (c £25.8m) excluding matching funding.
- (b) This funding will be allocated under Priority 1 (Sub-Priority 1(a)) Measure 1.4.

Executive Programme Funds: Equality Obligations

Mr B Hutchinson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to confirm that allocations from Executive Programme Funds are equality proofed to avoid discrimination against marginalised groups. (AQW 2534/00)

Mr Durkan: The Executive Programme Fund allocations which were announced earlier this month were carefully scrutinised to ensure that they were consistent with statutory equality obligations and the principles of New Targeting Social Need.

Review of Accommodation

Ms Hanna asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to give an update on the review of accommodation. (AQO 1280/00)

Mr Durkan: Tenders for the accommodation review assignment have been invited from suitably qualified

firms and I expect consultants to be appointed by the end of April. In the matter of timing, and as I explained in the answer I provided on 12 February, I anticipate it will be October, possibly November, before final recommendations regarding accommodation and associated dispersal implications can be brought to the Assembly.

Needs and Effectiveness Reviews

Mr A Doherty asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail what progress has been made on the needs and effectiveness reviews. (AQO 1278/00)

Mr Durkan: The Executive has agreed terms of reference for five reviews of expenditure covering the areas of health, education, training, housing, and industrial development. These reviews are in their initial stages and my officials are working in conjunction with colleagues in the Economic Policy Unit and the relevant departments to take the exercise forward.

2001 Census

Mr Attwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline what arrangements have been made for the processing of the 2001 Census and when the first results will become available. (AQW 2738/00)

Mr Durkan: The 2001 Census will use state of the art information capture system to process some 700,000 forms. The processing of Census forms for the whole of the UK has been outsourced using competitive procurement procedures to Lockheed Martin. Lockheed Martin performed a similar service for the US Census last year and have chosen a site in Widnes in the North West of England to undertake the work. The joint procurement with Scotland and England and Wales will keep NI Processing costs to a minimum releasing resources for alternative uses in the NI programme. The processing operation will also involve the necessary data editing, coding and tabulation. A priority will be the production of information on age and sex for all geographical levels of output by early Autumn 2002 such that the data can inform public expenditure allocations.

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Econometric Models

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the nature and use of econometric models, such as the regional capitation formula, within her Department. (AQW 2496/00)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms de Brún): The main area where the Department has to date made use of econometric models has been in the development of deprivation - related needs indicators for use in a number of its resource allocation formulae. These include not only the regional capitation formula but also those formulae used to allocate GP Prescribing and GP Fundholding (Acute Services) resources to Health and Social Services Boards. In this context, econometric models are used to determine those factors, over and above age and gender, which best predict an area's need for resources.

I bhforbairt táscairí riachtanas bainteach le hanás le húsáid i gcuid dá foirmlí dháileadh acmhainní ab ea an príomhréimse inar bhain an Roinn úsáid as creatlacha eacnaméadracha go dtí seo. Ní chuireann siad seo an fhoirmle réigiúnach cheannsráithe amháin san áireamh ach na foirmlí sin a úsáidtear le hacmhainní ciste-shealbhaíochta (géarsheirbhísí) agus ordaithe gnáthdhochtúra a dháileadh ar bhoird sláinte agus seirbhísí sóisialta. Sa chomhthéacs seo, úsáidtear creatlacha eacnaméadracha leis na fachtóirí sin, le cois aoise agus inscne, a mheasann níos fearr riachtanais cheantair d'acmhainní a shocrú.

Fundholding Practices: Notices of Withdrawal of Recognition

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm (a) if notices of withdrawal of recognition have been sent to general practitioner fundholders (b) if these notices will be sent by 1 April 2001 and (c) if extra money will be given to general practitioner fundholders to reduce their overspends. (AQW 2507/00)

Ms de Brún: No notices of withdrawal of recognition have been sent to any fundholding practices.

I have made additional resources available which will permit health and social services boards to address the accumulated deficits incurred by GP fundholders in 2000-01. This means that fundholders' budgets in 2001-02 will not be reduced to cover prior year overspends.

Níor cuireadh fógraí ag tarraing siar aitheantais chuig clinici ciste-shealbhaíochta ar bith.

Chuir mé acmhainní breise ar fáil a chuirfidh ar chumas bhoird sláinte agus seirbhísí sóisialta le dul i gceann easnamh carnach tarraingthe ar ciste-shealbhóirí gnáthdhochtúra i 2000-01. Ciallaíonn sé seo nach ndéanfar laghdú i mbuiséid ciste-shealbhóirí i 2001-01 le caiteachais iomarcacha ó anuraidh a chumhdach.

Priorities for Action 2001-02

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in relation to her 'Priorities

for Action 2001-02' document to detail (a) to whom it was sent (b) who was involved in its drafting and (c) who was consulted regarding its content.

(AQW 2508/00)

Ms de Brún:

- (a) 'Priorities for Action 2001-02' contains planning guidelines for the health and personal social services. As such, it has been issued for action to all HPSS bodies and general medical practitioners, including GP fundholders. In the interests of openness and transparency, copies have also been sent to public representatives, trades unions, professional bodies and a wide range of voluntary and community groups.
- (b) 'Priorities for Action' was compiled by senior officials and professional advisers in my Department. As the Member will be aware, a draft was put before the HSSPS Committee in tandem with the public service agreement and budget allocations.
- (c) 'Priorities for Action' sets the agenda for the health and personal social services to deliver on the Executive's Programme for Government, in particular 'Working for a Healthier People'. It was, therefore, drawn up in the context of the Programme for Government, itself the subject of extensive consultation, and the budget allocations for 2001-02, which were agreed by the Assembly.
- (a) In 'Tosaíochtaí do Ghníomhaíocht' 2001-02 tá treoirínte pleanála do na seirbhísí sláinte agus sóisialta pearsanta. Mar sin de, cuireadh amach do ghníomhú chuig na forais SSSP uile agus chuig gnáthdhochtúirí í, gnáthdhochtúirí ciste-shealbhaíochta san áireamh. Ar mhaithe le hoscailteacht agus le soiléireacht, cuireadh cóipeanna di chuig ionadaithe poiblí, ceardchumann, forais ghairmiúla agus chuig réimse leathan grúpaí deonacha agus pobail.
- (b) Oifigigh shinsearach agus comhairleoirí gairmiúla i mo Roinn a chuir 'Tosaíochtaí do Ghníomhaíocht' le chéile. Mar is eol don Bhall, cuireadh dréacht di faoi bhráid an Choiste SSSSP mar aon le dáiltí buiséid agus an comhaontú seirbhíse poiblí.
- (c) Leagann 'Tosaíochtaí do Ghníomhaíocht' an clár oibre síos do na seirbhísí sláinte agus sóisialta pearsanta le Clár Rialtais an Fheidhmeannais a chur i bhfeidhm, go háirithe 'Ag Obair Do Phobal Níos Sláintiúla'. Mar sin de, dréachtaíodh i gcomhthéacs an Chláir Rialtais í, é féin ábhar an chomhairlithe fhorleathain chomh maith leis na dáiltí buiséid do 2001-02 a comhaontaíodh ag an Tionól.

Morbidity Figures

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 2206/00,

to detail in what format figures on morbidity in Northern Ireland can be obtained. (AQW 2509/00)

Ms de Brún: There are no standard measures of morbidity, but death rates are often used as an indicator of ill health and some information is available from disease registries and population surveys.

Níl tomhais chaighdeánaithe ghalracha ar bith ann ach is minic a úsáidtear rátaí báis mar tháscaire easláinte agus tá roinnt eolais ar fáil ó chlár ghalair agus ó shuirbhéanna daonra.

Food Safety Promotion Board

Mr J Kelly asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what progress has been made by the implementation body, Food Safety Promotion Board, set up under the North/South Ministerial Council. (AQW 2516/00)

Ms de Brún: The Food Safety Promotion Board has been active for over 12 months, although it was not formally launched until November last year. Since its inception, it has promoted a TV advertising campaign to enhance awareness of food safety and preventative measures against foodborne diseases; set up its own helpline and funded research into food safety. Steps have been taken to set up a website and an interim scientific advisory committee has been established. Seven staff, out of a planned 20, are in post and the leasing of its permanent headquarters in Cork is being finalised.

Bhí an Ghníomhaireacht um Chur Chun Cinn Sábháilteachta Bia gníomhach le breis agus 12 mí anuas, cé nár seoladh go foirmiúil í go dtí an tSamhain anuraidh. Óna bunú chuir sí feachtas fógraíochta teilifíse chun cinn le heolas ar shábháilteacht bia agus ar bhearta coisctheacha in éadan galar a thagann ó bhia a mhéadú; chuir sí a líne chabhrach féin ar bun, agus mhaoinigh sí taighde ar shábháilteacht bia. Rinneadh bearta le líonláithreán a chruthú agus bunaíodh coiste comhairleach eatramhach eolaíochta. Tá post ag seachtar as an fhiche duine pleanáilte le bheith ar an fhoireann agus tá an dlaoi mhullaigh á cur ar léasú a ceannárais bhuain i gCorcaigh.

Digital Hearing Aids

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to give her assessment of the benefits in the provision of digital hearing aids and to make a statement. (AQW 2520/00)

Ms de Brún: The provision of digital hearing aids by the Health Service is being trialed in 20 hospital audiology departments in England. An interim report on this new service is due in October. I expect this report will provide me with a firm basis on which to make decisions as to the introduction of a similar service here. Meanwhile, I

have discussed the benefits of digital hearing aids with representatives of the deaf community here.

Tá triail á baint as áiseanna éisteachta digiteacha soláthraithe ag an tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Sláinte i 20 roinn closeolaíochta otharlainne i Sasana. Cuirfear tuairisc eatramhach ar an tseirbhís nua seo amach i nDeireadh Fómhair. Tá mé ag súil gur céillí an bunús í seo le cinneadh a dhéanamh ar thabhairt isteach seirbhíse mar an gcéanna anseo. Idir an dá linn, phléigh mé tairbhí áiseanna digiteacha éisteachta le hionadaithe an phobail bhodhair anseo.

Spruce House: Rehabilitation and Specialist Care

Mr Tierney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of in-patients in acute hospitals with brain injuries and related disorders waiting to be referred to Spruce House, in Derry City Council area, for rehabilitation and specialist care.

(AQW 2523/00)

Ms de Brún: This information is not available.

Níl an t-eolas seo ar fáil.

Brain Injuries: North West Region

Mr Tierney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what therapeutic physical, speech and language services are available for inpatients with brain injuries in the north west region.

(AQW 2524/00)

Ms de Brún: In patients with brain injuries receive speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, and physiotherapy in accordance with their medically assessed need. The necessary therapy is provided by hospital staff.

Faigheann othair chónaitheacha le gortuithe inchinne teiripe labhartha agus teanga, teiripe saothair agus fisiteiripe de réir a riachtanais mhíochaine mheasúnaithe. Soláthraíonn an fhoireann otharlainne an teiripe atá riachtanach.

Transfer of Patients to Spruce House

Mr Tierney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average waiting time for in-patients in acute hospitals with brain injuries and related disorders waiting to be transferred to Spruce House, in Derry City Council area, for rehabilitation and specialist care.

(AQW 2525/00)

Ms de Brún: This information is not available.

Níl an t-eolas seo ar fáil.

Medical Care for People With Brain Injuries

Mr Tierney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline what developments have taken place in the north west region since the publication of the 1998-99 report into brain injured rehabilitation inpatient services in Northern Ireland by Dr Paul Darragh.

(AQW 2526/00)

Ms de Brún: Since the publication of Dr Darragh's report, the Western Health and Social Services Board has developed 'A Strategy for Meeting the Needs of Adults with Brain Injury'. The board has committed five beds in Spruce House to the assessment, rehabilitation, and respite medical care for people with brain injury.

Community services are being developed through the provision of a community rehabilitation team. A neuro-psychologist and a social worker have already been appointed. Funding has also been made available to facilitate the development of community rehabilitation services in Foyle and Sperrin Lakeland HSS Trusts.

The board is liaising with voluntary and independent providers to further develop additional specialist residential care for people with brain injuries.

Ó fhoilsiú tuairisc an Dr. Darragh, d'fhorbair Bord Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta an Iarthair 'Straitéis le Riar ar Riachtanais Daoine Fásta le Gortú Inchinne' Chuir an bord cúig leaba i Spruce House ar fáil do mheasúnú, d'athshlánú agus do chúram faoisimh mhíochaine do dhaoine le gortú inchinne.

Tá seirbhísí pobail á bhforbairt trí chur le chéile foirme athshlánú pobail. Ceapadh néarsiceolaí agus oibrí sóisialta cheana féin. Cuireadh maoiniú ar fáil le cuidiú le forbairt sheirbhísí athshlánaithe pobail in Iontaobhais SSS An Fheabhail agus Speirín Tír naloachanna.

Tá an bord ag comhoibriú le soláthraithe deonacha agus neamhspleácha le sainchúram cónaithe breise do dhaoine le gortuithe inchinne a fhorbairt a thuilleadh.

Coagucheck System Machines

Mr Molloy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline what action can be taken to increase the availability of Coagucheck system machines to enable self-testing/monitoring of blood.

(AQW 2528/00)

Ms de Brún: Anti-coagulant monitoring is usually provided by the outpatient department of acute hospitals or by general practitioners. In recent years near-patient testing has been made possible by the introduction of Coagucheck system machines and other similar devices. This is beneficial to a proportion of patients who require monitoring. Currently, the test strips are not available on prescription and my Department is considering the

possibility of the test strips being admitted to the drug tariff.

Ranna isothar géarotharlann nó gnáthdhochtúirí a dhéanann monatóireacht fhrith-théachtach de ghnáth. Sna blianta déanacha, féadadh scrúdú a dhéanamh ar othair chónagaracha nuair a tugadh meaisíní córas seiceála téachta agus gléasanna eile cosúil leo isteach. Tá siad seo tairbheach do roinnt othar ar gá monatóireacht a dhéanamh orthu. Faoi láthair, níl na stiallacha scrúdaithe ar fáil ar ordú agus tá mo Roinn ag déanamh machnaimh ar an fhéidearacht go gcuirfí na stiallacha scrúdaithe ar fáil ar tharaif dhrugaí.

Ministerial Group on Drugs

Mr B Hutchinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail her meetings with the Minister for Social Development and/or his officials and the Minister of State and/or officials in the Northern Ireland Office in relation to the drug strategy for Northern Ireland and to make a statement. (AQW 2533/00)

Ms de Brún: In February 2000, the Executive Committee determined that responsibility for driving forward the drug strategy and co-ordinating action to tackle drug-related issues should rest with the Department for Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

As a result of this decision, the ministerial group on drugs was established. I chair this group, which provides for membership by the Ministers for Social Development, Education and Further and Higher Education, Training and Employment. The NIO Minister Adam Ingram also agreed to attend the ministerial group meetings on a regular basis.

This group has met on three occasions: October 2000, January 2001 and April 2001. Adam Ingram, Minister of State, has attended these meetings, along with Mr McGuinness. Dr. Farren has attended two meetings.

The Minister for Social Development, and his predecessor, have refused to participate in the group.

I wrote to the Minister for Social Development on 29 March and reiterated my invitation to him to participate in the ministerial group meetings. He has once again declined to participate in the group and has expressed his opinion that the arrangements devised by the Executive are seriously flawed and represent an inadequate mechanism to tackle the problems.

Officials from the relevant Departments, including DSD and NIO, participate on the central co-ordinating group for action against drugs, chaired by the permanent secretary of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

I Mí Feabhra 2000, chinn an Coiste Feidhmiúcháin go mbeadh an Roinn Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí freagrach as cur chun cinn na

straitéise drugaí agus as comhordú birt le dul ngleic le ceisteanna bainteach le drugaí.

Mar thoradh ar an chinneadh seo, bunaíodh an grúpa aireachta ar dhrugaí. Tá mé sa chathaoir ar an ghrúpa seo, a bhfuil na hAirí Forbartha Sóisialta, Oideachais, Breis agus Ardoideachais Oiliúna agus Fostaíochta ina mbaill de. D'aontaigh an tAire OTÉ Adam Ingram go bhfreastalódh sé ar chruinnithe an ghrúpa aireachta go rialta.

Bhuail an grúpa seo le chéile trí huaire: Deireadh Fómhair 2000, Eanáir 2001 agus Aibreán 2001. D'fhreastail Adam Ingram, An tAire Stáit, ar na cruinnithe seo, mar aon leis an Uasal Mac Aonghusa. D'fhreastail an Dr. Ó Fearáin ar dhá chruinniú.

Dhiúltaigh an tAire Forbartha Sóisialta reatha agus a réamhtheachtaí rannpháirt a ghlacadh sa ghrúpa.

Scríobh mé chuig an Aire Forbartha Sóisialta ar an 29 Márta agus d'atug mé cuireadh dó rannpháirt a ghlacadh i gcruinnithe an ghrúpa aireachta. Arís, dhiúltaigh sé rannpháirt a ghlacadh sa ghrúpa agus chuir sé a thuairim in iúl go raibh lochtanna troma ar na socruithe déanta ag an Fheidhmeannas agus go léiríonn siad go bhfuil an mheicníocht easnamhach le tabhairt faoi na fadhbanna.

Glacann oifigigh ó na Ranna cuí, an RFS agus OTÉ san áireamh, páirt sa ghrúpa comhordaithe lárnach um beartú in éadan drugaí, a bhfuil rúnaí buan na Roinne Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí sa chathaoir air.

Amber-Rated Prescription Drugs

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail which amber-rated prescription drugs are prescribed by general practitioners in the Eastern Health Social Services Board Area. (AQW 2536/00)

Ms de Brún: The Eastern Health and Social Services Board does not operate a system of amber-rated prescription drugs for prescribing by general practitioners in its area. However, my Department has recently consulted widely on proposals developed by the regional group on the prescribing of specialist drugs for the development of red and amber lists relating to the prescribing responsibility for certain medicines. The proposals seek to ensure consistency of approach and high-quality patient care throughout the four health boards. The comments received are being considered and I will decide on the way forward shortly.

Níl córas drugaí ómra measta ar ordú i bhfeidhm ag Bord Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta an Oirthir ina limistéar féin do ghnáthdhochtúirí le hordú. Ar na mallaibh áfach, chuaigh mo Roinn i gcomhairle fhorleathan ar mholtaí forbartha ag an ghrúpa réigiúnach ar ordú drugaí speisialtachta d'fhorbairt liostaí dearga agus ómra ag

baint leis an fhreagracht ordaithe do chórais ar leith. Tá na moltaí ag iarraidh cur chuige atá de réir a chéile agus cúram ardcháilíochta othar a chinntiú ar fud na gceithre bhord sláinte. Tá machnamh á dhéanamh ar na moltaí a fuarthas faoi láthair agus déanfaidh mé cinneadh ar an bhealach chun tosaigh ar ball.

People Suffering from HIV, Haemophilia and Hepatitis C

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of people suffering from (a) human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) (b) haemophilia (c) hepatitis C and to outline her policy on compensation payments for those suffering from hepatitis C following a court ruling in England and Wales, on 26 March 2001, awarding compensation to those infected by hepatitis-contaminated blood.

(AQW 2537/00)

Ms de Brún:

- (a) The information is not available in the format requested. However, the cumulative total of people who have tested HIV positive here, since testing began in 1985, now stands at 207. This total relates to those first diagnosed here and does not include people initially diagnosed elsewhere who may now be resident here.
- (b) Two hundred and fifty-three haemophilia patients are registered at the haemophilia centre based at the Royal Group of Hospitals. A small number of other patients, not registered at the centre, attend Altnagelvin Hospital.
- (c) The information is not available in the format requested. However the cumulative number of hepatitis C laboratory reports recorded here each year since 1994 (none are recorded before that) now stands at 255.

With regard to the issue of compensation and the recent court ruling on 26 March against the National Blood Authority, the High Court judgement is long and complex and it would be inappropriate to offer any comment on the matter of compensation until there has been an opportunity to assess it carefully.

- (a) Níl an t-eolas ar fáil san fhoirm a iarradh. Is é 207 líon iomlán carnach na ndaoine anois fáthmheasta mar VED-dhearfach anseo ó thosaigh scrúduithe i 1985. Baineann an t-íomlán seo leo siúd a céadfáthmheasadh anseo agus ní chuireann sé daoine a céadfáthmheasadh in áiteanna eile agus a chónaíonn anseo anois san áireamh.
- (b) Tá 253 othar haemaifilia cláraithe ag an ionad haemaifilia in Otharlanna an Ghrúpa Ríoga. Freastalaíonn roinnt bheag othar nach bhfuil cláraithe ag an ionad ar Otharlann Alt na nGealbhan.

- (c) Níl an t-eolas ar fáil san fhoirm a iarradh. Is é 255 anois líon carnach na dtuairiscí saotharlainne ar heipitíteas C cláraithe anseo gach bliain ó 1994 áfach. (Níl tuairisc ar bith cláraithe roimhe sin).

Maidir le ceist an chúitimh agus an rialú cúirte is déanaí ar an 26 Márta in éadan an Údaráis Náisiúnta Fola, tá breithiúnas na hArd-Chúirte fada agus casta agus bheadh sé mícheart agam tuairim a thabhairt ar cheist an chúitimh go dtí go raibh deis agam é a mheas go cúramach.

Diabetes

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail, by board area, (a) the number of people diagnosed as having diabetes (b) the resources allocated to diabetes services and (c) innovations introduced to diabetes services in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. (AQW 2548/00)

Ms de Brún:

- (a) It is not possible to detail the number of people diagnosed as having diabetes here as there is no central register of diabetes sufferers. However, data from the Survey of Health and Social Wellbeing, carried out in 1997 show that the proportion of people aged 16 and over in each board area who had been told by a doctor that they were suffering from diabetes were as follows:

Board	%
Northern	2.0
Southern	2.8
Eastern	3.6
Western	2.4
Overall	2.9

- (b) The information is not available in the form requested. The Department does not allocate funds by medical specialty.
- (c) It is difficult to document all innovations introduced in each board area in each of the last 10 years. However, the main innovations over that period include:-
 - (i) The development of multidisciplinary teams (in secondary or primary care), which provide the skill mix necessary for the span of diabetic care encompassing education, nutrition, medical interventions, foot care, and eye care. In addition, some services provide joint specialist clinics, for example, consultant obstetricians and diabetologists working together to manage the care of a diabetic pregnant woman.

- (ii) The appointment of diabetes specialist nurses, who provide ongoing education and support for diabetic patients and their families. The specialist nurse facilitates continuity between the hospital and community.
 - (iii) Changes in the GP contract in 1990 and in health promotion and chronic disease management payments for GPs increased the involvement of primary care teams in the management of diabetic patients. Several shared care systems are in operation providing structured co-operation between the hospital and primary care teams.
 - (iv) Since March 2000, insulin pen needles and certain reusable pens have been prescribable by GPs.
 - (v) The development of local diabetic services advisory groups in board areas, which provide a central forum for local professional and user input to improve the quality of care provided and to input into local service planning.
 - (vi) The development of hospital and community based diabetic retinopathy screening services. The WHSSB uses optometrists to screen for diabetic retinopathy in the community; in other boards a mobile screening service is available. Further work is under consideration by my Department to facilitate implementation of the recent recommendations of the National Screening Committee on the provision of a comprehensive screening programme for diabetic retinopathy.
 - (vii) The piloting of the diamond diabetic information management system in the Ulster Hospital and Community Trust. This may inform development of a diabetic register here.
 - (viii) The expansion of renal services here to allow patients with renal failure to access haemodialysis services.
 - (ix) Where it is considered to be appropriate, the referral of patients to Dublin for combined pancreatic and renal transplant.
 - (x) The incorporation of recognised guidelines into standards for diabetic care and the promotion of multidisciplinary audit against these standards both in primary and secondary care.
 - (xi) The convening of a local taskforce on diabetes whose aim is to propose a framework for diabetes care here by March 2002.
- (a) Ní féidir mionchuntas a thabhairt ar líon na ndaoine a fáthmheasadh le diaibéiteas anseo mar nach bhfuil clár láir ar bith d'fhlungaithe diaibéitis ann. Léiríonn na sonraí seo a leanas ón Suirbhé Sláinte agus Leasa

Shóisialaigh a rinneadh i 1997 coibhneas na ndaoine 16 bliain d'aois agus níos mó i ngach ceantar boird i ndúirt a ndochtúir leo go raibh siad ag fulaingt ó dhiaibéiteas:

Bord	%
Tuaisceart	2.0
Deisceart	2.8
Oirthear	3.6
Iarthar	2.4
Iomlán	2.9

- (b) Níl an t-eolas ar fáil san fhoirm a iarradh. Ní dháileann an Roinn maoinithe de réir speisialtachta míochaine.
- (c) Tá sé deacair gach athrú déanta i ngach ceantar boird i ngach bliain de na 10 bliain deireanacha a dhoiciméadú. I measc na bpríomhathruithe a rinneadh le linn na tréimhse sin bhí:-
 - (i) Forbairt foirne ildhisciplíneacha (i gcúram tánaisteach nó i bpríomhchúram) a sholáthraíonn an réimse scileanna atá riachtanach don réimse cúraim dhiaibéitigh ag cuimsiú oideachais, cothaithe, idirghabhálacha míochaine agus cúraim choise agus shúile. Ina theannta sin, soláthraíonn roinnt seirbhísí clinici comhspeisialtachta, mar shampla, cnáimhseoirí comhairleacha agus diaibéiteolaithe ag obair le chéile le riar ar chúram mná diaibéití ag iompar clainne.
 - (ii) Ceapadh sainbhanaltraí diaibéitís, a sholáthraíonn oideachas agus tacaíocht leanúnach d'othair dhiaibéiteacha agus dá dteaghlaigh. Cothaíonn an sainbhanaltra leanúnachas idir an otharlann agus an pobal.
 - (iii) Athruithe sa chonradh gnáthdhochtúra i 1990 agus i gcur chun cinn sláinte chomh maith le híocaíochtaí do dhochtúirí as a riar ar ghalair ainsealacha, a mhéadaigh an bhaint a bhí ag foirne príomhchúraim le riar othar diaibéiteach. Tá roinnt córas cúraim roinnte i bhfeidhm ag soláthar comhoibrithe struchtúrtha idir an otharlann agus na foirne príomhchúraim.
 - (iv) Ó Mhárta 2000, bhí snáthaidí pinn insline agus pinn athúsáidte ar ordú ó ghnáthdhochtúirí.
 - (v) Forbairt grúpaí comhairleacha ar sheirbhísí aitiúla diaibéiteacha i gceantair bhoird, a chuireann fóram láir ar fáil d'ionchur gairmithe agus úsáideoirí áitiúla le cáilíocht an chúraim a sholáthraítear a fheabhsú agus le tuairimí a thabhairt ar phleanáil sheirbhísí áitiúla.
 - (vi) Forbairt sheirbhísí scagtha retineapaite diaibéití otharlannbhunaithe agus pobalbhunaithe.

Úsáideann an BSSSI radharceolaithe leis an phobal a scagadh do retineapaite dhiaibéiteach, i mboird eile tá seirbhís ghluaisteach scagtha ar fáil. Tá mo Roinn ag déanamh machnaimh ar thuilleadh oibre faoi láthair le cuidiú le cur i bhfeidhm moltaí déanacha an Choiste Náisiúnta Scagtha ar sholáthar cláir chuimsithigh scagtha do retineapaite dhiaibéiteach.

- (vii) Píolótú córais riartha eolais dhiaibéitigh an diamond in Iontaobhas Otharlann agus Phobal Uladh. D'fhéadfadh sé seo cuidiú le forbairt chlár dhiaibéitigh anseo.
- (viii) Leathnú seirbhísí duánacha anseo le ligint d'othair le teip dhuánach seirbhísí haemascagdhéalaithe a fháil.
- (ix) Atreorú othar go Baile Átha Cliath do hrasphlandáil paincréasach agus duánach má shíltear go bhfuil sé cuí.
- (x) Cur isteach treoirínte aitheanta sna caighdeáin do chúram diaibéiteach agus cur chun cinn iniúchta ildhisiplínigh in éadan na gcaighdeán seo i bpríomhchúram agus i gcúram tánaisteach araon.
- (xi) Tionól tascfhórsa aitiúil ar dhiaibéiteas agus cuspóir aige creatlach do chúram diaibéitis anseo a mholadh faoi Mhárta 2002.

Waiting Lists: Western Health and Social Services Board

Mrs Courtney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of cases on waiting lists for more than 12 months in Western Health and Social Services Board. (AQW 2549/00)

Ms de Brún: At 31 December 2000 (the latest date for which information is available), 314 people (5% of the total waiting) had been waiting for 12 months or more for inpatient admission to Western Board hospitals. At the same time, 1,422 people (8% of the total waiting) had been waiting for 12 months or more for their first outpatient appointment at Western Board hospitals.

Ag an 31 Nollaig 2000 (an dáta is déanaí dá ha fuil eolas ar fáil) bhí 314 duine (5% den líon iomlán ag fanacht) ag fanacht ar feadh 12 mí nó níos mó le dul isteach in otharlanna Bhord an Iarthair mar othair chónaitheacha. Ag an am céanna, bhí 1,422 duine (8% den líon iomlán ag fanacht) ag fanacht ar feadh 12 mí nó níos mó dá gcéad choinne éisothair ag otharlanna Bhord an Iarthair.

New Ambulance Vehicles: Downpatrick

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of new ambulance vehicles brought into service in the Downpatrick Ambulance Unit from October 1999 to date.

(AQW 2576/00)

Ms de Brún: One new accident and emergency ambulance vehicle was brought into service in the Downpatrick area from October 1999.

Chuaigh otharcharr timpistí agus éigeandálaí nua amháin i seirbhís i gceantar Dhún Pádraig ó Dheireadh Fómhair 1999.

24-Hour Paediatric Community Nurse Service

Mr Tierney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail those community trusts that have a 24-hour paediatric community nurse service. (AQW 2599/00)

Ms de Brún: None of the local trusts provides a 24-hour paediatric community nurse service.

Six local trusts, Foyle, Sperrin Lakeland, Armagh & Dungannon, North & West Belfast, Ulster Community & Hospitals, South & East Belfast, provide a paediatric community nurse service from Monday to Friday from 9 am until 5 pm. In addition, Causeway Trust provides a community paediatric nurse service seven days a week from 9am until 5 pm.

Ní chuireann iontaobhais áitiúla ar bith seirbhís phéidiatraiceach altra pobail 24 uair ar fáil.

Cuireann sé iontaobhas áitiúla, An Feabhal, Sliabh Speirín, Ard Mhacha agus Dún Geanainn, Béal Feirste Thuaidh agus Thiar, Pobal agus Otharlanna Uladh, Béal Feirste Theas agus Thoir, seirbhís phéidiatraiceach altra pobail ar fáil ón Luain go hAoine ó 9r.n. go dtí 5i.n.. Ina theannta sin, cuireann Iontaobhas An Chlocháin seirbhís phéidiatraiceach altra pobail ar fáil seacht lá sa tseachtain ó 9r.n. go dtí 5i.n.

Royal Group of Hospitals: Operational Deficit

Ms Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what steps she is taking to address the accumulated deficit problem at the Royal Group of Hospitals. (AQW 2621/00)

Ms de Brún: The forecast accumulated operational deficit at the Royal Group of Hospitals as at 31 March 2001 amounted to some £18m. Some £10.5m of this was financed via a short-term loan issued by the former Department of Health and Social Services in 1998-99 and 1999-2000.

At the end of March, an allocation of £10.5m was made to the trust specifically to repay the loan to the Department. This has now been effected.

In addition, a further £7.7m has been made available to the trust to eradicate the remaining operational deficit. This was largely financed by a share of the £18m special allocation approved by the Executive for trust deficits.

As a result of these transactions, the accumulated operational deficit at the Royal Group of Hospitals has now been discharged.

£18m san iomlán ab ea an t-easnamh feidhmiúil carnach measta ag Otharlanna an Ghrúpa Ríoga ag an 31 Márta 2001. Maoiníodh £10.5m de seo trí iasacht ghearrthéarmach a thug an Iar-Roinn Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta i 1998-99 agus i 1999-2000.

Ag deireadh Mhí an Mhárta, dáileadh £10.5m ar an iontaobhas leis an iasacht a fuair sé a aisíoc don Roinn. Tá seo déanta anois.

Ina theannta sin, cuireadh £7.7m breise ar fáil don iontaobhas leis an chuid eile den easnamh feidhmiúil a ghlanadh. Maoiníodh é seo den chuid is mó trí sciar den dáileadh speisialta £18m ceadaithe ag an Fheidhmeannas d'easnamh iontaobhais.

Mar thoradh ar na bearta seo, glanadh anois an t-easnamh feidhmiúil carnach ag Otharlanna an Ghrúpa Ríoga.

Departmental Equality Scheme: Complaints Received

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) the number of complaints received under the Department's equality scheme since its approval and (b) the subject area of each complaint.

(AQO 1275/00)

Ms de Brún: My Department has received one complaint under its equality scheme, relating to the availability of drugs for patients undergoing fertility treatment.

Fuair mo Roinn gearán amháin faoina scéim chomhanannais a bhain le hinfhaighteacht drugaí d'othair a bhí ag dul faoi chóireáil thoirchithe.

Food Standards Agency: Specified Risk Material

Mr Poots asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline what consultation she has had with the Food Standards Agency on the recent importation of meat containing specified risk material.

(AQO 1302/00)

Ms de Brún: I have been kept informed by way of case-by-case submissions from the Food Standards Agency

on all incidents involving beef imported here with specified risk material attached. In each case, the agency has informed me of the details of the affected consignments from other member states importing directly into here and of the action taken to protect public health.

Coinníodh ar an eolas mé trí aighneachtaí cás ar chás ón Ghníomhaireacht um Chaighdeán Bia ar gach eachtra a bhaineann le mairteoil a iomportáladh anseo a bhfuil abhar sainbhaoil iniata léi. I ngach cás, thug an ghníomhaireacht eolas domh ar shonraí na gcoinsíneachtaí a bhfuil amhras ann fúthu ó bhallstáit eile a iomportáladh go díreach anseo agus ar na bearta a rinneadh le sláinte an phobail a chosaint.

Prostate Cancer Screening

Mrs Courtney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline when she hopes to be in a position to make prostate testing available in all board areas.

(AQO 1289/00)

Ms de Brún: The National Screening Committee, which advises Health Ministers, does not recommend prostate cancer screening based on the prostate specific antigen (PSA) test. However, this is being kept under review. In addition, the Department of Health in London is developing a prostate cancer risk management programme that will enable those anxious about this disease to make an informed choice about whether to take the PSA test. I will consider in due course whether this should be developed here.

Ní mholann an Coiste Náisiúnta Scagtha, a thugann comhairle d'Airí Sláinte, scagadh ailse próstataí a bunaíodh ar an scrúdú antaigine próstataí (APL). Tá sé seo á choinneáil faoi athbhreithniú, áfach. Ina theannta sin, tá An Roinn Sláinte i Londain ag forbairt chlár bainistíochta baoil ón ailse phróstatach a ligfidh dóibh siúd atá buartha faoin ghalair seo rogha eolach a dhéanamh ar cé acu a ba chóir dóibh dul faoin scrúdú APL nó nár chóir. Déanfaidh mé machnamh in am is i dtráth ar chóir é a fhorbairt anseo.

Rates Paid to Nursing and Residential Homes

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to increase, in line with inflation, the tariff paid to nursing and residential homes for the care of the elderly.

(AQO 1274/00)

Ms de Brún: It is the responsibility of health and social services boards to agree with providers the fees to be paid and rates are reviewed each year in light of prevailing circumstances and priorities. I understand that boards are seeking to agree rates for places in independent sector residential and nursing care homes above the rate of inflation.

Is é freagracht na mbord sláinte agus seirbhísí sóisialta teacht ar aontú leis na soláthraithe ar na táillí atá le hioc, agus athbhreithnítear na rátaí gach bliain de réir gnáth-thosca agus gnáth-thosaíochtaí. Tuigim go bhfuil boird ag iarraidh rátaí d'áiteanna i dtithe altranaís agus cónaithe na hearnála neamhspleáiche a aontú thar an ráta boilsceithe.

Treatment for Diabetes

Mr M Murphy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what steps she is taking to ensure that people with diabetes receive the best standard of treatment available irrespective of socio-economic background. (AQO 1293/00)

Ms de Brún: Treatment for diabetes is available for all those who have this condition, irrespective of socio-economic background. Much work is ongoing at board level, and in HSS trusts and primary care, to promote high-quality services for those with diabetes. In addition, a local task force on diabetes has recently been convened to review guidelines on best practice and to consider the impact of developments in diabetic services elsewhere. It will provide updated clinical and service guidance to promote best standards of care for diabetic patients here.

Tá cóireáil don diaibéiteas le fáil ag gach duine a bhfuil an riocht seo acu, cuma faoina chúlra shocheacnamaíoch. Tá a lán oibre ar siúl ag leibhéal boird agus in iontaobhais SSS agus i gcúram príomhúil le seirbhísí ardcháilíochta a chur ar fáil dóibh siúd a bhfuil diaibéiteas orthu. Lena chois sin, cuireadh le chéile tascfhórsa ar dhiaibéiteas áitiúil le treoirlínte ar dhea-chleachtas a athbhreithniú agus le héifeacht forbairtí i seirbhísí diaibéitis in áiteanna eile a mheas. Soláthróidh sé treoir chliniciúil agus seirbhíse uasdátaithe leis na caighdeáin chúraim is fearr a chur ar fáil d'othair dhiaibéiteacha anseo.

Capital Expenditure Plans

Mr Berry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail her capital expenditure plans for the next financial year. (AQO 1266/00)

Ms de Brún: My capital budget for the financial year 2001-02 is £64.85 million. This includes £4.9 million for centrally funded projects, mainly IT, and £1 million earmarked for modernisation of the Ambulance Service.

Proceeds from sales, estimated at £2 million, will be added to the budget.

I have approved expenditure totalling £20.55 million to take forward, or complete, major hospital redevelopment projects at Altnagelvin, Causeway, Craigavon and the Royal Victoria Hospitals, and to begin work on the cancer day hospital at the Belfast City Hospital, together with essential remedial works at the Central Services Agency headquarters building in Adelaide Street, Belfast.

A total of £22 million has been distributed to health and social services trusts to enable them to undertake local capital works.

In addition, I will be considering projects for funding, in line with my 'Priorities for Action' published last month. These include the provision of residential children's homes, expansion of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), as part of the 'Imaging Modernisation Programme' I announced last December, further redevelopment of the Royal Victoria Hospital and the upgrading of the Ulster Hospital.

Is ea £64.85 mhilliún mo bhuiséad caipitil don bhliain airgeadais 2001-02. Cuimsíonn sé seo £4.9 milliún do scéimeanna lármhaoinithe, TE don chuid is mó agus £1 milliún curtha in áirithe leis an tSeirbhís Otharcharr a nuachóiriú.

Cuirfear fáiltais ó dhíolacháin — meastar gur £2 mhilliún atá ann faoi láthair — leis an bhuiséad iomlán.

Cheadaigh mé caiteachas a shuimíonn £20.55 mhilliún le scéimeanna atógála tábhachtacha otharlainne a dhéanamh, nó a chríochnú ag Otharlanna Alt na nGealbhan, An Chlocháin, Craigavon agus ag Otharlann Ríoga Victoria, agus le hobair a thosú ar an otharlann lae aile ag Otharlann Chathair Bhéal Feirste, agus ar oibreacha riachtanacha feabhais ag foirgneamh cheannáras na LárGhníomhaireachta Seirbhísí i Sráid Adelaide, Béal Feirste.

Dáileadh £22 mhilliún san iomlán ar iontaobhais sláinte agus seirbhísí sóisialta le cuidiú leo oibreacha áitiúla caipitil a dhéanamh.

Ina theannta sin, beidh mé ag déanamh machnaimh ar mhaoiniú roinnt scéimeanna de réir mo 'Tosaíochtaí do Gníomhaíocht' a foilsíodh an mhí seo caite. Orthu seo tá soláthar tithe cónaithe do pháistí, leathnú ar íomhú athshondais mhaighnéadaigh (ÍAM) mar chuid den 'Clár Nuachóirithe Íomhaithe' a d'fhógair mé An Nollaig seo caite, tuilleadh atógála na hOtharlainne Ríoga Victoria agus uasghrádú Otharlainne Uladh.

Job Vacancies: Advertisements

Mr J Kelly asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what media outlets are utilised by trusts and boards to advertise job vacancies. (AQO 1299/00)

Ms de Brún: Job vacancies are advertised mainly in the 'Belfast Telegraph', although local newspapers in a trust or board area are used to recruit into lower paid jobs. Consultant posts are advertised in the British Medical Journal. Professional posts that are difficult to fill and those of a specialised nature are publicised in the appropriate professional journal.

Fógraítear folúntais sa 'Belfast Telegraph' don chuid is mó, cé go n-úsáidtear nuachtáin áitiúla i limistéar iontaobhais nó boird le daoine a earcú i bpoist a bhfuil

tuarastal níos ísle orthu. Fógraítear poist lianna comhairleacha sa British Medical Journal. Fógraítear poist ghairmiúla atá deacair a líonadh agus iad siúd de nádúir shainiúil, san irisleabhar cuí.

Hearing: Screening for Infants

Mr McFarland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail her plans for the introduction of screening to identify hearing impairment in infants. (AQO 1296/00)

Ms de Brún: We will be participating in the planned pilot programme to introduce hearing screening of newborn babies. Applications from trusts to run a pilot here are being considered and it is hoped that one will be in operation by June.

Beimid rannpháirteach sa chlár píolóta pleanáilte le scagadh éisteachta leanaí nuabhreithe a thabhairt isteach. Tá machnamh á dhéanamh ar iarratais ó iontaobhais le clár píolóta a reáchtáil anseo agus táthar ag súil go mbeidh ceann i bhfeidhm faoi Mheitheamh.

Carraigfoyle Paediatric Support Unit, Belfast

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the steps she intends to take to maintain paediatric services as a result of the intended closure of Carraigfoyle Paediatric Support Unit, Belfast. (AQO 1309/00)

Ms de Brún: The Eastern Health and Social Services Board has advised that it is in discussion with the Ulster Community and Hospitals HSS Trust about alternatives to the paediatric services provided at Carraigfoyle. The trust will shortly be advising parents of new arrangements. South and East Belfast HSS Trust will continue to deliver a local service for children from their area through their community paediatric facilities, such as Holywood Arches Clinic. In the meantime, provision at Carraigfoyle will continue until alternative services are in place.

Chuir Bord Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta an Oirthir in iúl go bhfuil sé ag plé seirbhísí eile seachas na seirbhísí pédiatraiceacha a sholáthraítear ag Carraig Feabhail le hiontaobhas SSS Phobal agus Otharlanna Uladh. Beidh an t-iontaobhas ag cur tuismitheoirí ar an eolas faoi na socruithe nua ar ball. Leanfaidh iontaobhas SSS Bhéal Feirste Theas agus Thoir ar aghaidh seirbhís áitiúil a chur ar fáil do pháistí óna cheantar féin trína n-áiseanna pédiatraiceacha pobail, amhail Clinic Stuanna Ard Mhic Nasca. Idir an dá linn, leanfar ar aghaidh seirbhísí a chur ar fáil ag Carraig Feabhail go dtí go mbeidh na seirbhísí eile ar fáil.

Review of the Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986

Mr Neeson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm that the pending review of

the Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 will be conducted by an independent body. (AQO 1295/00)

Ms de Brún: I have not yet finalised my plans for this review.

Níor chuir mé an dlaoi mhullaigh ar mo phleananna don athbhreithniú seo.

Assembly Questions

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline her policy in dealing with Assembly questions requiring answers in writing. (AQO 1261/00)

Ms de Brún: My policy in answering all Assembly questions is to give the relevant information as fully and concisely as possible, taking into account factors such as the availability of the information requested and the estimated cost of providing it.

Is é an polasaí atá agam an t-eolas bainteach a thabhairt i bhfreagraí ar cheistanna uilig de chuid an Tionóil a iomláine agus a achoimre agus is féidir, ag cur san áireamh fachtóirí amhail infhaighteacht an eolais a iarrtar agus an costas a bhaineann lena chur ar fáil.

Transfer of Patients by Minibus

Ms Armitage asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to explain (a) why seriously ill patients are transferred from hospitals in Belfast to hospitals in the constituency of East Londonderry by minibus and not by ambulance; (b) how are these decisions made and (c) by whom. (AQO 1263/00)

Ms de Brún: Decisions about the transfer of service users from one hospital to another are taken by hospital clinicians in the context of the service user's condition. If the Member has concerns about a specific case I shall be happy to look into it.

Is iad na cliniceoirí ospidéil a dhéanann cinnidh faoi aistriú úsáideoirí seirbhíse ó ospidéal amháin go hospidéal eile, i gcomhthéacs riocht úsáideoir na seirbhíse. Má tá an Comhalta buartha faoi chás ar leith, ba bhreá liom an cás a scrúdú.

HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

Times Higher Education Supplement: Statistics

Dr Birnie asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to confirm the accuracy of the statistics quoted in 'The Times Higher

Education Supplement' of 23 March 2001 that percentages of Catholics and Protestants in local full-time education were 39.5% and 29.1% respectively in higher education and 47.8% and 37.1% in further education.

(AQW 2562/00)

The Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Dr Farren):

The information on the religion of NI full-time students enrolled at higher education institutions in Northern Ireland was based on provisional enrolment data for the 1999-2000 academic year held by the Department. This information has subsequently been revised and is detailed below.

NI STUDENTS ENROLLED ON FULL-TIME COURSES AT HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN NORTHERN IRELAND 1999/00

	Numbers	%
Protestant	7,250	29.9
Roman Catholic	9,892	40.8
Other Religion	604	2.5
Religion not stated	6,504	26.8
Total	24,250	

The information on the religion of students enrolled on full-time courses at the NI further education colleges in 1999-2000, published in the Times Higher Education Supplement of 23 March 2001 is correct

Student Powered Unit of Resource

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to explain (a) the funding method student powered unit of resources (b) why using this funding method has a differential impact on colleges and (c) what advice is he giving to colleges in this regard.

(AQW 2580/00)

Dr Farren:

- (a) The new FE funding formula is based on the measurement of student activity and achievement called a student powered unit of resource (SPUR). SPURS are awarded for the delivery and study of further education at three key interconnected phases: recruitment phase, learning phase, outcome phase. The SPURS generated take account of the mode of delivery, course duration, type of provision (e.g. vocational, non-vocational), the category of student and subject area.
- (b) The new FE funding formula was introduced after incorporation and replaced the five separate funding formulae operated by the education and library boards (ELBs). Under the funding arrangements for ELBs, each ELB was free to determine the amount to

be allocated to further education and this resulted in different levels of funding for colleges depending on the area in which the college was sited. The new funding methodology ensures that all colleges are funded on the same basis. The new funding methodology has been introduced on a transitional basis over the past three years to allow colleges time to adjust to the common funding arrangements, with full implementation of the formula from 2001-02.

- (c) The new FE funding formula has been developed with the full co-operation of the sector. It has been the subject of detailed consideration and wide consultation. The formula funding working group, which comprised representatives from colleges and the Department, made its initial recommendations in March 1998 and, after consultation with the whole sector, agreed the formula for implementation in March 1999.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Access to Public Transport for the Disabled

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his plans to increase access to public transport for the disabled.

(AQW 2449/00)

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Campbell): I recently announced the publication of a consultation document on draft Rail Vehicle Accessibility Regulations. These draft regulations lay down standards for the accessibility of trains by people with disabilities and standards which should enable them to travel in safety and comfort. The Regulations will apply to all new trains entering service, including the trains that Translink are in the preliminary stages of ordering. Translink has advised that, where practical, it will bring older trains undergoing major refurbishment into line with the legislation.

Bus accessibility regulations are a matter for the Minister of the Environment, but in advance of such legislation being introduced, Translink has already started to replace old buses with new low floor buses which people with disabilities find easier to use. Translink is also making railway and bus stations more accessible for people with disabilities when upgrading work takes place. In the current year, improved facilities will come into use at Bangor, Coleraine and Belfast Central.

Under the rural transport fund programme an additional five new fully accessible minibuses will be made available to rural community transport partnerships, bringing the total fleet up to 25. My Department also continues to fund dial-a-ride and easibus services, which improve access to transport for people with disabilities.

Converting Grass Verges to Hard Shoulders

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development to consider, where suitable, the conversion of wide grass verges to hard shoulders that would be capable of carrying slow-moving traffic on major rural routes.

(AQW 2467/00)

Mr Campbell: The use of hard shoulders as running lanes for traffic would be in breach of the Road Traffic Regulation (Northern Ireland) Order 1997. Nevertheless, my Department's Roads Service is considering the road safety, structural and legislative issues associated with the possible use of hard shoulders by very slow-moving vehicles.

The Roads Service is, however, of the view that instead of converting wide grass verges to hard shoulders for use as occasional running lanes, it would be more cost effective to provide improved overtaking opportunities at selected locations by the use of "2+1" carriageway layouts. A "2+1" layout is where there are two lanes in one direction and one lane in the other direction.

Market Research on Belfast/Newry Rail Service

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the market research undertaken to establish the rail transport requirements for passengers travelling between Belfast and Newry.

(AQW 2471/00)

Mr Campbell: The Enterprise train provides most of the rail services for passengers travelling between Belfast and Newry. Translink has advised that extensive market research was undertaken as part of the Enterprise service specification and development project. The research programme was undertaken by Oscar Faber in association with Irish Marketing Surveys and Ulster Marketing Surveys. The research sought to identify passenger needs and expectations as well as developing a passenger-led timetable, including the required stopping patterns of trains. Over 1700 interviews were conducted in the process.

In addition, a study aimed at developing a plan for increasing the patronage of both bus and rail services in Northern Ireland was carried out by Steer, Davies and Gleave in 1999 during which the corridor between Newry and Belfast was considered. As a result of the study, a rail link bus service connecting Newry station to the town centre was introduced and considerable improvements were made to the provision of passenger facilities at the station.

Free Public Transport for Students

Dr Birnie asked the Minister for Regional Development to give his assessment of (a) the feasibility and (b) the public expenditure implications of the introduction of free public transport for students.

(AQW 2473/00)

Mr Campbell: Students over the age of 16 do not qualify for assistance under the concessionary fares scheme. Neither my Department nor Translink holds sufficient information in accessible form about the usage of public transport by students over 16 or by students receiving tertiary level education to enable an assessment of the costs of allowing them to travel free.

It would probably be feasible to introduce free travel for students, if the resources were available, but, having secured funding to provide free public transport for people aged 65 and over, my next aim is to extend the provision of half-fare concessions for more categories of people with disabilities. I consider that my priority in future funding negotiations.

Strabane 2000 Urban Regeneration Programme: Pedestrian Bridge

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development to consider the provision of pedestrian bridges across the river Mourne at Strabane as recommended in the Strabane 2000 urban regeneration programme.

(AQW 2476/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service acknowledges that the two pedestrian bridges over the River Mourne, as proposed by Strabane 2000, would be desirable. However, the two road bridges, which provide pedestrian access across the river, mean that the construction of the pedestrian bridges (estimated to cost some £1.5m) would not be regarded as a high priority by the Roads Service.

I can, however, confirm that, if Strabane 2000 is successful in securing funding for the bridges, the Roads Service would be happy to project-manage the construction of the bridges, provided they are designed to the Roads Service technical standards with links to the footway network so that, when completed, they can be adopted into the public road network.

Analysis of Urban Land

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail what analysis of urban land, unused because of political divides, is available.

(AQW 2521/00)

Mr Campbell: There is no information available on the quantum of urban land unused because of political divides.

It is recognised, however, that some urban land has been unused or underused because of community conflict.

Urban capacity studies being prepared by the Department of the Environment will provide a baseline survey for the future supply of housing land in urban areas and will inform the preparation of development plans. These studies will also be used to assess the potential of all sites for

brownfield development. It is recognised that there are issues related to availability of brownfield land, and this is a matter which will require further work as part of the drive to deliver urban renaissance.

Brownfield Sites

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail all brownfield sites available.

(AQW 2527/00)

Mr Campbell: At present, information is not held detailing brownfield sites available.

The draft of the regional development strategy, which is being considered by DRD Assembly Committee, outlines that urban capacity studies will be used to inform the degree to which urban housing growth can be met within the “footprint” of individual towns. The urban capacity studies being prepared by the Department of the Environment will provide a baseline survey for future supplies of housing land in urban areas and will inform the preparation of development plans.

The draft strategy also shows that the aspirational target for brownfield development is a minimum of 40% with a recognition that higher targets can be set for towns and cities as the urban capacity studies become available.

The DRD Assembly Committee, and some Members, have expressed concern that the 40% minimum figure is too low and, indeed, could end up becoming the accepted figure. I am giving serious consideration to their representations before deciding how best to address this matter.

Craig's Bog Road, Aughnacloy: Abandonment Order

Mrs Carson asked the Minister for Regional Development to state when he intends to issue a closure order for the Craig's Bog Road, Aughnacloy in order to end the problem of illegal dumping in the Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council area.

(AQW 2535/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service hopes to publish a notice of intention to make an abandonment order for part of Craig's Bog Road in the local press within the next two weeks. After publication, a statutory period of one month is allowed for objections. The timescale for the completion of the necessary statutory process will depend on the number and nature of objections that may be received.

Tactile Paving Surfaces: Larne Town Centre

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development to give his assessment of the provision of tactile paving surfaces in Larne town centre and if he has any

plans to upgrade surfaces to improve the safety of the visually impaired.

(AQW 2608/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service acknowledges that there may be scope for further tactile paving in Larne town centre. Arrangements are being made for officials from the Roads Service and Disability Action to meet on site to discuss this matter and I am hopeful that such paving can be provided at appropriate sites over the coming months.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Heating Repairs Recommended on Occupational Therapy Grounds

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development to explain why legislation and procedures were changed to place responsibility on the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, as opposed to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, for carrying out heating repairs recommended on occupational therapy grounds.

(AQW 2483/00)

The Minister for Social Development (Mr Morrow): This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive but I am advised by the chief executive that there has been no change in responsibility for carrying out heating repairs recommended on occupational therapy grounds.

However, in conjunction with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSS&PS), the Housing Executive recently carried out a best value review of the housing adaptation service. One of the aims of the review was to deal with concerns about waiting times for adaptations, particularly for the conversion of fuel heating systems.

In addressing the provision of suitable heating in the homes of elderly and disabled people, the review found that in the public sector, heating requests were overloading occupational therapy (OT) and Housing Executive systems, thereby delaying other adaptations. It was therefore agreed that the Housing Executive should take responsibility for assessment of public sector heating changes, enabling it to include heating adaptation schemes in its heating strategy. This would reduce the workload of OTs and enable them to concentrate on other types of adaptation need.

In the private sector there is a legal duty for DHSS&PS and the Housing Executive to liaise on disabled facilities grants. OT's will continue to assess and make recommendations regarding private sector requests for heating changes.

Social Security Agency Customer Charter Initiative

Mr McGrady asked the Minister for Social Development to list the performance indicators which have been put in place to measure the effectiveness of the additional expenditure on the social security agency customer charter Initiative. (AQW 2488/00)

Mr Morrow: There are performance indicators to measure standards and targets, and these are set out in the customer charter. These are well established and performance is reported regularly against them in the agency's annual report.

Social Security Agency Staff: Training

Mr McGrady asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the training available for Social Security Agency staff on the benefit system and to confirm that Social Security Agency staff are now being trained across the benefit system. (AQW 2489/00)

Mr Morrow: Staff undergo an extensive and detailed training programme in the benefit they administer. In addition, customer service training, which includes a general awareness of all benefits, is provided to front-line staff who deal directly with customers.

Customer Charter Initiative: Additional Staff

Mr McGrady asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of additional staff that were recruited for deployment to provide advice and information to the public on the customer charter initiative. (AQW 2490/00)

Mr Morrow: No additional staff were recruited specifically because of the customer charter initiative. As part of the process to improve customer service, staffing levels increased by 80. However, these staff carry out as many duties, including providing information, advice and assistance to customers.

Unfit Housing

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (a) the number of unfit houses and (b) the percentage of unfit housing by (i) district council area and (ii) parliamentary constituency. (AQW 2495/00)

Mr Morrow: Every five years, the Housing Executive carries out a house condition survey which shows the levels of unfit housing in Northern Ireland. The information is not analysed at a parliamentary constituency level. The analysis requested by district council area from the most recent survey is as follows:

UNFITNESS BY LOCAL COUNCIL AREA 1996 SURVEY

Council	Number Unfit	%
Antrim	630	3.8
Ards	1730	6.6
Armagh	1700	9.8
Ballymena	1250	5.5
Ballymoney	850	9.3
Banbridge	1210	8.9
Belfast	8470	7.5
Carrickfergus	520	3.6
Castlereagh	790	3.0
Coleraine	1860	8.4
Cookstown	1560	13.0
Craigavon	990	3.6
Londonderry	1950	6.3
Down	2160	10.6
Dungannon	1700	10.4
Fermanagh	3510	17.5
Larne	930	8.1
Limavady	900	9.0
Lisburn	1520	3.9
Magherafelt	1280	10.5
Moyle	560	9.5
Newry & Mourne	2380	9.9
Newtownabbey	1310	4.6
North Down	1720	5.5
Omagh	1330	8.8
Strabane	1170	9.3
N Ireland	43970	7.3

Income Support: Unclaimed/Underpaid

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Social Development to give details of the actual or estimated amount of income support that was (a) not claimed and (b) underpaid by the Social Security Agency, in each district council area, in each of the last five years for which figures are available. (AQW 2498/00)

Mr Morrow: The Social Security Agency does not hold figures for the actual or estimated amount of income support not claimed. Although it does not hold figures for actual or estimated amount of income support underpaid by district council area, the total estimated amounts of income support underpaid is as follows:

Year ending March 1999	£7,122,550
Year ending March 2000	£5,994,239

NIHE Grant

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Social Development with regard to each category of Northern Ireland Housing Executive grant, what is the average time between (a)

submission of the completion card and inspection of the finished work and (b) approval of the finished work and payment being made by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. (AQW 2499/00)

Mr Morrow: Information is not available in a form which allows separate answers to parts (a) and (b) of the question. However, the average time from submission of the completion card to making the payment is six weeks. The average time by grant type is as follows:

Grant type	Average number of weeks from submission of the completion card to making the payment
Renovation	6
Replacement	5
Disabled Facilities	7
Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO)	7
Minor Works Assistance	5

NIHE Programme: South Down

Mr M Murphy asked the Minister for Social Development to ensure that funding is made available for the extensive Northern Ireland Housing executive programme in the South Down constituency. (AQW 2530/00)

Mr Morrow: I will continue to argue the strongest case possible for a budget that can effectively tackle housing need in Northern Ireland. The Housing Executive is responsible for identifying that need and for allocating funding accordingly. I understand that it has a comprehensive list of schemes programmed to start in 2001-02 in South Down and will be bidding for additional funds to carry out any schemes for which funding is not yet available.

Attendance Allowance

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Social Development to give details of the actual or estimated amount of attendance allowance that was (a) not claimed and (b) underpaid by the Social Security Agency, in each district, in each of the last five years. (AQW 2541/00)

Mr Morrow: The Social Security Agency does not hold figures for the actual or estimated amount of attendance allowance not claimed or underpaid.

Invalid Care Allowance

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Social Development to give details of the actual or estimated amount of invalid care allowance that was (a) not claimed and (b) underpaid by the Social Security Agency, in each district, in each of the last five years. (AQW 2542/00)

Mr Morrow: The Social Security Agency does not hold figures for the actual or estimated amount of invalid care allowance not claimed. No evidence of underpayment of benefit has been identified in a review of invalid care allowance.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Social Development to give details of the actual or estimated amount of Incapacity benefit that was (a) not claimed and (b) underpaid by the Social Security Agency, in each district, in each of the last five years. (AQW 2543/00)

Mr Morrow: The Social Security Agency does not hold figures for the actual or estimated amount of incapacity benefit not claimed. An estimate of the amount of that benefit underpaid for year ending March 2001 will be made but is not yet available. I will write to the Member when this information is available.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Social Development to give details of the actual or estimated amount of disability living allowance that was (a) not claimed and (b) underpaid by the Social Security Agency, in each District, in each of the last five years. (AQW 2544/00)

Mr Morrow: The Social Security Agency does not hold figures for the actual or estimated amount of disability living allowance not claimed. Although it does not hold figures for actual or estimated amount of disability living allowance underpaid by district area, the total estimated amount of disability living allowance underpaid is as follows:

Year ending March 1999	£16,614,359
------------------------	-------------

Child Benefit

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Social Development to give details of the actual or estimated amount of child benefit that was (a) not claimed and (b) underpaid by the Social Security Agency, in each district, in each of the last five years. (AQW 2545/00)

Mr Morrow: The Social Security Agency does not hold figures for the actual or estimated amount of child benefit not claimed. While a review of child benefit was carried out in year ending March 2000, a statistically valid estimate of underpayment could not be made as no material evidence of underpayment was identified.

Community Sector: Mainstream Core Funding

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister for Social Development to detail which agencies or groups in the

community sector are entitled to mainstream core funding and whether this funding is available only to those agencies or groups with a regional remit. (AQW 2550/00)

Mr Morrow: None of the voluntary and community sector organisations in receipt of mainstream core funding from the Department for Social Development has an entitlement, as such, to funding of that type. The Department, together with its advisers, exercises its judgement and discretion in determining which applications for funding should be given priority subject to the availability of resources. Part of that process involves consideration of whether the work of the voluntary and community organisation will help the Department further its policy objectives or provide a resource supporting the wider voluntary and community sector. The Department also needs to consider whether it has a clear long-term policy need for the services provided, whether it values the services provided by the organisation and agrees with the organisation's view of their relative priority, and also whether the Department values the body's expertise and ability to develop new approaches to meeting needs.

Finally, it should be noted that organisations in receipt of core funding operate on a regional, rather than local, basis.

Industrial Injuries Disablement Pension

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Social Development to give details of the actual or estimated amount of industrial injuries disablement pension that was (a) not claimed from and (b) underpaid by the Social Security Agency, in each district, in each of the last five years. (AQW 2556/00)

Mr Morrow: The Social Security Agency does not hold figures for the actual or estimated amount of industrial injuries disablement pension not claimed or underpaid.

Maternity Allowance

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Social Development to give details of the actual or estimated amount of maternity allowance that was (a) not claimed from and (b) underpaid by the Social Security Agency, in each district, in each of the last five years. (AQW 2557/00)

Mr Morrow: The Social Security Agency does not hold figures for the actual or estimated amount of maternity allowance not claimed or underpaid.

Retirement Pension

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Social Development to give details of the actual or estimated amount of retirement pension that was (a) not claimed from and (b) underpaid

by the Social Security Agency, in each district, in each of the last five years. (AQW 2558/00)

Mr Morrow: The Social Security Agency does not hold figures for the actual or estimated amount of retirement pension not claimed or underpaid.

Industrial Injuries Death Benefit

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Social Development to give details of the actual or estimated amount of industrial injuries death benefit that was (a) not claimed from and (b) underpaid by the Social Security Agency, in each district, in each of the last five years. (AQW 2559/00)

Mr Morrow: The Social Security Agency does not hold figures for the actual or estimated amount of industrial injuries death benefit not claimed or underpaid.

Contribution-based Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Social Development to give details of the actual or estimated amount of contribution-based jobseeker's allowance that was (a) not claimed from and (b) underpaid by the Social Security Agency, in each district, in each of the last five years. (AQW 2560/00)

Mr Morrow: The Social Security Agency does not hold figures for the actual or estimated amount of contribution-based Jobseeker's Allowance not claimed. While a review of contribution-based jobseeker's allowance was carried out, a statistically valid estimate of underpayment for year ending March 2000 could not be made as no material evidence of underpayment was identified.

Social Security Benefits

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Social Development to detail over what period may (a) overpayment of Social Security benefits be recovered and (b) underpayment of Social Security benefits be backdated. (AQW 2565/00)

Mr Morrow: There is no legislative provision for the period of recovery of Social Security benefits. The period of recovery depends on the amount of the overpayment and the rate of recovery. The rate of recovery depends on a person's ability to repay

Normally, underpayments of benefits are backdated to the date the error occurred. However, if the customer contributed to the error, underpayment can be backdated only up to a maximum of 13 months.

Martin Memorial Clock

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (a) when the Northern Ireland Housing

Executive intends to have the Martin Memorial Clock at Shrigley refurbished and (b) how much this will cost.

(AQW 2570/00)

Mr Morrow: The Housing Executive is working with several organisations to have the clock restored in its present location and to have it managed by a trust. However, a developer has applied for planning permission to construct houses beside the monument, which may have implications for any proposals to refurbish it. It is not possible, therefore, to say when refurbishment work may be carried out, as this will depend on the outcome of a planning inquiry and on obtaining suitable funding. There are no costings for restoration, but in 1995 the cost was estimated to be between £150,000 and £175,000.

Building Work: Model Farm, Downpatrick

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development whether the developer had commenced building work at Model Farm, Downpatrick before the land purchase from NIHE was finalised.

(AQW 2646/00)

Mr Morrow: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive but the chief executive has advised that the developer started building work on land which had not been offered for sale. On discovery, the Housing Executive immediately took action to prevent the developer from proceeding.

In subsequently agreeing to the sale of the land to the developer, the Housing Executive took account of the Planning Service's opinion on the best use for the land and also sought substantial compensation, including interest charges, from the developer. This has been paid in full and the sale of the site to the developer was completed in March 2001.

Disabled Facilities Grant

Mr Gibson asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the number of disabled facilities grants that are available to those seeking adaptations in their homes.

(AQW 2672/00)

Mr Morrow: There are two types of grant-aid available to those in the private sector. First, disabled facilities grant is available for major works and is means-tested. The approval of an application for this grant is mandatory for work involving access to, around, and within the house, as well as access to facilities in the house. In addition, discretionary grant aid may be given for other works that would make the dwelling or building suitable for the accommodation, welfare or employment of a disabled occupant.

Secondly, the minor works assistance grant covers small scale works, similar in nature to that covered by the disabled facilities grant and is available to those on income related benefits and tax credits.

The Housing Executive and registered housing associations carry out adaptations in their own stock.

Social Security Agency Performance Targets

Mr Carrick asked the Minister for Social Development what performance targets have been set for the Social Security Agency for the current financial year.

(AQW 2684/00)

Mr Morrow: The following targets have been set with the objective of continuing to provide high levels of service to customers. I am satisfied that the targets are represent a demanding challenge for the agency. The targets will be included in the agency's 2001-04 strategic and business plan, which is due for publication later this month. A copy of the plan will be placed in the Library. The targets are as follows:

1. Customer Satisfaction
90% of customers to regard the agency's service as satisfactory or better.
2. New Deal Initiatives
To increase the numbers of lone parents participating in the scheme by 25% year on year.
To increase the numbers of partners of the unemployed participating in the scheme by 25% year on year.
3. Benefit Accuracy
Disability living allowance
Incapacity benefit
Income support
Jobseeker's allowance
4. Benefit Clearance Times
Disability living allowance
Incapacity benefit
Income support
Jobseeker's allowance
5. Fraud
To achieve a 5% reduction in fraud and error in income support.
To achieve a 5% reduction in fraud and error in jobseeker's allowance.
To achieve a 5% reduction in fraud and error in disability living allowance.
6. Financial Recovery
Recovery of overpayments - £4.0 million.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 4 May 2001

Written Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

North/South Ministerial Council: Transportation Working Group

Mr McNamee asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail what progress has been made by the Transportation working Group set up under the North/South Ministerial Council. (AQW 2519/00)

Reply: Officials met at the beginning of April to take forward work on the programme approved by the Council for enhancing North/South co-operation on Road Safety. Meetings of officials to prepare work programmes on Strategic Transport Planning and Rail Safety have yet to be arranged.

Terms of Reference for Working Group on Children's Commissioner

Ms Ramsey asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail the terms of reference of the Inter-Departmental Working Group on The Children's Commissioner. (AQW 2589/00)

Reply: The terms of reference for the interdepartmental group are as follows:

to consider:

- the precise role and remit of a Commissioner for Children;
- the scope of a children's strategy;
- the delivery mechanisms;
- how the Executive might exercise its interests in ensuring the development of co-ordinated policies on matters affecting children, eg by establishing a sub-committee;
- suggestions as to how the Assembly might exercise its role in scrutinising policies on matters affecting

children, eg through the establishment of a standing committee;

- how research and development needs might be met; and
- any other necessary arrangements.

Nominations for Working Group on Children's Commissioner

Ms Ramsey asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail (a) who has been nominated to sit on the Inter-Departmental Working Group on the Children's Commissioner and (b) when is the Group due to meet. (AQW 2590/00)

Reply: The interdepartmental steering group is jointly-chaired by Minister Haughey and Minister Nesbitt and the group members are:

Department	Nominee	Position
DSD	Barney McGahan	Director of Operations, Social Security Agency
DHFETE	Tom Scott	Director of Skills and Industry Division
DCAL	Dr Eddie Rooney	Director of Policy and Development
DOE	Margaret Langhammer	Head of Equality Scheme
DFP	Clare Archbold Jack Layberry	Senior Legal Asst - Office of Law Reform Assistant Secretary - Supply Division
DARD	Noel Cornick	Head of Corporate Policy and European Issues
DRD	David Crabbe	Head of Central Management Branch
DHSSPS	Leslie Frew	Director of Child and Community Care
DE	Christine Jendoubi	Head of Children and Young People Division
OFMDFM	Chris Stewart Heather Stevens	Head of Community Relations, Human Rights and Victims Division Head of Human Rights Unit
DETI	Malcolm Briant	Head of Policy Evaluation and Organisational Change Division
NIO	Mark McGuckin Clare Salters	Head of Criminal Justice Services Division, Head of Human Rights Unit, London
N I Courts Service	Laura McPolin	Legal Officer Civil and Family Branch

The first meeting of the group was held on 10 April 2001.

Timescale for Children's Commissioner

Mr Shannon asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to give a timescale for the establishment of a Children's Commissioner.

(AQW 2596/00)

Reply: We are committed to taking action on this issue as quickly as possible; however, we are equally committed to getting it right.

Our aim is to complete a formal consultation on the role and remit of the Commissioner by the autumn.

Following consideration of consultation responses and finalisation of proposals, it will then be necessary to take legislation through the Assembly.

This will mean that a Commissioner for Children should be appointed by Spring 2002.

Working Group on Travellers

Mr Adams asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to identify the steps taken by their office to ensure culturally appropriate consultation with the Travelling Community on the "Final Report of the Promoting Social Inclusion Working Group on Travellers."

(AQW 2607/00)

Reply: In order to ensure culturally appropriate consultation with the Travelling community, Equality Unit officials consulted with Traveller representative organisations on how best to carry out a consultation process with Travellers.

An independent organisation will undertake this consultation on behalf of the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister and will work closely with Traveller representatives. Travellers representatives have been invited onto the steering group which will oversee the consultation process.

Cultural Traditions: Unionist/Loyalist Community

Mr Gibson asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail the steps it is taking to ensure the Unionist and Loyalist community have full human rights and equality of opportunity to enjoy the traditions of their culture.

(AQO 1317/00)

Reply: Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights prohibits discrimination in the application of other Convention Rights, including the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion contained in Article 9 of the Convention, the right to freedom of expression in Article 10, and the right to freedom of association in Article 11. The Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister is working to ensure compliance with the convention rights in all Departments.

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires public authorities, in carrying out their functions, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between, among others, persons of different religious beliefs and political opinions. The Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister has put in place an equality scheme setting out the arrangements for fulfilling the duties imposed by section 75. It also advises and challenges, where appropriate, other Departments regarding their duties under section 75.

The Programme for Government contains a range of specific actions to support cultural and linguistic diversity including:

- the development by December 2001 of a policy on linguistic diversity, including Ulster Scots;
- making key information available in languages other than English by May 2001, including the development of services for Ulster Scots in support of the Charter for Regional or Minority languages; and
- the extension from April 2001 of the Diversity 21 initiative to promote greater respect and understanding of cultural diversity.

Independent International Commission on Decommissioning

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail any reports received from the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning.

(AQO 1311/00)

Reply: The most recent report of the Independent International Commission for Decommissioning to the British and Irish Governments was that dated 22 March 2001.

Children's Forum

Mrs E Bell asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail the proposed timetable for the setting up of the Non Governmental Organisation's Children's Forum and to make a statement.

(AQO 1330/00)

Reply: Following the announcement on 3 April of the establishment of the Non Governmental Organisations' Forum, letters of invitation to join the Forum have been issued and it is expected that the first meeting of the Forum will take place shortly.

We have been encouraged by the positive response to the announcement of the Non Governmental Organisations' Forum and we look forward to working in partnership with it. It is through this process of ongoing dialogue with those directly involved with children, young people and their parents that we can best develop proposals which will achieve our aim of placing Northern Ireland at the leading edge of best practice.

Executive Office in Brussels: Appointments

Dr Birnie asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail the current position on appointments to the Executive Office in Brussels.

(AQO 1347/00)

Reply: The Head of Office took up his post in Brussels on 26 March and is already providing a service to Departments. He is operating initially out of the UK Permanent Representation until the Office premises are completed in May. A deputy head of Office is currently being sought by internal trawl and the selection will take place in May.

Advertisements have been placed in the Belgian press for two locally engaged staff to provide support in the running of the Office. They should be in place in June.

Northern Ireland Bureau in Washington DC

Mr Neeson asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail progress in upgrading the representative role of the Northern Ireland Bureau in Washington D.C.

(AQO 1320/00)

Reply: The resources of the Northern Ireland Bureau have been strengthened by engaging locally an additional member of staff at middle management level. A relocation of the Bureau to offices in downtown Washington shall allow it to present a more focused image of Northern Ireland. In addition, we will be reviewing the functions of the Bureau, including its relationship with other bodies promoting Northern Ireland in the U.S.

Executive Programme Funds: Consultation

Mr Cobain asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to give an assessment on consultation by the Executive Committee with the Departmental Committees on the Executive Programme Funds and to make a statement.

(AQO 1345/00)

Reply: The Executive agreed that the Departmental Committees should be consulted on departmental proposals for the Executive Programme Funds. Departments forwarded their Executive Programme Fund proposals to their respective Committees for consideration and views received were taken into account. Unfortunately, only a limited amount of time was available to Committees to consider the detail.

The experience with the first tranche of Fund allocations will be used to improve the procedures for future rounds with the aim of ensuring that proposals are made available to the Departmental Committees at an earlier stage.

North/South Ministerial Council: Mobility Study

Ms Lewsley asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to outline what progress has been made on the Mobility Study approved at the last North/South Ministerial Council Meeting.

(AQO 1357/00)

Reply: The Mobility Study was initially included in the Executive's Agenda for Government in June 2000. The Agenda identified actions to support North/South development, including the need to take action to "remove barriers to living/working North and South" in the island of Ireland.

At the second plenary meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC), held in Dublin on 26 September, 2000, the Irish Government side on NSMC agreed to co-operate with the Executive in taking forward the study through a steering group of officials, North and South, which would report to the Council.

In follow-up discussions, terms of reference were agreed and a copy is attached. It was further agreed that the report for the Council should be informed by a study to be undertaken on a consultancy basis under the guidance of the North/South Steering Group of officials.

Following a public tendering process the consortium of PricewaterhouseCoopers and Indecon Economic Consultants was awarded the contract to carry out this study.

The consultants are currently undertaking a comprehensive research programme. This includes:

- Statistical research to identify flows of economically active and inactive persons between the jurisdictions, North and South;
- A newspaper advertisement inviting submissions to the study
- A survey of recruitment agencies, North and South;
- An interview programme with individuals, companies and representative organisations, and
- Case Studies involving a number of companies, across key sectors and representing a good geographic spread.

In addition to the above activities, public consultation conferences were planned for 1 May in the North and 16 May in the South.

The 1 May conference has been postponed because of the latest foot-and-mouth disease outbreak. It is however hoped that the 16 May conference will take place, subject of course to any further developments in relation to foot-and-mouth disease.

The consultants will present their report to the Steering Group on 31 May 2001. The Steering Group will report to the next plenary meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council.

Community Relations: Review of Policy

Mr Maginness asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to review its policy on community relations. (AQO 1364/00)

Reply: The Programme for Government includes a commitment to review and put in place a cross-departmental strategy for community relations leading to measurable improvements in community relations.

It is our intention to begin the review of existing policy before the summer.

Children's Fund

Mrs Courtney asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to give an assessment on the operation of the Executive "Children's Fund". (AQO 1354/00)

Reply: The first round of allocations from the Children's Fund, totalling £10.5m, was announced by the Minister for Finance and Personnel on 2 April. The 12 successful projects will make a real contribution to protecting children in need or at risk.

The Children's Fund has already generated a great deal of interest and attracted a number of high quality bids. It is now our intention to ensure that the voluntary and community sector are able to access the next round of the Children's Fund.

Victims Commission

Mr Leslie asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQO 1136/00, to detail any further discussions with the Minister of State regarding the proposal for a Victims Commission. (AQO 1349/00)

Reply: Further discussions have not yet taken place. The Junior Ministers, Denis Haughey MLA and Dermot Nesbitt MLA, who are dealing with victims issues, will be meeting with their Northern Ireland Office counterpart, Adam Ingram, in the near future to discuss a range of relevant matters, including the question of a Victims Commission.

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Flooding Problems: Strabane District Council Area

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail her response to the consultant's

report to the Rivers Agency on flooding problems in the Strabane District Council area. (AQW 2500/00)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers): Rivers Agency has in fact commissioned reports on flooding problems at Lisdivin, Burndennet, Sion Mills and Newtownstewart in the Strabane Council area.

I am pleased to confirm that the findings of the studies at Sion Mills and Newtownstewart have proved positive and it is the intention of Rivers Agency to proceed with flood defence improvements at these locations as resources permit.

I am very conscious of concerns about flooding from the Burndennet River and I have fully considered the findings of the recent consultant's report on that problem. While the study examined a number of scheme options, I very much regret that none of these was financially viable and it is clear that the costs of providing enhanced flood protection at Lisdivin greatly exceed the benefits accruing. This being the case none of the options meets the conditions for proceeding to the prioritisation stage for flood protection schemes. In such circumstances it is not possible for Rivers Agency to proceed with a flood alleviation scheme. I would emphasise that the study concluded that the risk to life from any embankment breach is low.

The Rivers Agency will remain vigilant in regard to the necessary inspections of the existing embankment along the Burndennet River and continue to maintain it as required. The Agency's call-out arrangements and warning regime for adjacent properties at times of high flow will remain in place.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease Outbreak: RUC and Army Support

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she has requested assistance from the Royal Ulster Constabulary or the Army to patrol the border following the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in County Louth. (AQW 2503/00)

Ms Rodgers: From the start of the current crisis I have, and continue to have, essential support from the RUC and army. In relation to the Co Louth outbreak, the police and army have assisted with the checking of vehicle movements, road closures, etc under DARD direction.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease Outbreak

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to her response to questions on her statement of 2 April 2001, to list the names of those on the 'ad hoc committee' who met with her concerning foot-and-mouth disease and who sought an amnesty for those involved in the crisis. (AQW 2573/00)

Ms Rodgers: The meeting I had with representatives of the farming unions and of the south Armagh farmers involved in the cull of sheep was private. The representatives attended the meeting on that basis and had no expectation of their names being put in the public domain. Under Article 8 of the Human Rights Directive, relating to privacy of the individual, it would be an infringement to release the names of the individuals without their consent. For that reason I am not in a position to release their names.

In relation to the second part of your question, there was never any question of my granting amnesty to these farmers or any farmers in Northern Ireland. I have made that clear on a number of occasions and I re-iterate it now.

Pig Outgoers Scheme

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (a) how much money was paid out to pig farmers under the Pig Outgoers Scheme, (b) how many sow places were achieved as a result, and (c) how many applicants were unsuccessful in their bid and the number of sows this represented. (AQW 2656/00)

Ms Rodgers: The answers to your questions are as follows :

- (a) The cost of the first Outgoers Scheme was £10,624,480. About £851,000 will be paid to Northern Ireland applicants.
- (b) Successful bids represented 95,838 sow places UK-wide, including 7,911 in Northern Ireland.
- (c) A total of 805 applicants were unsuccessful in their bid, 423 of these were from Northern Ireland. Unsuccessful bids represented 109,489 sow places in the UK, 32,756 of which were in Northern Ireland.

Under the terms of the EU State Aid approval, the UK is required to reduce its production capacity by 16% (i.e. 120,000 sow places). The second Outgoers scheme, which closed to applications on 20 April, should account for the balance.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Epidemiological Investigation

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to give her assessment of the effect of European Union community law on the spread of foot-and-mouth disease. (AQW 2688/00)

Ms Rodgers: A detailed epidemiological investigation is being conducted into every confirmed outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease. An assessment will be made of the lessons to be learnt from the original cause of the outbreak in Northern Ireland and the factors that have contributed towards the spread of the disease.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Compensation Claims

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, following the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease, to detail (a) the number of compensation claims found to be incorrect and (b) her policy to ensure the verification of all claims. (AQW 2694/00)

Ms Rodgers: Technically, there are no claims as such for compensation in respect of foot-and-mouth disease. All animals slaughtered by DARD are valued, prior to slaughter, by a DARD valuation officer or independent valuer, if the Department's valuation is not accepted by the producer. Producers are paid the agreed valuation. On receipt at Headquarters, an arithmetical check on all valuation forms is undertaken to ensure accuracy prior to payment.

Agrimonetary Aid Package

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to give her assessment of the impact, for Northern Ireland's dairy, cattle and sheep farmers, of the European Commission UK agrimonetary aid package of £153,843,057 to offset the adverse effects of fluctuating sterling/Euro exchange rates on prices and on premiums paid under the common agricultural policy. (AQW 2716/00)

Ms Rodgers: The compensation package announced at the end of February will be worth approximately £21.5 million to Northern Ireland farmers, with approximately £10 million each accruing to the dairy and beef sectors and the remaining £1.5 million to the sheep sector.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease Outbreak: Consequential Compensation

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to consider the payment of compensation to farmers affected by foot-and-mouth disease for (a) loss of earnings and (b) stress. (AQW 2731/00)

Ms Rodgers: Compensation for loss of earnings is, in effect, consequential compensation. The Government's position on this is that there is no provision or precedent for such payments. The issue is for consideration at UK level and any decisions taken will equally apply here. The Executive is aware of financial pressures faced by some rural businesses and is considering a package of economic measures.

Neither is compensation available for stress suffered as a result of the foot-and-mouth disease situation in Northern Ireland. To assist in this respect a Rural Support Line has been set up whereby trained advisors will listen, and provide guidance to, the farming and rural community experiencing problems. The Support

Line is funded under the DARD Rural Stress Fund and supported by the Armagh and Dungannon Health Action Zone, Ulster Farmers' Union, NIAPA, Farm Crisis Network and Family Farm Development.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Exit Strategy

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail her forward planning of an exit strategy when the current foot and mouth emergency is over that will assist the farming industry in particular and the rural economy in general towards achieving greater stability. (AQO 1313/00)

Ms Rodgers: I have established a new sub-group of the Vision Steering Group to report to me as a matter of urgency on any issues which the group regards as relevant to the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease. I have asked the sub-group to look at the regulations which govern the movement and trading in the sheep sector. The outcome of the work of this group will be included in the main report of the Vision Group but any issues which require urgent action will be brought forward for immediate decision.

I have asked the group to take account in its deliberations of the views of all interested parties in Northern Ireland. It will be important also that the group reflects on measures being introduced in the Republic of Ireland.

Use of Local Produce

Mr Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to give her assessment in relation to the level of local produce being used in hospitals, schools and public sector canteens and to make a statement. (AQO 1335/00)

Ms Rodgers: My Department has no information, or indeed responsibility for, purchases made by these establishments. In general public service catering is contracted to the private sector which makes the relevant purchases. To include a specific requirement that contractors must prefer local produce would be in contravention of EU law on public procurement. I am advised that the Government Purchasing Agency which is responsible for managing Civil Service contracts does ask contractors to consider using local produce, where possible. I cannot emphasise too strongly the high quality of Northern Ireland produce and the benefits to the Northern Ireland economy, particularly producers and processors, of sourcing products from Northern Ireland.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Main Contributing Factor

Mr McHugh asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to give her assessment of the main contributing factor that resulted in the outbreak of

foot-and-mouth disease in Northern Ireland and outline what steps can be taken to prevent a recurrence. [R] (AQO 1329/00)

Ms Rodgers: The main factor in the original spread of this disease to Northern Ireland was clearly the illegal importation of sheep from GB. The reasons for the subsequent wider spread of the disease within Northern Ireland are still under investigation by my Department and it is too early to say with any certainty what they might be.

However, I would say that undoubtedly the most significant factor in the spread of the disease is animal movements and that is why I imposed extremely strict movement controls on all susceptible animals and on horses. If people flout these controls they will risk bringing ruin on the whole industry and I would appeal to anyone with information about illegal movements to come forward with that information to my Department.

Agriculture Industry: Equality of Opportunity

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the steps she is taking to ensure equality of opportunity in all branches of the Agricultural Industry in West Tyrone. (AQO 1318/00)

Ms Rodgers: The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's Equality Scheme, submitted to the Equality Commission on 30 June 2000, and recently approved by the Commission, sets out in considerable detail our approach to the equality agenda, and records my personal commitment to promoting equality of opportunity for everyone in Northern Ireland.

The promotion of equality of opportunity within the agricultural industry is, of course, a matter for the industry itself, but I can assure the Member that my Department will continue to provide all its services to all its customers in the full knowledge of its responsibilities under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Computerised Geographical Information System

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to indicate when she will utilise the computerised mapping system cited in the recent report by the Public Accounts Committee on National Agriculture support: (Fraud) and to make a statement. (AQO 1337/00)

Ms Rodgers: My Department is currently piloting a fully computerised Geographical Information System for recording and checking land declarations for agricultural subsidy purposes.

It expects to start full implementation of the system later this year and to complete the work within 2 years,

which is well in advance of the European Commission requirement of 1st January 2005.

Tie-up Scheme

Rev Dr Ian Paisley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to the resolution of the Assembly of 27 March 2001 (Hansard Vol 10 P 179), to detail when she intends to implement a 'tie-up' scheme for local fishermen. (AQO 1310/00)

Ms Rodgers: Whilst I have taken note of the resolution of the Assembly it has not been policy to provide compensation, including tie up schemes because of reductions in fish quotas. I have however subsequent to the debate in the Assembly been able to announce £5m for a decommissioning scheme, a draft of which the Member will have seen. I would hope to be in a position in the very near future to introduce such a scheme.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Consequential Compensation

Mr Poots asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline what representation she has made to the Prime Minister on the issue of consequential compensation as a result of foot-and-mouth disease. (AQO 1332/00)

Ms Rodgers: I have raised this issue with the Prime Minister to ensure that I am kept fully informed of the Government's considerations in relation to wider compensation. In addition the Executive is represented on the Government's Task Force chaired by Michael Meacher and part of that Group's remit is to consider the wider economic impact of the disease. That Group is considering options on how to alleviate some of the impact to the overall rural economy.

Protecting Animal Health

Mrs Courtney asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail what strategies she, in consultation with her Ministerial counterpart in the Republic of Ireland, can put in place to protect animal health in the wake of the Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy and Foot and Mouth outbreaks. (AQO 1351/00)

Ms Rodgers: Within the framework of the North/South Ministerial Council I have agreed with Joe Walsh a more formal and structured liaison between our two administrations on general animal health matters, which obviously includes BSE and foot-and-mouth disease as priority areas.

We established structures to consider policy issues on animal health which apply to the whole island. These issues include foot-and-mouth disease, BSE, Bovine TB,

Brucellosis, Veterinary Medicines and Animal Welfare to name but a few areas.

These new formal arrangements will augment the close informal liaison there has been between the two Departments for many years.

Role of Women in the Rural Community

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail her plan for the recognition of women and their contribution to farming life and the rural community. (AQO 1342/00)

Ms Rodgers: I am acutely aware of the importance of the role of women within farm families and in the wider rural community. For a number of years my Department has recognised the specific role that women play within the rural community and will continue to do so.

We will be seeking to encourage the full participation of women in the Rural Development Programme 2001-2006. Women are one of the specific target groups identified in the LEADER+ Programme. The Rural Development Programme will also offer opportunities to develop sectoral programmes specifically targeted at women.

Rural Development Division are currently working with the Women's Resource Development Agency and six Rural Women's Networks to carry out an economic appraisal, including a needs analysis, on the Rural Women's Sector to address identified and prioritised needs for rural women. My Department is funding the economic appraisal.

My Department is also involved in a partnership, which has commissioned research on the impact of CAP reform on women in rural communities and in farm families.

The Agri-food Development Service, as well as offering training courses tailored to the needs of women's groups, provide a full range of short courses open to both women and men.

It will also be responsible for Measures under the PEACE II Operational Programme aimed at farmers, their spouses and members of the farming family engaged on the farm, thereby recognising the contribution of the whole family to the farming business.

CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Odyssey Project

Mrs Nelis asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail how the board of the Odyssey Project is constituted and what process is involved. (AQO 1339/00)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McGimpsey): Odyssey Trust Company Limited is a private charitable company limited by guarantee. Constitution of the board is governed by the company's memorandum and articles of association and as such, is a matter for the board. Appointment of trustees is by ordinary resolution and the board may appoint a person who is willing to be a trustee, either to fill a vacancy or as an additional trustee.

The chairman of Odyssey Trust Company is currently in the process of restructuring the board to ensure that it has the necessary skills to reflect its role post opening. The chairman has employed PriceWaterhouseCoopers to assist in this exercise which is expected to be completed by 1st September 2001.

EDUCATION

Home Tutors: Terms and Conditions of Employment

Mr Tierney asked the Minister of Education if conditions of employment for Home Tutors are consistent with European Union regulations in relation to holiday pay and sick pay. (AQW 2540/00)

The Minister of Education (Mr M McGuinness): As employers, education and library boards are responsible for ensuring that the terms and conditions of employment for home tutors comply with the Part-time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000, which relate to holiday pay and sick pay. My Department will be consulting boards about these and other related matters in connection with the employment of home tutors in the near future.

Official School Visits

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of official school visits he has undertaken to, (a) the Irish Medium Sector, (b) the Integrated Sector, (c) the Maintained Sector and (d) the Controlled sector. (AQW 2651/00)

Mr M McGuinness: As a result of invitations received, I have undertaken official visits to the following numbers of schools:

- a. The Irish-Medium Sector = 9
- b. The Integrated Sector = 4
- c. The Maintained Sector = 38
- d. The Controlled Sector = 8

Common Funding Formula: Ulster Scots Translation

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Education to confirm if the consultation document on a Common Funding Formula for Granted-Aided Schools is available in Ulster Scots and if so, (a) how much did it cost to produce in Ulster Scots, and (b) was the contract for translating it into Ulster Scots put out for tender and if so, who was the successful bidder or if not, what process was used to award the contract. (AQW 2667/00)

Mr M McGuinness: There are currently no Ulster Scots Schools here and hence it was not considered necessary to produce the Consultation Document on a Common Funding Formula for Grant-Aided Schools in the Ulster Scots language.

Initial Teacher Training Courses

Mr Maskey asked the Minister of Education to outline his plans to bring initial teacher training into line with current curriculum changes and the changes in education which may result from increased early years provision and post primary restructuring. (AQO 1405/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Initial teacher training courses are designed by the higher education institutions to meet the requirements of our curriculum, including the needs of teachers wishing to specialise in early years or in post-primary subjects. The courses are kept under review by the training providers and adapted to meet changing requirements on which they are consulted by my Department.

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Attracting Investment: Rathfriland Area

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail what plans the Industrial Development Board for Northern Ireland has to attract investment to the Rathfriland area. (AQW 2575/00)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Sir Reg Empey): IDB seeks to encourage new employment opportunities within existing companies and from new investors. Recent success has come particularly from the knowledge-based sectors such as telecommunications, software development and call centre operations. While companies operating in these knowledge-based sectors have concentrated on areas of large population, IDB has been seeking to achieve a wider spread of investment across Northern Ireland.

In doing so, IDB has been working with local councils both to support the councils' own efforts and to encourage and agree a joint approach to the marketing of their areas to potential investors. A seminar for economic development officers from all councils was organised by IDB in September 2000 and attended by representatives of both Banbridge and Newry and Mourne District Councils. The objective of the seminar was to share experiences in marketing Northern Ireland and agree how IDB and councils can work together. Following the seminar, a template for an inward investment information database was developed by IDB and issued to all councils in November 2000. Follow-up by IDB will take place over the next few months. The Council Forum which I convened on 12 April addressed this very important issue of how IDB and LEDU, and the new agency, will work closely with the councils to take forward economic development.

Development of Renewable Energy

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the steps he is taking to increase energy production from renewable resources. (AQW 2582/00)

Sir Reg Empey: I fully support the development of sustainable and renewable energy. The harnessing of renewable energy sources assists the diversification of Northern Ireland's energy supplies and has an important role to play in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Government has established an initial target of 45MW of renewables plant in Northern Ireland by the year 2005. The then Department of Economic Development, in pursuit of this objective, made two Non-Fossil Fuel Orders (NFFO) in 1994 and 1996 under which Northern Ireland Electricity (NIE) is required to purchase some 32MW of renewable energy. In addition, a number of innovative renewable energy projects have been assisted under the EU funded Energy Demonstration Scheme and the EU INTERREG cross-border energy sub-programme. Furthermore, over 1,000 customers currently receive all or part of their electricity from renewable sources under Northern Ireland Electricity's Eco Energy tariff scheme. The first large industrial customer, Interface Europe Ltd, Craigavon, has recently signed up to Eco Energy.

Recent assessments of the potential for renewables in Northern Ireland have indicated that, based on certain assumptions, some 7% of electricity consumption could be met by offshore wind energy by 2005 and that a further 7.6% could be met by other renewables by 2010.

My Department intends to consult interested parties in May 2001 on the future development of renewable energy sources in Northern Ireland. We will wish, in particular, to seek views on how Northern Ireland might best make a proportionate contribution to the revised UK target of 10% of electricity from renewables by 2010 and also on the possible replication of the recent Great Britain legislation on a renewables obligation which will place an obligation on suppliers to obtain a specified percentage of their supplies from renewable sources.

Promoting Renewable Energy

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the action he is taking to promote renewable energy. (AQW 2588/00)

Sir Reg Empey: I would refer to my written answer to AQW No: 2582/00.

Reducing Energy Costs

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the steps he is taking to reduce energy costs. (AQW 2643/00)

Sir Reg Empey: Responsibility for ensuring that prices paid by electricity and natural gas customers reflect the cost of production and distribution, rests with the independent Regulator. Similar regulatory arrangements do not apply in the already competitive oil and coal sectors where market forces determine the prices charged to customers.

My Department's objective, which is fully in line with wider UK5 and EU energy policy, is to achieve a secure, diverse, competitive and efficient energy market, with maximum choice for consumers and, as I said in my statement to the Assembly on 5 March, achieving significant price reductions is a key element in meeting this objective.

Action taken or under way to reduce energy costs includes: the opening up of the electricity market two years ahead of EU requirements; the Regulator's continuing discussions with the generators on reducing costs; the Regulator's review of NIE's Transmission & Distribution price controls; the allocation of the £60 million Government support package for electricity consumers; the commissioning of the electricity interconnector with Scotland in January 2002 thereby providing a new source of competitively priced electricity; the accelerated roll out of the natural gas programme in the Belfast licence area; the appraisal of applications for licences to take gas beyond the current licence area; the promotion by my Department of the more cost effective and environmentally friendly combined heat and power technology and the continuing campaign to promote greater energy efficiency.

The planned progressive development of an all island energy market within a European context will further increase choice and encourage downward pressure on prices.

ENVIRONMENT

Coastal Zone: Development and Sustainability

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of the Environment to give his assessment of the potential environmental

conflict between social and economic development needs and sustainability of the coastal zone.

(AQW 2664/00)

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Foster):

Several Departments have responsibilities which can affect the coastal zone. These include the Department for Agriculture and Rural Development and the Department for Regional Development, as well as the Department of the Environment.

As regards my own responsibilities for coastal matters, my Department will, over the course of this financial year, be engaged in the preparation of development plans which will include almost all of our coastline. These plans provide the opportunity to address environmental considerations alongside the social and economic development needs in local areas. The plan process will provide for the involvement of elected representatives in consideration and resolution of the issues involved.

My Department will also take account of the Regional Development Strategy, being prepared by the Department for Regional Development, which will include planning policy guidance designed to protect the undeveloped coastline, especially from intense recreational and tourism pressures. The guidance will recognise the need to reconcile development and management pressures arising from commercial and leisure use with conservation of distinctive coastal habitats.

My Department will also have regard to a Regional Planning Policy Statement on The Coast which, I understand, the Department for Regional Development intends to prepare. I further understand that work on the RPPS is planned to start during 2002/2003.

Coastal Zone

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of the Environment to detail what assessment he has made in relation to the current condition of Northern Ireland's coastal zone.

(AQW 2665/00)

Mr Foster: I have not made any overall assessment of the current condition of Northern Ireland's coastal zone. The term "coastal zone" is usually interpreted as including coastal waters, intertidal areas and maritime land. Within that broad definition, several Departments have responsibilities that can impact on the zone. These include the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Department for Regional Development, as well as the Department of the Environment.

My own responsibilities include coastal habitats, geological features and monuments. My Department has commissioned several surveys in recent years to identify areas of coastline that warrant designation for nature conservation and landscape purposes. These include surveys of intertidal and subtidal habitats. A major

project to map the sea bed habitats of Strangford Lough Marine Nature Reserve has just commenced.

Approximately three-quarters of the coastline is now covered by one or more of the statutory nature conservation or landscape designations. These include Areas of Special Scientific Interest and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty under domestic legislation and Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas under EC Directives.

In addition the Northern Ireland Landscape Character Assessment, which I launched recently, provides a detailed record of all of Northern Ireland's landscapes, including coastal areas. The assessments are based on local patterns of geology, land form, land use, cultural and ecological features.

During this financial year, my Department will be engaged in the preparation of development plans which will include almost all of our coastline. This will provide a further opportunity to assess the current condition of the coastal zone.

Northern Ireland Coastal Forum

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of the Environment to detail his plans to establish a Northern Ireland Coastal Forum.

(AQW 2666/00)

Mr Foster: I refer the Member to my reply to Oral Question 527/00, as set out in the Official Report for 18 December 2000.

It remains my intention to keep the benefits of a Coastal Forum in mind for future budget rounds, subject to the agreement of other Ministers with responsibilities relevant to the coastal area.

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

NICS:

Abolition of Compulsory Retirement Ages

Mr Fee asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he will consider abolishing compulsory retirement ages in the Northern Ireland Civil Service. (AQW 2563/00)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):

The policy on age of retirement is currently under review and consideration of a range of business and equality issues is ongoing. The independent team reviewing appointment and promotion procedures to the Senior Civil Service will consider, within their terms of reference, the age of retirement as it affects the Senior Civil Service. The way forward will be considered in the light both of the Review Team's findings and the on-going review.

SSA/T&EA: Strabane

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail progress on his consultation with the Social Security Agency and the Training and Employment Agency in Strabane, since November 2000, with a view to providing accommodation for joint delivery of their services. (AQW 2585/00)

Mr Durkan: The Social Security and Training and Employment Agencies (SSA/T & EA) are in the process of implementing a joint working initiative for jobseekers, which will enable them to deliver a joined-up job brokering and benefit service, from a single location, in the major towns across the province.

A roll-out programme of work has been drawn up and it is intended that the new joint working arrangements will be implemented in the first offices in February 2002 and that the roll-out will continue at the rate of one office per month until 2004.

The role of the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) is to provide office accommodation to meet the business needs of Departments. In the SSA/T & EA Joint Working partnership the Strabane office is number 23 in the roll-out programme of new offices, with a proposed start date of January 2002. Office Accommodation Branch in DFP has not to date received a business case or an accommodation brief from SSA/T & EA.

NICS: Early Retirement of Staff

Mrs Nelis asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail his policy and possible costs for the early retirement of Civil Servants. (AQW 2612/00)

Mr Durkan: The policy for the early retirement of staff before minimum retirement age is set out in the NICS Staff Handbook, Leaving the Service Part 5, chapters 3 and 4, a copy of which is available in the Library.

In relation to the possible costs, each individual case would depend on a number of variables, e.g., age, current salary and length of service. The calculation would be based on the formulae detailed in the Civil Service Compensation Scheme, a copy of which has been laid in the Library.

Further background information can be found in the attached Annex.

Annex A

Early retirement applies to staff aged 50-59. The categories of early retirement are:

- (a) compulsory early retirement and redundancy;
- (b) flexible early retirement;
- (c) approved early retirement; and
- (d) actuarially reduced retirement

The grounds on which early retirement in categories a to c above may be considered are:

- (a) Compulsory early retirement - on grounds of limited efficiency, structure, redundancy;
- (b) Flexible early retirement - on grounds of limited efficiency, limited postability and structure;
- (c) Voluntary - to stimulate improvements in the effectiveness and efficiency of departments and to assist their manpower planning by enabling staff to retire early provided that management is absolutely satisfied in each case that the retirement will enhance departmental efficiency. There are two elements under this category. Under element (a) staff may apply if they are aged 50 or over with 5 years or more qualifying service. Under element (b) staff may apply if they are aged 55 and over with at least 25 years qualifying service.

Category (d), actuarially reduced retirement, is the only category under which staff have a right to retire. Such retirements are at no additional cost to the public purse. All other categories are subject to management invitation or veto and must be supported by a value for money business case. The cost of the early pension is met by the relevant Department. Staff leaving under the categories flexible early retirement, approved early retirement and actuarially reduced retirement do so willingly, and no element of compulsion is attached to these schemes.

In addition staff may be retired on medical grounds where the Occupational Health Service advises that the individual is unable to undertake the duties of his/her grade until retirement age.

Departmental Underspends

Mrs Nelis asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in respect of the 2000/01 financial year, to outline (a) the level of underspend in each Department's budget and (b) what programmes this money has been allocated to.

(AQW 2614/00)

Mr Durkan: Provisional Out-turn information for the financial year 2000-01 is not yet available and therefore details of Departmental underspends cannot be provided at this time.

Provisional Out-turn information from Departments is due with DFP in the coming weeks and I will subsequently be reporting the position to the Executive. Details of the Provisional Out-turn position are normally published in July. Decisions on how underspends carried forward into 2001-02 are allocated is a matter for the Executive. Normally such decisions are taken in the first Monitoring round, due in June.

Review of Rating Policy: Village and Rural Houses

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail whether he plans to extend rate relief to village and rural houses on the same basis as village Post Offices. (AQW 2625/00)

Mr Durkan: Existing legislation would not permit this and I have no plans to extend relief in this way. The Review of Rating Policy, which is currently underway, however will consider all current rate relief schemes. The extension to Domestic property in rural areas would be part of that consideration.

Rates on Commercial Premises: Representation

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline what recent representations he has received from industry and business representatives concerning rates on commercial premises. (AQW 2627/00)

Mr Durkan: I have received eleven representations from industry and business since 1 January 2001. These covered questions on the level of the Regional Rates and the availability of relief from rates.

Peace II Programme: Funding Matters

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail his plans to increase the proportion of Peace II funding, allocated to the constituency of East Antrim in comparison to that awarded under Peace I. (AQO 1363/00)

Mr Durkan: The funding to be allocated under the Peace II Programme has been agreed by the Executive and the respective allocations for each priority and measure are contained in the operational programme which was formally agreed with by the European Commission on 22 March 2001. Details of the eligibility criteria for projects under each priority and measure will be contained in the Programme Complement which is currently being drawn up by the Special EU Programmes Body for agreement by the Programme Monitoring Committee. The distribution of funding under this Programme will, therefore, be determined by the extent to which project promoters are able to demonstrate how their projects contribute to the Programme's overall objectives as well as to the relevant priority and measure level objectives. Whilst it is anticipated that all parts of Northern Ireland will benefit from funding under Peace II no pre-determined allocations of funding have been made to any of the eighteen constituencies in Northern Ireland.

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Retention of Children's Organs: RVH

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail progress being made on investigations into the unauthorised retention of children's organs at the Royal Victoria Hospital and will she consider a public inquiry into this matter. (AQW 2572/00)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms de Brún): On 22 March I announced the establishment of the Human Organs Inquiry chaired by John O'Hara QC. The Inquiry will cover all aspects of past and current post mortem policy and practice and will draw on whatever medical and other professional support it requires to discharge its duties. The Chief Medical Officer's investigation of organ retention practice here, including the Royal Victoria Hospital, initiated in January, has been completed and all of the information obtained will be passed to the Human Organs Inquiry and published.

Ar an 22 Márta d'fhógair mé bunú an Fhiosrúcháin Orgáin Dhaonna le John O'Hara QC sa chathaoir air. Cumhdóidh an Fiosrúchán gach uile gné de pholasaí agus chleachtadh fiosrúcháin bháis reatha agus san am atá thart agus meallfaidh sé cibé tacaíocht mhíochaine agus ghairmiúil eile atá de dhíth air lena dhualgais a chomhlíonadh. Críochnaíodh fiosrúchán an Phríomh-Oifigigh ar chleachtadh choinneáil orgán anseo, Otharlann Ríoga Vichteoiria san áireamh, a tosaíodh i Mí Eanáir, agus tabharfar an t-eolas uile a fuarthas don Fhiosrúchán Orgáin Dhaonna agus foilseofar é.

Waiting Times: Downe Hospital

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline her plans to reduce the average waiting time for admissions to Downe Hospital. (AQW 2574/00)

Ms de Brún: I am concerned about reducing waiting times and waiting lists for treatment at all acute hospitals. In 'Priorities For Action', which I issued on 8 March, I set a target of reducing by 50% during the next year the number of those waiting more than 18 months, and the complete elimination of such long waits by March 2003. I also set a target for overall waiting lists to be reduced to 48,000 by March 2002, as a first step towards bringing the numbers down to 39,000 by March 2004. These reductions will have a direct impact on the length of time that people wait for treatment.

Tá mé buartha faoin laghdú in amanna agus i liostaí feithimh do chóireáil ag gach uile géarotharlann. In

Tosaíochtaí Do Ghníomhú a d'eisigh mé ar an 8 Márta, leag mé sprioc síos le líon na ndaoine sin ag fanacht níos mó ná 18 mí a laghdú faoi 50% le linn na bliana seo chugainn, agus le deireadh iomlán a chur lena leithéid d'fheithreamh fada sin faoi Mhárta 2003. Leag mé sprioc eile síos fosta le liostaí feithimh san iomlán a laghdú go 48,000 faoi Mhárta 2002, mar an chéad chéim chuig laghdú na líonta go 39,000 faoi Mhárta 2004. Beidh éifeacht dhíreach ag na laghduithe seo ar an mhéid ama a fhanfaidh daoine ar chóireáil.

Fairer Charging Policies for Home Care and Other Non-Residential Social Services

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail any response she has made to the Government's consultation paper "Fairer Charging Policies for Home Care and Other Non-Residential Social Services". (AQW 2583/00)

Ms de Brún: This consultation paper has been issued by the Department of Health in England and does not apply here. However, I will wish to consider the implications of any guidance issued by the Department of Health and its relevance for services here.

D'eisigh An Roinn Sláinte i Sasana an páipéar comhairleach seo ach ní bhaineann sé leis an limistéar seo. Is mian liom machnamh a dhéanamh áfach ar impleachtaí treorach ar bith tugtha ag An Roinn Sláinte agus ar na himpleachtaí atá aici do sheirbhísí anseo.

Residential Homes: Funding

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to give her assessment of the current level of funding to residential homes to cover the cost of care of residents. (AQW 2584/00)

Ms de Brún: The rates paid to residential homes here are comparable to those paid in similar areas in England, Scotland and Wales.

As I have previously indicated, a working group examined the funding structure for independent sector homes last year and made a number of recommendations that are currently being implemented by boards and trusts. This report recognised the increasing financial pressure on the sector and the boards and trusts will take this into account in seeking to agree increases in rates for places in residential and nursing homes for 2001-2002.

Is féidir comparáid a dhéanamh idir rátaí a íoctar do thithe cónaithe anseo agus na rátaí sin a íoctar i gceantair eile cosúil léi i Sasana, in Albain agus sa Bhreatain Bheag.

Mar a chuir mé in iúl roimhe sin, rinne grúpa oibre scrúdú ar an struchtúr maoinithe do thithe na hearnála neamhspleáiche anuraidh agus rinne sé roinnt moltaí atá á gcur i bhfeidhm ag Boird agus ag Iontaobhais faoi

láthair. D'aithin an tuairisc seo an brú airgeadais, atá ag dul i méid, ar an earnáil agus cuirfidh Boird agus Iontaobhais é seo san áireamh agus iad ag iarraidh méaduithe i rátaí d'áiteanna i dtithe cónaithe agus banaltrachta sa bhliain 2001-2002 a chomhaontú.

Paediatric Intensive Care Beds

Mr Tierney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of paediatric intensive care beds with attendant nursing staff that are available in Northern Ireland. (AQW 2597/00)

Ms de Brún: Currently there are six paediatric intensive care beds open here (seven when staffing levels permit). There are a total of 38.95 whole-time equivalent paediatric intensive care nurses with two whole-time equivalent support nursing auxiliaries.

Faoi láthair, tá sé leaba péidiatraiceacha dianchúraim ar fáil anseo (7 leaba ag brath ar líon na foirne). Tá 38.95 banaltra péidiatraiceacha dianchúraim coibhéise ama iomláin mar aon le 2 banaltra tacaíochta cúnta coibhéise ama iomláin ann san iomlán.

Children in Intensive Care: Average Cost

Mr Tierney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average cost per day for the care of a child in an intensive care bed. (AQW 2598/00)

Ms de Brún: The average cost per day for the financial year 1999/00 was £1,685.

£1,685 ba ea an meánchostas in aghaidh an lae don bhliain airgeadais 1999/00.

Paediatric Intensive Care Beds

Mr Tierney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of paediatric intensive care beds being occupied by children awaiting transfer to home ventilation and what is the average waiting time for transfer to home ventilation. (AQW 2600/00)

Ms de Brún: At 24 April 2001 there were two children awaiting home ventilation, one of whom had been waiting for approximately six months, the other eight months.

Ag an 24 Aibreán 2001 bhí beirt pháistí ag fanacht le haeráil bhaile, bhí páiste amháin ag fanacht le thart faoi sé mhí, agus an páiste eile ag fanacht le hocht mí.

Intensive Care Beds

Mr Tierney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of

intensive care beds in place but unavailable due to the lack of nursing staff. (AQW 2601/00)

Ms de Brún: It is not possible to give a figure for the number of intensive care beds not available at any one time as this changes from day to day and from hour to hour.

At 9.00 am on 30 March 2001 (the last day of winter pressures monitoring) there were 2 intensive care/high dependency beds closed in hospitals here. The reasons why these beds were closed are not available.

Ní féidir figiúr a thabhairt ar mhéid na leapacha dianchúraim nach bhfuil ar fáil ag am ar leith mar go n-athraíonn sé seo ó lá go lá agus ó uair go huair.

Ar 9.00i.n. ar an 30 Márta 2001 (lá deireanach na monatóireachta ar bhrúnna geimhridh), bhí 2 leaba dianchúraim/ardspleáchais druidte in otharlanna anseo. Níl na fáthanna ar druideadh na leapacha seo ar fáil.

General Practitioner Referral Times

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) the average waiting time between General Practitioner referral and hospital consultant appointment for Downe Hospital and (b) the average waiting time between a consultant referral and hospital admission at Downe Hospital for the period January 2000 to February 2001. (AQW 2603/00)

Ms de Brún: Details of waiting times for inpatient admissions and outpatient appointments are collected in time bands. It is therefore not possible to compute an average waiting time.

Numbers of completed waits for inpatient admission and first outpatient appointment for Downe Hospital for the quarter ending 31 December 2000 (the latest date for which information is available) are detailed in the tables below.

COMPLETED WAITS FOR INPATIENT ADMISSION TO DOWNE HOSPITAL, 31 DECEMBER 2000

Time Waiting (in months)									
0-2	3-5	6-8	9-11	12-14	15-17	18-20	21-23	24+	Total
473	61	22	2	0	1	0	0	0	560

COMPLETED WAITS FOR FIRST OUTPATIENT APPOINTMENT AT DOWNE HOSPITAL, 31 DECEMBER 2000

Time Waiting (in months)									
0-2	3-5	6-8	9-11	12-14	15-17	18-20	21-23	24+	Total
1,578	194	106	42	0	0	0	0	0	1,920

Cruinnítear sonraí ar amanna feithimh do ghlacadh isteach othar cónaitheach agus do choinní éisothar i mbandaí ama. Mar sin de, ní féidir meánam feithimh a áireamh.

Mionléirítear sna táblaí thíos méid an fheithimh le glacadh isteach othar cónaitheach, agus le céad choinne éisothar déanta in Otharlann An Dúin, sa ráithe ag críochnú an 31 Nollaig 2000 (an dáta is deireanaí atá eolas ar fáil).

FEITHEAMH LE GLACADH ISTEACH OTHAR CÓNAITHEACH DÉANTA IN OTHARLANN AN DÚIN, 31 NOLLAIG 2000.

Am ag Feitheamh (i míonna)									
0-2	3-5	6-8	9-11	12-14	15-17	18-20	21-23	24+	Iomlán
473	61	22	2	0	1	0	0	0	560

FEITHEAMH LE CÉAD CHOINNE ÉISOTHAR DÉANTA AG OTHARLANN AN DÚIN, 31 NOLLAIG 2000.

Am ag Feitheamh (i míonna)									
0-2	3-5	6-8	9-11	12-14	15-17	18-20	21-23	24+	Iomlán
1,578	194	106	42	0	0	0	0	0	1,920

Recombinant Factor VIII

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline her policy on the provision of “recombinant Factor VIII” for haemophiliacs and to state what guarantees there are for under 16’s and adults not affected by hepatitis/HIV in receiving “recombinant Factor VIII”. (AQW 2604/00)

Ms de Brún: My Department has been working with Health Boards to bring about as quickly as possible the phased introduction of recombinant products for all patients. Currently recombinant products are provided for children under 16 and any patients previously untreated with plasma products. Since recombinant Factor VIII is not derived from human blood this ensures that the possibility of contamination by HIV, hepatitis viruses or any other blood borne virus is virtually eliminated.

Bhí an Roinn s’agamsa ag obair le Boird Sláinte chun táirgí athchuingreacha a thabhairt isteach céim ar céim do gach uile othar a ghasa is féidir. Faoi láthair, soláthraítear táirgí athchuingreacha do pháistí faoi 16 agus d’othair ar bith nár cóireáladh roimhe sin le táirgí plasma. Mar nach dtagann Fachtóir athchuingreach VIII ó fhuil dhaonna, cinntíonn seo go ndíbrítear chóir a bheith féidearthacht an tsalaithe ó SEIF, víris heipitítis agus ó víreas fola ar bith eile.

Spending Review Bids

Mr Maskey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the extra funding required to fulfil the bids submitted by her Department and to make a statement. (AQW 2605/00)

Ms de Brún: The table below shows the extra amounts that would be needed to meet in full my Department's spending review bids for the 2001-02 financial year:

		£m
1.	Acute hospitals – development, capacity and regional services	14.3
2.	Ambulance Service	11.0
3.	Cancer Services	5.0
4.	Capital including IT	37.5
5.	Care Direct	1.0
6.	Children's Services	1.8
7.	Children's Fund	6.5
8.	Community Care	14.0
9.	Departmental administration	1.5
10.	HPSS education and training	1.7
11.	Equality obligation	0.6
12.	Food Safety Promotion Board	0.2
13.	Maintaining existing services (pay and price increases etc)	14.4
14.	Medium Secure Unit etc	3.0
15.	Mental Health and Learning Disability	17.0
16.	Pay Modernisation	3.0
17.	Primary Care	5.0
18.	Public Health	3.3
19.	Respite Care	1.0
20.	Traumatic brain injury	1.0
21.	Victims of the Troubles	6.0
22.	Winter Pressures	2.0
	Total	150.8

The outcome of the spending review fell short of what is required to transform the HPSS so that it fully meets our needs. I will, of course, work to see that we continue to make the best use of the money we have, and to obtain additional resources. In fact, since the spending review was completed, the HPSS has been awarded a further £7.5m for the current financial year from the Executive Programme funds. All told, the first tranche of the Funds will be allocating to my Department an extra £42m across the three years to 2003-04. This money will enable us to take forward a range of developments that will go some way towards modernising the HPSS and making it more accessible to service users.

Léiríonn an tábla thíos na suimeanna a bheadh de dhíth le tairiscintí Athbheithniú na Roinne ar Chaiteachas don bhliain airgeadais 2001-02 a sheasamh:

		£m
1.	Géarocharlanna– forbairt, toilleadh agus seirbhísí réigiúnacha	14.3
2.	Seirbhís Otharcharr	11.0
3.	Seirbhísí Ailse	5.0

		£m
4.	Caipiteal TE san áireamh	37.5
5.	Cúram Díreach	1.0
6.	Seirbhísí Páistí	1.8
7.	Ciste Páistí	6.5
8.	Cúram Pobail	14.0
9.	Riarachán Roinne	1.5
10.	Oideachas agus Oiliúint SSSP	1.7
11.	Dualgas Cothroime	0.6
12.	An Bord um Chur Chun Cinn Sábháilteachta Bia	0.2
13.	Ag coinneáil seirbhísí atá ann faoi láthair (arduithe pá agus praghas srl.)	14.4
14.	Meánionad Slándála srl.	3.0
15.	Sláinte Meabhrach agus Míchumas Foghlama	17.0
16.	Nuachóiriú Pá	3.0
17.	Príomhchúram	5.0
18.	Sláinte Phoiblí	3.3
19.	Cúram Faoisimh	1.0
20.	Gortú Inchinne Trámach	1.0
21.	Íobartaigh na dTrioblóidí	6.0
22.	Brúnna Geimhridh	2.0
	Iomlán	150.8

Theip ar thoradh an Athbheithnithe ar Chaiteachas, a bhí de dhíth leis na SSSP a athrú sa dóigh go riarfadh sé go hiomlán ar ár riachtanais, a bhaint amach. Ar ndóigh, leanfaidh mé ar aghaidh le cinntiú go leanaimid ar aghaidh ag baint na húsáide is fearr as an airgead atá againn, agus le hacmhainní breise a fháil. Ó críochnaíodh an tAthbheithniú ar Chaiteachas, is amhlaidh a tugadh £7.5m breise do na SSSP don bhliain airgeadais reatha ó Chistí Chlár an Fheidheannais. Agus sin uile ráite, sa chéad bhabhta de na Cistí, dáilfear £42m breise ar an Roinn s'agamsa ar feadh na dtrí bliana go 2003-04. Cuirfidh an t-airgead seo ar ár gcumas réimse forbairtí a chur chun cinn a chuideoidh na SSSP a chur in oiriúint don lá atá inniu agus a chuirfidh ar fáil níos mó d'úsáideoirí seirbhísí iad.

Tuberculosis

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) the number of people suffering from tuberculosis and (b) what steps she is taking to combat this disease. (AQW 2623/00)

Ms de Brún:

- In 2000 (the latest date for which information is available) there were 51 cases of tuberculosis notified here.
- There has been enhanced surveillance for TB here since 1991-02. In March 1997, the Department issued guidelines on TB control and prevention to HSS

boards and trusts here. In June 2000, guidelines on drug-resistant TB were issued. The Schools BCG Immunisation Programme, which was suspended in September 1999 due to a severe shortage of vaccine here and in England, Scotland and Wales, will restart in the very near future.

- (a) Sa bhliain 2000 (an dáta is deireanaí atá eolas ar fáil) bhí 51 cás eitinne curtha in iúl anseo.
- (b) Bhí méadú san airdeall ar eitinn anseo ó 1991-02. I Márta 1997, thug an Roinn treoirínte ar smachtú agus ar chosc eitinne do Bhoird agus d'Iontaobhais SSS anseo. I Meitheamh 2000, tugadh treoirínte ar eitinn dhruaga-fhrithbheartach. Atosóidh an Clár Imdhíonta BCG i Scoileanna, a cuireadh ar ceal i Mí Mheán Fómhair 1999 mar gheall ar ghéarghanntanas vacsaíne anseo, i Sasana, in Albain agus sa Bhreatain Bheag, ar ball.

Tuberculosis

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm that tuberculosis is on the increase in Northern Ireland and can she explain how this disease has re-emerged.

(AQW 2624/00)

Ms de Brún: In 1995 there were 84 identified cases of Tuberculosis here. Every year since, there has been a reduction in this number down to a figure of 51 in 2000. There is a very effective TB control programme in place here and as the figures show there is no question of a re-emergence of the disease.

Sa bhliain 1995, bhí 84 cás eitinne aitheanta anseo. Gach bliain ó shin, bhí laghdú sa mhéid seo síos go 51 i 2000. Tá clár smachtaíthe eitinne iontach éifeachtach i bhfeidhm anseo agus mar a léiríonn na figiúirí, níl baol ar bith ann go nochtfar an galar arís.

Paediatric Intensive Care: Admission Rates

Mr Tierney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what steps are being taken to improve the ability of paediatric intensive care units to improve admission rates.

(AQW 2635/00)

Ms de Brún: Paediatric intensive care services are provided at one location, in the Royal Group's Paediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU). To cope with increased demand, the steps taken over the past year include an extensive recruitment drive, the development of a tailored internal training programme and increased career development opportunities for all nursing staff.

Soláthraítear Seirbhísí Péidiatraiceacha Dianchúraim ag láithreán amháin, in Ionad Péidiatraiceach Dianchúraim an Ghrúpa Ríoga (IPDC). Le déileáil leis an méadú san éileamh orthu, i measc na mbeart a rinneadh le linn na

bliana seo a chuaigh thart, bhí feachtas leathan earcaíochta, forbairt cláir oiliúna inmheánaigh rí-fheiliúnaigh agus deiseanna níos mó lena saol oibre a fhorbairt don fhoireann banaltrachta uile.

Paediatric Intensive Care Beds: Non Availability

Mr Tierney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of operations that have been cancelled since January 2000 due to the non-availability of paediatric intensive care beds.

(AQW 2636/00)

Ms de Brún: Over the last 15 months since January 2000, a total of 6 operations affecting a total of 3 people have been cancelled due to non-availability of paediatric intensive care beds.

Le linn na 15 mí deireanacha ó Eanáir 2000, cuireadh sé obráid ar ceal mar gheall ar an easpa leapacha péidiatraiceacha dianchúraim. Chuaigh seo i bhfeidhm ar thrí dhuine.

Paediatric Intensive Care Services: Refusals of Admission

Mr Tierney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of patients who have been refused admission to paediatric intensive care services since January 2000.

(AQW 2637/00)

Ms de Brún: Over the last 15 months since January 2000, there have been 34 refusals of admission to paediatric intensive care services.

Le linn na 15 mí deireanacha ó Eanáir 2000, diúltaíodh seirbhísí péidiatraiceacha dianchúraim a chur ar fáil do 34 duine.

Provision of Suitable Residential Care for Young People

Mrs E Bell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline any discussions she has had with the NIO concerning the protection of vulnerable young people in care and juvenile detention centres; and to make a statement.

(AQW 2638/00)

Ms de Brún: Discussions are ongoing between officials of my Department and the NIO about the provision of suitable residential care for young people who have been accused, or have been convicted, of a criminal offence, but for whom custody in a juvenile justice centre is not considered appropriate. The discussions have also covered the implications which the NIO's decision to concentrate its entire juvenile justice provision in one centre at Rathgael, Bangor will have for the regional care centres in Belfast

and Bangor, and these matters are being addressed by the Children Matter task force.

Part of the Social Services Inspectorate concentrate on criminal justice services and work in liaison with the Northern Ireland Office. In the last 12 months there have been a total of 7 unannounced inspection visits made to juvenile justice centres. These visits focus on the treatment, care and protection of young people.

Should the need arise for intervention at Ministerial level, then I would deal with that as appropriate.

Tá caibidil ar siúl idir feidhmeannaigh mo Roinne agus OTÉ faoi chúram cónaithe cuí do dhaoine óga a cúisíodh nó a ciontaíodh i gcoir, ach nach meastar príosúntacht in ionad cirt d'aosánaigh a bheith fóirsteanach. Ar na hábhair a pléadh bhí na himpleachtaí a bheadh ar chinneadh OTÉ iomlán a soláthair don cheart d'aosánaigh a shocrú i mBeannchar ar ionaid chúraim réigiúnacha i mBéal Feirste agus i mBeannchar. Tá an tascfhórsa Tá Tabhacht le Páistí ag tabhairt aghaidhe ar na hábhair seo.

Diríonn cuid de Fhoireann Chigireachta na Seirbhísí Sóisialta ar Sheirbhísí Cirt Choiriúil agus oibríonn sí i gcomhar le hOifig Thuaisceart Éireann. Sa 12 mhí dhéag dheireannacha rinneadh seacht gcuaire chigearachta gan choinne ar ionaid de chuid an chórais dlí agus cirt d'aosánaigh. Diríonn na cuairteanna seo ar chúram agus chosaint na ndaoine óga.

Má bhíonn gá le hidirghabháil aireachta, pléifidh mé féin leis mar is cuí.

Deaths Related to Zyban

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of people in Northern Ireland who have died as a result of taking the anti-smoking drug 'Zyban'. (AQW 2699/00)

Ms de Brún: There have been no reported deaths here.

Níor tuairiscíodh bás ar bith anseo.

HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

Hearing Impairment: Assistance to Obtain Employment

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail the steps he is taking to assist those with partial or total hearing impairment to gain employment. (AQW 2593/00)

The Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Dr Farren): My Department offers a range of practical and financial help to assist

people with hearing impairments to gain employment. Information on the Department's assistance is available in sign language (BSL and ISL) and sub-titled video format, and sign language interpreters can be requested for interviews with Job centre staff. Under the Access to Work (NI) scheme, a wide range of specific assistance can be offered including communication support at job interviews, a support worker in the workplace, specialist equipment and work-based sign language training for immediate work colleagues. In addition to this specific help for hearing impairment, the Department offers job capability assessment, New Deal for Disabled People, Job Introduction Scheme, Employment Support and access to all other Departmental programmes.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Free Travel for Pensioners

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the procedure to be used to assess the number of pensioners who will be entitled to free rail and bus fares following the introduction of the free travel scheme for pensioners on 1 October 2001.

(AQW 2373/00)

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Campbell): The detailed procedures relating to the introduction of free travel for older people will be the subject of new agreements to be drawn up between my Department and passenger transport undertakings and approved by the Department of Finance and Personnel. Discussions between my officials and those undertakings and the Department of Finance and Personnel will begin shortly.

Rural Buses: Additional Funding

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline any representation he has made to the Minister of Finance and Personnel to bid for additional funding consequential to the Deputy Prime Minister's announcement, on 19 February 2001, of an extra £62m for rural buses and to make a statement. (AQW 2377/00)

Mr Campbell: The £62 million of investment, announced by the Deputy Prime Minister, to improve rural bus services in England is an allocation out of the resources already provided in the 2000 spending review. The Northern Ireland block, therefore, has already received its Barnett share. In the December Budget, the Assembly approved the allocation of extra resources to the Rural Transport Fund. In addition, I have bid for a further £1.2 million in each of the next five years, from

the Infrastructure Fund, to assist Translink to purchase new low floor buses for use on rural services.

Free Travel for Pensioners

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his plans to introduce free transport for pensioners stating (a) the planned timetable for the introduction of the scheme and (b) any restrictions that will apply to journeys undertaken under the scheme. (AQW 2398/00)

Mr Campbell: The scheme will commence on 1 October 2001. It will provide people, who are resident in Northern Ireland, aged 65 and over with unlimited free travel, at any time, on scheduled bus and rail services within Northern Ireland.

Road Condition: Ballymacarn Road, Ballynahinch

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his plans to reinstate and improve the Ballymacarn Road near Ballynahinch. (AQW 2578/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service has advised me that the condition of the Ballymacarn Road near Ballynahinch has deteriorated largely as a result of its extensive use by construction traffic.

The Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 provides that, where roads are damaged by extraordinary traffic, my Department may recover the unusual expense of maintaining the roads from the persons concerned. In the case of Ballymacarn Road, the Roads Service is currently in consultation with the contractor involved in the above-mentioned project regarding the necessary remedial works.

The Roads Service is hopeful that an agreement will be reached in the near future and, pending the implementation of more extensive repairs, will continue to maintain the road in keeping with normal maintenance guidelines to ensure the safety of road users.

Upgrading Wastewater Treatment Works: Rathfriland

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his plans to update sewage disposal facilities in Rathfriland. (AQW 2602/00)

Mr Campbell: The Wastewater Treatment Works at Rathfriland is operating marginally in excess of its design capacity and requires to be upgraded. A detailed technical appraisal has been initiated to establish the extent and cost of the improvement work.

A study of the Rathfriland sewerage system has recently been completed and a range of minor improvements,

estimated to cost £100,000, has been identified. These are not considered to be urgent.

Given current levels of funding and more pressing priorities in the Capital Investment Programme, it is unlikely that the improvements to the Wastewater Treatment Works and the sewerage network will commence before 2005.

Blocked Sewer: Beverley Road, Newtownards

Mr Taylor asked the Minister for Regional Development to explain, (a) why the foul sewer was blocked, on Sunday 11 March 2001, at the main road opposite Nos. 16 and 18 Beverley Road, Newtownards, (b) why the Water Service Helpline was not responding to telephone calls that afternoon, and (c) what proposals are there to address this problem. (AQW 2620/00)

Mr Campbell: The Water Service was informed about a blocked sewer at Beverley Road, Newtownards at approximately 2.00 pm on Sunday 11 March 2001. A maintenance contractor carried out investigations and established that the blockage was caused by an accumulation of building debris and other material in a section of the sewer downstream from Beverley Road. This was cleared by the contractor and free flow was restored at approximately 5.20 pm. This response time was well within the Water Service's Customer Charter standards. The aim is to have inspection staff on site within 6 working hours and to clear blocked sewers within 1 working day.

A subsequent camera survey of the sewer identified further building debris. Although this is not currently inhibiting the operation of the sewer, arrangements have been made to have this material removed.

The Water Service's customer service units, which answer calls on the Waterline, are staffed 24 hours per day, 365 days per year. In view of forecasts of heavy rainfall over the weekend of 10/11 March additional call handlers were deployed to deal with an anticipated increase in the number of calls from customers about flooding and blocked sewers. On Sunday 11 March 84 separate incidents were reported to Eastern Division's customer service unit and 61 calls were answered between 2.00 and 3.00 pm. It is accepted that during this peak period, some calls were not answered as quickly as normal. This may account for the mistaken perception, by some customers, that the Waterline was not operating.

The Water Service has procedures in place for responding to an increased volume of customer calls. These procedures include mobilising additional call handlers to support the affected Divisional customer service unit, diverting calls to other Divisional Units unaffected by an incident, and diverting calls to a call handling centre in England capable of bringing large numbers of

call handlers on line at short notice. These procedures are kept under regular review.

Creation of Cycle Lanes: West Tyrone

Mr Gibson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the steps he is taking to encourage the creation of cycle lanes in West Tyrone. (AQW 2628/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service recognises the important role that cycling has to play in creating a sustainable transportation strategy for the future and is committed to playing its part in encouraging a pro-cycle culture throughout Northern Ireland. In the West Tyrone area, the Roads Service has constructed over 6 km of purpose-built cycle paths and has signed approximately 134 km of existing lightly-trafficked minor roads as part of the National Cycle Network (NCN). I understand that Omagh District Council has also contributed to the development of the NCN by creating a further 3 km of off-road cycle paths.

The Roads Service plans to construct a further 1.25 km of cycle path along Gortin Road in Omagh within the coming months. This will complete the NCN in the West Tyrone area.

In addition to the NCN, where practical, the Roads Service constructs new footways, such as that at Dromore Road, Omagh, to a standard suitable for use by both pedestrians and cyclists. The needs of cyclists are also being given careful consideration in the design of new road schemes such as the Strabane bypass and the Omagh throughpass Stage III.

Access to Public Transport for the Disabled

Mr Gibson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his plans to increase access to public transport for people with disabilities. (AQW 2629/00)

Mr Campbell: Consultation has just ended on draft Rail Vehicle Accessibility Regulations. A number of points made by consultees are now being considered by officials. These draft regulations lay down standards for the accessibility of trains by people with disabilities and standards that should enable them to travel in safety and comfort. The Regulations will apply to all new trains entering service, including the trains that Translink are currently in the preliminary stages of ordering. Translink have advised that, where practical, they will bring older trains undergoing major refurbishment into line with the legislation.

Bus accessibility regulations are a matter for the Minister of the Environment, but in advance of such legislation being introduced, Translink have already started to replace old buses with new low-floor buses which people with disabilities find easier to use. Translink are also making

railway and bus stations more accessible for people with disabilities when upgrading work takes place. In the current year improved facilities will come into use at Bangor, Coleraine and Belfast Central.

My Department has recently launched a site on the Internet called Getting Out and About. This service provides information on the transport services and related facilities that are available to people with disabilities.

Under the Rural Transport Fund Programme an additional 5 new fully accessible minibuses will be made available to Rural Community Transport Partnerships, bringing the total fleet up to 25. My Department also continues to fund Dial-a-Ride and Easibus services, which improve access to transport for people with disabilities.

Maintenance Programme: Rural Roads South Down

Mr McGrady asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his plans to carry out a maintenance programme on rural roads in the constituency of South Down as a result of deterioration caused by severe weather in February 2001. (AQW 2640/00)

Mr Campbell: Within my Department's Roads Service, the Divisional Roads Managers are currently preparing proposed road maintenance programmes for 2001/02 for the district council areas within their respective Divisions. The Southern Divisional Roads Manager will be presenting his proposals to each district council within the constituency of South Down over the coming weeks.

In general terms, the programmes in rural areas will focus on the structural maintenance of the road network through carriageway resurfacing and surface dressing, along with the repair and augmentation of the road drainage system. These measures will help to address the deterioration of roads which occurred during last winter.

Rail Transport: Funding

Mr Gibson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his plans to increase the level of funding for rail transport. (AQW 2641/00)

Mr Campbell: The Budget which the Assembly approved on 18 December 2000 provided for an increase in funding for railways of £19.6m in 2001-02 and indicative increases of £48m and £34.5m in 2002-03 and 2003-04. The resources available should enable the consolidation option in the Railways Task Force's Interim Report to be taken forward. This involves upgrading those parts of the core network which have not been improved recently and the acquisition of 23 new trains.

Although these increases are most welcome, the resources available for railways are less than those which my predecessor and I sought. I will, therefore, be reviewing

the position and may seek further increases in this year's spending review.

Environmental Impact Assessment for a Road Scheme

Mr Gibson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the environmental criteria against which new motorway and bypass projects are considered; and to make a statement. (AQW 2644/00)

Mr Campbell: Where my Department's Roads Service is required to carry out an environmental impact assessment for a road scheme, it must do so in accordance with the European Community's Council Directive No. 85/337/EEC, as amended by Council Directive No. 97/11/EC. That Directive requires that the Environmental Statement must contain the information referred to in Annex IV of the Directive. A copy of Annex IV is attached.

ANNEX IV

Information Referred to in an Article 5(1)

1. Description of the project, including in particular:-
 - a description of the physical characteristics of the whole project and the land-use requirements during the construction and operational phases;
 - a description of the main characteristics of the production processes, for instance, nature and quantity of the materials used;
 - an estimate, by type and quantity, of expected residues and emissions (water, air and soil pollution, noise, vibration, light, heat, radiator, etc) resulting from the operation of the proposed project.
2. An outline of the main alternatives studied by the developer and an indication of the main reasons for his choice, taking into account the environmental effects.
3. A description of the aspects of the environment likely to be significantly affected by the proposed project, including, in particular, population, fauna, flora, soil water, air, climatic factors, material assets, including the architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the inter-relationship between the above factors.
4. A description of the likely significant effects of the proposed project on the environment resulting from:
 - the existence of the project;
 - the use of natural resources;
 - the emission of pollutants, the creation of nuisances and the elimination of waste, and the description by the developer of the forecasting methods used to assess the effects on the environment.

5. A description of the measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and where possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment.
6. A non-technical summary of the information provided under the above headings.
7. An indication of any difficulties (technical deficiencies or lack of know-how) encountered by the developer in compiling the required information.

Congestion Charges

Mr Gibson asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his policy on the introduction of a congestion charge for motorists travelling during peak times to Belfast. (AQW 2645/00)

Mr Campbell: There are presently no plans to introduce congestion charges in Northern Ireland.

Road Maintenance Programme: Ards Borough Council Area

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his plans to undertake an urgent maintenance programme for the road network in the Ards Borough Council area. (AQW 2648/00)

Mr Campbell: You will be aware that the funds available for road maintenance are not sufficient to enable my Department's Roads Service to maintain adequately the country's road network. The budget for 2001/02 is about half of that which is required. In this context Divisional Roads Managers within Roads Service are currently preparing proposed road maintenance programmes for 2001/02 for the district council areas within their respective Divisions. The Southern Divisional Roads Manager, will be presenting his proposals for the Ards Borough Council area to the Council on 25 June 2001.

In general terms, the programme will focus on the structural maintenance of the road network through carriageway resurfacing and surface dressing, along with the repair and augmentation of the road drainage system.

Public Liability Claims: Damage to Vehicles

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (a) the number of public liability claims for damage to vehicles caused by poor road surfaces in the years 1999-2000 and 2000-01 and (b) what steps he is taking to address the problem. (AQW 2649/00)

Mr Campbell: The number of public liability claims lodged against the Department for Regional Development during the last two financial years in respect of damage to vehicles was –

1999-2000: 1702	2000-01: 2094
-----------------	---------------

The structural integrity of the road network is the top priority of my Department's Roads Service. In support of this objective, the Roads Service undertakes a programme of structural maintenance which comprises good value planned activities, such as resurfacing and surface dressing, as well as reactive patching, which is essential to protect my Department against public liability claims.

During 2000-01, as part of the Roads Service Continuous Improvement Programme, new road maintenance standards were introduced. These standards, which take into account varying circumstances (eg the severity of defect and pedestrian and traffic volumes), resulted in quicker response times for repairing road defects.

In addition, I will of course continue to press for additional funds for road maintenance to further reduce the potential for public liability claims.

Central Claims Unit

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to confirm (a) that the Central Claims Unit has sufficient staff and resources to process compensation claims within current guidelines and (b) the average timescale for processing a claim. (AQW 2650/00)

Mr Campbell: There are 3 categories of public liability claims which are made against the Department for Regional Development: vehicle damage, property damage and personal injury. The Central Claims Unit deals with all these claims against the Department. As regards vehicle damage, the main business goal of the Unit is to make decisions on those claims within an average of 6 months from receipt of the claim. Recent figures show that the average timescale for processing vehicle damage claims is 5½ months. As this meets their objective, it demonstrates that the unit has sufficient staff and resources to achieve their current targets.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Attacks on NIHE Personnel

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of attacks that have taken place against NIHE personnel in each constituency in the years 1999-00 and 2000-01. (AQW 2647/00)

The Minister for Social Development (Mr Morrow): The information is not available by Constituency. The figures by Housing Executive area are as follows:

Housing Executive area.	1999/00	2000/01
Belfast	3	11
South East	10	8
South	2	5

Housing Executive area.	1999/00	2000/01
West	0	0
North East	6	4
Total	21	28

The figures cover all reported incidents of a threatening nature encountered by Housing Executive staff and include a variety of situations ranging from verbal abuse to physical harm.

Urban II Programme

Mr M Murphy asked the Minister for Social Development to detail what measures are in place, under the Urban II Programme, to promote social inclusion and affordable access to basic services. (AQW 2746/00)

Mr Morrow: The draft Urban II Operational Programme that my Department has prepared has 3 priorities, one of which is developing the potential of people resources. Within that priority there are proposals to develop programmes that will remove key obstacles and maximise opportunities for those most marginalised in inner North Belfast to access training and job linked opportunities. Affordable access to basic services was not highlighted in the consultation process that underpins the proposals but there may be some opportunities in this area through the provision of new facilities for community, training and business development.

The Department's proposals are subject to agreement with the European Commission.

ASSEMBLY COMMISSION

Appointment to the Assembly Secretariat

Mr C Murphy asked the Assembly Commission to detail how much weight will be attached to a civil service board outcome when a civil servant is competing against those from outside the civil service in an external competition for appointment to the Assembly Secretariat. (AQW 2610/00)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mrs E Bell): No weight is attached to any civil service board outcome in assessing candidates' suitability for appointment to posts within the Assembly Secretariat, which were the subject of public advertisement.

All appointments to the Assembly Secretariat are made on the basis of selection on merit through fair and open competition. This recruitment principle ensures that all applicants are afforded equality of treatment during the course of their candidature in recruitment competitions and that only the most suitable candidates will be appointed to Assembly posts.

Appointment to the Assembly Secretariat

Mr Molloy asked the Assembly Commission to detail what proportion of civil servants, formerly holding seconded positions within the Assembly, were subsequently successful in external competitions for appointment to the Assembly Secretariat. (AQW 2611/00)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mrs E Bell): Of the 37 civil servants holding seconded positions in the Assembly and who applied for an advertised post in the Assembly Secretariat, 27 (73 %) were successful in securing an appointment.

Appointment to the Assembly Secretariat

Mr Maskey asked the Assembly Commission to detail what measures have been put in place to ensure that seconded civil servants, already included on civil service promotion lists, do not enjoy unfair advantage over non-seconded staff in competition for appointment to the Assembly Secretariat. (AQW 2613/00)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mrs E Bell): No consideration is given to whether candidates are civil servants or non civil servants in determining their suitability for the job.

In accordance with the recruitment principle adopted by the Assembly Commission, all appointments to the Assembly Secretariat are on the basis of selection on merit, through fair and open competition. Adherence to this principle maintains the integrity of the Assembly and cultivates an environment in which applicants for Assembly posts will have confidence in knowing that they will be treated equally and fairly.

All applicants progress through the stages of all Assembly external recruitment competitions solely on their ability to satisfy the requirements of the job for which they have applied.

Appointment to Assembly Secretariat: Equality Consideration

Mr C Murphy asked the Assembly Commission to confirm that it complies with equality legislation when recruiting staff for (a) new posts, (b) upgrading on a temporary basis and (c) on a full time basis to the Assembly Secretariat. (AQW 2630/00)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mrs E Bell): All appointments, made to the Assembly Secretariat through external recruitment, comply fully with current equality legislation.

In terms of its recruitment policy the Assembly Commission has adopted the merit principle with all appointments made on the basis of fair and open

competition which not only maintains the integrity of the Assembly but also cultivates an environment in which potential applicants for Assembly posts will have confidence that they will be treated in a fair and open manner. The Assembly Commission is committed to attracting the widest pool of applicants to ensure that all sections of the community have the opportunity to compete for employment within the Assembly and that only the most suitable applicants are appointed to Assembly positions.

All job advertisements include the Assembly Commission's equal opportunities statement, which sets out the Commission's commitment to equality of opportunity, equity and selection on the basis of merit.

Appointment to Assembly Secretariat

Mr P Doherty asked the Assembly Commission to detail, (a) the number of civil servants, seconded to the Assembly, that have taken up positions on the basis of upgrading or otherwise improved conditions, and (b) what proportion of non civil servants have been recruited on the basis of a negotiated reduction in their former salaries. (AQW 2631/00)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mrs E Bell):

- (a) Of the civil servants seconded to the Assembly Secretariat with effect from 2 December 1999, there have been 27 to date who, through external recruitment, applied for, and were successful in obtaining, appointments at a higher level or under otherwise improved conditions.
- (b) Of the 52 non-civil servants recruited to date to the Assembly Secretariat through external recruitment, there have been 8 (15 %) who were recruited on the basis of a negotiated reduction in their former salaries.

All competitions involving temporary upgrading within the Assembly are carried out using procedures which have been agreed with the local Trade Union Side and which fully comply with all equality legislation and the Equality Commission's Code of Practice.

Assembly Secretariat

Ms McWilliams asked the Assembly Commission to detail the number of Assembly staff who are (a) contract staff and (b) permanent staff, and of these, how many are (i) men and (ii) women. (AQO 1315/00)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr J Wells): There are currently 65 contract staff working in the Assembly of whom 38 are men and 27 women. Of the 234 permanent staff, comprising both secondees from the Civil Service and direct recruits, 118 are men and 116 women.

Index

INDEX PART I (BUSINESS)

- A2 road
 - Station Road, Greenisland junction: congestion, WA107
 - Traffic flow, WA82
 - A5 road: Ballygawley - Omagh upgrade, WA137–8
 - A8 road improvements, WA48
 - A26 road safety improvements, WA136
 - Abattoirs
 - Licence for sending animals to, WA56
 - Slaughter charges, WA116
 - Accident and emergency services
 - Antrim Area Hospital, WA81
 - Lagan Valley Hospital, 324–5
 - Units: drug-related problems, WA73
 - Waiting lists, WA132
 - Accommodation, review, WA159–60
 - Acute hospital services, 22–3, WA20–1
 - South-west, WA129
 - Addiction clinics, WA42
 - Adolescent psychiatric services, 263–75
 - Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Bill (NIA 8/00):
 - Consideration Stage, 397–9
 - Ageism: within workforce, WA91
 - Agricultural waste, WA15–16
 - Agriculture (foot-and-mouth disease) sectoral meeting
 - North/South Ministerial Council, 304–9
 - Agriculture industry
 - Equality of opportunity, WA182
 - NI Executive Brussels Office: support, 202
 - see also* Farmers
 - Agriculture and Rural Development Department (DARD): review panel: membership, WA141
 - Agrifood co-operatives, WA57
 - Agrimonetary compensation, 68–9, WA5–6, WA181
 - Air ambulance, WA46
 - Bases, WA99–100
 - Scottish Executive, WA100
 - Air/sea rescue, WA45
 - Albert Road, Carrickfergus: maintenance, WA106
 - Alcoholism: drinks marketing, 322–3
 - Altnagelvin Hospital: cardiac angiogram service, WA130–1
 - Alzheimer's disease: free care, WA128
 - Ambulance Service
 - Depots, WA97
 - East Antrim, WA80
 - Personnel: assaults on, WA97
 - Recruitment, WA45–6
 - Response times: rural areas, WA36
 - Vehicles, WA99
 - New (Downpatrick), WA166
 - see also* Air ambulance
 - Angling
 - Concessions, 406–7
 - Foot-and-mouth disease: waters, closure, 65
 - Inland fisheries, 71–86
 - Inland waterways, WA58–9
 - Animals
 - Dangerous: welfare, housing and control, WA14
 - Ear tags, WA57
 - Health, protecting, WA183
 - Importation, WA54
 - Control, 200
 - Foot-and-mouth disease, 200
 - Meigh, Co Armagh, WA4–5
 - Veterinary inspections, WA5
 - Licence for sending to abattoirs, WA56
 - Antrim Area Hospital A&E unit, WA81
 - AONB
 - see* Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty
 - Apartments: private sector rents, WA127
 - Aquaculture and marine matters: North/South Ministerial Council, WA142
 - Ards and Down area plan, WA123
 - Ards Borough Council
 - Roads maintenance programme, WA196
 - Services for children with hearing difficulties, 320
 - Area plans
 - Ards and Down, WA123
 - Northern, WA123–4
 - Consultation, WA123
 - Areas of greatest social need: National Lottery funding, WA7
 - Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB): protection, WA156–7
 - Armagh city: regeneration, WA84
 - Army: foot-and-mouth disease: support, WA180
 - Arts: access to, WA6
 - Arts sector: cultural quarter, 408
 - AS and A2 modular A level exams, 18–19
 - Asbestos cement watermain, WA135–6
 - Asperger's Syndrome
 - Health care, WA36, WA37
 - Special educational provision, WA118
 - Assembly
 - Adjournment debate, 42
 - Clerk to the Assembly, 179
 - Commissioner for Standards, 194–9
 - Committee Chairperson/Deputy Chairperson: precedence in debates, 187
 - Consultation period, 40
 - Fair trade goods: use, 414
 - Lilies: display in Parliament Buildings, 277–94
 - Members
 - Accusations against, 242
 - Behaviour in Chamber, 92–3
-

-
- Referred to in debate, 289, 293–4, 345
 - Ministerial statements: questions, 392, 393, 395
 - Non-devolved matters, 128
 - Private notice questions
 - Road safety, 226–8
 - Questions requiring oral answer
 - Redirection, 111
 - Written reply, 111
 - Questions requiring written answers, WA169
 - Secretariat: appointments to, WA197–8
 - Staff recruitment, 414–15
 - Civil servants, proportion, 415–16
 - Standing Orders, 238, 304, 331–8, 399
 - Sub judice rule, 387–8, 392, 393, 399
 - Unparliamentary language, 6, 10, 41–2, 282, 345
 - Voting, 41
 - Assumption Grammar School (Ballynahinch), 318–19
 - Asymmetric digital subscriber line, WA92
 - Asthma: cases diagnosed, WA44
 - Attendance allowance, WA174
 - Aughnadarragh Lough, Co Down: Special Area of Conservation (SAC), WA124–5
 - Autism, WA8–9, WA21
 - Additional funding, WA97
 - Children, educational needs, WA63
 - B90: road-safety improvements, WA48–9
 - Ballyheather Road, Strabane, WA49
 - Ballymacarn Road, Ballynahinch: condition, WA194
 - Ballynahinch, Assumption Grammar School, 318–19
 - Bangor-Belfast railway line, 204–5
 - Bann Systems Ltd, WA2
 - Barnett formula, WA19–20, WA68–9
 - Beef and pig sectors, 145–59
 - Beef Labelling Regulations (EU), WA87
 - Belfast-Bangor railway line, 204–5
 - Belfast City Hospital: theatre utilisation, WA39–40
 - Belfast hills
 - Conservation, WA15
 - Regional park, WA15
 - Belfast-Larne railway line: maintenance work, WA105
 - Belfast Lough: industrial waste, WA68
 - Belfast-Newry rail service: market research, WA171
 - Benefits, WA175
 - Child benefit, WA174
 - Fraud, tackling, WA83
 - Overpayment/underpayment, WA175
 - Beverly Road, Newtownards: sewer blocked, WA194–5
 - Bills
 - Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Bill (NIA 8/00)
 - Consideration Stage, 397–9
 - Children’s Commissioner Bill (NIA 14/00)
 - First Stage, 416
 - Defective Premises (Landlord’s Liability) Bill (NIA 5/00)
 - Committee Stage, CS3–5
 - Consideration Stage, 395–6
 - Department for Learning and Employment Bill (NIA 12/00)
 - First Stage, 106
 - Second Stage, 229
 - Committee Stage, CS19–27
 - Electronic Communications Bill (NIA 9/00)
 - Final Stage, 57
 - Family Law Bill (NIA 4/00)
 - Committee Stage, CS1, CS7–10
 - Proceeds of Crime Bill: Ad Hoc Committee, 125
 - Product Liability (Amendment) Bill (NIA 13/00)
 - First Stage, 395
 - Trustee Bill (NIA 11/00)
 - First Stage, 17
 - Second Stage, 107–10
 - Committee Stage, CS11–18
 - Birth certificates, bilingual, WA19
 - Black Mountain
 - Conservation, 416–23
 - Quarrying, WA15
 - Brain injuries
 - Medical care, WA162
 - North-west region, WA162
 - British-Irish Council
 - Environment sectoral meeting, 401–2
 - Work programmes, WA114
 - British sign language, WA63
 - Broadband services, WA92
 - Brownfield sites, WA172
 - Housing, 206–7
 - Rural areas, WA126
 - Brussels
 - NI Executive Office, WA113, WA179
 - Agriculture industry, support, 202
 - Cost, 400–1
 - Budget Act: Royal Assent, 87
 - Bullying
 - Down Academy, Downpatrick, WA147
 - Legislation to address, WA150
 - Northern Ireland Civil Service, WA95
 - Buses
 - Lanes, WA107
 - Rural areas: additional funding, WA95, WA193–4
 - see also* Public transport
 - Bush, President George W: invitation to, 403–4
 - Bush River: fish production, WA62
 - Businesses: relief: foot-and-mouth disease, 413, 425–40
 - Business training places, WA56
 - Cancer
 - Hospital treatment facilities, 23–5
 - Incidence, reducing, WA129–30
 - Cardiac surgery: hospital stay, average length, WA36
 - Cargie Road, Cullyhanna, Co Armagh, WA49
 - Car parking
-

-
- On-street tariffs, WA138
 - Pay and display, WA107
 - Carraigfoyle paediatric support unit, Belfast, WA169
 - Carrickfergus: pay and display car parks, WA107
 - Carrickfergus Castle: running costs, WA66
 - Carrickfergus Maritime Area Partnership Board, WA109–10
 - Castleberg Area Based Strategy Group: miscellaneous expenditure, WA142–3
 - Cattle
 - German imports, WA1
 - Killing in meat plants, WA141
 - see also* Animals: beef
 - Census (2001), WA69, WA160
 - Central claims unit, WA197
 - Central Community Relations Unit: group funding, WA85–6
 - Chancellor of the Exchequer: education funding, WA117, WA152
 - Charities legislation, WA50
 - Chastisement, reasonable parental, WA127–8
 - Child benefit, WA174
 - Child protection working group: North/South Ministerial Council (education), 316–18
 - Children
 - Drinking under-age, 18
 - Hearing difficulties
 - Ards Borough Council services, 320
 - Classroom assistants, WA118
 - Screening for, WA169
 - Organs, retention: RVH, WA188
 - Parental reasonable chastisement, WA127–8
 - Poverty, WA83
 - Special educational needs
 - Higher and further education colleges: special facilities, WA82
 - Stateminting process, WA152
 - Sports code, 65–6
 - Children's commissioner, 204
 - Timescale for, WA178
 - Children's Commissioner Bill: First Stage, 416
 - Children's Commissioner working group
 - Nominations for, WA177
 - Terms of reference, WA177
 - Children's Forum, WA178
 - Children's fund
 - Access to, 326
 - Health, Social Services and Public Safety Department bids, WA131–2
 - Operation, WA180
 - Child Support Agency
 - Complaints, WA84
 - Targets, WA140
 - Civic Forum: draft Programme for Government, WA114
 - Civil servants
 - Assembly Secretariat: appointment to, WA197–8
 - Early retirement, WA187
 - Retirement age, compulsory, WA157–8, WA186
 - see also* Northern Ireland Civil Service
 - Civil Service
 - see* Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS)
 - Classroom assistants, WA88
 - Children with hearing difficulties, WA118
 - Coagucheck system machines, WA162–3
 - Coastal erosion: Newcastle beach, WA156
 - Coastal Forum, WA186
 - Coastal zone, WA186
 - Development and sustainability, WA185–6
 - Cod recovery plan: fishing vessels, tie-up, WA116, WA143, WA183
 - Cold weather payments, WA83, WA112
 - Comber
 - Bypass, WA137
 - Land vesting for road improvements, 206
 - Riverside: planning applications, WA14–15
 - Commercial premises: rates, representation, WA188
 - Commissioner for children
 - see* Children's Commissioner
 - Common funding formula
 - Local management of schools (LMS), 354–77
 - Ulster-Scots translation, WA184
 - Community capacity building: imbalance, 61–2
 - Community care packages, WA69–70
 - Community relations
 - Larne area, WA114
 - Policy review, WA180
 - Community Relations Council, 401
 - Appointments, WA113, WA115
 - Sectarianism, tackling, WA52
 - Community sector: mainstream core funding, WA174–5
 - Companies (1986 Order) (Audit Exemption) (Amendment) Regulations, 191–4
 - Consultancy services
 - Culture, Arts and Leisure Department, WA6
 - Education Department, WA8
 - Health, Social Services and Public Safety Department, WA75
 - Consultants (medical)
 - Numbers, WA22
 - Recruitment and retention, WA130
 - Contraception, emergency hormonal, WA128
 - Controlled grammar schools: funding, WA10
 - Co-operatives, agrifood, WA57
 - Corgary, Newry: telecommunications masts, WA155
 - Coronary heart disease, WA130
 - Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
 - Members, WA63
 - Rent and rates, WA64
 - Countryside and Rights of Way Act (ch 37), WA93
 - Craft-related occupations: skills shortage, WA104
 - Craigavon Area Hospital: beds, 25–6
-

-
- Craig's Bog Road, Aughnacloy: abandonment order, WA172
- Cross-border school transport, 21–2
- Cross-community participation, WA111
- Crown immunity: Water Service, WA135
- Culture, Arts and Leisure Department
- Consultancy services, WA6
 - Irish language, 64–5
 - Ulster-Scots expertise, WA58
 - Venues due for audit, WA61
- Culture, Arts and Leisure Minister: special adviser, WA7
- Customer charter initiative
- Additional staff, WA173
 - Social Security Agency, WA173
- Cycle lanes, creation: west Tyrone, WA195
- D5 development, WA92–3
- DARD
- see* Agriculture and Rural Development Department
- Day-care places: elderly people, WA78
- Deaf people
- see* Hearing difficulties
- Deaths, Zyban-related, WA193
- Decommissioning, fishing vessels, 410–11, WA57
- see also* Fishing vessels: tie-up scheme
- Defective Premises (Landlord's Liability) Bill (NIA 5/00)
- Committee Stage, CS3–5
 - Consideration Stage, 395–6
- Department for Learning and Employment Bill (NIA 12/00)
- First Stage, 106
 - Second Stage, 229
 - Committee Stage, CS19–27
- Deprivation
- Noble study, 28
 - see also* Poverty
- Developments: roads and services adopted from, WA49
- Diabetes
- Cases diagnosed, WA44, WA164–6
 - Services, WA164–6
 - Treatment, WA168
- Digital hearing aids, WA161–2
- Disability living allowance, WA174
- Independent appeal tribunals, WA82–3
- Disability rights task force, WA53, WA115
- Disabled facilities grant, WA176
- Disabled people
- Public transport, access, WA170, WA195
 - Sports, funding, WA59, WA60–1, WA144
- District councils: local economic development, WA122–3
- Domestic Energy Efficiency Scheme (DEES), WA50
- Domiciliary care: training requirements, WA99
- Down Academy, Downpatrick: bullying, WA147
- Downe Hospital: waiting times, WA188–9, WA190
- Downpatrick: ambulance vehicles, WA166
- Draft Life Sentences Order, 31–40
- Drinking, under-age, 18
- Drinks marketing: alcoholism, 322–3
- Driver licences
- Fraud, 211–12
 - Mutual recognition, WA93
- Driver penalties: NI/GB, mutual recognition, WA155–6
- Drug misuse, WA45, WA72–3
- Education: 'Michael Young Campaign', WA119
 - Ministerial group on combating, WA163
 - NI drug strategy, WA80, WA111–12, WA148
- Drugs
- see also* Prescription drugs
- Dunlady Stream and culvert: improvements, WA3
- East Antrim
- Ambulance Service, WA80
 - Speech therapy, WA22
 - Teaching posts, WA88
- Eastern Health and Social Services Board: hospital services, development, WA76
- Economic development
- Agencies, 112
 - Local, WA122–3
- Economy: growth rate, WA120–1
- Edenvale Avenue, Carrickfergus: housing development, WA50
- Education
- Chancellor of the Exchequer funding, WA117, WA152
 - North/South Ministerial Council
 - Child protection working group, 316–18
 - Educational underachievement working group, WA151
 - Pupil attendance/retention working group, WA150
 - Sectoral meeting, 315–16
 - Special educational needs working group, 318, WA152 - Regional manager/deputy posts: annual funding, WA149
 - Educational courses: funding methodology, WA134–5
 - Educational psychologists: appointment, requirements for, WA152
 - Education and library boards: funding, WA91
- Education Department
- Budget, 320
 - Capital projects — resources, WA11
 - Consultancy services, WA8
 - Equality agenda, 17–18
 - Equality impact assessments, WA151
 - Executive programme funds, WA11
- Education Minister
- School visits, official, WA184
-

-
- Special adviser, WA9
 - Egan project, WA138, WA139–40
 - Eglinton: community nursery school, WA149
 - Elderly people
 - Care, WA134
 - Day-care places, WA78
 - Healthcare strategy, WA129
 - Long-term care, WA48
 - Elective surgery, WA78–9
 - Electricity supply interruptions, 116
 - Electronic Communications Act (Northern Ireland) 2001: Royal Assent, 295
 - Electronic Communications Bill (NIA 9/00): Final Stage, 57
 - Employability and long-term unemployment task force, WA104–5
 - Employment
 - Ageism in, WA91
 - Full, WA85
 - Hearing impairment: assistance to obtain employment, WA193
 - Job creation, WA121
 - Law, WA103
 - Statistics, WA13
 - Textile workers (former), 115–16
 - Enbrel: prescription, WA100
 - Energy
 - Costs, reducing, WA185
 - Efficiency, domestic, 122
 - Produced from waste products, WA91
 - Renewable
 - Development, WA185
 - Promotion, WA185
 - English as an additional language: funding allocated, WA12
 - Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee: Second Report, 457–78
 - Environment
 - British-Irish Council sectoral meeting, 401–2
 - Crime, WA126–7
 - North/South Ministerial Council sectoral meetings, 11–17, WA155
 - Training places, WA56
 - Environment Minister: special adviser, WA13–14
 - Environment Protection Agency, WA123
 - Equality
 - Education Department agenda, 17–18
 - Obligations: Executive programme funds, WA159
 - Single Bill, 202–3, WA86
 - Equality impact assessments: Education Department, WA151
 - Erne Hospital
 - Microbiology services, WA133
 - Qualified staff, retaining, WA132
 - Scanning services, WA132–3
 - Services available, WA133–4
 - European Cohesion Forum, 404
 - European Council of Agriculture Ministers, WA55–6
 - European Union
 - Environmental law: legal sanctions for breaches, WA93–4
 - Objective 1 status: Northern Ireland, 57–8
 - Packaging: rules and regulations, WA54–5
 - Special programmes
 - Interim funding, WA157
 - North/South Ministerial Council, 309–14
 - Structural funds, 133–44
 - Peace and reconciliation, 329–30
 - European Week Against Racism, WA53
 - Ewes, movement of, WA56
 - Examinations: severe weather conditions, 20
 - Exclusion zones: foot-and-mouth disease, WA143
 - Executive
 - see* Northern Ireland Executive
 - Executive programme funds
 - Consultation, WA179
 - Education Department, WA11
 - Equality obligations, WA159
 - First allocations, 213–26
 - Social inclusion, WA85
 - Ex-prisoners' groups, 30–1
 - Fair trade goods: Assembly use, 414
 - Family Law Bill (NIA 4/00): Committee Stage, CS1, CS7–10
 - Family Planning Services
 - Clinics, WA98–9
 - Review, WA98
 - Farmers
 - Foot-and-mouth disease: losses, 412–13
 - Hill farmers: income, WA86
 - Integrated administrative control systems (IACS), WA55
 - Summoned for offences, WA3
 - Farmers' markets, 69–70
 - Farming, organic: research and development, WA86–7
 - Felling licences: forest policy review, WA56
 - Finance and Personnel Department: Review of Audit and Accountability (report), 27–8
 - Finance and Personnel Minister: special adviser, WA16
 - Fire Service
 - False alarm calls, malicious, WA74–5
 - New targeting social need, WA78
 - Unnecessary emergency calls, WA79
 - Fireworks, injuries caused by, WA45
 - Fisheries (Amendment) Act: Royal Assent, 87
 - Fishing industry, WA54
 - Light dues, payment, WA5
 - see also* Angling
 - Fishing vessels
 - Decommissioning, 410–11, WA57
 - Tie-up scheme, WA143, WA183
 - Cod recovery plan, WA116
-

Fish production: River Bush, WA62
 Fleming Fulton Special School: speech and language therapy, WA150
 Flooding problems: Strabane District Council area, WA180
 Food Safety Promotion Board, WA161
 Food Standards Agency: specified risk material, WA167
 Foot-and-mouth disease
 Agriculture and Rural Development Department: communication with farmers, WA57–8
 Angling waters, closure, 65
 Cancelled events due to, WA52
 Compensation, 66–8, WA4, WA181
 Consequential compensation, WA143, WA181–2, WA183
 Culture, Arts and Leisure Department and, 408–9, WA62
 Debates, 1–10, 87–96, 440–56
 Epidemiological investigation, WA181
 Exclusion zones, WA143
 Exit strategy, WA182
 Export controls, WA1
 Farmers' losses, 412–13
 “Fortress island” approach, 413–14
 Germany, WA3
 Healthy animals, destroying, 133
 Importation of animals: control, 200
 Interdepartmental committee, WA52, WA181–2
 Main contributing factor, WA182
 Ministerial statement, 179–87, 295–304
 Newry and Mourne area, 409–10
 Precautionary measures, WA141
 Relief for businesses affected, 413, 425–40
 RUC and Army support, WA180
 Rumen contents: disposal, WA143–4
 Slaughter charges, WA116
 Sport, restrictions on, 408–9, WA62, WA146–7
 Tourism, impact on, 113–15
 Tourist industry: financial assistance, WA152–3
 Update on situation, 70–1
 Football, WA8
 Northern Ireland teams: supporters' clubs, 409
 Sectarianism, 62–4
 Strategy, 66, WA62–3
 Forestry, WA3–4
 Policy review: felling licences, WA56
 Forestry Service, WA4
 “Fortress island” approach to foot-and-mouth disease, 413–14
 Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission
 North/South Ministerial Council, 388–95, WA142
 Framework agreement: official statistics, presentation, WA20
 Fuel poverty: eradication, WA111
 Further education
 Colleges, funding, 120–1, WA134–5
 Funding formula, WA170
 Student places, 117–18
 Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), WA145
 Galleries, museums and visitor centres: collaboration, WA8
 Gap funding, WA17–18
 North-west, WA16
 GCSE: vocational subjects, WA147
 General practitioners
 Fundholders, WA73
 Recognition withdrawal notices, WA160
 Geographical information system, computerised, WA182–3
 German cattle imports, WA1
 Germany: foot-and-mouth disease, WA3
 Glenavy area: roads, WA138
 GoDigital initiative, WA120
 Government Departments
 Percentage Budget increase, WA19
 Staffing, 30
 Underspends, WA187
 Government Resources and Accounts Act: Royal Assent, 87
 Grammar schools: voluntary and controlled, funding, WA10
 Grant-aided schools: performance-related pay, WA149
 Ground Rents Act: Royal Assent, 87
 Haemophilia: numbers suffering from, WA164
 Hannahstown/Glenavy areas: roads, WA138
 Harassment, allegations: Northern Ireland Civil Service, WA94
 Hares, Irish, 208–9
 Hazard warning lights: school transport, WA125
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety Department
 Capital expenditure plan, WA168
 Econometric models, WA160
 Equality scheme: complaints received, WA167
 Funding allocated, WA37
 Job vacancies: advertisements, WA168–9
 Spending review bids, WA190–1
 Health, Social Services and Public Safety working group: North/South Ministerial Council, 320–2
 Healthcare
 Expenditure per head, WA69, WA73–4
 Long term, WA45
 Provision, WA71
 Workforce, WA21–2
 Infected: management of, WA43–4
 Health indices for Northern Ireland, WA44
 Health and Personal Social Services Act: Royal Assent, 87
 Health reviews, WA42–3
 Health and social services trusts
 Deficit position, WA43

-
- Performance-related pay, WA46
 - Healthy eating programme: nursery and primary schools, 319
 - Hearing aids: digital, WA161–2
 - Hearing difficulties
 - Children with: classroom assistants, WA118
 - Infants, screening for, WA169
 - Employment, assistance to obtain, WA193
 - Unemployment, WA92
 - Heart attacks/disease, WA72, WA130
 - see also* Cardiac surgery
 - Heating systems: housing executive houses, 125
 - Helicopter rescue service, 126–31, WA73
 - Hepatitis C: numbers suffering from, WA164
 - Higher education colleges
 - Funding, 120–1
 - Special facilities for students with special needs, WA82
 - Student places, 117–18
 - High-voltage overhead power lines: planning applications, WA66
 - Hill farmers: income, WA86
 - HIV
 - see* Human immunodeficiency virus
 - Holocaust, commemoration, WA54
 - Home care: fairer charging policies, WA189
 - Home help services, WA95
 - Home tutors
 - Salaries, parity, WA149
 - Terms and conditions of employment, WA184
 - Horse racing, Sunday, WA112
 - Hospitals
 - Acute hospitals, 22–3, WA20–1
 - South-west, WA129
 - A&E units
 - Antrim Area Hospital, WA81
 - Drug-related problems, WA73
 - Lagan Valley Hospital, 324–5
 - Waiting lists, WA132
 - Altnagelvin Hospital: cardiac angiogram service, WA130–1
 - Antrim Area Hospital A&E Unit, WA81
 - Beds
 - Craigavon Area Hospital, 25–6
 - Intensive care, WA130, WA189–90
 - Paediatric intensive care, WA189
 - South-west region, WA130
 - Belfast City Hospital: theatre utilisation, WA39–40
 - Cancer treatment: facilities, 23–5
 - Cardiac surgery, average length of stay, WA36
 - Craigavon Area Hospital: beds, 25–6
 - Downe Hospital: waiting times, WA188–9, WA190
 - Erne Hospital
 - Microbiology services, WA133
 - Qualified staff, retaining, WA132
 - Scanning services, WA132–3
 - Services available, WA133–4
 - Hygiene, 23
 - Intensive care beds, WA189–90
 - Lagan Valley Hospital: A&E department, 324–5
 - Paediatric intensive care
 - Admission rates, WA192
 - Beds, WA189
 - Cost, WA189
 - Non-availability, WA192
 - Refusals of admission, WA192
 - Royal Group of Hospitals: operational deficit, WA166–7
 - Royal Victoria Hospital
 - Retention of children's organs, WA188
 - Theatre utilisation, WA40–2
 - Single-use instruments, WA46
 - Specialty waiting lists, WA22–36
 - Ulster Hospital, 323–4
 - Theatre utilisation, WA38–9
 - Waiting lists
 - Reductions, WA46–7
 - Specialty, WA22–36
 - Western Health and Social Services Board, WA166
 - Waiting times, WA129, WA134
 - Downe Hospital, WA188–9, WA190
 - House of Commons Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs: Parades Commission inquiry, WA52
 - Housing
 - Brownfield sites, 206–7
 - Elderly and disabled people: Newry, WA109
 - Private developments, WA107
 - Private sector rents, WA127
 - Travelling people: pilot scheme, WA111
 - Unfit, WA173
 - Housing benefit, WA110
 - Administration, WA83, WA84
 - Rate Collection Agency charges, WA157, WA158
 - Housing development: Edenvale Avenue, Carrickfergus, WA50
 - Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV): numbers suffering from, WA164
 - Human organs, retention, WA46
 - Royal Victoria Hospital, WA188
 - Hygiene: hospitals, 23
 - Hypothermia, deaths from, WA112
 - IACS
 - see under* Farmers
 - Imported animals
 - see* Animals
 - Incapacity benefit, WA174
 - Income support: unclaimed/underpaid, WA173
 - Independent appeal tribunals: disability living allowance, WA82–3
 - Independent International Commission on Decommissioning, WA178
 - Industrial Development Board (IDB)
-

-
- Expenditure level, WA119–20
 - Investment: west Tyrone, WA122
 - Industrial injuries
 - Death benefit, WA175
 - Disablement pension, WA175
 - Industrial tribunals: referrals to, WA100
 - Industrial waste: Belfast Lough, WA68
 - Infants: screening for hearing, WA169
 - Infertility treatment, WA71–2
 - Information, public access, WA150
 - Information communication technology (ICT)
 - Funding, WA90
 - Teachers, training, WA11
 - Information technology: postgraduate students, WA100
 - Injuries caused by fireworks, WA45
 - Inland fisheries, 71–86
 - Inland waterways
 - Fish caught by anglers, WA58–9
 - North/South Ministerial Council sectoral meetings, WA146
 - Integrated administrative control systems (IACS): farmers, WA55
 - Intensive care beds: paediatric, WA189–90
 - Intermediary funding bodies: Peace II funding programme, 327–8
 - InterTradeIreland: progress, WA153
 - Invalid care allowance, WA174
 - Investment, attracting: Rathfriland area, WA184–5
 - Inward investment, WA121
 - Irish hare, 208–9
 - Irish language
 - Culture, Arts and Leisure Department, 64–5
 - Funding parity with Ulster-Scots language, WA7
 - Irish Parliament: history, publication, WA61–2
 - Irish Republic
 - see* Republic of Ireland
 - Job creation, WA121
 - Job grant, WA110
 - Jobseeker's allowance, WA50
 - Contribution-based, WA175
 - Kitchen/bathroom replacements: Housing Executive dwellings, 124–5
 - Labour market: new entrants, WA105
 - Lagan Valley constituency: women, skills-based training, WA103
 - Lagan Valley Hospital: A&E department, 324–5
 - Land
 - Urban: analysis, WA171–2
 - Vesting for road improvements: Comber area, 206
 - Languages teaching: primary schools, WA9
 - Larne area
 - Community relations, WA114
 - Pay and display car parks, WA107
 - Tactile paving surfaces: town centre, WA172
 - Larne-Belfast railway line: maintenance work, WA105
 - Larne Lough: pollution, 210
 - Library provision: Queen's Parade, Bangor, WA61
 - Licences: animals sent to abattoirs, WA56
 - Licensed premises: planning permission, WA153–5
 - Light bulbs, low-energy, WA110–11
 - Light dues, payment: fishing industry, WA5
 - Linguistic diversity projects, WA58, WA87
 - Lisburn Women's Centre, WA113–14
 - Listed buildings: grant aid, WA125
 - Literacy and numeracy strategy, WA119, WA148
 - Livestock ear tags, WA57
 - Local economic development: financial allocation, WA159
 - Local government finance: reform, WA156
 - Local Government (Payment to Councillors) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999, WA126
 - Local management of schools (LMS)
 - Consultation period, WA151
 - Funding formula, 354–77, WA11–12
 - Review, WA148
 - Local produce, use, WA182
 - Londonderry area: unadopted roads, WA136
 - Long-term care, WA45
 - Elderly people, WA48
 - Residential and nursing home places, WA77
 - Lough Foyle: Sellafield discharge limit, WA126
 - Loughs Agency, 411–12
 - Loyalist/Unionist community: cultural traditions, WA178
 - M1 motorway/Westlink: public inquiries, WA105–6
 - M2 motorway: use of hard shoulder, WA138
 - McCleery, B H, & Co, Ballygowan, WA13
 - Magee College, University of Ulster: students, full-time, WA102
 - Maghaberry, HMP: rates paid, WA127
 - Manufacturing sector: recruitment trends, WA120
 - Martin Memorial Clock, WA175–6
 - Maternity allowance, WA175
 - Maze, HMP: rates paid, WA127
 - Meat plants: cattle killed in, WA141
 - Medical and health facilities, provision: Mourne area, 377–85
 - Medical workforce, WA21–2
 - Meeting halls: rateable valuation, WA20
 - Meigh, Co Armagh: importation of animals, WA4–5
 - Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986: review, WA169
 - Mental illness, WA130
 - Adolescent psychiatric services, 263–75
 - Young people, WA37
 - 'Michael Young Campaign': drugs education, WA119
 - Mid Ulster
 - Parking tickets, income, WA135
 - Unemployment statistics, WA13
-

-
- Milk collection: severe weather, WA87
 - Minimum income guarantee, 123–4, WA83
 - Minimum wage, 252–63, WA119, WA122
 - Ministers, representation when unavailable, WA54
 - Miscarriages, WA43
 - Mitchell House Special School: speech and language therapy, WA150
 - Mixed marriages: Housing Executive policy, 121–2
 - Mobile phone masts
 - see* Telecommunications masts
 - Model farm, Downpatrick: building work, WA176
 - Moderate learning difficulties: special education units, WA116–17
 - Morbidity rate, WA71, WA161
 - Morning-after pill, WA128
 - Mourne area: medical and health facilities, provision, 377–85
 - Museums, galleries and visitor centres: collaboration, WA8

 - National Lottery funding, WA144–5
 - Areas of greatest social need, WA7
 - City and rural areas, WA145
 - Sport, WA145
 - National minimum wage, 252–63, WA119, WA122
 - Needs and effectiveness reviews, WA160
 - Neurosurgery: patients suffering from Parkinson's Disease, WA80
 - Newcastle beach: coastal erosion, WA156
 - New Deal, 120
 - Newry
 - Housing: elderly and disabled people, WA109
 - Social security office, new, WA18–19
 - Newry-Belfast rail service: market research, WA171
 - Newry and Kilkeel Institute: gender and religious composition, WA82
 - New targeting social need (TSN), WA52–3
 - Fire Authority, WA78
 - Funding, 123
 - Schools, WA118
 - Unemployment differentials, 203–4
 - Upper Bann, WA85
 - Newtownabbey: primary school places, WA90–1
 - Newtownards: Housing Executive office, WA109
 - Nicotine replacement therapy, WA132
 - Noble study: deprivation, 28
 - Non-residential social services: charging policies, fairer, WA189
 - North Antrim: Ulster-Scots language, culture and history: promotion, WA7
 - North Down: wastewater treatment works, WA137
 - Northern area plan, WA123–4
 - Consultation, WA123
 - Northern Ireland: promotion overseas, WA91
 - Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS)
 - Bullying, WA95
 - Compulsory retirement age, WA157–8, WA186
 - Early retirement of staff, WA187
 - Harassment, allegations, WA94
 - Retirement policy, WA95
 - Senior Civil Service review, 31
 - Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Recruitment Service
 - Job advertisements, WA18
 - Job applications, WA18
 - Northern Ireland Events Company, WA147
 - Northern Ireland Executive
 - Brussels office, WA113, WA179
 - Agriculture industry, support, 200
 - Cost, 400–1
 - Washington bureau, WA52, WA114
 - Programme for Government, 402–3
 - Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE)
 - Egan project, WA138, WA139–40
 - Grant, WA173–4
 - Grass cutting, WA139
 - Heating repairs on occupational therapy grounds, WA172
 - Heating systems, 125
 - Housing benefit: administration, WA83, WA84
 - Kitchen/bathroom replacements, 124–5
 - Londonderry response maintenance project, WA138–9
 - Mixed marriages: housing policy, 121–2
 - Newtownards office, WA109
 - Personnel: attacks on, WA197
 - Rent arrears owed, WA84
 - South Down programme, WA174
 - Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, WA115
 - Northern Ireland Regional Centre for Performance Management, WA90
 - Northern Ireland Social Fund: discretionary budget 2001–02, WA140
 - Northern Ireland Tenants Action Project, WA110
 - Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB)
 - Chairman, 112–13
 - Marketing strategy, WA12
 - Operational arrangements, WA12
 - North/South Language Body, WA145–6
 - North/South Ministerial Council sectoral meetings
 - Agriculture (foot-and-mouth disease), 304–9
 - Aquaculture and marine matters, WA142
 - Education, 315–16, WA12
 - Working groups, 316–18, WA10, WA12, WA150, WA151, WA152
 - Environment, 11–17, WA155
 - Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission, 388–95, WA142
 - Health, Social Services and Public Safety working group, 320–2
 - Inland waterways, WA146
 - Mobility study, WA179
 - Special EU programmes, 309–14, WA158–9
 - Tourism, 346–50, WA153
-

-
- Transportation, WA177
 - North-west region
 - Brain injuries, WA162
 - Gap funding, WA16
 - Numeracy and literacy strategy, WA119, WA148
 - Nursery schools
 - Eglinton, WA149
 - Healthy eating programme, 319
 - Places, WA119
 - Nursing and residential homes
 - Funding, WA189
 - Places, WA77
 - Rates paid to, WA167
 - Nursing posts vacant, WA128
 - Objective 1 status, 57–8
 - Odyssey project, WA183–4
 - Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister: special advisers, WA51
 - Omagh: throughpass, WA135
 - Omagh College: new build, WA135
 - On-course betting, Sunday, WA112
 - On-street car parking tariffs, WA138
 - Operating instruments, single-use, WA46
 - Organic farming: research and development, WA86–7
 - Orthopaedic consultants, WA97–8
 - Orthopaedic operations: elective and routine, WA98
 - Orthopaedic services, WA80–1
 - Packaging: EU rules and regulations, WA54–5
 - Paediatric community nurse, 24-hour service, WA166
 - Paediatric intensive care
 - Admission rates, WA192
 - Beds, WA189
 - Cost, WA189
 - Non-availability, WA192
 - Refusals of admission, WA192
 - Palliative care, WA47
 - Parades Commission inquiry: House of Commons Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs, WA52
 - Parental reasonable chastisement, WA127–8
 - Parking
 - see* Car parking
 - Parkinson's Disease patients: neurosurgery for, WA80
 - Patients
 - Transfer by minibus, WA169
 - Treatment, cost, WA43
 - Peace and reconciliation: EU structural funds, 329–30
 - Peace II programme funding, WA19, WA127, WA188
 - Community and voluntary sector, 327
 - Distribution of money, 326–7
 - Intermediary funding bodies, 327–8
 - Partnership models, 329
 - Victims, 230–51
 - Women's centres, WA158
 - Peace I programme funding: women's centres, WA158
 - Pensioners
 - see* Senior citizens
 - Pensions: retirement pension, WA175
 - Performance-related pay: grant-aided schools, WA149
 - Pesticide control, WA4
 - Pig and beef sectors, 145–59
 - Pig Industry Restructuring (Capital Grant) Scheme, 188–91
 - Pig outgoers scheme, WA181
 - Planning
 - Licensed premises: permission, WA153–5
 - Regulations: new shop fronts, WA67
 - Retrospective approvals, WA67
 - Planning Appeals Commission, WA14
 - Planning applications
 - High-voltage overhead power lines, WA66
 - No Y/2000/0610/0, WA15
 - Riverside, Comber, WA14–15
 - Strangford, 212–13
 - Telecommunications masts, WA68
 - Planning (Compensation, etc) Act: Royal Assent, 87
 - Points of order, 6, 10, 133, 187, 242, 304, 352–3, 380–1
 - Policing Board nominations, WA52
 - Pollution: Larne Lough, 210
 - Postgraduate students: information technology, WA100
 - Post-primary education: transfer procedure, 19–20
 - Post-primary review body: remit, WA10
 - Poverty
 - Children, WA83
 - Combating, 59, WA53
 - Power lines, high-voltage overhead
 - Planning applications, WA66
 - Public safety concerns, WA76–7
 - Prescription drugs, amber-rated, WA163–4
 - Primary care pilot schemes, WA44–5
 - Primary schools
 - Exceptional closure, WA149–50
 - Funding disparity with secondary schools, WA90, WA151–2
 - Healthy eating programme, 319
 - Language teaching, WA9
 - Places: Newtownabbey, WA90–1
 - 'Priorities for Action 2001-02', WA160–1
 - Private contractors: severe weather conditions, WA82
 - Private Streets (Construction) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001, 351–3
 - Proceeds of Crime Bill: Ad Hoc Committee, 125
 - Procurement, public: policy, 29–30, 328–9
 - Product Liability (Amendment) Bill (NIA 13/00): First Stage, 395
 - Programme for Government, WA19
 - Draft: Civic Forum, WA114
 - Northern Ireland bureau, Washington, 402–3
 - Prospect area, Carrickfergus: unadopted roads and services, 205–6
 - Prostate cancer screening, WA36–7, WA81, WA167
-

-
- Public appointments, 399–400
 - Public liability claims: vehicles, damage by road surface, WA196–7
 - Public library provision: Queen’s Parade, Bangor, WA61
 - Public sector comparator, WA16
 - Public swimming pool: centrally located, 407–8
 - Public transport
 - Belfast-Dublin route, WA108
 - Concession fares, WA108
 - Disabled people, access, WA170, WA195
 - M2: use of hard shoulder, WA138
 - Rural areas: additional funding, WA95
 - Senior citizens, free travel, WA49, WA193, WA194
 - Students: free travel, WA171
 - see also* School transport
 - Pupils
 - Additional fees, WA11
 - Boarding, WA9
 - Medical needs, WA152
 - Strangford parliamentary constituency: numbers, WA9–10
 - Quarrying: Black Mountain, WA15
 - Queen’s Parade, Bangor: library provision, WA61
 - Railways
 - Belfast-Bangor line, 204–5
 - Belfast-Larne line: maintenance work, WA105
 - Belfast-Newry service: market research, WA171
 - Funding, WA195–6
 - Translink: new trains, WA136
 - see also* Public transport
 - Rate Collection Agency, WA20
 - Enforcement action, WA19
 - Housing benefit: charges, WA157, WA158
 - Rates
 - Arrears, 330, WA19
 - Commercial premises: representation, WA188
 - HM prisons/Thiepval Barracks: paid, WA127
 - Rateable valuation: meeting halls, WA20
 - Rural rate relief schemes, WA93
 - see also* Rating policy
 - Rates (Regional Rates) (No 2) Order 2001, 43–56
 - Rathfriland area
 - Investment, attracting, WA184–5
 - Wastewater treatment works: upgrading, WA194
 - Rating policy, 28–9, WA68
 - Review, 26–7
 - Village and rural houses: review, WA188
 - Recombinant Factor VIII, WA190
 - Recruitment trends: manufacturing/service sector, WA120
 - Recycled waste, WA14
 - Regional regeneration task forces, 121
 - Rents: private sector houses, WA127
 - Republic of Ireland
 - Improved co-operation with, WA70–1
 - Visitors, WA121–2
 - Residential and nursing homes
 - Funding, WA189
 - Places, WA77
 - Rates paid to, WA167
 - Residential care: young people: suitable provision, WA192–3
 - Respite care, WA77–8
 - Retirement pension, WA175
 - Retrospective planning approvals, WA67
 - Rivers
 - Improved water quality, WA62
 - see also* Inland waterways
 - Riverside, Comber: planning applications, WA14–15
 - Roads
 - A2/Station Road, Greenisland junction: congestion, WA107
 - A2 traffic flow, WA82
 - A5 Ballygawley-Omagh upgrade, WA137–8
 - A8 improvements, WA48
 - A26 safety improvements, WA136
 - Accidents, 210–11
 - Adopting from developers, WA49
 - Albert Road, Carrickfergus: maintenance, WA106
 - B90: road safety improvements, WA48–9
 - Ballyheather Road, Strabane, WA49
 - Ballymacarn Road, Ballynahinch: condition, WA194
 - Bus lanes, WA107
 - Cargie Road, Cullyhanna, Co Armagh, WA49
 - Comber bypass, WA137
 - Congestion charges, WA196
 - Craig’s Bog Road, Aughnacloy: abandonment order, WA172
 - Cycle lanes, creation: west Tyrone, WA195
 - Environmental impact assessment of schemes, WA196
 - Grass verges, converting to hard shoulders, WA171
 - Gritting: rural roads, WA82
 - Hannahstown/Glenavy areas, WA138
 - Hard shoulders used as traffic lanes, WA171
 - Improvements, WA137
 - Infrastructure investment, WA135
 - Land, vesting for improvements: Comber area, 206
 - Larne town centre: tactile paving surfaces, WA172
 - M1/Westlink: public inquiries, WA105–6
 - M2: use of hard shoulder, WA138
 - Maintenance programme: Ards Borough Council area, WA196
 - Omagh throughpass, WA135
 - On-street car parking tariffs, WA138
 - Private contractors: severe weather conditions, WA82
 - Road Safety Council of Northern Ireland, WA65
 - Rural (south Down): maintenance programme, WA195
-

-
- Salting, WA105
 - School crossing patrols, WA48
 - Strangford constituency: improvements, WA106
 - Tidal flow traffic schemes, WA49
 - Toome bypass, 207–8
 - Traffic-calming measures: west Belfast, 339–44
 - Unadopted
 - Londonderry area, WA136
 - Prospect area, Carrickfergus, 205–6
 - Verge cutting in rural areas, WA49–50
 - Road safety, 226–8, WA157
 - Education officers, 212
 - Speed cameras, WA155–6
 - Road Safety Council of Northern Ireland, WA65, WA125–6
 - Rosstulla Special School: speech and language therapy, WA10, WA100, WA128
 - Royal Group of Hospitals: operational deficit, WA166–7
 - Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC): foot-and-mouth disease: support, WA180
 - Royal Victoria Hospital (RVH)
 - Children’s organs, retention, WA188
 - Theatre utilisation, WA40–2
 - Rural areas
 - Adverse development, WA153
 - Ambulance response times, WA36
 - Brownfield sites, WA126
 - Buses: additional funding, WA95
 - Rate relief schemes, WA93
 - Rating policy: review, WA188
 - Roads: gritting, WA82
 - Roads maintenance programme: south Down, WA195
 - Sports facilities, WA6–7
 - Verge cutting, WA49–50
 - Women, role, WA183
 - Rural Women’s Network: funding, WA115
 - Safer Routes to Schools projects, WA108
 - Funding, WA107
 - St Mary’s University College: student places, WA90
 - Salmonid enhancement scheme, WA2, WA3
 - Salting: school bus routes, WA105
 - School crossing patrols, WA48
 - Schools
 - Additional fees, WA11
 - Anti-bullying legislation, WA150
 - Assumption Grammar School (Ballynahinch), 318–19
 - Boarders, WA9
 - Budget information, WA88
 - Classroom assistants, WA88, WA118
 - Down Academy, Downpatrick: bullying, WA147
 - Free meals, WA63
 - Funding disparity, WA90
 - Healthy eating programme, 319
 - Local management (LMS)
 - Common funding formula, 354–77, WA11–12
 - Consultation period, WA151
 - Review, WA148
 - Maintenance work, WA64
 - West Tyrone, WA147–8
 - New targeting social need (TSN), WA118
 - Property, protection, WA11
 - Uniforms and pupils’ equipment, 20–1
 - Vandalism in, WA88–9
 - School transport
 - Cross-border, 21–2
 - Funding, WA118
 - Hazard warning lights, WA125
 - Routes, salting, WA105
 - Science Research Investment Fund programme, WA105
 - Scottish Executive: air ambulances, WA100
 - Scottish visitors, WA13
 - Secondary schools
 - Funding disparity with primary schools, WA90
 - Standards, raising, WA119
 - Sectarianism
 - Community Relations Council: tackling, WA52
 - Football, 62–4
 - Sellafield discharge limit: Lough Foyle, WA126
 - Senior citizens, 201–2
 - Commissioner for, WA116
 - Free travel, WA193, WA194
 - Minimum income guarantee, 123–4, WA83
 - Senior Civil Service review, 31
 - Service sector: recruitment trends, WA120
 - SEUPB
 - see* Special EU Programmes Body
 - Severe weather conditions
 - Examinations, 20
 - Milk collection, WA87
 - Roads: private contractors, WA82
 - Sewer, blocked: Beverly Road, Newtownards, WA194–5
 - Sewerage infrastructure: Whitehead, WA106–7
 - Sheep: ewes, movement of, WA56
 - Sheep farmers (Silent Valley): compensation payments, WA136
 - Sheepmeat exports, WA55
 - Shop fronts, new: planning regulations, WA67
 - Sign language, teaching, WA63
 - Silage wrap disposal, WA15–16
 - Silent Valley: sheep farmers: compensation payments, WA136
 - Single equality Bill, 202–3, WA86
 - Skills, basic: young people, 119
 - Skills-based training: women, WA103
 - Skills shortages, WA48
 - Craft-related occupations, WA104
 - Small businesses, 116
 - Soccer
-

-
- see* Football
 - Social exclusion, combating, WA53
 - Social inclusion
 - Executive programme funds, WA85
 - Promoting, 404
 - Social Security Agency
 - Budget 2001-02, WA140
 - Customer charter initiative, WA173
 - Performance targets, WA176
 - Staff training, WA173
 - Strabane, WA187
 - Social Security appeal tribunal hearings, WA112
 - Somerton/Chichester conservation area, WA124
 - South Down
 - Northern Ireland Housing Executive programme, WA174
 - Rural roads: maintenance programme, WA195
 - South-west region
 - Acute hospital provision, WA129
 - Hospital beds, WA130
 - Special advisers
 - Cost, WA114
 - Culture, Arts and Leisure Minister, WA7
 - Education Minister, WA9
 - Environment Minister, WA13–14
 - Finance and Personnel Minister, WA16
 - Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, WA51
 - Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)
 - Aughnadarragh Lough, Co Down, WA124–5
 - West Tyrone, WA94
 - Special educational needs
 - Asperger's Syndrome, WA118
 - Children: statementing process, WA152
 - Working group: North/South Ministerial Council: Education, 318, WA152
 - Special education units, WA88
 - Funding, WA116–17
 - Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), WA158–9
 - Special schools: speech and language therapy provision, WA10, WA100, WA128, WA150
 - Specialty waiting lists, WA22–36
 - Specified risk material: Food Standards Agency, WA167
 - Spectator facilities, safe, 404–5
 - Speech and language therapy
 - Adult waiting lists, WA96
 - Children's waiting lists, WA96–7
 - East Antrim, WA22
 - Rosstulla Special School, WA100, WA128
 - Special schools, WA10, WA150
 - Therapists, numbers, WA95–6
 - Speed cameras: road safety, WA156
 - Sport
 - Children's code, 65–6
 - Disabled people, WA59, WA60–1, WA144
 - National Lottery funding, WA145
 - Rural facilities, WA6–7
 - Safe spectator facilities, 404–5
 - United Kingdom teams, 64
 - Sports Council for Northern Ireland
 - Equality obligations, WA60
 - Funding allocated, WA59–60
 - Springvale campus, WA104
 - Spruce House
 - Patients, transfer to, WA162
 - Rehabilitation and specialist care, WA162
 - SPUR
 - see* Student powered unit of resource
 - Staff development performance review: teachers' salaries and, WA89
 - Steering committee for cross-border rural development, WA141–2
 - Strabane
 - Flooding problems, WA180
 - Social Security Agency and Training and Employment Agency, WA187
 - Strabane 2000 urban regeneration programme: pedestrian bridge, WA171
 - Strangford
 - Planning applications, 212–13
 - Pupil numbers, WA9–10
 - Roads, WA106
 - Strategic railway review body, WA138
 - Street Trading Act (Northern Ireland) 2001: Royal Assent, 295
 - Student powered unit of resource (SPUR), WA170
 - Students
 - Finance, 118–19, WA103–4
 - Higher and further education places, 117–18
 - Higher education: qualifications, WA103
 - Postgraduate: information technology, WA100
 - Public transport: free travel, WA171
 - Support, 97–106
 - Sunday
 - Horse racing, WA112
 - On-course betting, WA112
 - Sure Start programme, WA37–8
 - Surgery, elective, WA78–9
 - Swimming pool (public): centrally located, 407–8
 - Teachers
 - Conditions of service, WA89–90
 - Discrimination against, WA51
 - Employment and retirement, WA64
 - Information communication technology (ICT) training, WA11
 - Initial training courses, WA184
 - Performance-related pay, WA89
 - Staff development performance review and pay, WA89
 - Vacancies, WA118
 - Teaching posts: East Antrim, WA88
-

-
- Telecommunications infrastructure: west Tyrone, WA92
 - Telecommunications masts
 - Corgary, Newry, WA155
 - Income generated, WA75–6, WA87–8
 - Planning applications, WA68
 - Textile industry
 - Future, WA92
 - Workers (former): employment, 115–16
 - Thiepval Barracks: rates paid, WA127
 - Third-level education: west Tyrone, WA104
 - Tidal flow traffic schemes, WA49
 - Tie-up scheme: fishing vessels, WA116, WA143, WA183
 - ‘Times Higher Education Supplement’: statistics, WA169–70
 - Toome bypass, 207–8
 - Tourism
 - Foot-and-mouth disease
 - Financial assistance, WA152–3
 - Impact, 113–15
 - Funding, 115
 - North/South Ministerial Council, 346–50
 - Republic of Ireland visitors, WA121–2
 - Scottish visitors, WA13
 - Tourism Ireland Ltd, WA12
 - Operational arrangements, WA12
 - Townscape character, areas of, WA65, WA67–8
 - Traffic
 - Average journey times
 - 7.30 am, WA108–9
 - 5.30 pm, WA109
 - Traffic-calming measures, west Belfast, 339–44
 - Training
 - Business training places, WA56
 - Environmental training places, WA56
 - Training and Employment Agency
 - Rapid reaction service, WA104
 - Strabane, WA187
 - Training centres, 116
 - Transfer procedure: post-primary education, 19–20
 - Translink
 - New trains, WA136
 - Revenue
 - Estimated loss, WA108
 - Protection, WA108
 - Travelling people
 - Housing scheme, pilot, WA111
 - Sites, 122–3
 - Travellers’ working group: consultation with, WA178
 - Treatment, cost of, WA43
 - Tree preservation orders, 209–10, WA94
 - Trees
 - Felling licences, WA56
 - Native, WA87
 - Planting, WA55
 - Trustee Bill (NIA 11/00)
 - First Stage, 17
 - Second Stage, 107–10
 - Committee Stage, CS11–18
 - TSN
 - see* New targeting social need
 - Tuberculosis, WA42, WA79–80, WA191–2
 - Ulster Hospital, 323–4
 - Theatre utilisation, WA38–9
 - Ulster-Scots culture and heritage: promotion, WA7, WA58, WA144
 - Ulster-Scots language
 - Funding parity with Irish language, WA7
 - Promotion: north Antrim, WA7
 - Teaching, WA11
 - Ulster-Scots translation: common funding formula, WA184
 - Unemployment
 - Differentials (TSN action plans), 203–4
 - Hearing-disabled people, WA92
 - Statistics
 - 50 to 65 age bracket, WA92
 - District council areas, WA121
 - Mid Ulster, WA13
 - Upper Bann, WA64–5
 - Unfit housing, WA173
 - Unionist/Loyalist community: cultural traditions, WA178
 - United Kingdom sports teams, 64
 - United States Government: discussions with, 200–1, WA53–4
 - Universities: funding methodology, WA134–5
 - University of Ulster
 - Academic staff, full-time, WA100–1
 - Maximum student number (MaSN) (1997–2001), WA103
 - Students, full-time, WA101–2
 - Upper Bann
 - New targeting social need (TSN), WA85
 - Unemployment statistics, WA64–5
 - Victim support, WA115
 - Urban II operational programme, WA197
 - Urban land: analysis, WA171–2
 - Vandalism: schools, WA88–9
 - Vehicles
 - Excise duty, WA94
 - Failure to display, WA65
 - Licensing fraud, 211–12
 - Occupancy, WA107–8
 - Public liability claims: damage by road surface, WA196–7
 - Verge cutting: rural areas, WA49–50
 - Veterinary inspections: imported animals, WA5
 - Victims
 - Groups, funding, WA16–17, WA51
-

Peace II programme, 230–51
 Support, 58–9, 60–1
 Upper Bann, WA115
 Victims commission, WA180
 Victims Unit: funding, WA1
 Villages: adverse development, WA153
 Visitor amenities, 405–6
 Visitor centres: collaboration with museums and galleries, WA8
 Voluntary grammar schools: funding, WA10
 Voluntary organisations: Peace II funding programme, 327

Wages, national minimum, 252–63, WA119, WA122
 Waiting lists, WA129, WA134
 A&E, WA132
 Downe Hospital, WA188–9, WA190
 Reduction, WA46–7
 Specialty, WA22–36
 Western Health and Social Services Board, WA166

Washington DC
 Northern Ireland Bureau, WA52, WA114, WA179
 Programme for Government, 402–3
 Visit of First Minister and Deputy First Minister, WA115, WA116

Waste
 Agricultural, WA15–16
 Energy produced from, WA91
 Industrial, WA68
 Recycled, WA14

Wastewater treatment works
 North Down, WA137
 Rathfriland: upgrading, WA194

Watermains, asbestos cement, WA135–6
 Water quality, WA125
 Rivers: improved, WA62

Water Service: Crown immunity, WA135
 West Belfast: traffic-calming measures, 339–44
 Western Education and Library Board: bills, payment, 319–20
 Western Health and Social Services Board: waiting lists, WA166
 Westlink/M1: public inquiries, WA105–6

West Tyrone
 Constituent, medical needs, WA134
 Cycle lanes: creation, WA195
 IDB investment, WA122
 School maintenance work, WA147–8
 Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), WA94
 Telecommunications infrastructure, WA92
 Third-level education, WA104

Whitehead: sewerage infrastructure, WA106–7
 Winter fuel payments, WA83, WA112

Women
 Rural community, role, WA183
 Skills-based training, WA103

Women's centres: Peace I/II funding, WA158

Woodland
 Cover, WA55
 Native, WA87

Workforce
 Ageism within, WA91–2
 Medical, WA21–2

Young people
 Mental illness, WA37
 Psychiatric services, 263–75
 Residential care, suitable: provision, WA192–3
 Skills, basic, 119

Zyban, deaths related to, WA193

INDEX PART II (MEMBERS)

Adams, Mr G

- Assembly: points of order, 421
- Belfast hills
 - Conservation, WA15
 - Regional park, WA15
- Black Mountain
 - Conservation, 416–17
 - Quarrying, WA15
- MI/Westlink public inquiries, WA105–6
- National minimum wage, WA119
- Travellers, working group, WA178

Adamson, Dr I

- Adolescent psychiatric services, 265–6
- Arts sector: cultural quarter, 408
- Black Mountain: conservation, 417–18
- Culture, Arts and Leisure Department: Irish language, 65
- Inland fisheries, 80–1
- Northern Ireland Ambulance Service: recruitment, WA45
- Ulster Hospital, 324
- Victims: Peace II programme, 249

Agnew, Mr F

- Inland fisheries, 76–7

Armitage, Ms P

- Bush, President George W: invitation to, 403
- Cancer treatment: hospital facilities, 23–4
- Patients: transfer by minibus, WA169
- Textile industry: future, WA92

Armstrong, Mr B

- Agriculture (foot-and-mouth disease): North/South Ministerial Council, 308
- Beef and pig sectors, 155
- Children's commissioner, 204
- Domestic energy efficiency scheme (DEES), WA50
- Ex-prisoners' groups, 30–1
- Foot-and-mouth disease, 5, 67–8, 94–5, 187, 300, 447–8
 - Newry and Mourne area, 410
 - Relief for businesses affected, 432–3
- Hospitals
 - Specialty waiting lists, WA22–36
 - Waiting lists: reduction, WA46–7
- Language teaching: primary schools, WA9
- Lilies: display in Parliament Buildings, 290–1
- Parking tickets: income, Mid Ulster, WA135
- Prostate cancer screening programme, WA81
- Road improvements, WA137
- Small businesses, 116
- Treatment, cost of, WA43
- Tree preservation orders, 209
- Unemployment statistics, WA13
- Victims: Peace II programme, 246

Attwood, Mr A

- Black Mountain: conservation, 418–20
- Census 2001, WA160
- Draft Life Sentences Order, 38–9
- Parental reasonable chastisement, WA127
- Rates (Regional Rates) (No 2) Order 2001, 50–1
- Traffic-calming measures: west Belfast, 340–1

Beggs, Mr R

- A8 improvements, WA48
- Air ambulance
 - Bases, WA99
 - Scottish Executive, WA100
- Assembly
 - Commissioner for Standards, 196–7
 - Points of order, 325, 416
 - Staff recruitment: civil servants, proportion, 415
 - Standing Orders, 334
- Bus lanes, WA107
- Community relations: Larne area, WA114
- Department for Learning and Employment Bill (NIA 12/00), CS20, CS23, CS25–6, CS27
- Deprivation: Noble study, 28
- Drug misuse, WA45
- European Union structural funds, 142
- Foot-and-mouth disease, 8, 303
- Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission: North/South Ministerial Council, 394
- Information and communication technology: funding, WA90
- Larne town centre: tactile paving surfaces, WA171
- Local management of schools (LMS): common funding formula, 372–3
- Minimum wage, 260–1
- Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Recruitment Service
 - Job advertisements, WA18
 - Job applications, WA18
- Peace II programme, WA188
 - Intermediary funding bodies, 328
- Planning applications: high-voltage overhead power lines, WA66
- Pollution (Larne Lough), 210
- Power lines, high-voltage: public safety concerns, WA76
- Programme for Government: NI bureau, Washington, 402
- Regional regeneration task forces, 121
- Retrospective planning approvals, WA67
- Roads and services
 - Adopting from developers, WA49
 - Unadopted (Prospect area, Carrickfergus), 205
- Safer Routes to Schools, WA107, WA108
- Student support, 106

-
- Training centres, 116–17
 - Vehicle occupancy, WA107–8
 - Victims: Peace II programme, 239
 - Visitor amenities, 406
 - Bell, Mr B**
 - Assembly: point of order, 62
 - Victim support, 60
 - Bell, Mrs E**
 - Assembly
 - Members referred to in debate, 294
 - Points of order, 283
 - Belfast-Bangor railway line, 205
 - Children's Forum, WA178
 - Children with special educational needs:
 - statementing process, WA152
 - Civic Forum: draft Programme for Government, WA114
 - European Week Against Racism, WA53
 - Farmers' markets, 69–70
 - Library provision: Queen's Parade, Bangor, WA61
 - Literacy and numeracy, promotion, WA148
 - Local management of schools (LMS): common
 - funding formula, 360–1
 - Minimum income guarantee (senior citizens), 123–4
 - Road Safety Council, WA125
 - Skills shortage: craft-related occupations, WA104
 - Student support, 102
 - Townscape character, areas of, WA65
 - Ulster Hospital, 323–4
 - Victims: Peace II programme, 232
 - Wastewater treatment works: north Down, WA137
 - Young people: suitable residential care, provision, WA192
 - Bell, Mrs E (for Assembly Commission)**
 - Assembly Secretariat: appointment to, WA197–8
 - Berry, Mr P**
 - Adolescent psychiatric services, 266
 - Agriculture (foot-and-mouth disease): North/South Ministerial Council, 307
 - Assembly: points of order, 456
 - Consultants (hospital), numbers, WA22
 - Education Department
 - Budget, 320
 - Capital projects: resources, WA11
 - Environment: North/South Ministerial Council, 14
 - Foot-and-mouth disease, 183, 449–50
 - Government Departments: staffing, 29–30
 - Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 - Department: capital expenditure plans, WA168
 - Helicopter rescue service, 129
 - Medical workforce, WA21–2
 - Peace and reconciliation: EU structural funds, 329
 - Regional regeneration task forces, 121
 - Victims: Peace II programme, 230–2, 236
 - Birnie, Dr E**
 - British-Irish Council: work programmes, WA114
 - Brussels: Northern Ireland Executive office, WA179
 - Crown immunity: Water Service, WA135
 - Department for Learning and Employment Bill (NIA 12/00)
 - Second Stage, 229
 - Committee Stage, CS19–24, CS25–7
 - Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee:
 - Second Report, 464–5
 - Environment: North/South Ministerial Council, 16
 - Environment Protection Agency, WA123
 - EU special programmes: North/South Ministerial Council, 311
 - EU structural funds, 138
 - Peace and reconciliation, 330
 - Executive programme funds: first allocations, 221
 - Framework agreement: official statistics,
 - presentation, WA20
 - Higher and further education: student places, 117–18
 - Local management of schools (LMS) funding
 - formula, WA11
 - Minimum wage, 253–4, 255, 257, 259
 - Objective 1 status, 58
 - Rates (Regional Rates) (No 2) Order 2001, 47
 - Science Research Investment Fund programme, WA105
 - Single equality Bill, 203
 - Students
 - Free public transport, WA171
 - Support, 100
 - 'Times Higher Education Supplement': statistics, WA169–70
 - Tourism
 - Irish Republic visitors, WA121
 - Scottish visitors, WA13
 - Boyd, Mr N**
 - Foot-and-mouth disease, 4
 - Lilies: display in Parliament Buildings, 289–90
 - Safe spectator facilities, 405
 - Victims: Peace II programme, 233
 - Bradley, Mr P J**
 - Agriculture (foot-and-mouth disease): North/South Ministerial Council, 305
 - Assembly: points of order, 442
 - Beef and pig sectors, 148–9
 - Brownfield sites: rural areas, WA126
 - Fishing industry: payment of light dues, WA5
 - Foot-and-mouth disease, 8, 186, 300, 443–4
 - Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission:
 - North/South Ministerial Council, 391
 - Gritting of rural roads, WA82
 - Livestock ear tags, WA57
 - Local produce, use, WA182
 - Medical and health facilities, provision: Mourne area, 383–4
-

NI Executive Brussels office: agriculture industry, support, 202
Pig Industry Restructuring (Capital Grant) Scheme, 189
Primary schools: exceptional closure, WA149
Special facilities for children with special needs, WA82
Swimming pool (public): centrally located, 407
Telecommunications mast: Corgary, Newry, WA155

Byrne, Mr J

Agriculture (foot-and-mouth disease): North/South Ministerial Council, 307
Assembly: Standing Orders, 336
Department for Learning and Employment Bill (NIA 12/00): Committee Stage, CS20, CS22, CS23
EU structural funds, 138
Executive programme funds: first allocations, 219
Foot-and-mouth disease, 6–7, 95, 298
Local economic development, WA122
New Deal, 120
NI Executive Brussels office: cost, 401
Poverty, combating, 59
Private Streets (Construction) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001, 352
Procurement policy, 29–30
Road infrastructure investment, WA135
Student support, 104

Campbell, Mr G (Minister for Regional Development)

Average journey times
7.30 am, WA108–9
5.30 pm, WA109
Brownfield sites, 206–7, WA171
Buses, rural: additional funding, WA193–4
Car parking
On-street parking tariffs, WA138
Parking tickets: income, Mid Ulster, WA135
Pay and display, WA107
Central claims unit, WA197
Executive programme funds: first allocations, 224
Housing
Brownfield sites, 206–7
Private developments, WA107
Larne town centre: tactile paving surfaces, WA171
Northern Ireland Housing Executive: grass cutting, WA139
Private Streets (Construction) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001, 351, 353
Public liability claims: vehicles damaged by road surface, WA196–7
Public transport
Concession fares, WA108
Disabled people: access to, WA170, WA195
Senior citizens: free travel, WA49, WA193, WA194
Students: free travel, WA171

Railways

Belfast-Bangor line, 204–5
Belfast-Larne line: maintenance work, WA105
Belfast-Newry service: market research, WA171
Funding, WA195–6
Strategic railway review body, WA138
Translink: new trains, WA136

Roads

A2/Station Road, Greenisland junction: traffic congestion, WA107
A2 traffic flow, WA82
A5 Ballygawley-Omagh: upgrade, WA137–8
A8 improvements, WA48
A26 safety improvements, WA136
Adopting from developers, WA49
Albert Road, Carrickfergus: maintenance, WA106
B90: road safety improvements, WA48–9
Ballyheather Road, Strabane, WA49
Ballymacarn Road, Ballynahinch: condition, WA194
Bus lanes, WA107
Cargie Road, Cullyhanna, Co Armagh, WA49
Comber bypass, WA137
Congestion charges, WA196
Craig's Bog Road, Aughnacloy: abandonment order, WA171
Cycle lanes, creation: west Tyrone, WA195
Environmental impact assessment: schemes, WA196
Grass verges, conversion to hard shoulders, WA171
Hannahstown/Glenavy schemes, WA138
Improvements, WA137
Strangford constituency, WA106
Vesting of land (Comber area), 206
Infrastructure investment, WA135
M2: public transport use of hard shoulder, WA138
Maintenance programme
Ards Borough Council area, WA196
South Down rural roads, WA195
MI/Westlink public inquiries, WA105–6
Omagh throughpass, WA135
Private contractors: severe weather conditions, WA82
Rural: gritting, WA82
Safety, 226–8
School bus routes: salting, WA105
School crossing patrols, WA48
Tidal flow traffic schemes, WA49
Toome bypass, 207–8
Traffic-calming measures: west Belfast, 342–4
Unadopted
Londonderry area, WA136
Prospect area, Carrickfergus, 205–6
Vehicle occupancy, WA107–8

-
- Verge cutting in rural areas, WA49–50
 - Safer Routes to Schools, WA107, WA108
 - Sewer blocked: Beverly Road, Newtownards, WA194–5
 - Sewerage infrastructure: Whitehead, WA106–7
 - Silent Valley sheep farmers: compensation payments, WA136
 - Strabane 2000 urban regeneration programme: pedestrian bridge, WA171
 - Translink revenue
 - Loss, WA108
 - Protection, WA108
 - Urban land: analysis, WA171
 - Wastewater treatment works
 - North Down, WA137
 - Upgrading: Rathfriland, WA194
 - Watermains: asbestos cement, WA135–6
 - Water Service: Crown immunity, WA135
 - Carrick, Mr M**
 - Asbestos cement watermains, WA135–6
 - Business and environmental training places, WA56
 - Child Support Agency: targets, WA140
 - Community capacity building: imbalance, 61
 - Craigavon Area Hospital: beds, 26
 - Department for Learning and Employment Bill: Committee Stage (NIA 12/00), CS20, CS23, CS26
 - Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee: Second Report, 462–3
 - Environmental crime, WA126
 - Executive programme funds: first allocations, 220
 - Job grant, WA110
 - Minimum income guarantee (senior citizens), 124
 - Minimum wage, 260
 - Northern Ireland social fund: discretionary budget 2001-02, WA140
 - Rivers: improved water quality, WA62
 - Social Security Agency: performance targets, WA176
 - Victim support: Upper Bann, WA115
 - Carson, Mrs J**
 - A&E waiting lists, WA132
 - Acute hospital services, 23
 - Agricultural waste, WA15–16
 - Alcoholism: drinks marketing, 323
 - Beef and pig sectors, 152–3
 - Craig's Bog Road, Aghnacloy: abandonment order, WA171
 - Department for Learning and Employment Bill (NIA 12/00), CS20–1, CS22, CS23
 - Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee: Second Report Committee Stage, 467–8
 - Environment: North/South Ministerial Council, 12
 - Erne Hospital
 - Microbiology services, WA133
 - Qualified staff, retaining, WA132
 - Scanning services, WA132–3
 - Services available, WA133
 - Foot-and-mouth disease
 - Precautionary measures, WA141
 - Relief for businesses affected, 434
 - Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission: North/South Ministerial Council, 392
 - Inland fisheries, 81–2
 - Local management of schools (LMS): common funding formula, 369–70
 - Planning permission: licensed premises, WA153–5
 - Public appointments, 399–400
 - Single equality Bill, WA86
 - Under-age drinking, 18
 - Villages: adverse development, WA153
 - Close, Mr S**
 - Angling: inland waterways, WA58
 - Bann Systems Ltd, WA2
 - Defective Premises (Landlord's Liability) Bill (NIA 5/00): Committee Stage, CS3, CS4, CS5
 - EU structural funds, 139–40
 - Executive programme funds: first allocations, 220
 - Family Law Bill (NIA 4/00): Committee Stage CS1
 - Finance and Personnel Department: Review of Audit and Accountability (report), 27–8
 - Foot-and-mouth disease: rate relief for businesses, 413
 - Rates
 - Arrears, 330
 - Paid: HM prisons/Thiepval Barracks, WA127
 - Rates (Regional Rates) (No 2) Order 2001, 46–8, 50
 - Salmonid enhancement scheme, WA2, WA3
 - Swimming pool (public): centrally located, 407
 - Tourism: foot-and-mouth disease, 114
 - Trustee Bill (NIA 11/00): Committee Stage, CS12, CS13–14, CS15
 - Young people: basic skills, 119
 - Clyde, Mr W**
 - German cattle imports, WA1
 - Tourism: North/South Ministerial Council, 348
 - Cobain, Mr F**
 - Executive programme funds
 - Consultation, WA179
 - First allocations, 219
 - Fuel poverty, eradication, WA111
 - Minimum wage, 257–8
 - Coulter, Rev Robert**
 - Fireworks, injuries caused by, WA45
 - Lilies: display in Parliament Buildings, 280
 - Toome bypass, 208
 - Courtney, Mrs A**
 - Animal health, protecting, WA183
 - Arts sector: cultural quarter, 408
 - Children's fund, WA180
 - Access to, 326
 - Eglinton: community nursery school, WA149
 - Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee: Second Report, 468
 - European Union structural funds, 142
-

Executive programme funds: first allocations, 222
Foot-and-mouth disease: relief for businesses affected, 433
Labour market: new entrants, WA105
Nicotine replacement therapy, WA132
Prostate cancer screening, WA167
Public appointments, 400
Single equality Bill, 202–3
Special EU programmes: North/South Ministerial Council, 313–14
Student support, 105
Tourism
 Foot-and-mouth disease, 114
 North/South Ministerial Council, 347–8
Waiting lists: Western Board, WA166
Western Education and Library Board: bills, payment, 319–20
Young people: basic skills, 119

Dallat, Mr J

Agrimonetary compensation, 69
Alcoholism: drinks marketing, 322–3
Assembly
 Points of order, 277
Beef and pig sectors, 153–4
Department for Learning and Employment Bill (NIA 12/00): Committee Stage, CS21–2, CS23, CS26
European Cohesion Forum, 404
Foot-and-mouth disease, 2, 448–9
Higher and further education: student places, 117
Local management of schools (LMS): common funding formula, 367
M2: public transport use of hard shoulder, WA138
New TSN: funding, 123
Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS)
 Harassment allegations, WA94
 Retirement policy, WA95
Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) chairman, 113
Nursery and primary schools: healthy eating programme, 319
Procurement, 328
Road accidents, 210–11
Road safety, 228
School uniforms and pupils' equipment, 20–1
Senior citizens, 201–2
Student support, 100
Tourism: North/South Ministerial Council, 348
United States Administration, relations with, WA53–4
Victims: Peace II programme, 230
Women, role in rural community, WA183

Dalton, Mr D S

Assembly: Standing Orders, 332
Autism: additional funding, WA97
Economic development agencies, 112

Davis, Mr I

Assembly: points of order, 325
Inland fisheries, 77–8
US Administration: discussions with, 201
Washington DC: visit, WA115

de Brún, Ms B (Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety)

Addiction clinics, WA42
Adolescent psychiatric services, 271–3
Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Bill (NIA 8/00): Consideration Stage, 397–9
Air ambulance, WA46
 Bases, WA99–100
 Scottish Executive, WA100
Air/sea rescue, WA45
Alcoholism: drinks marketing, 322–3
Alzheimer's Disease: free care for patients, WA128
Amber-rated prescription drugs, WA163–4
Ambulance Service
 Depots, WA97
 East Antrim, WA80
 Fleet, WA99
 Personnel: assaults on, WA97
 Recruitment, WA45–6
 Response times: rural areas, WA36
Asperger's Syndrome, WA36, WA37
Assembly: questions requiring written answers, WA169
Asthma: cases diagnosed, WA44
Autism, WA21
 Additional funding, WA97
Brain injuries: medical care, WA162
Cancer
 Hospital treatment facilities, 23–5
 Incidence, reducing, WA129–30
Cardiac surgery: average length of hospital stay, WA36
Carraigfoyle Paediatric Support Unit, Belfast, WA169
Children's fund, WA131–2
Children's organs, retention: Royal Victoria Hospital, WA188
Coagucheck system machines, WA162–3
Community care packages, WA69–70
Consultants (hospital)
 Numbers, WA22
 Recruitment and retention, WA130
Deaths related to Zyban, WA193
Department
 Capital expenditure plans, WA168
 Consultancy services, WA75
 Econometric models, WA160
 Equality scheme: complaints received, WA167
 Funding allocated, WA37
 Job vacancies: advertisements, WA168–9
 Spending review bids, WA190–1
Diabetes, WA164–6

Cases diagnosed, WA44
Treatment for, WA168
Digital hearing aids, WA161–2
Domiciliary care: training requirements, WA99
Downpatrick: new ambulance vehicles, WA166
Drug misuse, WA45, WA72–3
 Anti-drugs strategy, WA80
 Ministerial group, WA163
Eastern Board: hospital services, development, WA76
Elderly people
 Care, WA134
 Day care places, WA78
 Healthcare strategy, WA129
 Long-term care, WA48
Elective surgery, WA78–9
Enbrel: prescription, WA100
Family planning clinics, WA98
 Cancellation, WA98–9
Family Planning Services: review, WA98
Fire Authority: New TSN, WA78
Fire Service
 Emergency calls, unnecessary, WA79
 False alarm calls, malicious, WA74–5
Fireworks, injuries caused by, WA45
Food Safety Promotion Board, WA161
Food Standards Agency: specified risk material, WA167
GP fundholders, WA73
 Recognition withdrawal notices, WA160
Health, Social Services and Public Safety:
 North/South Ministerial Council working group, 320–2
Healthcare provision, WA71
Healthcare workers, infected: management of, WA43–4
Health expenditure per head, WA69, WA73–4
Health indices for Northern Ireland, WA44
Health reviews, WA42–3
Hearing: screening for infants, WA169
Heart attacks, WA72
Helicopter rescue service, WA73
HIV, haemophilia, hepatitis C: numbers suffering from, WA164
Home care/non-residential social services: cost, WA189
Home help service, WA95
Hospitals
 Acute hospitals, WA20–1
 South-west, WA129
 Acute services, 22–3
 A&E
 Drug-related problems, WA73
 Waiting lists, WA132
 Altnagelvin Hospital: cardiac angiogram service, WA130–1
 Antrim Area Hospital A&E unit, WA81

Beds: south-west region, WA130
Belfast City Hospital: theatre utilisation, WA39–40
Craigavon Area Hospital: beds, 25–6
Downe Hospital: waiting times, WA188–9, WA190
Erne Hospital
 Microbiology services, WA133
 Qualified staff, retaining, WA132
 Scanning services, WA132–3
 Services available, WA133–4
Intensive care beds, WA189–90
Lagan Valley Hospital: A&E department, 324–5
Paediatric intensive care
 Admission rates, WA192
 Admissions, refusal, WA192
 Beds, WA189, WA192
 Cost, WA189
Royal Group Hospitals: operational deficit, WA166
Royal Victoria Hospital: theatre utilisation, WA40–2
Single use instruments, WA46
Specialty waiting lists, WA22–36
Ulster Hospital, 323–4
 Theatre utilisation, WA38–9
Waiting lists
 Reduction, WA46–7
 Western Board, WA166
 Waiting times, WA129, WA134
HSS trusts
 Deficit position, WA43
 Performance-related pay, WA46
Human organs, retention, WA46
Infertility treatment, WA71–2
Long-term care, WA45, WA48
Medical and health facilities, provision: Mourne area, 384–5
Medical workforce, WA21–2
Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986: review, WA169
Mental illness, WA37, WA130
Miscarriages, WA43
Morbidity rate, WA71, WA161
Morning-after pill, WA128
Neurosurgery: patients suffering from Parkinson's Disease, WA80
Nicotine replacement therapy, WA132
Nursing posts, vacant, WA128
Nursing/residential homes
 Places, WA77
 Rates paid to, WA167
Orthopaedic consultants, WA97–8
Orthopaedic operations: elective and routine, WA98
Orthopaedic services, WA80–1
Paediatric community nurse, 24-hour service, WA166

-
- Palliative care, WA47
 - Patients: transfer by minibus, WA169
 - Power lines, high-voltage: public safety concerns, WA76–7
 - Primary care pilot schemes, WA44–5
 - ‘Priorities for Action 2001-02’, WA160–1
 - Prostate cancer screening, WA36–7, WA81, WA167
 - Recombinant Factor VIII, WA190
 - Republic of Ireland: improved co-operation with, WA70–1
 - Residential homes: funding, WA189
 - Respite care, WA77–8
 - Speech and language therapy
 - East Antrim, WA22
 - Rosstulla Special School, WA100, WA128
 - Therapists: numbers, WA95–6
 - Waiting lists, WA96–7
 - Spruce House, WA162
 - Rehabilitation and specialist care, WA162
 - Sure Start programme, WA37–8
 - Telecommunications masts: income from siting, WA75–6
 - Treatment, cost of, WA43
 - Tuberculosis, WA42, WA79–80, WA191–2
 - West Tyrone constituent, medical needs, WA134
 - Young people: suitable residential care, provision, WA192–3
 - Dodds, Mr N**
 - Assembly: Standing Orders, 332–3, 334
 - Defective Premises (Landlord’s Liability) Bill (NIA 5/00): Committee Stage, CS4
 - EU structural funds, 144
 - Higher and further education: student places, 117–18
 - Long-term care, WA45
 - Programme for Government: NI bureau, Washington, 402
 - Rates (Regional Rates) (No 2) Order 2001, 45–6
 - Rating policy, 28–9
 - School property, protection, WA11
 - Doherty, Mr A**
 - Environment: North/South Ministerial Council sectoral meeting, 15
 - Native woodland, WA87
 - Needs and effectiveness reviews, WA160
 - Procurement policy, 29–30
 - Tree preservation orders, 209, WA94
 - Doherty, Mr P**
 - Assembly: Secretariat: appointment to, WA198
 - Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee: Second Report, 457–9, 476–8
 - Foot-and-mouth disease, 186, WA57–8
 - Relief for businesses affected, 439–40
 - Douglas, Mr B**
 - Altnagelvin Hospital: cardiac angiogram service, WA130
 - Beef and pig sectors, 151–2
 - Community capacity building: imbalance, 62
 - Cross-community participation, WA111
 - Foot-and-mouth disease, 68, 91, 299, 445–6
 - Special advisers
 - Culture, Arts and Leisure Minister, WA7
 - Education Minister, WA9
 - Environment Minister, WA13–14
 - Finance and Personnel Minister, WA16
 - Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, WA51
 - Durkan, Mr M (Minister of Finance and Personnel)**
 - Accommodation review, WA159–60
 - Barnett formula, WA19–20, WA68–9
 - Birth certificates, WA19
 - Buses (rural): additional funding, WA95
 - Census 2001, WA69, WA160
 - Children’s fund: access to, 326
 - Civil servants
 - Bullying/harassment allegations, WA94, WA95
 - Retirement policy, WA157–8, WA186, WA187
 - Defective Premises (Landlord’s Liability) Bill (NIA 5/00): Consideration Stage, 396
 - Department: Review of Audit and Accountability (report), 27–8
 - Departmental budgets: percentage increase, WA19
 - Deprivation: Noble study, 28
 - EU programmes: interim funding, WA157
 - EU structural funds, 133–44
 - Peace and reconciliation, 329–30
 - Executive programme funds
 - Equality obligations, WA159
 - First allocations, 213–26
 - Ex-prisoners’ groups, 30–1
 - Foot-and-mouth disease: relief for businesses affected, 436–9
 - Framework agreement: official statistics, presentation, WA20
 - Gap funding, WA17–18
 - north-west, WA16
 - Government Departments: underspends, WA187
 - Housing benefit: Rate Collection Agency charges, WA157, WA158
 - Local economic development: financial allocation, WA159
 - Needs and effectiveness reviews, WA160
 - Newry: new Social Security Office, WA18–19
 - Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS)
 - Bullying/harassment allegations, WA94, WA95
 - Retirement policy, WA95, WA186
 - Senior Civil Service review, 31
 - Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Recruitment Service
 - Job advertisements, WA18
 - Job applications, WA18
 - Parental reasonable chastisement, WA127–8
 - Peace II programme funding, WA19, WA127, WA188
-

-
- Community and voluntary sector, 327
 - Distribution, 326–7
 - Intermediary funding bodies, 327–8
 - Partnership models, 329
 - Procurement, public, 29–30, 328–9
 - Product Liability (Amendment) Bill (NIA 13/00):
 - First Stage, 395
 - Programme for Government, WA19
 - Public sector comparator, WA16
 - Rateable valuation of meeting halls, WA20
 - Rate Collection Agency, WA20
 - Enforcement action, WA19
 - Rates
 - Arrears, 330
 - Commercial premises: representation, WA188
 - Paid: HM prisons/Thiepval Barracks, WA127
 - Rates (Regional Rates) (No 2) Order 2001, 43–4, 53–6
 - Rating policy, 28–9, WA68
 - Review, 26–7
 - Village and rural houses, WA188
 - Rents: private sector
 - Apartments, WA127
 - Houses, WA127
 - Social Security Agency/T&EA: Strabane, WA187
 - Special adviser, WA16
 - Special EU programmes: North/South Ministerial Council, 309–14, WA158–9
 - Trustee Bill (NIA 11/00)
 - First Stage, 17
 - Second Stage, 107–10
 - Victims' groups, WA16–17
 - Women's centres: Peace I/II funding, WA158
 - Empey, Sir Reg (Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment)**
 - Ageism within the workforce, WA91–2
 - Asymmetric digital subscriber line, WA92
 - Broadband services, WA92
 - Companies (1986 Order) (Audit Exemption) (Amendment) Regulations, 191–2, 193–4
 - Deaf people: unemployment, WA92
 - Economic development
 - Agencies, 112
 - Local, WA122–3
 - Economic growth rate, WA120–1
 - Electricity supply interruptions, 116
 - Employment
 - Job creation, WA121
 - Statistics, WA13
 - Textile workers (former), 115–16
 - Energy
 - Costs, reducing, WA185
 - Produced from waste products, WA91
 - Renewable
 - Development, WA185
 - Promoting, WA185
 - Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee:
 - Second Report, 472–6
 - Foot-and-mouth disease
 - Relief for businesses affected, 427
 - Tourist industry, financial assistance, 113–15, WA152–3
 - GoDigital initiative, WA120
 - Industrial Development Board (IDB)
 - Expenditure level, WA119–20
 - Investment in west Tyrone, WA122
 - InterTradeIreland: progress, WA153
 - Inward investment, WA121
 - Job creation, WA121
 - Manufacturing/service sector: recruitment trends, WA120
 - B H McCleery & Co Ltd, Ballygowan, WA13
 - National minimum wage, WA119, WA122
 - Northern Ireland: promotion overseas, WA91
 - Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB)
 - Chairman, 112–13
 - Marketing strategy, WA12
 - Operational arrangements, WA12
 - Rathfriland area: investment, attracting, WA184–5
 - Small businesses, 116
 - Telecommunications infrastructure: west Tyrone, WA92
 - Textile industry: future, WA92
 - Tourism
 - Foot-and-mouth disease, 113–15, WA152–3
 - Funding, 115
 - Irish republic visitors, WA121–2
 - North/South Ministerial Council, 346–50, WA153
 - Scottish visitors, WA13
 - Tourism Ireland Ltd, WA12
 - Unemployment statistics, WA13
 - District council areas, WA121
 - 50 to 65 age bracket, WA92
 - Upper Bann, WA64–5
 - Ervine, Mr D**
 - Children's commissioner, 204
 - Foot-and-mouth disease, 92
 - Housing (brownfield sites), 207
 - Lilies: display in Parliament Buildings, 278, 284
 - Minimum wage, 253, 254, 259–60
 - Victims: Peace II programme, 234–5
 - Farren, Dr S (Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment)**
 - Courses, funding methodology, WA134–5
 - Department for Learning and Employment Bill (NIA 12/00)
 - First Stage, 106
 - Second Stage, 229
 - Employability and long-term unemployment taskforce, WA104–5
 - Employment law, WA103
 - Further education colleges
-

-
- Funding, 120–1
 - Special facilities for children with special needs, WA82
 - Student places, 117–18
 - Hearing impairment: assistance to obtain employment, WA193
 - Higher education colleges
 - Colleges, funding, 120–1
 - Special facilities for children with special needs, WA82
 - Industrial tribunals: referrals to, WA100
 - Labour market: new entrants, WA105
 - Magee College: full-time students, WA102
 - New Deal, 120
 - Newry and Kilkeel Institute: gender and religious composition, WA82
 - Omagh College: new build, WA135
 - Postgraduate students: information technology, WA100
 - Redundancies: rapid reaction service, WA104
 - Science Research Investment Fund programme, WA105
 - Skills shortages, WA48
 - Craft-related occupations, WA104
 - Springvale campus, WA104
 - Student powered unit of resource (SPUR), WA170
 - Students
 - College places, 117–18
 - Finance, 118–19, WA103–4
 - Higher education qualifications, WA103
 - Support, 97–100
 - ‘Times Higher Education Supplement’: statistics, WA169–70
 - Training centres, 116–17
 - University of Ulster
 - Academic staff, full-time, WA100–1
 - Maximum student number (MaSN), WA103
 - Students, full-time, WA101–2
 - West Tyrone: third-level education, WA104
 - Women: skills-based training, WA103
 - Young people: basic skills, 119–20
- Fee, Mr J**
- Addiction clinics, WA42
 - Ambulance response times: rural areas, WA36
 - Armagh city: regeneration, WA84
 - Asperger’s Syndrome, WA36
 - Special educational provision, WA118
 - Assembly
 - Questions for oral answer
 - Redirection, 111
 - Written reply, 111
 - Attendance allowance, WA174
 - Belfast-Newry rail service: market research, WA171
 - Cargie Road, Cullyhanna, Co Armagh, WA49
 - Child benefit, WA174
 - Civil Service: compulsory retirement ages, abolition, WA186
 - Disability living allowance, WA174
 - Education Department: equality agenda, 17
 - Elective surgery, WA78
 - Foot-and-mouth disease, 9, 70–1, 93, 184
 - Newry and Mourne area, 409–10
 - Forestry, WA3
 - Gap funding, WA17–18
 - Home help service, WA95
 - Housing benefit, WA110
 - Rate Collection Agency charges, WA157, WA158
 - Housing developments, private, WA107
 - Incapacity benefit, WA174
 - Income support: unclaimed/underpaid, WA173
 - Industrial injuries death benefit, WA175
 - Invalid care allowance, WA174
 - Jobseeker’s allowance, WA50
 - Contribution-based, WA175
 - Lilies: display in Parliament Buildings, 287
 - Maternity allowance, WA175
 - Newry
 - Housing for elderly/disabled people, WA109
 - Social security Office, WA18–19
 - Northern Ireland Housing Executive grant, WA173–4
 - Rate Collection Agency: enforcement action, WA19
 - Recycled waste, WA14
 - Rents, private sector
 - Apartments, WA127
 - Houses, WA127
 - Retirement pension, WA175
 - Salting: school bus routes, WA105
 - Senior citizens: free travel, WA194
 - Social security benefits, WA175
 - Spectator facilities, safe, 404–5
 - Speed cameras: road safety, WA156
 - Washington bureau, WA52, WA114
 - Programme for Government, 402
- Ford, Mr D**
- AS and A2 modular A levels, 18–19
 - Adolescent psychiatric services, 267–8
 - Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Bill (NIA 8/00):
 - Consideration Stage, 398
 - Amber-rated prescription drugs, WA163
 - Assembly
 - Fair trade goods, use, 414
 - Points of order, 282
 - Brussels, NI Executive Office: agriculture industry, support, 202
 - Central Community Relations Unit: group funding, WA85–6
 - Charities legislation, WA50
 - Children’s fund, WA131–2
 - Community Relations Council: appointments, WA113, WA115
-

-
- Economic growth rate, WA120
 - Energy efficiency, domestic, 122
 - Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee:
 - Second Report, 471–2
 - Environment: North/South Ministerial Council, 14
 - Foot-and-mouth disease, 3–4, 91, 182, 298, 408, 444–5, WA57, WA62
 - Farmers' losses, 412
 - Health Department equality scheme: complaints received, WA167
 - Inward investment, WA121
 - Job creation, WA121
 - Long-term care, elderly people, WA48
 - Ministers, representation when unavailable, WA54
 - Procurement, public, 328
 - Rating policy review, 26–7
 - Redundancies: rapid reaction service, WA104
 - Road safety officers, 212
- Foster, Mr S (Minister of the Environment)**
- Animals, dangerous: welfare, housing and control, WA14
 - Ards and Down area plan, WA123
 - Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: protection, WA156–7
 - Areas of Townscape Character, WA65, WA67–8
 - Belfast hills
 - Conservation, WA15
 - Regional park, WA15
 - Black Mountain
 - Conservation, 421–3
 - Quarrying, WA15
 - Brownfield sites: rural areas, WA126
 - Carrickfergus Castle: running costs, WA66
 - Coastal erosion: Newcastle beach, WA156
 - Coastal Forum, WA186
 - Coastal zone, WA185–6
 - Countryside and Rights of Way Act (ch 37), WA93
 - D5 development, Knocknagoney, WA92–3
 - Driving licences
 - Fraud, 211–12
 - Mutual recognition, WA93
 - Driving penalties: NI/GB, mutual recognition, WA155–6
 - Environment: North/South Ministerial Council, 11–17, WA155
 - Environmental crime, WA126–7
 - Environment Protection Agency, WA123
 - EU environmental law: legal sanctions for breaches, WA93–4
 - Irish hare, 208–9
 - Listed buildings: grant aid, WA125
 - Local government finance: reform, WA156
 - Local Government (Payment to Councillors) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999, WA126
 - Northern area plan, WA123–4
 - Planning: retrospective approvals, WA67
 - Planning Appeals Commission, WA14
 - Planning applications
 - High-voltage overhead power lines, WA66
 - No Y/2000/0610/0, WA15
 - Riverside, Comber, WA14–15
 - Strangford, 212–13
 - Telecommunications masts, WA68
 - Planning permission: licensed premises, WA153–5
 - Planning regulations: new shop fronts, WA67
 - Pollution (Larne Lough), 210
 - Road accidents, 210–11
 - Road safety, WA157
 - Education officers, 212
 - Speed cameras, WA156
 - Road Safety Council, WA65, WA125–6
 - Rural rate relief scheme, WA93
 - School transport: hazard warning lights, WA125
 - Sellafield discharge limit: Lough Foyle, WA126
 - Somerton/Chichester conservation area, WA124
 - Special adviser, WA13–14
 - Special Areas of Conservation, WA94
 - Aughnadarragh Lough, Co Down, WA124–5
 - Telecommunications mast: Corgary, Newry, WA155
 - Tree preservation orders, 209–10, WA94
 - Vehicle excise duty, WA94
 - Failure to display, WA65
 - Vehicle licences, fraud, 211–12
 - Villages: adverse development, WA153
 - Waste
 - Agricultural, WA15–16
 - Industrial: Belfast Lough, WA68
 - Recycled, WA14
 - Water quality, WA125
- Gallagher, Mr T**
- Acute hospital services, 22
 - Agriculture (foot-and-mouth disease): North/South Ministerial Council, 306–7
 - Education: North/South Ministerial Council, 316
 - Foot-and-mouth disease: relief for businesses affected, 434–5
 - Lilies: display in Parliament Buildings, 291
 - Local management of schools (LMS): common funding formula, 357–8
 - Peace II partnership models, 329
- Gibson, Mr O**
- Acute hospital services, 22
 - South-west, WA129
 - Agricultural industry: equality of opportunity, WA182
 - Agriculture (foot-and-mouth disease): North/South Ministerial Council, 308
 - Agrimonetary compensation, 69, WA5
 - Anti-drugs strategy, WA80
 - Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: protection, WA156
 - Arts, access to, WA6
 - Assembly
 - Points of order, 281
-

Standing Orders, 334–5
 Barnett formula, WA68
 Beef Labelling Regulations, WA87
 Benefit fraud, tackling, WA83
 Cancer: incidence, reducing, WA129
 Child poverty, WA83
 Child Support Agency: complaints, WA84
 Consultants (hospital): recruitment and retention, WA130
 Cycle lanes, creation: west Tyrone, WA195
 Disabled facilities grants, WA176
 Disabled people: access to public transport, WA195
 Education: North/South Ministerial Council, 316
 Elderly people: healthcare strategy, WA129
 Employment, full: achieving, WA85
 Employment and unemployment statistics, WA13
 Energy
 Costs, reducing, WA185
 Renewable, WA185
 Environment: North/South Ministerial Council, 15
 Environmental impact assessment: road schemes, WA196
 Foot-and-mouth disease, 9
 Farmers' losses, 412
 Relief for businesses affected, 427
 Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission: North/South Ministerial Council, 394
 GCSE: vocational subjects, WA147
 Health expenditure per head, WA69
 Hill farmers: income, WA86
 Hospital beds: south-west region, WA130
 Hospital waiting times, WA129, WA134
 Housing benefit: administration, WA83, WA84
 Hypothermia, deaths from, WA112
 Independent appeal tribunals: disability living allowance, WA82–3
 Lilies: display in Parliament Buildings, 290
 Literacy and numeracy strategy, WA119
 Local government finance: reform, WA156
 Local management of schools (LMS): common funding formula, 358–9
 Minimum income guarantee, WA83
 Museums, galleries and visitor centres: collaboration, WA8
 National Lottery funding to areas of greatest social need, WA7
 Northern Ireland: promotion overseas, WA91
 Nursery school places, WA119
 Nursing posts, vacant, WA128
 Organic farming: research and development, WA86
 Packaging: EU rules and regulations, WA54–5
 Post-primary education: transfer procedure, 19
 Private Streets (Construction) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001, 353
 Prostate cancer screening, WA36
 Rail transport: funding, WA195
 Rate Collection Agency, WA20

Rates on commercial premises: representation, WA188
 Rating policy review: village and rural houses, WA188
 Roads: congestion charges, WA196
 Road safety, WA157
 Rural sports facilities, WA6
 Secondary schools: standards, raising, WA119
 Senior citizens: free travel, WA49
 Sheepmeat exports, WA55
 Skills shortages, WA48
 Special advisers, ministerial, WA114
 Telecommunications infrastructure: west Tyrone, WA92
 Third-level education: west Tyrone, WA104
 Tourism: North/South Ministerial Council, 349
 Unadopted roads and services (Prospect area, Carrickfergus), 205
 Unionist/Loyalist community: cultural traditions, WA178
 Victims
 Peace II programme, 243–4
 Support, 58
 Winter fuel allowance, WA83
 Woodland cover, WA55

Gildernew, Ms M

Assembly
 Staff recruitment: civil servants, proportion, 415–16
 Craigavon Area Hospital: beds, 26
 Executive programme funds: first allocations, 224
 Foot-and-mouth disease, 3, 187
 “Fortress island” approach, 413–14
 Relief for businesses affected, 431–2
 North/South pupil attendance/retention joint working party, WA150
 Rural Women's Network: funding, WA115
 Sunday racing and on-course betting, WA112
 Travelling people: sites, 123

Gorman, Sir John

Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE): kitchen/bathroom replacements, 124

Gorman, Sir John (as Deputy Speaker)

Assembly
 Members: behaviour in Chamber, 92–3
 Question Time, 71

Hamilton, Mr T

Children with hearing impairment: Ards Borough Council services, 320
 Comber bypass, WA137
 Education Department: Executive programme fund, WA11
 Helicopter rescue service, 129–30

Hanna, Ms C

Accommodation review, WA159
 Community Relations Council: tackling sectarianism, WA52

-
- Environment: North/South Ministerial Council, 11–12
- European Union structural funds, 143
- Executive programme funds: first allocations, 225
- Family planning clinics, WA98
- Family Planning Services: review, WA98
- Human organs, retention, WA46
- Minimum wage, 258
- Planning Appeals Commission, WA14
- Social inclusion, promoting, 404
- Unemployment differentials(TSN action plans), 203
- Haughey, Mr D (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister)**
- Electronic Communications Bill (NIA 9/00): Final Stage, 57
- Victims: Peace II programme, 230
- Hay, Mr W**
- Department for Learning and Employment Bill (NIA 12/00): Committee Stage CS21, CS22, CS23
- European Union structural funds, 143
- Listed buildings: grant aid, WA125
- Private Streets (Construction) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001, 351–2
- Rates (Regional Rates) (No 2) Order 2001, 53
- Tourism: North/South Ministerial Council, 349
- Unadopted roads: Londonderry area, WA136
- Hendron, Dr J**
- Adolescent psychiatric services, 264–5
- Black Mountain: conservation, 420–1
- Cancer treatment: hospital facilities, 25
- Family Law Bill (NIA 4/00): Committee Stage, CS7, CS8, CS9, CS10
- Hilditch, Mr D**
- A2/Station Road, Greenisland junction: traffic congestion, WA107
- Albert Road, Carrickfergus: maintenance, WA106
- Ambulance Service
- Depots, WA97
- East Antrim, WA80
- Personnel: assaults on, WA97
- Antrim Area Hospital A&E Unit, WA81
- B90: road safety improvements, WA48
- Belfast-Larne railway line: maintenance work, WA105
- Bush, President George W: invitation to, 403–4
- Carrickfergus Castle: running costs, WA66
- Carrickfergus Maritime Area Partnership Board, WA109–10
- Consultancy services
- Culture, Arts and Leisure Department, WA6
- Education Department, WA8
- Health, Social Services and Public Safety Department, WA75
- Culture, Arts and Leisure venues due for audit, WA61
- Driving licences: mutual recognition, WA93
- Foot-and-mouth disease: events cancelled due to, WA52
- Forestry Service, WA4
- Housing development: Edenvale Avenue, Carrickfergus, WA50
- Industrial waste: Belfast Lough, WA68
- Inland fisheries, 78–9
- Milk collection: severe weather, WA87
- On-street parking tariffs, WA138
- Pay and display car parks, WA107
- Roads: private contractors: severe weather conditions, WA82
- Schools: maintenance work, WA64
- Sewerage infrastructure: Whitehead, WA106
- Speech and language therapy
- East Antrim, WA22
- Therapists, WA95
- Waiting lists, WA96–7
- Teaching posts: east Antrim, WA88
- Telecommunications masts: income generated, WA75, WA87
- Traffic flow: A2, WA82
- Vandalism in schools, WA88
- Verge cutting in rural areas, WA49
- Victims Unit: funding, WA1
- Hussey, Mr D**
- A5 Ballygawley-Omagh road: upgrade, WA137
- Agrimonetary aid package, WA181
- Ballyheather Road, Strabane, WA49
- Brownfield sites, WA171
- Castledearg Area Based Strategy Group, WA142
- Community capacity building: imbalance, 61
- Countryside and Rights of Way Act (ch 37), WA93
- Diabetes, WA164
- Digital hearing aids, WA161
- Education: North/South Ministerial Council: special educational needs working group, 318
- Elderly people, care, WA134
- Employment: former textile workers, 115
- Energy produced from waste products, WA91
- Environment: North/South Ministerial Council, 15–16
- EU environmental law: legal sanctions for breaches, WA93
- Executive programme funds: first allocations, 223
- Finance and Personnel Department: Review of Audit and Accountability (report), 27
- Fire Authority: New TSN, WA78
- Flooding problems: Strabane District Council area, WA180
- Foot-and-mouth disease, 9, 96, 183–4
- Consequential compensation, WA143
- Exit strategy, WA182
- Football: Northern Ireland teams supporters' clubs, 409
- Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission: North/South Ministerial Council, 393–4
-

-
- GoDigital initiative, WA120
 - Health, Social Services and Public Safety:
 - North/South Ministerial Council working group, 321
 - Econometric models, WA160
 - Health expenditure differential per head, WA73
 - Home care/non-residential social services: cost, WA189
 - IDB: investment in west Tyrone, WA122
 - Local Government (Payment to Councillors) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999, WA126
 - Manufacturing/service sector: recruitment trends, WA120
 - National minimum wage, WA122
 - Northern Ireland Housing Executive: grass cutting, WA139
 - Omagh College: new build, WA135
 - Omagh throughpass, WA135
 - Peace II funds: distribution, 326
 - Public sector comparator, WA16
 - Public transport: access for disabled people, WA170
 - Rating policy, WA68
 - Residential homes: funding, WA189
 - Roads: grass verges, conversion to hard shoulders, WA171
 - Road safety, 228
 - Road Safety Council of Northern Ireland, WA65
 - Rural buses: additional funding, WA95, WA193
 - Rural rate relief scheme, WA93
 - School maintenance work: west Tyrone, WA147
 - Social Security Agency/T&EA: Strabane, WA187
 - Special Areas of Conservation, WA94
 - Strabane 2000 urban regeneration programme:
 - pedestrian bridge, WA171
 - Travelling people: sites, 122
 - Trustee Bill (NIA 11/00): Committee Stage, CS13, CS15, CS16, CS18
 - UK sports teams, 64
 - Ulster-Scots culture: overseas promotion, WA144
 - Unemployment differentials(TSN action plans), 204
 - Unfit housing, WA173
 - Urban land: analysis, WA171
 - Victims: Peace II programme, 249
 - Voluntary and controlled grammar schools: funding, WA10
 - West Tyrone constituent, medical needs, WA134
 - Hutchinson, Mr B**
 - Assembly
 - Points of Order, 238
 - Standing Orders, 238
 - Draft Life Sentences Order, 37–8
 - Drugs, ministerial group on, WA163
 - Drug strategy, WA111, WA148
 - European Union structural funds, 140
 - Executive programme funds
 - Equality obligations, WA159
 - First allocations, 220–1
 - Foot-and-mouth disease, 4, 183
 - Importation of animals: control, 200
 - Football: sectarianism, 63
 - Local management of schools (LMS)
 - Common funding formula, 361–2, 364
 - Review, WA148
 - Minimum wage, 252–3
 - Road safety, 227
 - Springvale campus, WA104
 - Victims: Peace II programme, 236
 - Hutchinson, Mr R**
 - Department for Learning and Employment Bill (NIA 12/00): Committee Stage, CS21, CS22, CS23, CS26
 - Minimum wage, 255–6
 - Palliative care, WA47
 - Unadopted roads and services (Prospect area, Carrickfergus), 206
 - Kane, Mr G**
 - Agrifood co-operatives, WA57
 - Beef and pig sectors, 155
 - Fish production: River Bush, WA62
 - Foot-and-mouth disease, 5, 302
 - Objective 1 status, 57
 - Pig Industry Restructuring (Capital Grant) Scheme, 190
 - Toome bypass, 208
 - Under-age drinking, 18
 - Kelly, Mr G**
 - Victims: Peace II programme, 246–7
 - Kelly, Mr J**
 - Assembly: points of order, 277, 289, 450
 - Black Mountain: conservation, 420
 - Draft Life Sentences Order, 36–7
 - Examinations: severe weather conditions, 20
 - Food Safety Promotion Board, WA161
 - Foot-and-mouth disease, 449
 - Health Department: job vacancies: advertisements, WA168
 - Lilies: display in Parliament Buildings, 284, 287–8
 - North/South Ministerial Council: special education working group, WA152
 - St Mary's University College: student places, WA90
 - Student finance, 105, 118
 - Kennedy, Mr D**
 - Agriculture (foot-and-mouth disease): North/South Ministerial Council, 307
 - Agriculture and Rural Development Department:
 - review panel membership, WA141
 - Animals, importation: veterinary inspections, WA5
 - Assembly: points of order, 10, 425
 - Common funding formula: Ulster-Scots translation, WA184
 - Driver and vehicle licensing fraud, 212
-

-
- Education: North/South Ministerial Council: child protection working group, 317
 - EU programmes: interim funding, WA157
 - Executive programme funds: first allocations, 225, 226
 - Foot-and-mouth disease, 92, 186, 450–1, WA57
 - Football strategy, 66
 - Helicopter rescue service, 129
 - Local management of schools (LMS)
 - Common funding formula, 356–7, 374
 - Consultation period, WA151
 - Medical and health facilities, provision: Mourne area, 379–80
 - Minimum wage, 254
 - Newry and Kilkeel Institute: gender and religious composition, WA82
 - Pig outgoers scheme, WA181
 - Post-primary education: transfer procedure, 19–20
 - Schools: disparity in funding, WA90
 - Special EU programmes: North/South Ministerial Council, 312
 - Victims: Peace II programme, 247–8
 - Leslie, Mr J**
 - Agrimonetary compensation, 68–9
 - Air/sea rescue, WA45
 - Assembly
 - Points of order, 10
 - Standing Orders, 335–6
 - Defective Premises (Landlord's Liability) Bill (NIA 5/00): Committee Stage CS3–4
 - European Union structural funds, 141
 - Foot-and-mouth disease, 6, 96, 442–3
 - Rates (Regional Rates) (No 2) Order 2001, 47, 51
 - Rating policy, 29
 - Trustee Bill (NIA 11/00)
 - Second Stage, 109–10
 - Committee Stage, CS13, CS14, CS17–18
 - United States Government, discussions with, WA53
 - Victims commission, WA180
 - Lewsley, Ms P**
 - Abattoirs: licence for sending animals to, WA56
 - Angling: concessions, 406–7
 - Barnett formula, WA19–20
 - Black Mountain: conservation, 421
 - Census (2001), WA69
 - Community sector: mainstream core funding, WA174–5
 - Defective Premises (Landlord's Liability) Bill (NIA 5/00): Committee Stage, CS4
 - Disability rights task force, WA53, WA115
 - Education management: annual funding, WA149
 - Foot-and-mouth disease: relief for businesses affected, 428
 - Football: sectarianism, 62
 - Geographical information system, computerised, WA182
 - Grant-aided schools: performance-related pay, WA149
 - Hannahstown/Glenavy road schemes, WA138
 - Health trusts: performance-related pay, WA46
 - Information, public access to, WA150
 - Lisburn Women's Centre, WA113–14
 - Northern Ireland Regional Centre for Performance Management, WA90
 - North/South Ministerial Council: mobility study, WA179
 - Post-primary education: transfer procedure, 20
 - Rates (Regional Rates) (No 2) Order 2001, 44–5
 - Schools: additional fees, WA11
 - Student finance, 118, WA103–4
 - Teachers
 - Conditions of service, WA89
 - Performance-related pay, WA89
 - Staff development performance review and pay, WA89
 - Women: skills-based training, WA103
 - McCarthy, Mr K**
 - Agriculture (foot-and-mouth disease): North/South Ministerial Council, 306
 - Assembly: Commissioner for Standards, 198–9
 - Examinations: severe weather conditions, 20
 - Fishing vessel decommissioning scheme, WA57
 - Football: sectarianism, 62–3
 - Inland fisheries, 75–6
 - Nursing/residential homes: rates paid to, WA167
 - Planning applications (Strangford), 213
 - Pupils: medical needs in schools, WA152
 - Road improvements: vesting of land (Comber area), 206
 - Tuberculosis vaccinations, WA42
 - McCartney, Mr R**
 - Assembly
 - Members referred to in debate, 293
 - Points of order, 442
 - Unparliamentary language, 42
 - Foot-and-mouth disease, 446
 - Lilies: display in Parliament Buildings, 285–6
 - Rates (Regional Rates) (No 2) Order 2001, 48–50
 - McClarty, Mr D**
 - Areas of townscape character, WA67–8
 - Coastal Forum, WA186
 - Coastal zone, WA186
 - Development and sustainability, WA185–6
 - Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee:
 - Second Report, 460–1
 - Environment: North/South Ministerial Council, 13
 - Foot-and-mouth disease, 301
 - Relief for businesses affected, 430
 - Northern area plan, WA123
 - Consultation, WA123
 - Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB)
 - Marketing strategy, WA12
 - Operational arrangements, WA12
-

-
- Tourism
 - Foot-and-mouth disease, 113–14
 - North/South Ministerial Council, 346
 - Tourism Ireland Ltd, WA12
 - Operational arrangements, WA12
 - Unemployment figures: district council areas, WA121
 - McClelland, Mr D**
 - Assembly
 - Commissioner for Standards, 194–6, 199
 - Children’s Commissioner Bill: First Stage, 416
 - McClelland, Mr D (as Deputy Speaker)**
 - Assembly
 - Members referred to in debate, 293–4
 - McCrea, Rev Dr William**
 - Assembly: points of order, 304
 - Environment: North/South Ministerial Council, 16
 - Ewes, movement of, WA56
 - Foot-and-mouth disease, 93–4, 300, 446–7
 - Lilies: display in Parliament Buildings, 292
 - McDonnell, Dr A**
 - Adolescent psychiatric services, 273–5
 - Belfast-Bangor railway line, 205
 - Companies (1986 Order) (Audit Exemption) (Amendment) Regulations, 192–3
 - Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee: Second Report, 461–2
 - Sure Start programme, WA37–8
 - Tourism: North/South Ministerial Council, 346–7
 - Ulster Hospital, 324
 - McElduff, Mr B**
 - Air ambulance, WA46
 - Birth certificates, WA19
 - Culture, Arts and Leisure Department: Irish language, 64
 - Foot-and-mouth disease, 10
 - Local management of schools (LMS): common funding formula, 367–9
 - North/South educational underachievement working group, WA151
 - Rates (Regional Rates) (No 2) Order 2001, 52
 - Swimming pool (public): centrally located, 407
 - Teachers :information communication technology training, WA11
 - McFarland, Mr A**
 - Agriculture (foot-and-mouth disease): North/South Ministerial Council, 308
 - Assembly
 - Members referred to in debate, 293
 - Standing Orders, 333
 - Belfast-Bangor railway line, 204–5
 - Belfast City Hospital: theatre utilisation, WA39–40
 - Cancer treatment: hospital facilities, 24
 - Children’s fund: access to, 326
 - Children’s sports code, 66
 - Family Law Bill (NIA 4/00): Committee Stage, CS8–9, CS10
 - Fire Service: malicious false alarm calls, WA74
 - Foot-and-mouth disease: interdepartmental committee, WA52
 - Healthcare provision, WA71
 - Hearing: screening for infants, WA169
 - Lilies: display in Parliament Buildings, 286–7
 - Planning regulations: new shop fronts, WA67
 - Private Streets (Construction) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001, 351
 - Republic of Ireland: improved co-operation with, WA70
 - Royal Victoria Hospital: theatre utilisation, WA40–2
 - Traffic-calming measures: west Belfast, 342
 - Ulster Hospital: theatre utilisation, WA38–9
 - McGimpsey, Mr M (Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure)**
 - Angling
 - Concessions, 406–7
 - Inland fisheries, 82–5
 - Inland waterways, WA58–9
 - Waters, closure: foot-and-mouth disease, 65
 - Arts: access to, WA6
 - Arts sector: cultural quarter, 408
 - Department
 - Consultancy services, WA6
 - Irish language, 64–5
 - Ulster-Scots expertise, WA58
 - Venues due for audit, WA61
 - Fish production: River Bush, WA62
 - Foot-and-mouth disease, 408–9, WA62
 - Sport, restrictions on, WA146–7
 - Football, WA8
 - NI teams supporters’ clubs, 409
 - Sectarianism, 62–4
 - Strategy, 66, WA62–3
 - GAA, WA145
 - Inland waterways: North/South Ministerial Council, WA146
 - Irish language: funding parity with Ulster Scots, WA7
 - Irish Parliament: history, publication, WA61–2
 - Library provision: Queen’s Parade, Bangor, WA61
 - Linguistic diversity projects, WA87
 - Museums, galleries and visitor centres: collaboration, WA8
 - National Lottery funding, WA144–5
 - Areas of greatest social need, WA7
 - City and rural areas, WA145
 - Sport, WA145
 - Northern Ireland Events Company, WA147
 - North/South Language Body, WA145–6
 - Odyssey project, WA183–4
 - Rivers
 - Debris, clearing, 409
 - Water quality, improved, WA62
 - Special adviser, WA7
-

-
- Sport
 - Children's code, 66
 - Disabled people's, WA144
 - Funding, WA59, WA60–1
 - Foot-and-mouth disease: restrictions on, WA146–7
 - National Lottery funding, WA145
 - Rural facilities, WA6–7
 - Safe spectator facilities, 404–5
 - UK teams, 64
 - Sports Council for Northern Ireland
 - Equality obligations, WA60
 - Funding allocated, WA59–60
 - Swimming pool (public): centrally located, 407–8
 - UK sports teams, 64
 - Ulster-Scots culture and heritage
 - Overseas promotion, WA144
 - Promotion, WA58
 - Ulster-Scots language,
 - Funding parity with Irish language, WA7
 - Promotion: north Antrim, WA7
 - Visitor amenities, 405–6
 - McGrady, Mr E**
 - Assembly: points of order, 187, 277
 - Assumption Grammar School (Ballynahinch), 318–19
 - Barnett formula, WA20
 - Children's sports code, 65–6
 - Domiciliary care: training requirements, WA99
 - Driving penalties: NI/GB, mutual recognition, WA155
 - Electricity supply interruptions, 116
 - Employability and long-term unemployment taskforce, WA104–5
 - Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee: Second Report, 465–6
 - Environment
 - British-Irish Council, 401–2
 - North/South Ministerial Council, 13
 - Fishing vessels: decommissioning, 410–11
 - Foot-and-mouth disease, 5, 66–7, 90, 181–2, 303, 451
 - Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission: North/South Ministerial Council, 392–3
 - Further and higher education colleges: funding, 120
 - Helicopter rescue service, 130–1
 - Medical and health facilities, provision: Mourne area, 377–9
 - Minimum wage, 254–5, 258
 - New TSN, WA52–3
 - Peace II programme: intermediary funding bodies, 327
 - Proceeds of Crime Bill: Ad Hoc Committee, 125
 - Regional regeneration task forces, 121
 - Roads maintenance programme: south Down rural roads, WA195
 - Social Security Agency
 - Budget 2001-02, WA140
 - Customer charter initiative, WA173
 - Staff training, WA173
 - Special EU programmes: North/South Ministerial Council, 311
 - US Administration: discussions with, 200–1
 - Visitor amenities, 405–6
 - Winter fuel payments, WA112
 - McGuinness, Mr M (Minister of Education)**
 - AS and A2 modular A levels, 18–19
 - Asperger's Syndrome: special educational provision, WA118
 - Assumption Grammar School (Ballynahinch), 318–19
 - Autism, WA8–9
 - Educational needs, WA63
 - British sign language, WA63
 - Bullying
 - Anti-bullying policy: legislation, WA150
 - Down Academy, Downpatrick, WA147
 - Children with hearing impairment
 - Ards Borough Council services, 320
 - Classroom assistants, WA118
 - Children with special educational needs:
 - statementing process, WA152
 - Common funding formula: Ulster-Scots translation, WA184
 - Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
 - Members, WA63
 - Rent and rates, WA64
 - Department
 - Budget, 320
 - Capital projects: resources, WA11
 - Consultancy services, WA8
 - Equality agenda, 17–18
 - Equality impact assessments, WA151
 - Executive programme funds, WA11
 - Drugs education: 'Michael Young Campaign', WA119
 - Drug strategy, WA148
 - Education
 - Chancellor of the Exchequer: funding, WA118, WA152
 - Management: annual funding, WA149
 - North/South Ministerial Council, 315–16
 - Child protection working group, 316–18
 - Educational underachievement working group, WA151
 - Pupil attendance/retention joint working party, WA150
 - Special education working group, 318, WA152
 - Working groups, WA10, WA12
 - Education and library boards: funding, WA91
 - English as an additional language: funding allocated, WA12
 - Examinations: severe weather conditions, 20
 - GCSE: vocational subjects, WA147
-

Grant-aided schools: performance-related pay, WA149

Home tutors

- Parity of salary, WA149
- Terms and conditions of employment, WA184

Information, public access to, WA150

Information communication technology

- Funding, WA90
- Teachers, training, WA11

Literacy and numeracy

- Promotion, WA148
- Strategy, WA119

Local management of schools (LMS)

- Common funding formula, 354–6, 373–7, WA11–12
- Consultation period, WA151
- Review, WA148

Mitchell House/Fleming Fulton Special Schools: speech therapy, WA150

Newtownabbey: primary school places, WA90–1

Northern Ireland Regional Centre for Performance Management, WA90

Nursery schools

- Eglinton, WA149
- Healthy eating programme, 319
- Places, WA119

Post-primary education: transfer procedure, 19–20

Post-primary review body: remit, WA10

Primary schools

- Exceptional closure, WA149–50
- Funding, WA151–2
- Healthy eating programme, 319
- Language teaching, WA9

Pupils: medical needs in schools, WA152

St Mary's University College: student places, WA90

Schools

- Additional fees, WA11
- Boarders, WA9
- Budget information, WA88
- Classroom assistants, WA88
- Free meals, WA63
- Funding disparity, WA90
- Maintenance work, WA64
- Maintenance work: west Tyrone, WA147–8
- New TSN, WA118
- Official visits, WA184
- Property, protection, WA11
- Uniforms and pupils' equipment, 20–1
- Vandalism in, WA88–9

School transport

- Cross-border, 21–2
- Funding, WA118

Secondary schools: standards, raising, WA119

Special adviser, WA9

Special education units, WA88

- Funding, WA116–17

Special schools: speech and language therapy provision, WA10, WA150

Strangford constituency: pupil numbers, WA9–10

Teachers

- Conditions of service, WA89–90
- Employment and retirement, WA64
- Information communication technology training, WA11
- Initial training courses, WA184
- Performance-related pay, WA89
- Staff development performance review and salaries, WA89
- Vacancies, WA118

Teaching posts: east Antrim, WA88

Telecommunications masts: income generated, WA87–8

Ulster-Scots language, teaching, WA11

Under-age drinking, 18

Voluntary and controlled grammar schools: funding, WA10

Western Education and Library Board: bills, payment, 319–20

McHugh, Mr G

Agriculture (foot-and-mouth disease): North/South Ministerial Council, 307

Aquaculture and marine matters: North/South Ministerial Council, WA142

Beef and pig sectors, 150–1

Education: North/South Ministerial Council: working groups, WA10

Farmers: integrated administrative control systems (IACS), WA55

Foot-and-mouth disease, 5–6, 90, 184, 298, 444

- Exclusion zones, WA143
- Farmers' losses, 413
- Importation of animals: control, 200
- Main contributing factor, WA182
- Relief for businesses affected, 429–30

Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission: North/South Ministerial Council, 391–2

Local management of schools (LMS): common funding formula, 359–60

Pig Industry Restructuring (Capital Grant) Scheme, 189

Post-primary education: transfer procedure, 20

School transport: hazard warning lights, WA125

Special EU programmes: North/South Ministerial Council, 312

Steering committee for cross border rural development, WA141–2

Tourism: foot-and-mouth disease, 114

Tree preservation orders, 209–10

Young people: basic skills, 119

McLaughlin, Mr M

Environment: North/South Ministerial Council, 14, WA155

Sellafield discharge limit: Lough Foyle, WA126

-
- Toome bypass, 207–8
- McMenamin, Mr E**
- Adolescent psychiatric services, 263–4
 - Deprivation: Noble study, 28
 - Foot-and-mouth disease, 302
 - Inland fisheries, 78
 - Neurosurgery: patients suffering from Parkinson's Disease, WA80
 - Senior citizens: commissioner for, WA116
 - Social exclusion and poverty, combating, WA53
 - Students: higher education qualifications, WA103
 - UK sports teams, 64
 - Under-age drinking, 18
 - Victim support, 60
- McNamee, Mr P**
- Assembly
 - Commissioner for Standards, 198
 - North/South educational underachievement working group, WA151
 - North/South transportation working group, WA177
 - Single equality Bill, 203
- McWilliams, Ms M**
- Adolescent psychiatric services, 268–70, 272
 - Assembly: secretariat staff, WA198
 - Department for Learning and Employment Bill (NIA 12/00): Committee Stage, CS19–20, CS22–3
 - Family Law Bill (NIA 4/00): Committee Stage, CS8, CS9–10:
 - Lilies: display in Parliament Buildings, 284–5
 - Local management of schools (LMS): common funding formula, 362, 365
 - Minimum wage, 256–7
 - Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) chairman, 112
 - Single use instruments, WA46
 - Special EU programmes: North/South Ministerial Council, 314–15
 - Student support, 102–4
 - Teachers, discrimination against, WA51
- Maginness, Mr A**
- Assembly
 - Points of order, 10, 283
 - Standing Orders, 333
 - Community relations: policy review, WA180
 - Draft Life Sentences Order, 32–4
 - Enbrel: prescription, WA100
 - Holocaust, commemoration, WA54
 - Inland fisheries, 81
 - Lilies: display in Parliament Buildings, 280–1
 - Private Streets (Construction) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001, 351
 - Public transport: concession fares, WA108
 - Senior citizens: free travel, WA193
 - Senior Civil Service review, 31
 - Somerton/Chichester conservation area, WA124
 - Special EU programmes: North/South Ministerial Council, 314
- Speech and language therapy: Rosstulla Special School, WA100, WA128
 - Translink: revenue, WA108
 - Vehicle excise duty, WA94
 - Victims: Peace II programme, 235–7, 245
- Mallon, Mr S (Deputy First Minister)**
- British/Irish Council: Environment sectoral meeting, 401–2
 - NI Executive Brussels office: agriculture industry, support, 202
 - Objective 1 status, 57–8
 - Poverty, combating, 59–60
 - Public appointments, 399–400
 - Social inclusion, promoting, 404
 - Unemployment differentials (TSN action plans), 203–4
 - US Administration: discussions with, 200–1
 - Victim support, 60–1
- Maskey, Mr A**
- Arts sector: cultural quarter, 408
 - Assembly
 - Points of order, 325
 - Secretariat: appointment to, WA198
 - Sub judice rule, 387
 - Education
 - North/South Ministerial Council, 315–16
 - Working groups, WA12
 - Executive programme funds: first allocations, 222
 - Foot-and-mouth disease, 95–6
 - Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission: North/South Ministerial Council, 390
 - Health, Social Services and Public Safety: North/South Ministerial Council working group, 320–1
 - Health, Social Services and Public Safety Department: spending review bids, WA190–1
 - Local economic development: financial allocation, WA159
 - Loughs Agency, 411–12
 - Peace II programme: community and voluntary sector, 327
 - Special EU programmes: North/South Ministerial Council, WA158
 - Teachers: initial training courses, WA184
 - Traffic-calming measures: west Belfast, 339
 - Trustee Bill (NIA 11/00): Committee Stage, CS16
- Molloy, Mr F**
- Assembly
 - Ministerial statements: questions, 392, 393, 395
 - Points of order, 242
 - Secretariat: appointment to, WA198
 - Sub judice matters, 392, 393
 - Coagucheck system machines, WA162
 - Cold weather payments, WA112
 - Defective Premises (Landlord's Liability) Bill (NIA 5/00)
 - Committee Stage, CS3–5
-

-
- Consideration Stage, 395–6
 - European Union structural funds, 137
 - Executive programme funds: first allocations, 218
 - Foot-and-mouth disease, 301
 - Relief for businesses affected, 425–7
 - Football strategy, WA62–3
 - Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission:
 - North/South Ministerial Council, 393
 - Lagan Valley Hospital: A&E department, 324–5
 - Rates (Regional Rates) (No 2) Order 2001, 44
 - Rating policy review, 26–7
 - School uniforms and pupils' equipment, 21
 - Trustee Bill (NIA 11/00): Committee Stage, CS12, CS13, CS14, CS15, CS16, CS18
 - Morrice, Ms J**
 - Children's Commissioner Bill: First Stage, 416
 - Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee:
 - Second Report, 463–4
 - European Union structural funds, 140
 - Private Streets (Construction) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001, 352
 - Road safety (private notice question), 226–8
 - Victims: Peace II programme, 235, 248
 - Morrice, Ms J (as Deputy Speaker)**
 - Assembly
 - Consultation period, 40
 - Debates, time allocated, 442
 - Points of order, 10, 325, 380–1, 425
 - Standing Orders, 277, 331
 - Unparliamentary language, 6, 10
 - Morrow, Mr M (Minister for Social Development)**
 - Armagh city: regeneration, WA84
 - Attendance allowance, WA174
 - Benefit fraud, tackling, WA83
 - Carrickfergus Maritime Area Partnership Board, WA109–10
 - Charities legislation, WA50
 - Child benefit, WA174
 - Child poverty, WA83
 - Child Support Agency
 - Complaints, WA84
 - Targets, WA140
 - Community sector: mainstream core funding, WA174–5
 - Cross-community participation, WA111
 - Disability living allowance, WA174
 - Disabled facilities grants, WA176
 - Domestic energy efficiency scheme (DEES), WA50
 - Drugs: Northern Ireland strategy for tackling drugs misuse, WA111–12
 - Energy efficiency, domestic, 122
 - Fuel poverty, eradication, WA111
 - Housing, unfit, WA173
 - Housing benefit, WA110
 - Administration, WA83, WA84
 - Housing development: Edenvale Avenue, Carrickfergus, WA50
 - Hypothermia, deaths from, WA112
 - Incapacity benefit, WA174
 - Income support: unclaimed/underpaid, WA173
 - Independent appeal tribunals: disability living allowance, WA82–3
 - Industrial injuries death benefit, WA175
 - Invalid care allowance, WA174
 - Job grant, WA110
 - Jobseeker's allowance, WA50
 - Contribution-based, WA175
 - Low-energy light bulbs, WA110–11
 - Martin Memorial Clock, WA175–6
 - Maternity allowance, WA175
 - Minimum income guarantee, 123–4, WA83
 - Model Farm, Downpatrick: building work, WA176
 - Newry: housing for elderly/disabled people, WA109
 - New TSN: funding, 123
 - Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE)
 - Egan project, WA138, WA139–40
 - Grant, WA173–4
 - Heating repairs (occupational therapy grounds), WA172
 - Kitchen/bathroom replacements, 124–5
 - Mixed marriages: housing policy, 121–2
 - Newtownards office, WA109
 - Personnel, attacks on, WA197
 - Programme: south Down, WA174
 - Rent arrears owed, WA84
 - Response maintenance project: Londonderry, WA138–9
 - Northern Ireland Social Fund: discretionary budget 2001-02, WA140
 - Northern Ireland Tenants Action Project, WA110
 - Regional regeneration task forces, 121
 - Retirement pension, WA175
 - Social Security Agency
 - Budget 2001-02, WA140
 - Customer charter initiative, WA173
 - Performance targets, WA176
 - Staff training, WA173
 - Social security benefits, WA175
 - Sunday racing and on-course betting, WA112
 - Travelling people
 - Pilot housing scheme, WA111
 - Sites, 122–3
 - Urban II programme, WA197
 - Winter fuel allowance, WA83, WA112
 - Murphy, Mr C**
 - Acute hospital services, 22–3
 - Agriculture (foot-and-mouth disease): North/South Ministerial Council, 306
 - Assembly
 - Secretariat, appointment to, WA197
 - Equality consideration, WA198
 - Staff recruitment, 414–15
 - Standing Orders, 331–2, 336–8
-

-
- Cross-border school transport, 21–2
 - Foot-and-mouth disease, 7, 182
 - Procurement policy, 29–30
 - Murphy, Mr M**
 - Diabetes: treatment for, WA168
 - Education: North/South Ministerial Council: special educational needs working group, 318
 - Environment: North/South Ministerial Council, 13
 - Foot-and-mouth disease, 302
 - Newry and Mourne area, 410
 - Relief for businesses affected, 432
 - Inland fisheries, 79–80
 - Medical and health facilities, provision: Mourne area, 380–2
 - Minimum wage, 256
 - Northern Ireland Housing Executive programme: south Down, WA174
 - Urban II programme, WA197
 - Water quality, WA125
 - Neeson, Mr S**
 - Assembly: Standing Orders, 334
 - Economic development agencies, 112
 - Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee: Second Report, 459–60
 - Foot-and-mouth disease: relief for businesses affected, 427–8
 - Lilies: display in Parliament Buildings, 282
 - Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986: review, WA169
 - Minimum wage, 256
 - Northern Ireland Housing Executive: mixed marriages housing policy, 121–2
 - Tidal flow traffic schemes, WA49
 - Tourism: North/South Ministerial Council, 346
 - Translink: new trains, WA136
 - Washington DC
 - NI bureau, WA179
 - Programme for Government, 403
 - Nelis, Mrs M**
 - Civil servants: early retirement, WA187
 - Department for Learning and Employment Bill (NIA 12/00): Committee Stage, CS26
 - Farmers' markets, 70
 - Foot-and-mouth disease, 94
 - Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission: North/South Ministerial Council, 394
 - Gap funding: north west, WA16
 - Government Departments: underspends, WA187
 - Inland fisheries, 72–3
 - Inland waterways: North/South Ministerial Council, WA146
 - Northern Ireland Events Company, WA147
 - North/South Language Body, WA145–6
 - Odyssey project, WA183–4
 - Road accidents, 211
 - Student support, 101, 118
 - Travelling people, pilot housing scheme, WA111
 - Unemployment differentials(TSN action plans), 203–4
 - Victims
 - Groups, WA51
 - Peace II programme, 238–9
 - Support, 58
 - Nesbit, Mr D (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister)**
 - Victims: Peace II programme, 249–51
 - O'Connor, Mr D**
 - Low-energy light bulbs, WA110–11
 - Private Streets (Construction) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001, 352
 - O'Hagan, Dr D**
 - Alcoholism: drinks marketing, 323
 - Assembly: points of order, 6, 284
 - Education: North/South Ministerial Council, 315–16
 - European Union structural funds, 141
 - IDB: expenditure level, WA119
 - InterTradeIreland: progress, WA153
 - Lilies: display in Parliament Buildings, 281
 - Minimum wage, 261–3
 - North/South Ministerial Council: tourism working group, WA153
 - TSN: Upper Bann, WA85
 - Unemployment statistics: Upper Bann, WA64–5
 - ONEill, Mr É**
 - Agriculture (foot-and-mouth disease): North/South Ministerial Council, 308
 - Culture, Arts and Leisure Department: Irish language, 65
 - Environment: North/South Ministerial Council, 16
 - Executive programme funds: first allocations, 223–4
 - Foot-and-mouth disease: relief for businesses affected, 430–1
 - Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission: North/South Ministerial Council, 390
 - Housing (brownfield sites), 207
 - Inland fisheries, 71–2, 85–6
 - Local management of schools (LMS): common funding formula, 371–2
 - Medical and health facilities, provision: Mourne area, 383
 - Primary care pilot schemes, WA44
 - School budget information, WA88
 - Special EU programmes: North/South Ministerial Council, 313
 - Paisley, Ian Jnr**
 - Agriculture (foot-and-mouth disease): North/South Ministerial Council, 305
 - Assembly: points of order, 26, 278, 281, 289
 - Beef and pig sectors, 149–50
 - British sign language, WA63
 - Children's organs, retention: Royal Victoria Hospital, WA188
-

Decommissioning: Independent International Commission, WA178
Draft Life Sentences Order, 34–6
Driver and vehicle licensing fraud, 211
Farmers' markets, 70
Farmers summonsed for offences, WA3
Foot-and-mouth disease, 3, 95, 186, WA180–1
 Consequential compensation, WA181
 Epidemiological investigation, WA181
 Germany, WA3
 Relief for businesses affected, 431
Infected healthcare workers: management of, WA43
Lilies: display in Parliament Buildings, 286
New TSN: funding, 123
Road safety improvements: A26, WA136
Ulster-Scots language, culture and heritage, promotion, WA58
 North Antrim, WA7
US Administration: discussions with, 201
Vehicle excise duty: failure to display, WA65
Victims: Peace II programme, 236, 245, 247, 248
Washington DC: visit, WA116

Paisley, Rev Dr Ian

Assembly
 Adjournment debate, 42
 Members referred to in debate, 293–4
 Points of order, 148, 304
 Sub judice rule, 388
 Unparliamentary language, 41
Beef and pig sectors, 145–7, 149–50, 158–9
EU structural funds, 135, 139
Foot-and-mouth disease, 67, 88, 180–1, 297, 440–52
 Healthy animals: destruction, 133
 Relief for businesses affected, 428–9, 438
Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission: North/South Ministerial Council, 390
Pig Industry Restructuring (Capital Grant) Scheme, 188
Tie-up scheme, WA183
Victim support, 60

Poots, Mr E

Agriculture (foot-and-mouth disease): North/South Ministerial Council, 309
Assembly: points of order, 242, 450
Beef and pig sectors, 154–5
Brussels, NI Executive office
 Agriculture industry, support, 202
 Cost, 400–1
Cancer treatment: hospital facilities, 25
Environment: North/South Ministerial Council, 12
European Union structural funds, 142
Food Standards Agency: specified risk material, WA167
Foot-and-mouth disease, 7, 185
 Consequential compensation, WA183
 Relief for businesses affected, 413, 433–4

Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission: North/South Ministerial Council, 393
Irish hare, 208–9
Peace II funds: distribution, 326
Pig Industry Restructuring (Capital Grant) Scheme, 190
Primary schools: funding, WA151
Rateable valuation of meeting halls, WA20
Rivers: debris, clearing, 409
Social Security appeal tribunal hearings, WA112
Special EU programmes: North/South Ministerial Council, 312
Strategic railway review body, WA138
Student support, 101
Tourism: funding, 115
Victims: Peace II programme, 235, 244–6

Ramsey, Ms S

Adolescent psychiatric services, 266–7
Children's Commissioner working group
 Nominations for, WA177
 Terms of reference, WA177
Drugs education: 'Michael Young Campaign', WA119
Education: North/South Ministerial Council: child protection working group, 316–17
Education Department: equality agenda, 17
Executive programme funds: first allocations, 221
Family Law Bill (NIA 4/00): Committee Stage, CS10
Health, Social Services and Public Safety: North/South Ministerial Council working group, 320–1
Mental illness, WA130
Miscarriages, WA43
Royal Group of Hospitals: operational deficit, WA166
Special education units, WA88, WA116
Traffic-calming measures: west Belfast, 341–2

Robinson, Mr K

AS and A2 modular A levels, 19
Anti-bullying policy: legislation, WA150
Education and library boards: funding, WA91
Education Minister: official school visits, WA184
Environment: North/South Ministerial Council, 17
Local management of schools (LMS): common funding formula, 365–7
Newtownabbey: primary school places, WA90–1
Post-primary review body: remit, WA10
Schools: New TSN, WA118
School transport: funding, WA118
Special schools: speech and language therapy provision, WA10
Victim support, 58

Robinson, Mr M

Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee: Second Report, 466–7

Robinson, Mr P

Assembly: Adjournment debate, 42
Lilies: display in Parliament Buildings, 292–3
Rates (Regional Rates) (No 2) Order 2001, 45–6

Robinson, Mrs I

Acute hospitals, WA20–1
Adolescent psychiatric services, 270–1
Alzheimer's Disease: free care for patients, WA128
Animals
 Dangerous: welfare, housing and control, WA14
 Importing, WA54
 Meigh, Co Armagh, WA5
Asperger's Syndrome, WA37
Assembly
 Adjournment debate, 42
 Questions requiring written answers, WA169
Autism, WA8, WA21
 Educational needs, WA63
Chancellor of the Exchequer: education funding, WA117, WA152
Civil servants: retirement age, compulsory, WA157–8
Classroom assistants, WA88
 Children with hearing difficulties, WA118
Cod recovery plan: tie-up, WA116
Community care packages, WA69
Courses, funding methodology, WA134
Departmental budgets: percentage increase, WA19
Elderly people: day care places, WA78
Fire Service: unnecessary emergency calls, WA79
Fishing industry, WA54
Foot-and-mouth disease, 187
 Compensation, WA4, WA181
 Consequential compensation WA143, WA143
 Sport, restrictions on, WA146
Football, WA8
Free school meals, WA63
Further and higher education colleges: funding, 120
GP fundholders, WA73
 Recognition withdrawal notices, WA160
Health, Social Services and Public Safety
 Department funding allocated, WA37
Health indices for Northern Ireland, WA44
Health reviews, WA42
Health trusts: deficit position, WA43
Helicopter rescue service, 128–9
HIV, haemophilia, hepatitis C: numbers suffering from, WA164
Infertility treatment, WA71
Local management of schools (LMS): common funding formula, 372
Meigh, Co Armagh: importation of animals, WA4–5
Mental illness, WA37
Morbidity rate, WA71, WA161
Nursing home and residential places, WA77
Orthopaedic consultants, WA97–8

Orthopaedic operations: elective and routine, WA98
Orthopaedic services, WA80–1
Peace II funding, WA127
Pensioners: free travel, WA49
Pesticide control, WA4
Planning applications (Strangford), 212–13
‘Priorities for Action 2001-02’, WA160–1
Recombinant Factor VIII, WA190
Respite care, WA77
Roads
 Improvements
 Strangford constituency, WA106
 Vesting of land (Comber area), 206
Student powered unit of resource, WA170
Teachers: employment and retirement, WA64
Tuberculosis, WA79
Victims: Peace II programme, 237–8
Women's centres: Peace I/II funding, WA158

Roche, Mr P

Assembly: points of order, 242
Victims: Peace II programme, 240, 247, 248

Rodgers, Ms B (Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development)

Agriculture industry: equality of opportunity, WA182
Agriculture (foot-and-mouth disease): North/South Ministerial Council, 304–9
Agrifood co-operatives, WA57
Agrimonetary aid package, WA181
Agrimonetary compensation, 68–9, WA5–6
Animals
 Ear tags, WA57
 Health, protecting, WA183
 Importation, WA54
 Meigh, Co Armagh, WA5
 Veterinary inspections, WA5
 Licence for sending to abattoirs, WA56
Aquaculture and marine matters: North/South Ministerial Council, WA142
Bann Systems Ltd, WA2
Beef and pig sectors, 155–8
Beef Labelling Regulations, WA87
Business and environmental training places, WA56
Castlederg Area Based Strategy Group, WA142–3
Cattle
 German imports, WA1
 Killed in meat plants, WA141
Cod recovery plan: tie-up, WA116
Dunlady stream and overflow culvert: improvements, WA3
European Council of Agriculture Ministers, WA55–6
Farmers
 Integrated administrative control systems (IACS), WA55
 Summoned for offences, WA3
Farmers' markets, 69–70

-
- Fishing industry, WA54
 - Payment of light dues, WA5
 - Fishing vessels
 - Decommissioning, 410–11, WA57
 - Tie-up scheme, WA143, WA183
 - Flooding problems: Strabane District Council area, WA180
 - Foot-and-mouth disease, 1–10, 66–8, 70–1, 87–96, 179–87, 295–304, 452–5, WA57–8, WA180–1
 - Compensation, WA4, WA181
 - Consequential compensation, WA143, WA181–2, WA183
 - Epidemiological investigation, WA181
 - Exclusion zones, WA143
 - Exit strategy, WA182
 - Export controls, WA1
 - Farmers' losses, 412–13
 - Fortress island approach, 413–14
 - Germany, WA3
 - Main contributing factor, WA182
 - Newry and Mourne area, 409–10
 - Precautionary measures, WA141
 - Rate relief for businesses, 413
 - RUC and Army support, WA180
 - Rumen contents: disposal, WA143–4
 - Slaughter charges, WA116
 - Forestry, WA3–4
 - Policy review: felling licences, WA56
 - Forestry Service, WA4
 - Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission:
 - North/South Ministerial Council, 388–95
 - Geographical information system, computerised, WA182–3
 - Hill farmers: income, WA86
 - Local produce, use, WA182
 - Loughs Agency, 411–12
 - Meigh, Co Armagh: importation of animals, WA5
 - Milk collection: severe weather, WA87
 - Organic farming: research and development, WA86
 - Packaging: EU rules and regulations, WA54–5
 - Pesticide control, WA4
 - Pig Industry Restructuring (Capital Grant) Scheme, 188, 190–1
 - Pig outgoers scheme, WA181
 - Review panel membership, WA141
 - Salmonid enhancement scheme, WA2, WA3
 - Sheep: ewes, movement of, WA56
 - Sheepmeat exports, WA55
 - Steering committee for cross-border rural development, WA141–2
 - Women, role in rural community, WA183
 - Woodland
 - Cover, WA55
 - Native, WA87
- Savage, Mr G**
- Agriculture (foot-and-mouth disease): North/South Ministerial Council, 306
- Beef and pig sectors, 147–8
 - Cattle killed in meat plants, WA141
 - Craigavon Area Hospital: beds, 25
 - Draft Life Sentences Order, 31–2, 39–40
 - Environment: North/South Ministerial Council, 15
 - European Council of Agriculture Ministers, WA55
 - Foot-and-mouth disease, 2, 89, 181, 297–8, 455–6
 - Fortress island approach, 414
 - Importation of animals: control, 200
 - Relief for businesses affected, 436
 - Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission:
 - North/South Ministerial Council, 391
 - House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs
 - Committee: Parades Commission inquiry, WA52
 - Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, WA115
 - Pig Industry Restructuring (Capital Grant) Scheme, 188–9
 - Poverty, combating, 59
 - Special EU programmes: North/South Ministerial Council, 313
 - Student support, 105
 - Victims: Peace II programme, 248–9
- Shannon, Mr J**
- Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Bill (NIA 8/00), 398
 - A&E units: drug-related problems, WA73
 - Ageism within the workforce, WA91
 - Ambulance fleet, WA99
 - Asthma: cases diagnosed, WA44
 - Bullying
 - Civil Service, WA95
 - Down Academy, Downpatrick, WA147
 - Cardiac surgery: average length of hospital stay, WA36
 - Carraigfoyle Paediatric Support Unit, Belfast, WA169
 - Central claims unit, WA197
 - Children's commissioner: timescale for, WA178
 - Culture, Arts and Leisure Department: Ulster-Scots expertise, WA58
 - D5 development, Knocknagoney, WA92
 - Deaths related to Zyban, WA193
 - Diabetes: cases diagnosed, WA44
 - Drug misuse, WA72
 - Eastern Board: hospital services, development, WA76
 - Employment law, WA103
 - Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee:
 - Second Report, 468–70
 - Environment: North/South Ministerial Council, 16
 - Executive programme funds
 - First allocations, 225
 - Social inclusion, WA85
 - Fishing vessels
 - Decommissioning, 411
 - Tie-up scheme, WA143
-

-
- Foot-and-mouth disease, 8, 68
 - Export controls, WA1
 - Precautionary measures, WA141
 - Relief for businesses affected, 435–6
 - RUC and Army support, WA180
 - Rumen contents: disposal, WA143–4
 - Slaughter charges, WA116
 - Tourist industry, financial assistance, WA152
 - Football: sectarianism, 63
 - GAA, WA145
 - Hearing impairment: employment, WA92, WA193
 - Heart attacks, WA72
 - Helicopter rescue service, 127–8
 - Industrial tribunals: referrals to, WA100
 - Inland fisheries, 75
 - Irish language: funding parity with Ulster Scots, WA7
 - Irish Parliament: history, publication, WA61
 - Linguistic diversity projects, WA87
 - Martin Memorial Clock, WA175–6
 - B H McCleery and Co Ltd, Ballygowan, WA13
 - Model Farm, Downpatrick: building work, WA176
 - Morning-after pill, WA128
 - National Lottery funding, WA144–5
 - City and rural areas, WA145
 - Sport, WA145
 - Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE)
 - Egan project, WA138, WA139–40
 - Heating repairs (occupational therapy grounds), WA172
 - Newtownards office, WA109
 - Personnel, attacks on, WA197
 - Rent arrears owed, WA84
 - Response maintenance project: Londonderry, WA138–9
 - Northern Ireland Tenants Action Project, WA110
 - Peace II programme funding, WA19
 - Pig Industry Restructuring (Capital Grant) Scheme, 190
 - Planning applications: telecommunications masts, WA68
 - Private Streets (Construction) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001, 353
 - Public liability claims: vehicles damaged by road surface, WA196
 - Road accidents, 211
 - Road maintenance programme: Ards Borough Council area, WA196
 - School crossing petrols, WA48
 - Senior citizens, 202
 - Special Area of Conservation: Aughnadarragh Lough, Co Down, WA124
 - Spectator facilities: safe, 405
 - Speech therapy: Mitchell House/Fleming Fulton Special Schools, WA150
 - Sport for disabled people, WA59, WA60, WA144
 - Sports Council for Northern Ireland
 - Equality obligations, WA60
 - Funding allocated, WA59
 - Teacher vacancies, WA118
 - Tourism: North/South Ministerial Council, 349
 - Travelling people: sites, 123
 - Tuberculosis, WA191
 - Ulster-Scots language
 - Funding parity, WA11
 - Teaching, WA11
 - Unemployment statistics: 50 to 65 age bracket, WA92
 - Victims
 - Groups, WA16–17
 - Peace II programme, 239–41
 - Speaker (The Lord Alderdice)**
 - Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Bill (NIA 8/00): Consideration Stage, 397–9
 - Assembly
 - Adjournment debate, 42
 - Clerk to the Assembly, 179
 - Committee Chairmen/Deputy Chairmen: precedence in debate, 187
 - Debate: time-limited, 50
 - Members
 - Departure from Chamber during debate, 52–3
 - Referred to in debate, 242, 345
 - Speaking through Chair, 299–300
 - Ministerial statements: questions, 392, 393, 395
 - Non-devolved matters, 128
 - Points of order, 133, 187, 304, 352
 - Questions for oral answer
 - Redirection, 111
 - Written reply, 111
 - Standing Orders, 238, 304, 392, 399
 - Sub judice matters, 387–8, 392, 393, 399
 - Unparliamentary language, 41–2, 345
 - Voting, 41
 - Defective Premises (Landlord's Liability) Bill (NIA 5/00): Consideration Stage, 395
 - Electronic Communications Act (Northern Ireland) 2001: Royal Assent, 295
 - Street Trading Act (Northern Ireland) 2001: Royal Assent, 295
 - Taylor, Rt Hon John**
 - Brussels, NI Executive office, WA113
 - Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
 - Members, WA63
 - Rent and rates, WA64
 - Dunlady stream and overflow culvert: improvements, WA3
 - Foot-and-mouth disease, 185
 - Planning applications
 - No Y/2000/0610/0, WA15
 - Riverside, Comber, WA14–15
 - Road improvements: vesting of land (Comber area), 206
 - Schools: boarders, WA9
-

Sewer blocked: Beverly Road, Newtownards, WA194

Strangford constituency: pupil numbers, WA9

Tierney, Mr J

Asymmetric digital subscriber line, WA92

Brain injuries: medical care, WA162

Home tutors

Parity of salary, WA149

Terms and conditions of employment, WA184

Intensive care beds, WA189–90

Journeys: average times

7.30 am, WA108–9

5.30 pm, WA109

Magee College: full-time students, WA102

Northern Ireland Housing Executive:

kitchen/bathroom replacements, 124

Paediatric community nurse, 24-hour service, WA166

Paediatric intensive care

Admission rates, WA192

Admissions, refusal, WA192

Beds, WA189, WA192

Cost, WA189

Postgraduate students: information technology, WA100

Spruce House

Patients, transfer to, WA162

Rehabilitation and specialist care, WA162

University of Ulster

Academic staff: full-time, WA100

Maximum student number (MaSN), WA103

Students, full-time, WA101–2

Trimble, Rt Hon David (First Minister)

Brussels, NI Executive office: cost, 400–1

Bush, President George W: invitation to, 403–4

Children's Commissioner, 204

Community capacity building: imbalance, 61–2

European Cohesion Forum, 404

Foot-and-mouth disease

Importation of animals: control, 200

Senior citizens, 201–2

Single equality Bill, 202–3

Victim support, 58–9

Washington DC, NI bureau: Programme for Government, 402–3

Watson, Mr D

Victims: Peace II programme, 233–4

Weir, Mr P

Assembly: points of order, 277

Defective Premises (Landlord's Liability) Bill (NIA 5/00): Committee Stage, CS3, CS4, CS5

Lilies: display in Parliament Buildings, 288–9

Student support, 104

Trustee Bill (NIA 11/00): Committee Stage, CS13, CS16–17

Wells, Mr J

Ambulance vehicles, new: Downpatrick, WA166

Ards and Down area plan, WA123

Assembly

Commissioner for Standards, 197–8

Points of order, 282, 352, 380–1

Question time, 71

Ballymacarn Road, Ballynahinch: condition, WA194

Coastal erosion: Newcastle beach, WA156

Companies (1986 Order) (Audit Exemption) (Amendment) Regulations, 193

Downe Hospital: waiting times, WA188–9, WA190

Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee: Second Report, 470–1

Foot-and-mouth disease, 301, 452

Relief for businesses affected, 438

Forest policy review: felling licences, WA56

Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission: North/South Ministerial Council, 391

Helicopter rescue service, 126–7, WA73

Lilies: display in Parliament Buildings, 277–80, 291–3

Medical and health facilities, provision: Mourne area, 382–3

Rathfriland area: investment, attracting, WA184

Silent Valley sheep farmers: compensation payments, WA136

Tourism: North/South Ministerial Council, 347

Tree preservation orders, 209

UK sports teams, 64

Wastewater treatment works, upgrading: Rathfriland, WA194

Wells, Mr J (for Assembly Commission)

Assembly

Fair trade goods, use, 414

Secretariat: staff, WA198

Staff recruitment, 414–15

Civil servants, proportion, 415–16

Wilson, Mr C

Assembly: points of order, 282

Foot-and-mouth disease, 4

Lilies: display in Parliament Buildings, 283–4

Victims: Peace II programme, 241–3

Wilson, Mr J

Angling

Inland fisheries, 73–5

Waters, closure: foot-and-mouth disease, 65

Education Department: equality impact assessments, WA151

Foot-and-mouth disease, 67, 303

Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission: North/South Ministerial Council, 389–90

Peace II programme: community and voluntary sector, 327

Policing Board nominations, WA52

Senior citizens, 202

Wilson, Mr S

Education: North/South Ministerial Council: child protection working group, 317

Energy efficiency, domestic, 122

English as an additional language: funding allocated, WA12

Executive programme funds: first allocations, 222

Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

North/South Ministerial Council working group, 322

Housing (brownfield sites), 206–7

Local management of schools (LMS): common funding formula, 363–5

Minimum wage, 258–9

Poverty, combating, 59

Programme for Government, WA19

Public appointments, 400

Rates (Regional Rates) (No 2) Order 2001, 51–2

Student finance, 119