



Northern Ireland
Assembly

OFFICIAL REPORT

(Hansard)

Volume 11

(7 May 2001 to 9 September 2001)

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Volume 11

7 May 2001 to 9 September 2001

(The Assembly was suspended for one day on 11 August 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)

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Berry, Paul (DUP) (Newry and Armagh)
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Bradley, P J (SDLP) (South Down)
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Doherty, Arthur (SDLP) (East Londonderry)
Doherty, Pat (SF) (West Tyrone)
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Durkan, Mark (SDLP) (Foyle)
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Hamilton, Tom (UUP) (Strangford)
Hanna, Ms Carmel (SDLP) (South Belfast)
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Hutchinson, Roger (Independent Unionist) (East Antrim)
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Savage, George (UUP) (Upper Bann)
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Wilson, Cedric (NIUP) (Strangford)
Wilson, Jim (UUP) (South Antrim)
Wilson, Sammy (DUP) (East Belfast)

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE ASSEMBLY

<i>First Minister</i>	The Rt Hon David Trimble MP (<i>resigned 1 July 2001</i>) ¹
<i>Deputy First Minister</i>	Séamus Mallon MP ²
<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 for Employment and Learning</i>	Dr Seán Farren
<i>Minister for Regional Development</i>	Gregory Campbell MP
<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
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¹ The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Sir Reg Empey, was designated to exercise the functions of the office of First Minister from 1 July 2001.

² Séamus Mallon MP ceased to hold office on the resignation of Rt Hon David Trimble MP as First Minister, but continued to exercise the functions of the office of Deputy First Minister.

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<i>Deputy Speakers</i>	Sir John Gorman Donovan McClelland Ms Jane Morrice
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<i>Private Secretary</i>	Ms Georgina Campbell
<i>Special Adviser</i>	Vacant
<i>Counsel</i>	Nicolas Hanna QC
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<i>Head of Security</i>	Gerald Colan-O’Leary

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 8 May 2001

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

STATEMENT BY THE FIRST MINISTER

Mr Speaker: I have received a request from the First Minister to make a personal statement.

The First Minister (Mr Trimble): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for the opportunity to make this personal statement to the Assembly. Sunday, 6 May 2001 marked the anniversary of the IRA statement that led to the decision of the Ulster Unionist Party to resume participation in the Northern Ireland Executive. In that statement the IRA promised to

“initiate a process that will completely and verifiably put IRA arms beyond use. We will do it in such a way as to avoid risk to the public and misappropriation by others and ensure maximum public confidence.”

As the Ulster Unionist Party made clear at the time, it was on the basis of that clear promise and in the expectation of its fulfilment that I and my party agreed to the restoration of devolution on an inclusive basis. Members will recall that that represented a second chance for the Republican movement following its failure to fulfil the expectations it created during the Mitchell review. In the statement of 6 May 2000 the IRA answered the first of the two questions on decommissioning famously put by the Deputy First Minister in the House of Commons on 3 February 2000 when he said:

“One: “Will you decommission?” Two: “If yes, when will you decommission?”

They did not, of course, answer the second question. However, we considered that the Government had set a term for that during the talks at Hillsborough. With the assent of all the parties, including Sinn Féin, they set June 2001 as the date for the full implementation of the agreement.

On 22 December 2000, the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning (IICD) stated its view that sufficient time still existed for the decommissioning of paramilitary arms by June 2001 but added:

“We believe that it is crucial that we have substantive engagement with the IRA representative as soon as possible, followed by early movement

on actual decommissioning by each of the paramilitary groups, if we are to meet the agreement’s decommissioning requirements.”

On 8 March 2001, the IRA promised that it would engage with the IICD, but, as yet, no substantive engagement has occurred. In any event, the commission has on a number of occasions said that the necessary preparations would need to begin some eight weeks before the target date if decommissioning is to occur. The end of June is less than eight weeks away. Because there is so little time left, because some in the Republican movement think they can avoid their obligations and because there have been comments purporting to come from the Government casting doubt on that date, I have decided to reinforce the agreement made at Hillsborough.

Mr Speaker, I have, on this date, signed and lodged with you a letter resigning as First Minister as from 1 July 2001. This letter will take effect unless before that date the Republican movement keeps the promise it made over a year ago. Members will know that neither my statement now, nor my resignation on 1 July, if that happens, will cause the institutions to collapse. However, a clear onus is now placed on Republicans and others to act to preserve them. — *[Interruption]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Members know that it is out of order to speak from a sedentary position and that personal statements should be made uninterrupted. I ask Members to observe that.

The First Minister: Mr Speaker, I take this step reluctantly. My Colleagues and I have worked very hard to make this agreement work. We have worked very hard to realise the full promise of the agreement. It promised the people of Northern Ireland a future free from violence and paramilitarism. That promise has not been delivered. IRA material, far from being dealt with so as to avoid risk and misappropriation, has been used in the last year to bomb and kill. I am convinced that if we were to acquiesce in the failure of the Republican movement to keep its promises, the people of Northern Ireland would always be at the mercy of armed gangs.

I said in the Odyssey a few months ago that there cannot be a moral vacuum at the heart of the peace process. Our inclusive arrangements in this Assembly depend on there being a transition from the violent past to a peaceful, democratic future. It is a point that I made at the very first sitting of this Assembly. I said then that because people have a certain past, it does not mean that they cannot have a future. It is possible for people to change, but that change must occur. That is why I said again in 1998 to those who are crossing the bridge from terror to democracy that while I welcomed every move towards peace, I would hold them to every pledge they made.

Today, I am making clear that the promise made a year ago must be kept and that failure to keep that promise will have consequences. In taking this step, I believe that I have the broad support of the people of Northern

Ireland. I know that, like me, they are proud of these institutions, and they relish the prospect of a peaceful Northern Ireland that is at ease with itself. I know that it will not be achieved without effort and risk. I believe that the people of Northern Ireland have supported me in the past when I have taken risks, not with the agreement, but for the agreement. I believe that they will understand and support the step I have taken today.

Mr Speaker: Order. This statement was made under the precedent of a statement of 15 July 1999. It was a statement, not about the Member's position as a Member, but of public office. Therefore, I will treat it in the same way as the statement that was made at that time.

Mr P Robinson: Treat it with contempt.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Dodds: Why is the First Minister resigning later? Why does he not resign now?

Mr Speaker: Order. Having received no request to follow it further, I will proceed with the next item of business.

Mr Dodds: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. In view of the fact that the First Minister has not actually resigned, are we going to get another statement in July? What reason has he given for issuing this call today, when there is likely to be an announcement of an election, and not actually resigning? It is an election ploy.

Mr Speaker: Order. I cannot say whether there will be a request for a statement in July.

PRODUCT LIABILITY (AMENDMENT) BILL

Second Stage

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):
I beg to move

That the Second Stage of the Product Liability (Amendment) Bill (NI 13/00) be agreed.

The Bill has been introduced with the purpose of fulfilling an obligation under European Community law to implement Directive 1999/34/EC. It has been necessary to implement the Directive by means of primary legislation instead of the usual method of secondary legislation. I will refer to this issue later.

The Bill is short, and its effect is to extend the current system of strict product liability to include primary agricultural products and game — food in its raw state. Food which has been processed in some way is already included in part two of the Consumer Protection (Northern Ireland) Order 1987. The amendment will mean that consumers injured by food sold in its unprocessed state will now be able to sue a producer for damages without having to prove negligence. However, the injured person must be able to prove the product was defective and that the defect caused the injury.

The original Product Liability Directive promulgated in 1985 and implemented in the 1987 Order allowed member states to include food sold in its raw state. There was some concern that food in its raw state may be prone to have hidden defects beyond the control of the producer. It has been acknowledged that these difficulties could affect other products already covered by the original Directive, although experience has shown that few problems arise in this area.

Finland, Sweden, Luxembourg and Greece, the four countries which chose to include such products at the time of implementing the original Directive, have reported no apparent problems with the measure. Concerns that this could lead to excessive insurance costs have also proved to be unfounded. A UK-wide regulatory impact consultation revealed that the majority of producers affected already carry adequate insurance cover, and any increases to those who do not will be minimal. The additional costs will be small when compared to the benefit for consumers.

I referred to the difficulty that was faced in implementing this measure. The power to modify the 1987 Order as regards the 1985 Directive was vested in the Secretary of State. Unfortunately, this was not addressed in the Modification of Enactments Order which followed devolution. To use this power would have been constitutionally anomalous in that the Secretary of State would have been legislating on a matter within the competence of the Assembly. I have taken the necessary steps to

rectify this by including a measure in clause 2 to substitute the power of the Secretary of State, with his agreement, and transfer responsibility to the appropriate devolved Department.

The result is that in future any obligatory changes to the Directive can be given force by secondary legislation.

10.45 am

The Bill will represent a small but important step in improving the framework of consumer protection in food safety. The amendment will remove any confusion over which food products are covered by strict liability, since all food will now be covered. I commend the Bill to the Assembly.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Sir Reg Empey): I am always pleased to support proposals that will give the consumer additional protection in their day-to-day dealings with business and industry. The Bill will implement an EC Directive aimed at increasing the level of consumer protection against damage caused to health or property by a defective product. It will also further harmonise EC law with regard to liability for defective products. Meaningful debate will take place on the principles behind it at European level, nevertheless we must proceed with implementing these Directives.

Consumers have a legitimate expectation that in the single market, their health will be protected. Demands for the inclusion of unprocessed primary agriculture products in the scope of the Product Liability Directive have increased in recent years. Such inclusion would constitute an important step in the protection of consumers. It will also mean that business throughout the EC will be operating on a level playing field, and citizens will have the assurance that the Directive covers all foods purchased. I am happy to support the proposals contained in this Bill.

Mr Durkan: I am pleased to acknowledge the support of the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. Producers who will, theoretically, be covered by the Bill support it in principle, and consumer groups welcome the move. Over the coming years the Bill will help to restore public confidence in food, and this, in turn, will help all concerned.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Second Stage of the Product Liability (Amendment) Bill [NIA 13/00] be agreed.

DEFECTIVE PREMISES (LANDLORD'S LIABILITY) BILL

Further Consideration Stage

Mr Speaker: No amendments to the Bill have been tabled, and no indication has been given that Members wish to speak. Therefore, I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to group the six clauses followed by the long title.

Clauses 1 to 6 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Long title agreed to.

Mr Speaker: The Bill now stands referred to the Speaker.

ADOPTION (INTERCOUNTRY ASPECTS) BILL

Further Consideration Stage

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms de Brún): Molaim go n-aontaítear Athchéim an Bhreithnithe den Bhille (Gnéithe Idirthíortha) Uchtaithe.

I beg to move that the Further Consideration Stage of the Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Bill be agreed.

Mr Ford: I am not sure of our position on the amendment that was put through at Consideration Stage last week in the name of the Minister and myself. Can the Minister tell us the position on the Secretary of State's approval for that amendment? Is the Bill cleared for Further Consideration Stage as it currently stands?

Mr Speaker: The Minister will not be in a position to say that before the Final Stage. There will, at that time, be an opportunity for the Minister to respond to that matter. It is a procedural point.

I have no indication that Members wish to speak on clauses that stand part, and no amendments have been tabled. I therefore propose, by leave of the Assembly, to group the 16 clauses, followed by the Schedule and the long title of the Bill.

Clauses 1 to 16 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule agreed to.

Long title agreed to.

Mr Speaker: The Bill now stands referred to the Speaker.

FIREWORKS

Mr Speaker: It is not clear whether the proposer of the motion is present. I must take the advice of the House as to whether Members wish me to suspend proceedings until Question Time at 2.30 pm.

Mr Neeson: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I understood that this motion was due to be debated at 11.30am. Efforts are currently being made to contact the proposer of the motion. Is it in order to suspend the House for a couple of minutes so that this very important matter can proceed?

Mr Speaker: The Member says that it was due to start at 11.30 am. I have frequently heard this misunderstanding or misrepresentation of the indicative timings. There is no “due to start” time at all. Members should be here at the time so that the particular item of business can go ahead — otherwise it creates enormous problems for the House.

I will have to put the question to the House, because otherwise it will create a problem for business. However, what the Member has raised as a point of order is, frankly, no excuse.

The Junior Minister (Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister) (Mr Nesbitt): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I want to reinforce your comments. I am here on time, as are the officials. There is no set time for the debate; there is a presumed time, at which it may start. We must all be ready — ahead of time, if necessary. I therefore support your position.

Mr Dallat: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. A precedent has surely been established already — the occasion when Sammy Wilson was very late. What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.

Mr Speaker: Without attributing the words “goose” or “gander” to either of those Members, perhaps the Member can clarify what he believes the precedent to be.

Mr Dallat: The precedent is that the Assembly was suspended for a short time until Mr Wilson was found.

Mr Speaker: Indeed, the Member is right. Ministers have been held quite firmly to these matters. If it is the wish of the House that the business be suspended for 10 or 15 minutes, I am at the mercy of the House. I feel that it is not a proper way to handle things, but I understand that it creates major problems for the business of the House if matters are suspended.

Mr P Robinson: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. If the House did not give leave, would that mean that we would have the rest of the day to deal with the motion of censure?

Mr Speaker: No, it would not — not that that will, in any way, affect the view of the Member.

Mr P Robinson: It will not influence me at all.

Mr Speaker: In fairness to the House, we will have to suspend at this point and resume with questions at 2.30 pm.

A Member: Mrs Bell is here now.

Mr Speaker: My understanding is that it is Mr McCarthy who is the proposer. I would have thought that they are difficult to confuse. As it is the wish of the House, the House stands suspended for 10 minutes.

The sitting was suspended at 10.55 am and resumed at 11.05 am (Mr Speaker in the Chair).

Mr McCarthy: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Executive to establish an interdepartmental working group in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Office to examine ways in which the nuisance caused by fireworks can be abated.

I humbly apologise to every Member for not being in the Chamber when I ought to have been. I was attending a meeting with the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, and I did not want to disappoint Mr McGimpsey.

Mrs I Robinson: So you disappointed Mr Speaker instead?

Mr McCarthy: Mr Speaker, and everyone else.

I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak on the serious matter of the misuse of fireworks. Raising the matter at this time of year may not seem appropriate or even one of our most pressing or immediate priorities. However, I assure Members that the matter is serious to many people in Northern Ireland and further afield, and debating it gives us an opportunity to agree to do something positive before the next season comes around, when fireworks are used wittingly or otherwise to terrorise many people.

Mr Ingram, the Minister of State, still has authority over fireworks. However, the people affected by them, and others in the community, elected us to the Assembly to improve the quality of life for everyone in Northern Ireland. They have a right to expect us to deliver. Many of our constituents are neither aware nor care about who is responsible for fireworks; they want us — as elected representatives — to act on their behalf and put the matter right.

My motion calls on the Executive to set up a working group to come up with a method of dealing with the misuse of heavy fireworks. That group could be made up of representatives from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the Department of the Environment, the Department for Social Development and, perhaps, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. All could work with Northern Ireland Office personnel to consider the possibility of a ban on the sale of fireworks.

Fireworks, if used sensibly, can provide immense pleasure and enjoyment. They can be spectacular, creative

and the cause of much excitement. They can be used to celebrate a sporting victory.

Fireworks are acceptable if used properly. However, the deliberate misuse of heavy fireworks can cause great annoyance and nuisance. It is usually the case that from early autumn, as the dark nights approach, through the Halloween period and almost up until Christmas, groups of young people start to set off fireworks. Senior citizens suffer most. They become afraid and feel terrorised in their own homes. It is worse when the fireworks are thrown into people's pathways and fireworks have even been dropped through letterboxes. The noise they make is almost enough to give elderly people a heart attack — they certainly leave many people distressed and living on their nerves.

Parents have to spend a good deal of time trying to comfort and pacify babies who can be traumatised when fireworks go off. Family pets might also react in a worrying way — the noise made by bangers can cause some pets to become aggressive. Therefore, it is obvious that fireworks distress both humans and animals, and we must try to eradicate this.

The misuse of fireworks can be destructive. In one incident last year, fireworks were placed in a small post box used by senior citizens who do not live on the main street. The post box and its contents were destroyed, and people were inconvenienced for two to three months. Many similar incidents have taken place.

The misuse of fireworks should be curtailed for many reasons. Ards Borough Council recently gave me its full support in asking the Northern Ireland Security Minister, Mr Adam Ingram, to help to alleviate the problem. I was disappointed when Mr Ingram advised the council that although he shared our concerns and understood the distress that fireworks can cause, he was not convinced that the problem would be solved by prohibiting the sale of fireworks. He believes that the enforcement of the current law and ensuring public awareness of the dangers of the misuse of fireworks provides a balanced approach. Let Mr Ingram tell that to the terrorised senior citizens who live alone and who have to suffer such trauma every night for months.

I assure the Minister that Mr Ingram's response is useless, and I hope that the Assembly responds more positively. Mr Ingram says that the law already prohibits the use of certain types of nuisance fireworks including bangers, small air bombs, and mini rockets in populated areas between 11.00 pm and 7.00 am. What about the long hours of darkness before 11.00 pm? Surely that is when the problem most frequently occurs? The Minister says that the police can take action when the law is broken. That might be true, but the police cannot be everywhere at once, therefore the activity continues unabated.

The continued misuse of these noisy fireworks causes great concern and distress to many of our constituents. I

plead with Members to support this motion. I hope that, in the few months before the next fireworks season, the Executive, through cross-departmental work, will be able to introduce measures to overcome the problem for good. We owe it to our community to do something now. We should show our constituents that the Assembly can make a difference and that on this occasion it will make a difference.

Mrs Courtney: I welcome the debate, and I support the motion. The Explosives (Fireworks) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999 repealed previous regulations and prohibit the possession, purchase or use of certain categories of fireworks, except under licence. The licence is issued by the Secretary of State, to whom a written application must be made. A licence fee must also be paid. The Regulations prohibit

“the possession, purchase, sale or use of fireworks of erratic flight, and mini rockets, bangers or air bombs”.

The Regulations provide an exception for supplies

“to any person for use, in the course of his trade or business, for special effects purposes in the theatre, on film or on television.”

These specified fireworks must be clearly marked, and the mark should say,

“This device must not be sold to, or used by a member of the general public.”

Sparklers should be clearly marked

“Warning: not to be given to children under 5 years of age.”

The Regulations prohibit retailers from selling fireworks if they have been removed from the primary pack. Under these Regulations the sale of all bangers is prohibited, however they seem to be available all year round. The fireworks industry, according to the Regulations, has agreed that fireworks should be widely available to the public for only the three weeks prior to Halloween, and for a few days afterwards. In addition, strict fire regulations apply to the storage of fireworks.

11.15 am

Fireworks cause hundreds of avoidable injuries every year. In the four years from 1996 to 1999 over 535 people were hurt during the Halloween period and required hospital treatment. In 1999 there were 139 injuries but, thankfully, no deaths. At Halloween 2000, 100 people were injured — a decrease of 28% from the 1999 figure. Those injuries were mostly to the face, head or neck.

Apart from the injuries caused, the nuisance to the elderly, people living alone and pets is inestimable. Every year in my council area — the Derry City Council area — there is a campaign to stop children and young people getting hold of fireworks, and to thus limit the distress caused to residents in the entire council area. Warnings are issued about the illegal sale and use of bangers, but the law continues to be broken.

The difficulty is in identifying those traders who carry on with this illegal trade. Young people refuse to divulge the name of the store or trader from whom they purchased the bangers. These items cause nuisance in the city centre and in the estates. Something must be done if we are to stop this annual nuisance afflicting our communities.

This year the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) has launched a fireworks safety campaign aimed at children and young people, because statistics show that they suffer over half the injuries. Despite the fact that the law prohibits bangers from being sold to anyone under 16 years of age, bangers are the most common cause of injury.

It is an offence to throw or discharge a firework in a street or public place, yet it happens on a regular basis. A penalty of up to £2,000 can result from a prosecution. However, there are few prosecutions for selling, purchasing or throwing illegal bangers. I support anything that makes life easier for all who dread the Halloween period because of the noise and disturbance that occurs at that time. I support the motion.

Mr Wells: Mr Speaker, you will recall that I raised this issue in the Assembly on 26 October 1998. In fact, I think it was the subject of my maiden speech. At that time certain Members accused me of exaggerating the situation when I said that I believed that people's lives were being tortured by the misuse of fireworks in places such as Ballynahinch, Kilkeel and Rathfriland. I am glad to say that I did receive support from Mr McCarthy, and other Members, on that day. I am glad too that, since then, many other Members have said that the situation is very bad.

I have children aged 10, 13 and 16. They have grown up without ever having used or handled fireworks. Their lives do not seem to be any poorer because of this. There are many hundreds of children and young adults walking around Northern Ireland today who, as a direct result of the fireworks ban that was instigated in the early 1970s, have all their fingers, two eyes and no scars. The ban was not instigated because of a need to protect pensioners or to prevent the cruelty to animals that occurs when fireworks are misused; it was imposed for other reasons. However, as an indirect result there were fewer injuries.

I am not calling for a ban on fireworks, but I am entirely supporting the motion put forward by Mr McCarthy. He is suggesting a very sensible and reasonable balance. There is no doubt that a problem exists. However, there are diverse viewpoints as to the solution. Mr McCarthy is proposing a very sensible halfway house.

I will illustrate some of the problems that have occurred since I first raised this issue in 1998. It is not uncommon for young thugs — frankly, that is the only phrase that I can use to describe them — to find it amusing to put powerful bangers through the letter boxes of old-age pensioners. They terrorise them for the two or three months around the Halloween period. In my own area

there are instances of fireworks being tied to the tails of dogs and cats. The animals are absolutely terrified, and, in one case, an animal died.

These people think that it is funny to put fireworks into metal waste disposal bins. The fireworks go off, creating a loud bang and a lot of unease among elderly people. There is absolutely no need for any of this. If my children want to enjoy fireworks they can go to a licensed display run by the local district council or an organisation such as the National Trust. They can enjoy a fine night out without being in any danger or causing distress to anyone else.

I would like to see more emphasis put on licensed displays in Northern Ireland. During my holidays I sometimes go to Disney World in Florida, where you can see the ultimate in firework displays. The Americans think that the idea of children being allowed access to fireworks is unusual. They see fireworks as something you watch and enjoy under strictly controlled conditions.

Another problem which has arisen in recent years is that many of the fireworks being used in Northern Ireland are illegally imported. I read with interest the almost weekly piece in the 'News Letter' which says that the police have raided Nutt's Corner and Jonesborough markets and found that 70% of the fireworks they have seized are illegal. That indicates that 30% of the fireworks are legal. From my experience of reading the papers and watching the court cases, I suspect that the vast bulk of the fireworks sold in these markets are illegally imported. This enables unscrupulous individuals in the Province, who are used to smuggling, to make a large amount of money selling fireworks that are extremely dangerous, particularly to children.

We must take a long hard look at the matter and come up with sensible proposals that enable people to enjoy fireworks — and I accept that a great deal of enjoyment can be gained from watching fireworks. We also need to reduce some of the misery being inflicted on society throughout the Province from the start of September until the end of October or early November. During that period a great deal of police time is taken up in trying to apprehend culprits and reassuring the elderly and those being intimidated by fireworks. Frankly, there is enough ordinary crime on the streets without police time being wasted chasing after these culprits.

I have been told at sub-divisional commander level in Ballynahinch and Kilkeel that during that period in the autumn, the largest number of complaints the police receive is as a result of fireworks.

We had the most obscene example of the abuse of fireworks in Castletwellan last Halloween. There is absolutely no doubt that terrorists used the cover of the illegal use of fireworks in that town to cover up a dastardly attack on a member of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. Five police officers were summoned from Newcastle to

Castlewellan to try to control a mob abusing fireworks in the town causing absolute havoc in that community — a strongly Nationalist community who called on the police to intervene and defuse the situation. Whilst all of that was going on, terrorists were using it as a cover to plant a bomb at the entrance to Castlewellan RUC station, seriously injuring a policeman who tried to move it. With the threat of terrorism still hanging over us, the last thing we need is for the attention of the police to be distracted for two months of the year trying to control this situation.

Given the amount of smuggling and the fact that there are cheap, imported fireworks, a lot of black economy is involved in this. If we are going to introduce controls on fireworks, we must not only control their use, but also their import and sale.

Mr McCarthy's motion hits the problem on the head. We are bringing together a wide range of interests. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, the Department of the Environment and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety need to be brought together to work out a sensible policy, which can then be implemented throughout the Province.

The policy should have the support of district councils, the police, this Assembly and parents' representatives to ensure that this problem is stopped. The one difficulty I see is that this is a growing problem throughout the Province. It is not going to get any easier to control, so we must act now. I congratulate Mr McCarthy on bringing forward the motion and urge all Members to support it. I am glad to say that others have seen the light and are also supporting stricter controls.

From a pure self-interest point of view, this would mean that my time during the autumn would not be wasted in trying to reassure elderly people, the disabled and pet owners, and trying to bring the culprits to book by contacting the police. This is a sensible way to bring the problem under control.

My ultimate fear is that someday one of those "tricks", as they are called, will go tragically wrong. Perhaps a firework will be put through a pensioner's door and lead to a fire; perhaps a pensioner will be so harassed that he or she will have a heart attack. Something tragic will happen if this problem is not nipped in the bud. I give this motion my complete support, and I hope that a working party is established as a matter of urgency.

Mr A Maginness: I strongly agree with the sentiments expressed by Mr Wells, Mr McCarthy and Mrs Courtney today. However, to describe the problem of uncontrolled fireworks as a nuisance is probably to underestimate the damage and concern that it causes to many in the community, particularly to older people. I frequently receive complaints from retired and elderly people who cannot get a night's sleep and whose evenings are disrupted by exploding fireworks in or around their homes.

Fireworks also pose a considerable problem as regards domestic animals, particularly dogs. We should have concern for pets in our society. They are defenceless in the face of fireworks, and we should afford them a degree of protection which hitherto they have not received.

Fireworks affect a third category — the young people themselves. Whether they realise it or not, they are exposing themselves to considerable danger by using fireworks in an uncontrolled, unsupervised fashion. Although the law is against the sale of fireworks to young people under 16 years of age, the law is honoured more in the breach than in the observance. One wonders what type of responsible retailers would sell fireworks to young people. It is the height of irresponsibility to allow that to happen.

Not only shopkeepers are at fault; perhaps street traders who are selling those items to young people are more at fault than shopkeepers. As Mr Wells pointed out, many of the fireworks that are sold in Northern Ireland are extremely powerful foreign imports. Their explosive contents are unregulated. As a result, young people are exposing themselves to even more danger.

The use of fireworks in streets and other public areas is prohibited by law. Again, the law is honoured more in the breach than in the observance. Society must demand zero tolerance of the unauthorised use of fireworks. We must change the current culture of tolerance to a culture of intolerance towards the unauthorised use of fireworks. We are too tolerant about it.

We are too tolerant. We say "Where is the harm if some youngsters let off a few squibs? Are they not entitled to a little fun?" It is not a little bit of fun for elderly people, domestic animals, and so forth. Young people are also exposed to serious danger.

11.30 am

I welcome the motion and the idea of setting up a joint working party with the Northern Ireland Office. It is important that we look at the whole area of the unauthorised use of fireworks and bring forward a series of measures to deal with the problem. We should do it now, and do it quickly, because the next season of unauthorised fireworks will soon be upon us. Any working party set up should report quickly and come up with practical measures to deal with this mischief.

Mr J Kelly: Go raibh maith agat. I support the motion, Cheann Comhairle. Mr Wells said that he had been to Disneyland. As I listened to his trying to extrapolate out of this debate a stick with which to beat Sinn Féin, I wondered whether he was still there. That is no way to support this motion.

Fireworks have been a part of life in most communities — not just in this part of Ireland but in the rest of Ireland and in England, Scotland and Wales. When I was a young man, Halloween was not Halloween without fireworks. What I am going to say may be nostalgia, but

there did not seem to be as many injuries or as much mischief relating to fireworks.

I am glad that Kieran McCarthy is not proposing the banning of fireworks. Under controlled conditions, fireworks can offer a very acceptable form of amusement and even an art form. A controlled fireworks display is as entertaining as a musical show that is watched on television or at a live display. There is nothing wrong with fireworks, providing experienced people use them in a controlled manner.

The tormenting of old people through the misuse of fireworks has become increasingly prevalent — that is brought up at council meetings year in, year out. In my day, you tied a piece of thread to someone's door knocker, hid around the corner, knocked the door and ran away. Nowadays it seems that you light a bundle of fireworks and put them through a person's letter box — or, worse still, you break a window and throw them in. That is not an appropriate form of amusement at a time when there should be enjoyment. There is a need for control, and we must ask where that control should come from. Should it come from the parents? They must know, because they give children the money to buy these things.

Mr B Hutchinson: One of my concerns is that people are talking in general terms, implying that every young person is a thug. We need to be careful, because many young people have a great deal to contribute to this society; they are the future. I am not opposed to what is being said in general, but we need to recognise that not all young people misuse fireworks.

Secondly, some parents buy fireworks for use in their own back gardens. That is a degree of control. I want to point out to some Members that we should not be tarring all young people with the same brush, or tying them all to the one rocket.

Mr J Kelly: Mr Hutchinson intervened at the wrong time. I was going on to suggest that many young people and many parents behave in a responsible way with regard to fireworks. I was not making a general statement about how some young people abuse this as they abuse other substances such as drugs and alcohol. I was going on to say that in controlled circumstances, young people and parents can have a good, neighbourly display of fireworks in their front or back gardens or in the street.

My comments were about those cases that are increasingly becoming the rule rather than the exception, where old people are tortured and tormented by young people abusing fireworks. There is no question about that — it happens. It happens on every estate, certainly on the estates in my area. I know from experience and from conversations I have had that it happens on other estates.

How we deal with it and legislate for it is another question. I suggest that parents have a responsibility, as they have in other areas of parental control, to ensure

that if their children are buying fireworks, they know what kind of fireworks they are buying, what they intend to use them for and how they intend to use them. Fireworks endanger the lives of those who use them and those whom they are being used against.

I welcome Mr McCarthy's motion. On a good morning like this, it is perhaps not timely, in seasonal terms, but it puts down a marker for the Assembly to ensure that we take cognisance of the concerns that people are expressing, and have expressed, about this very emotive subject.

Mr Nesbitt: As Mr McCarthy said this morning, this is perhaps not an opportune day to be discussing fireworks. It is the month of May, with nice temperatures and not a cloud in the sky, and here we are having a debate on fireworks.

Fireworks are not unknown to this Chamber in the word's metaphorical sense, never mind its literal one. However, this is a very serious matter indeed. All those who spoke supported the motion, and they all recognised that there is enjoyment to be had with fireworks. I note that Mr Wells referred to Disneyworld. I am sure that many of us have witnessed the wonderful fireworks there. Mr John Kelly talked about the nostalgia of the old days. I too remember Halloween. Halloween would not have gone past without bangers or "squibs", as we called them in the vernacular. Yes, we did enjoy ourselves. There is enjoyment to be had with fireworks.

However, there was also a theme running through the debate this morning of the misuse of fireworks, whether about young people or the elderly, in a sense, or about the law's not being adhered to, as Mr Maginness and Mrs Courtney mentioned.

We must also recognise — and Mr Billy Hutchinson made reference to this — that we are not in any way castigating all of the youth for what happens today. I, for one, and others recognise that the youth of today probably face more challenges than we ever faced in our youth. Today's youth are to be commended for how they react in the environment in which they find themselves. We do not in any way condemn them. I have no doubt that Mr Billy Hutchinson's interjection is resoundingly supported by all. None of the Members who spoke tried to give the impression that the youth of today are to be condemned.

Of course we have witnessed the misuse of fireworks, with the odd rocket suddenly going off in the quiet of the country and disturbing people. Mr McCarthy and Mr Wells referred to senior citizens, who probably suffer most. As Mr John Kelly said, there are those who do not just tie the cord to the letter box, pull it and run but put the firework through the letter box and much more besides. Senior citizens have a concern, and we must reflect that concern and endeavour to make sure that it is dealt with.

Mr McCarthy also mentioned pets. Pets are also innocent, and, in a sense, those who wish to do evil do it on pets as well. That must be a concern for us. Rev Robert Coulter asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety about the number of injuries last year, and it was reported that 100 people were treated in accident and emergency departments for injuries caused by fireworks. Thankfully, no one was killed during that autumn period, but, nonetheless, that is 100 injuries too many. Therefore, the Assembly — and the Administration in particular — must not be complacent.

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

Let me refer to what Government Departments and the NIO have been doing over the period. Since 1996, the NIO has funded, and has been closely involved in, the annual fireworks safety media campaign. That campaign results from collaboration with agencies throughout the United Kingdom, and also the Department of Trade and Industry, working closely with the Northern Ireland Fireworks Safety Group.

I will put on record how that group is made up. It comprises the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA), Home Accident Prevention Northern Ireland, the Departments of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and Education, the NIO, the Fire Authority for Northern Ireland, the RUC, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the health promotion agencies, district councils and Crimestoppers. There is a co-ordination group working there. We must give recognition to the work that is being done there and not lose sight of it. We must not, through this motion, give the impression that no one out there is doing anything. It is quite the reverse.

In general, the campaign has focused, through those various agencies, on children, because every year over half the injuries caused by fireworks are sustained by schoolchildren. Last year it was decided to introduce a schools resource pack, designed primarily to teach the safe usage of fireworks. That message was taken to the classroom. It was covered in Key Stages 1 to 4 and was distributed to both primary and post-primary schools.

The Northern Ireland Fireworks Safety Group is always seeking ways to increase children's awareness of safety: I emphasise that again. It is considering having seminars and is working, as is the Department of Health, to develop a hard-hitting fireworks safety drama for this autumn. Work is being done, and I wish to put that on the record.

Mr McCarthy mentioned the darkening nights of early autumn. I understand that the NIO is entering discussions with representatives of the fireworks industry to consider ways of restricting the period during which fireworks are available. We note that.

That fits in with what Mrs Courtney and Alban Maginness said about the law's being honoured more in the breach than in the observance. Alban Maginness

said that it was the "height of irresponsibility" to sell fireworks to under-age children, and that has been noted by the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister.

11.45 am

Members have had a good discussion this morning. The Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister has noted where problems are to be found and where they are not to be found. Lack of education is part of the problem, as are those who abuse the law in selling fireworks. Those two issues must be addressed, and the law must be more strictly adhered to.

However, links have been established throughout Northern Ireland's administrative structure. From 1999 to 2000 firework-related injuries fell by 28%. However, one should never take statistics in isolation. One year does not establish a trend, but that is an optimistic figure nonetheless.

The Administration are not complacent. They will continue to develop and work on what needs to be done. All participating Members spoke in favour of the motion; no one dissented. Therefore the Executive will carefully consider the motion.

Mrs E Bell: Mr McCarthy and I are grateful for the participation of Members in the debate and their recognition of the issue's seriousness. We are also grateful to the Junior Minister for attending; his words are heartening. It is only right that Members have had the debate and that it is pushed along so that the situation may improve.

My Colleague Mr McCarthy has outlined the reasons for tabling the motion. We want action to be taken before the outbreak of the fireworks season. From August to Christmas there are bangs at all hours of the day and night. Legislation should look at that. The fear and terror that elderly people, families and pets experience is dreadful. The Assembly must take that on board and ensure that it is stopped.

It may be difficult to set up an interdepartmental working group, but that should not deter the Assembly. The NIO will also have to be involved, and Members must acknowledge the role of the police, who have great difficulty in dealing with the many incidents that occur. Alban Maginness is right in saying that the message should be one of zero tolerance for the misuse of fireworks.

Mr Shannon: Does the Member agree that rather than being a source of pleasure and fun, fireworks have been turned into weapons and used against senior citizens, animal owners and families? Does she agree that the working group needs to achieve a balance between the legitimate use of fireworks and ensuring that people do not live in fear of them?

Mrs E Bell: As a councillor on North Down Borough Council I must say that fireworks are a wonderful form

of entertainment if properly supervised. However, they are being seriously misused in some instances — as some Members have mentioned — and that must be addressed.

We must look at all the possible causes and solutions and at the legislation concerning the sale of fireworks to individuals. Police must be afforded more manpower and resources to deal with the problems and to identify the people causing them.

As Billy Hutchinson rightly said, not every young person in every estate — private or council-owned — misuses fireworks. However, the numbers are increasing every year, and we must be concerned about that. Members have graphically outlined concerns about their constituents' safety. We do not wish to ban fireworks, but we must ensure that the situation is improved.

Remember, this problem will involve the RUC and even the Fire and Ambulance Services at times. Public safety and the danger to the environment are other issues that we need to look at. We require collective action. Mr Wells is quite right in outlining all the other possible repercussions of allowing fireworks to be freely available. I witnessed an example of these repercussions: a banger was thrown into the hallway of pensioners' flats. One resident was taken to hospital and was never able to return to his home afterwards, while the others required attention and reassurance from police and the community.

The buzz phrase is "community safety". Community associations should therefore be involved in this problem. Not all of our young people are involved in the misuse of fireworks, but if this problem is not dealt with, it will become an issue as serious as drugs or alcohol. Legislation does not solve the problem. I hope that immediate and effective action will now be taken and that today will be not just a marker, as Mr John Kelly suggested.

The National Campaign for Firework Reform and other relevant agencies state that their work would be easier with obvious support from the Assembly. The work that is already being done is not recognised by those directly affected. More public relations work needs to be done, and I appreciate the junior Minister's statement on the need for seminars.

Let us be under no illusions about this. If this problem is not dealt with effectively, more serious accidents and fatalities will occur. When they hear bangs at all hours of the day, elderly people will remember terrorising noises in the past — as will Members. That cannot continue. What use are we as a locally elected Assembly if we cannot deal directly with these problems for the safety of our people?

We do not wish to ban small family fireworks displays. Some of these are very good. I do not want to put problems in the way of families, charities and councils such as the North Down Borough Council who want to

organise such events. I ask the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to take all these comments on board. I am glad that the junior Minister has made that commitment today, and I ask him and the Assembly to please support this motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls on the Executive to establish an interdepartmental working group in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Office to examine ways in which the nuisance caused by fireworks can be abated.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The House will now suspend until Question Time at 2.30 pm.

Mr Tierney: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Is it not possible to move the 4.00 pm business up the Order Paper and proceed with it now? There are one-and-a-half hours left for debate, and we could extend that for a further half-hour. As Mr Speaker stressed this morning, the times on the Order Paper are indicative.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As you say, the indicative times suggested a close at 1.30 pm, and it is now just coming up to 12 o'clock. Ministers are advised to be here at 2.30 pm for Question Time. I have no intention of switching that programme. The House will suspend until 2.30 pm.

Mr Tierney: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. The Ministers are advised to be in the Chamber at 2.30 pm for Question Time. There is no reason why a two-hour debate could not last from 12 o'clock until 2.00 pm.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Tierney you know my views.

The sitting was suspended at 12.01 pm

2.30 pm

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

Oral Answers to Questions

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

AVX Coleraine (Grants)

1. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the value of grants made available to AVX Coleraine in each of the last three financial years and to indicate the net gain in jobs to date.

(AQO 1412/00)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Sir Reg Empey): The offers of Government assistance made in the last three financial years, including training and Industrial Research and Technology Unit (IRTU) support, amount to £10,664,300. In that time frame employment has risen from a low of 835 in the year ending March 1999, to a high of 1,349 earlier this year. Current employment is 1,238.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Minister for his reply and for his continuing interest in employment in Coleraine. Is the Minister aware that people who were made redundant from the textile industry in the last year have again been made redundant by AVX? Given that this company has moved part of its operations to the Czech Republic, where labour is much cheaper, can he understand workers' concern that the electronics industry might follow the same pattern as the textile industry? Can he assure the House that everything possible is being done to ensure that AVX continues to prosper, and that there is a broader base of industry in Coleraine?

Sir Reg Empey: I am conscious that some people have moved from textiles to telecom and other information communication technology (ICT)-related sectors and that they have found themselves in similar circumstances as before. This has been the case for some Nortel employees, for example. The Czech operation is currently controlled from Coleraine. While I understand the point about labour costs, we are going to face that problem as a result of competition from all Third World and developing countries. The only way to stay ahead is to have better innovation, technology and practices than those found anywhere else.

Offers of assistance do not necessarily mean that money has been, or will be, paid. Offers of assistance are drawn down systematically over a period, if targets are reached. The fact that this figure has been mentioned

does not mean that it has been obtained. I accept the Member's point and assure him that I intend to visit the Coleraine area soon. I have visited the area frequently, and I am aware that many people in that district are concerned, particularly those in the tourism sector.

Mr McClarty: I am aware of the Minister's deep concern for employment matters in Coleraine and other regions in Northern Ireland. The Minister will know, as Mr Dallat said, that AVX employees are gravely concerned about their future. Can the Minister assure the House that every possible means of assistance will be given to AVX during its present difficulties, and that it will continue to be given to them?

Sir Reg Empey: The figure that I quoted in response to Mr Dallat's question — a sum in excess of £10.6 million, including IRTU support — illustrates my Department's commitment to this company's development. This company has been in Northern Ireland for a considerable number of years. It is not a fly-by-night operation, and we believe that its technology is of the highest possible calibre. The last financial year was its most successful ever. In spite of the announcement of its cutbacks, its employment levels are still above the targets set out in its letter of offer from the IDB. Therefore, there is no clawback happening at this stage.

We are in touch with them regularly, but we have to remember that we are part of an international market. Things that happen in North America affect us, because many of AVX's customers are in North America. We are not insulated from any of these effects. I assure Mr McClarty that the IDB and IRTU are doing everything in their power to ensure that this company receives all the assistance that the state can provide.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease (All-Ireland Initiative)

2. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to work in close co-operation with the Minister of Tourism, Sport and Recreation in the Irish Government to devise an all-Ireland initiative aimed at countering any damage caused to the tourism industry by the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease.

(AQO 1378/00)

Sir Reg Empey: I have already discussed with Dr McDaid ways in which he and I might work together to counter damage to the tourism industry caused by the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease. I said that I would be happy to participate in a joint promotion with him, especially in the United States of America.

Mr McElduff: Ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil leis an Aire as a fhreagra; cuirim fáilte roimhe. Ach dar liom féin go bhfuil comhoibriú ar an ábhar seo fíorthábhachtach.

I thank the Minister for the information. Has he any further update for tourism-related industries, hotels and restaurants and farmers who have diversified into agri-tourism? All have experienced cancellations and suffered great consequential loss. Is any mechanism in place, or likely to be in place, to allow them to obtain compensation packages?

Sir Reg Empey: I refer the Member to an answer I gave last month to Mr Shannon. I said that the impact of foot-and-mouth disease on the tourism sector is widely acknowledged. Economic consequences are included in risk analyses and constantly reviewed by the Executive group chaired by Ms Rodgers. We are co-operating fully with other Departments.

The issue of compensation has raised its head and is a matter of concern. However, I stress to the Member that the solutions to the industry's problems do not lie in compensation, which, by definition, is going to be at the margins. The only way that we will resolve the problems in the industry is to get the visitors back, which I also said last week. Dr McDaid takes that view, which is also the view of other tourism ministers in the UK, with whom I met two weeks ago in Glasgow. They all said that we have to concentrate on getting the tourists back.

The Executive, in a statement last week, said that they had discussed the economic impact of foot-and-mouth disease on business in Northern Ireland and agreed that a grant aid scheme in lieu of rates relief should be developed, details of which the Executive hope to announce shortly. It is likely that my Department, among others, will be handling that scheme, because, as the Member knows, the legislation concerning rates relief in Northern Ireland is different from that in Great Britain. That scheme will be designed to help in some way. However, it is not the solution to the problem.

Job Losses (Fermanagh)

3. **Mr McHugh** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail what progress has been made by IDB and the local task force in tackling recent job losses in the Fermanagh area. (AQO 1415/00)

Sir Reg Empey: The task force is a council-led initiative, supported by local industry, to analyse Fermanagh's competitive position for a range of opportunities and to identify barriers to growth. The IDB, LEDU, and the Training and Employment Agency are working with that group, which I met on 4 May in Enniskillen to receive a report highlighting local priorities.

Mr McHugh: A LeasCheann Comhairle, I thank the Minister for his answer and also for meeting with the delegation from Fermanagh and South Tyrone and myself this morning to discuss job losses. One point that he made to me was that many of those businesses closed

without asking for any help from the IDB, the Assembly or anyone. That is a fairly important factor.

Is there anything that the new grouping, or the local task force, can do to project the risk of other businesses closing in a similar situation?

Sir Reg Empey: As the Member said, I met him and his Colleagues this morning. I also visited the County on Friday to receive the report, sent from the task force, which was prepared by Peter Quinn Consultancy Services. That report sets out a route map and strategy for the county. A very high-powered task force has been established, to which the IDB, LEDU, and the Training and Employment Agency are contributing.

I want to emphasise a point that is not often understood and one that I hope he, his Colleagues and Members will get across. On many occasions lay-offs are announced to the workforce at the same time as they are disclosed to us. Frequently we may find out from the press or via a telephone call from a councillor or MLA. In most cases, companies do not ask for help. I suspect the reason is that they do not want help. I say to the Member that if he knows where such a situation exists, our agencies would be happy to provide help.

Mrs Courtney: There have been job losses and hardship caused, particularly in the Fermanagh area. However, the Minister will agree that other areas have also suffered, particularly the Derry City Council area. Last week, we had further job losses in the textile industry with the loss of some jobs at Desmonds. Will the Minister assure us that he and his Department are doing all they can to alleviate the hardship that these job losses cause?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that the question was not directly related to Fermanagh.

Sir Reg Empey: The Member makes a point that many of my Colleagues have made in the Chamber. I am acutely aware of this problem, particularly in the textile industry. If any information is available to Members, please let IDB or LEDU know so that we can do something about it in time.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease (Impact on Tourism)

4. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the impact of foot-and-mouth disease on the tourist industry. (AQO 1385/00)

6. **Mr Poots** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to give his assessment of the impact of foot-and-mouth disease on the tourist industry. (AQO 1380/00)

Sir Reg Empey: With permission I will answer questions four and six together.

The impact of foot-and-mouth disease on the tourist industry has been widely acknowledged. The worst-case scenario estimates that losses of up to £180 million could occur. The economic consequences are factored into risk analyses constantly reviewed by the Executive group chaired by my Colleague, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. I maintain close contact with tourist industry representatives.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for his reply. My constituency of Strangford, being the most attractive tourist destination in Northern Ireland, has undoubtedly suffered. Many people have been affected, for instance, my wife, who sells Irish linen souvenirs. No visitors means no sales. The Kirkistown circuit has been closed, and the Carrowdore 100 has been postponed.

What help can the Minister give the organisers of events, the passing trade, pubs, petrol stations and the ordinary people who are trying to make a living? Foot-and-mouth disease has been a disaster for all of them.

Sir Reg Empey: I am not going to get drawn into the argument about which is the most beautiful constituency in Northern Ireland. I think it is East Belfast, but that is my personal opinion. I want to make the serious point that I am conscious that the absence of visitors and cancellation of events does have a knock-on effect. I stress that the compensation route will not solve the problem; the only thing that will achieve that is getting our visitors back.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board has undertaken a £1 million recovery programme, which is already rolling out. We were able to support the North West Fest proposals to try to make up for the cancellation of the NorthWest 200. If other areas have ideas and promotions we will certainly consider them.

However, the amount of money that we have committed towards the recovery of tourism is proportionately higher than that in any other part of these islands. Twelve million pounds was given to the British tourist authority last week on top of the £2.2 million that had already been submitted. Proportionately, we represent 3% of the UK, and you can see at a glance that our effort has been greater.

Mr Poots: This is not the first time that the Minister has ruled out consequential compensation to the tourist industry. He has mentioned that there is a £1 million package available for those in the tourism industry. What innovative ideas are actually coming from the Northern Ireland Tourist Board as to how this money should be best distributed to increase the number of tourists visiting the Province?

2.45 pm

Sir Reg Empey: First, I did not rule out consequential compensation. I am not sure if the Member was present earlier, but I will again refer to the Executive Committee statement of last week which said that the economic

impact of foot-and-mouth disease on businesses had been discussed and that it had been agreed that a grant-aid scheme, in lieu of rates relief, should be developed. We hope to announce details of that shortly.

Rates relief is not the solution. It may make a contribution, but I want the focus to be on trying to get our visitors back. To that end, the Tourist Board has put in an enormous amount of work getting together with carriers to encourage the regional tourism organisations to do promotional work in their areas. When the north-west requested help, the Tourist Board brought forward support. It has been very active and stands ready to help. A very substantial programme of events has been taking place in the United States, Europe, Great Britain and the Republic, rolling out over the next few weeks, to try to maintain as much of our tourism sector industry business this year as possible. It is also designed to ensure that the losses will not continue into the next year.

Mr McGrady: Members are inclined to agree with the Minister that compensation does not lie at the heart of the recovery. However, compensation does lie at the heart of sustaining those businesses which would not survive until that recovery takes place. We have lost the Easter period; we have lost the May Bank Holiday, and I cannot see the recovery's happening in time for the summer holiday period. I read this morning that in Great Britain another £25 million has been awarded to the tourism recovery programme. That makes a total of £265 million. What new grant-aided scheme is going to sustain businesses while recovery takes place?

Sir Reg Empey: The Executive, through the special group chaired by Ms Rodgers, are looking at all compensation-related issues. There will be a grant-aid scheme in lieu of rates relief, and we will have to look at hardship cases. Some national proposals are in operation with the revenue, with VAT and with the small firms loan guarantee schemes. I have written to the banks. I have also written to the electricity undertakings and the gas undertakings. We have approached other people who are in a position to influence the longevity of these businesses. We will look at individual applications ourselves. However, the only long-term solution is to continue to fight to get people not to cancel or to get people to visit. We have, therefore, been supporting the special offers that many hotels and resorts have been offering, and there are some early indications of success. It is not all downhill. People in the north-coast area have set an example which, I hope, other areas will follow.

Mr Armstrong: What evaluation is being carried out to ascertain the losses in various agri-associated businesses such as livestock marts? Can the Minister support their getting consequential compensation for the loss of 400 jobs in that business?

Sir Reg Empey: Although it is not my responsibility, the question of marts is a special case. I am assured by

Ms Rodgers and Mr Durkan that they are looking very closely at this issue. Members of the Agriculture Committee raised it on a number of occasions. I assure Mr Armstrong that the Executive are acutely aware of that case, and I look forward to a positive proposal being brought forward.

Promotion of Investment (Armagh)

5. **Mr Fee** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail his plans for the promotion of investment in Armagh City and to make a statement.

(AQO 1418/00)

Sir Reg Empey: The Programme for Government includes actions by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to work with regional groupings of district councils to co-ordinate marketing information about Northern Ireland and council areas as a location for investment. Armagh is an integral part of this process.

Mr Fee: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he accept that Armagh city is in a unique position? It has relatively low unemployment at just over 5%, but 68% of residents who are employed commute out of Armagh city. That means that the wages of 68% of the working population are not spent in local shops and businesses. There is a crying need for support to expand the city's manufacturing and retail base and a need to encourage people to spend in the city.

Sir Reg Empey: I am very familiar with Armagh, having spent many years at school there. I am also very conscious of the points to which Mr Fee referred. I must, however, say that the situation is not new.

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has, through the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, been very supportive of the new hotel project which now nears completion. That is a very ambitious project that will contribute to the fabric of Armagh's economy. Armagh District Council has been very proactive in developing various facilities, and the tourist industry there was given a real boost. The conferment of city status on Armagh some years ago added to that. The IDB is acutely aware of it, and I am conscious that it is has not been possible to get as much investment as we would like in that area.

For the Member's information, in the past three years there have been six visits by potential investors to Armagh and to the district council area. The IDB is very conscious of Armagh's need. We have a 9.4 acre estate available at Edenaveys, and I visited it the last time I was in the city. I assure the Member that we take his points seriously. We believe that we have the infrastructure in place for investment.

Mr C Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Is the Minister aware that in relation to Armagh the record of the IDB over the past five years — in projects and investment secured, jobs secured or safeguarded and

IDB assistance to business — is at best less than 0.5% of its overall record of achievement in the North of Ireland? Given that he says that Armagh is now an integral part of the IDB's plans for the future, can he explain how that will change? He will have to accept that it is a fairly abysmal record.

Sir Reg Empey: While I appreciate the Member's points, I have to say that one must look at the unemployment position in the area. As Mr Fee pointed out, it is at a comparatively low level. That is not to be complacent, because I am very conscious that proximity to the border and the surrounding area's dependence on agriculture are matters which have caused stress in the past few years. LEDU, for instance, has 53 growth clients in Armagh and the council area. That is a substantial number. As I indicated, we have 9.4 acres available for use. We have been very active in tourism, and we have put forward £2.8 million for the new hotel project. That shows a clear commitment to doing everything possible. I accept that it is not the best record in Northern Ireland, but policy must be related to need. The fact that unemployment in the city is comparatively low is testament that the policies have been working.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease (Impact on Business)

7. **Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to give his assessment of the impact that foot-and-mouth disease has had on businesses involved in country sports and leisure activities.

(AQO 1397/00)

Sir Reg Empey: The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure has advised that angling, tourism and related businesses have been affected, as the majority of fisheries adjacent to agricultural land remain closed. While some businesses, such as equestrian centres, have significant problems, the full economic consequences of foot-and-mouth disease will not be apparent for some time.

Mr Shannon: I am concerned about some country sports. Examples from my area illustrate what is happening in the Province. Trade has decreased by 50% in a number of country sport shops in the Strangford borough, and seven or eight put-and-take lakes have been closed for four months.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member come to his question?

Mr Shannon: The Ark Rare Breeds Open Farm, a tourist attraction in Newtownards, has been closed for four months. It has no income but must still pay rates and other bills. What can we do to help these people in the short and long term?

Sir Reg Empey: The Member has brought attention to the most difficult category of people to help — those who are adjacent to farmland. The Member must realise

that there is still a significant risk of foot-and-mouth disease as we saw a few weeks ago at Easter when cases appeared out of the blue in the Glens of Antrim and Ardboe. There is no guarantee that the disease has run its course, that there will not be other cases, that the infection is not already in other flocks. The last thing that the Member would want to see is further cases and outbreaks. Therefore those people who operate adjacent to farm land will not be free of the restrictions until we are satisfied on veterinary advice that it is safe to lift them.

As I said earlier, the Executive agreed last week that a grant-aid scheme in lieu of rates relief should be developed. The legislative base here is different, so we do not have the rates relief scheme that there is in Great Britain. However a grant-aid-in-lieu scheme is being developed, and it is likely that it will be administered, in part, by my Department. Obviously, we must take into account the specific hardship cases to which the Member has referred. Indeed, we may be able to make some provision for those hardship cases. However, I stress to the Member that while I understand that these businesses have been closed for months, they are the most difficult hardship cases to solve, and the last thing that we can do is take a chance and run the risk of another outbreak.

Economic Investment (West Tyrone)

8. **Mr Gibson** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the steps he is taking to stimulate economic investment in West Tyrone. (AQO 1374/00)

Sir Reg Empey: My Department, in partnership with the local councils, has taken a number of steps to stimulate economic investment in west Tyrone. They have included attractive new inward investment, assisting indigenous companies to become more competitive and promoting and encouraging the development of new enterprise.

Mr Gibson: In what areas of information technology communications — telecom or other providers — is west Tyrone deficient at the moment? What is being done to enable it to take on industrial and economical development on a footing that is equal to that of others?

Sir Reg Empey: Telecom communications in the constituency of West Tyrone, as in the rest of Northern Ireland, are good. However, I assure the Member that one of the Programme for Government commitments is to ensure the availability of broadband services that have an impact on businesses such as those that are information and communications technology-based. As the Member knows we recently, through the IDB, announced that we are trying to procure additional space in the Strabane area at the Orchard Road Industrial Estate, and we are actively seeking a tenant who could be based in that sector.

I assure the Member that we will ensure that areas such as west Tyrone are put on as level a playing field as possible with the rest of Northern Ireland for the

provision of the best possible technology. That is how it will be judged, and I suspect that the Member may well have something to do with assessing whether we get it right.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Byrne you may be able to pose a question if you are brief, but I suspect that the Minister may have to answer you in writing.

3.00 pm

Mr Byrne: I welcome what the Minister said about broadband telecommunications. Will he assure the House that everything is being done to expedite the assessment of all potential inward investment projects, including those that involve some local endeavour and initiative?

Sir Reg Empey: Yes.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I thank the Minister for being brief.

HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question two, in the name of Mr Beggs, and question 15, in the name of Mr Maskey, have been transferred to the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Minister of Education respectively. Those questions will receive a written reply.

Further Education Establishment (Larne)

1. **Mr O'Connor** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to outline his plans for the provision of a new further education establishment in the Larne Borough Council area.

(AQO 1368/00)

The Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Dr Farren): The East Antrim Institute of Further and Higher Education has been given approval for a new building on the existing Larne site. It will be financed from the proceeds of the sale of part of that site. The sale of the land has been formally approved, and the institute has appointed a commercial estate agent to examine the sale options.

Mr O'Connor: I welcome the Minister's statement. Can he give Members an assurance that his Department will foot the bill for any extra costs if the sale of the site does not raise enough money to cover the cost of the new building?

Dr Farren: The further education capital budget allocation is fully committed, and there are no central resources available to the institute for the development. Any alternative proposal from the institute that requires financial assistance will be considered in the light of available resources and other capital priorities in the

further education sector. It is imperative to pursue the prospects for the commercial sale of part of the site.

Mr Beggs: Does the Minister agree that Larne Borough Council is disadvantaged by the lack of a permanent further education college, and that East Antrim is the only constituency in Northern Ireland without a permanent further education college? Will he allow any surplus funds raised by the sale of the site to be reallocated in East Antrim in order to address that disadvantage?

Dr Farren: I do not concede that East Antrim is disadvantaged in the way that the Member suggested. The East Antrim Institute of Further and Higher Education at Newtownabbey provides a wide range of courses and attracts large numbers of students from throughout the East Antrim area and beyond. I am satisfied that the main further education needs are currently being addressed. However, I am conscious that there are special needs that could be more effectively addressed by the provision of some further education courses in Larne itself. That is why provision has been made for a new building for the East Antrim Institute of Further and Higher Education on that site.

Mr Neeson: Like Mr O'Connor, I wanted a stronger commitment from the Minister. Will the Minister assure the House that as wide a range of courses as possible will be made available in the new facility?

Dr Farren: My previous answers have given that assurance. I have met with a delegation from Larne Borough Council; I have visited the East Antrim Institute of Further and Higher Education, and I am fully aware of what is needed. Current plans are tailored to address those needs so that we can have the most effective range of further education provisions now and for the future.

Further Education Colleges

3. **Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to give his assessment of the consistency, within the 17 colleges of further education, in their delivery of an educational programme to prepare young people for work.

(AQO 1395/00)

Dr Farren: The Education and Training Inspectorate reports regularly to me on the overall provision in all 17 colleges of further and higher education, and on specific aspects of the colleges' course arrangements. The inspectorate's reports clearly indicate a quality of provision that is usually at least satisfactory and often good or better.

Mr Shannon: The Minister will be aware that colleges of further education have a degree of autonomy on their boards of governors. Is the Minister satisfied that effective liaison arrangements involving all 17 colleges across the Province are in place and that they are in a position to deliver a cohesive joined-up skills programme to meet

the demands of the labour market? For example, if someone undertakes a training course in Londonderry, is he or she qualified for a job in Belfast?

Dr Farren: I can assure all Members that effective liaison arrangements exist between my Department and all the colleges. I am currently undertaking a round of visits to each college in turn, an exercise which I expect to complete by the end of the academic year. In the colleges I have visited so far I have had the opportunity to listen to their plans and concerns, and I hope to have the same opportunity in those colleges I have yet to visit. I am impressed by the level of commitment and enterprise in our further education colleges. I am also impressed by the manner in which the colleges, in conjunction with my Department, the university sector and the world of business, are conscientiously addressing the question of skills needs to ensure that we have a labour force that is highly educated and well trained to meet those needs.

Mr Armstrong: Can the Minister tell me what, if any, links exist between representatives of further education colleges and local industrial bodies to enable the formation of special industry-related education programmes?

Dr Farren: In order to examine the question precisely, we must look at individual colleges to see how they are responding to needs in their own localities. All the colleges are engaged with local business representatives to ensure that the expertise, skills and facilities are made available to local businesses for training purposes. Many colleges have responded to requests from businesses to meet particular training requirements with customised programmes.

Careers Guidance Review

4. **Mrs Carson** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to give his assessment of the recently completed review of careers guidance.

(AQO 1402/00)

Dr Farren: My Department and the Department of Education commissioned the review of careers education and guidance. The working group's report is a useful first step towards meeting 'Strategy 2010' recommendations on enhancing the current system of careers guidance. That report is now under active consideration in my Department.

Mrs Carson: In the Republic of Ireland, reportedly, there is one staff member per 500 students. How many careers guidance staff are there in higher education in Northern Ireland?

Dr Farren: I would need to be given advance notice in order to answer the Member's question on the number of careers guidance staff in higher education. The report recommends that I should visit more job centres and colleges of further education. The issue of careers education

and guidance is frequently raised with me. The report is under active consideration and will be progressed by my Department and the Department of Education. Decisions will be made on the basis of the report's recommendations. The matter is receiving urgent attention.

Student Finance

5. **Mrs Nelis** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to outline how he intends to evaluate the impact of the recently announced student financial package, in terms of access, skills upgrading and student poverty. (AQO 1369/00)

8. **Mr Gallagher** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment if the changes he is proposing for student finance, and in particular the introduction of non-repayable bursaries, will be available to existing students as well as to new students. (AQO 1389/00)

11. **Ms Lewsley** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail how long the equality consultation on his student finance review is due to take and if it will impact on those elements of the package due to be introduced this September. (AQO 1386/00)

Dr Farren: Mr Speaker, with your permission, I will take questions 5, 8 and 11 together, as they relate to the same subject.

The process of the evaluation of the student support proposals is currently under consideration. The administrative and legislative details of those proposals are also still being considered. However, I intend to introduce the bursary element in higher education for existing and new students. The closing date for comments on the equality consultation is 15 June 2001. I cannot predict the outcome of that process, but I hope that it will not adversely affect the timing of my proposals.

Mrs Nelis: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's response. Although this question may be somewhat premature, will the Minister, as a result of such an evaluation, consider those areas in which capping has curtailed potential student enrolment and where an economic need exists for skills upgrading to alleviate long-term unemployment?

Dr Farren: I am not sure that I fully took in all of the issues that the Member raised. I assume the question relates to the increase in places that is contained in the proposals. If so, the allocation of additional places will certainly take into account the skills needs and the areas of qualification that we need to enhance the enrolment numbers. I wish to address that issue together with the higher education institutions to see exactly where those places may be allocated.

Mr Gallagher: What is the total funding that the Minister's Department will make available for the introduction of the new maintenance grants scheme? How many students does the Minister expect to qualify for the maintenance grants?

Dr Farren: The current estimate is that in one year around £21 million will be required to meet the applications for access bursaries. It is anticipated that one third of full-time students in higher education — approximately 14,000 — will be eligible for those bursaries. Approximately 3,000 equivalent bursaries will be made available in further and higher education colleges.

Ms Lewsley: The most important outcome of the Minister's review is that more students than ever before will have the chance to access third-level education. How can the Minister assure the House that students from previously under-represented groups will be encouraged to take up that opportunity to access third-level education?

Dr Farren: The question points at one of the key objectives of the new student financial support arrangements — to increase representation of those in hitherto under-represented groups, particularly those with lower incomes. Together with the representatives of the students' organisations, schools and universities themselves, my Department will be putting together a programme to inform pupils of the possibilities in further and higher education. The Department will be in a position to provide information as to how best to manage financial affairs.

I also draw the House's attention to the current initiatives in which both our local universities are involved, aimed at reaching out to pupils in schools with a small enrolment and familiarising them with what is available in further and higher education. We shall work with the Educational Guidance Service for Adults on parallel initiatives to inform adults who have not had the opportunity to enter further and higher education about their future prospects.

3.15 pm

Third-Level Education (West Tyrone)

6. **Mr Gibson** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail (a) his plans to make third level education available in West Tyrone and (b) the start date for the new college in Omagh. (AQO 1373/00)

Dr Farren: Omagh College of Further and Higher Education already delivers third-level education in West Tyrone, offering a range of part-time higher education courses. The outline business case for the Tyrone College's project, which encompasses new college buildings for Omagh and east Tyrone, was presented to my Department on 7 March 2001. Departmental officials are assessing the business case, and approval to proceed to the private

finance initiative procurement will be given if the assessment is positive. I trust that it will be.

Mr Gibson: When will opportunities to work in all the faculties of third-level educational institutions be available to those of my constituents who are in full-time and part-time employment? What efforts are being made to use information technology more widely as a means of communication, rather than having students or part-time workers travelling long distances to university campuses?

Dr Farren: The question refers to all faculties. Neither of our universities provides courses in all the possible faculties of a third-level educational institution. Some students are obliged to pursue their studies outside Northern Ireland, because their courses are not available here.

It is doubtful whether all the disciplines that can be pursued at higher education level will ever be available in our universities or colleges. However, we are working to widen the provision of higher education courses in Northern Ireland. The provision of higher education in Tyrone is under consideration. Online course delivery is now part of the planning of most courses at all levels of education. The issues that the Member raised are central to forward planning in my Department.

Mr Byrne: I welcome the Minister's comments about the new college in Omagh. Will the provision of foundation degrees be considered? Full-time higher education is important to a town such as Omagh, which has a population of 25,000.

Dr Farren: I have approved several foundation degree pilot programmes that will be introduced in the next academic year. These will be in areas of high-skill demand, including telecommunications, software development and engineering and computing technologies.

One of the pilots currently in development involves Queen's University in partnership with Omagh College of Further and Higher Education, British Telecom and the BBC to deliver a foundation degree in web technology at the Omagh College campus. This foundation degree will provide students in west Tyrone with modern, relevant and very marketable skills and is seen as a significant potential contributor to the economic regeneration of the area. I know that the college is looking forward very enthusiastically to the introduction of this course, and I recently met with representatives of the college and Queen's University to hear where preparations are at the present.

East Down Institute of Further and Higher Education

7. **Mr McGrady** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail when capital expenditure will be provided for the construction of the new East Down Institute of Further

and Higher Education in Downpatrick and to make a statement. (AQO 1367/00)

Dr Farren: The preferred option in the economic appraisal for a new college on the existing site has been cleared as the solution which offers best value for money in the case of the East Down Institute of Further and Higher Education in Downpatrick. It will be the subject of a private finance initiative test when capital resources can be made available, but unfortunately, at the present time, no funding commitment can be given.

Mr McGrady: I thank the Minister for his reply. He will know that there have been plans, discussions and representations about this education establishment since 1997. The building is old and decrepit. He will also know that the East Down Institute serves a very large area — the whole of the east Down peninsula as well as the southern part of Ards. It is important that finance be made available. I am most disappointed that it will probably be dependent on a private finance initiative, which will delay this for another couple of years.

Dr Farren: I am disappointed that we cannot meet all the pressing needs in the development of the estate in the further education sector. I have put the development of modern facilities and the provision of new replacement estate at the top of the agenda. All these matters become subject, eventually, to the provision of resources. The case for the East Down Institute is one that I fully appreciate. I am aware of the difficult circumstances in which members of staff have to work. I can assure them that I am pressing ahead, insofar as we can at this point, with all the plans.

As the basis for procurement, private finance initiative, rather than delaying, is a means by which we can expedite provision. The situation in County Tyrone, in both Dungannon and Omagh, and, indeed, elsewhere where we have had recourse to private finance initiative procurement, only bears out the point that we will have estate renewed and replaced at those locations earlier than might otherwise have been possible.

New Technologies Training

9. **Mr M Murphy** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to outline what measures are in place for training for new technologies such as computer-based production for commercial and green technologies. (AQO 1404/00)

Dr Farren: There has been a significant growth in the number of university and further education places in all computer-related areas which address issues concerning the emerging technologies. In addition, my Department supports a range of vocational courses, particularly in manufacturing, which contain elements that relate to computer-based manufacturing and environmental issues.

Mr M Murphy: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for his answer. Can he tell the Assembly what discussions he has had with the industry, and, in particular, with those pioneering in green technology, to determine their training requirements? What training courses is he hoping to make available so that we can benefit from potential growth in this area?

Dr Farren: I assure the Member that I am having regular discussions with a wide range of representatives from business sectors encompassing virtually all, if not all, our industries. This morning, I had a wide-ranging discussion with representatives of our universities and business sectors on the provision of foundation degrees. The Member will appreciate that the areas in which foundation degrees will be delivered during the first two-year pilot phase are those where there is growth potential in our industrial sector. Regular contact is, therefore, underway, and we receive a wide range of advice as to the areas on which we need to focus. We respond to that advice where it is possible, and where we feel that it is appropriate to do so.

Employability Taskforce

10. **Mr McMenamin** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail the progress made with the work of the taskforce on employability and long-term unemployment.

(AQO 1394/00)

Dr Farren: Two meetings of the taskforce on employability and long-term unemployment have taken place. The terms of reference and a definition of employability have been agreed. I intend to publish a scoping study on employability, and the taskforce will also engage with a broad range of non-governmental organisations with an interest in that issue. The taskforce is cross-departmental in its composition, with representation from the Equality Commission.

Mr McMenamin: What are the terms of reference for the taskforce, and when does the Minister expect an outcome from the group?

Dr Farren: The taskforce is to report its recommendations by spring 2002, by which time it is hoped that the implementation of those adopted will begin. The first term of reference is to analyse the factors which make individuals and groups employable and the obstacles faced by the economically inactive, — especially the long-term unemployed — including the different experiences of the unemployed on a community and geographic basis. The second is to engage with others who have a close interest in employability and long-term unemployment to seek their views on how obstacles to both might be overcome. The third is to report and make recommendations on how current actions might be improved, including any new initiatives which might be

undertaken by Government Departments in Northern Ireland and by others outside of Government.

Adult Literacy and Numeracy

12. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail what progress has been made by the Basic Skills Unit in tackling the issue of adult literacy and numeracy.

(AQO 1388/00)

Dr Farren: The Basic Skills Unit under the direction of the basic skills committee has advised the Department on areas of basic skills strategy and policy development. The Department is now studying this advice, and together with the basic skills strategy completed by the Department for Education and Employment, it will assist my Department in formulating a Northern Ireland strategy.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Minister for his continuing interest in this field. Given that the bottom 20% of those with low literacy and numeracy levels are now a vital part of the workforce, does the Minister agree that the task of this unit is more important than ever?

Dr Farren: As Mr Dallat will recall, we have emphasised in the House and elsewhere the importance placed by my Department, and the Executive as a whole, on addressing the problems associated with inadequate levels of literacy and numeracy. This is also reflected in the Programme for Government. Almost 20% of employees manifest some literacy and numeracy deficit. This deficit is also a contributory factor in unemployment, particularly long-term unemployment.

It is an indictment of a modern society for it to be reported that some 25% of our adult population have less than basic literacy and numeracy skills. Therefore there is an urgency in addressing that problem.

3.30 pm

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 17, in the name of Ms Patricia Lewsley, has been withdrawn.

Social Housing

1. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline what steps he intends to take to ensure that there is sufficient land made available for social housing and to make a statement. (AQO 1413/00)

The Minister for Social Development (Mr Morrow): The social housing programme is not currently constrained by a shortage of land. In the last financial year housing associations started just over 1,100 new units, and the target for the current year is 1,200. The year 2001-02 has been overprogrammed to allow for slippage, but, despite

that, only six of the sites required for the gross programme have still to be identified. In subsequent years the number of sites still to be identified is higher, but at this early stage in the development process that is not unusual.

Mr Dallat: Does the Minister support the concept of allocating a percentage of development land for social housing where there is an established need, so that those people dependent on public authority housing are not disadvantaged by the unavailability of building land at affordable prices. Will he go further than that and encourage the integration of private and public housing?

Mr Morrow: I will take the last part of the question first. The integration of private and public housing is a very healthy option. It was first introduced many years ago when the Housing Executive took the policy decision of selling off homes to sitting tenants. That was the right road to go down, and I recall being, I think, the first councillor in what was then Dungannon District Council to propose that that was the right road to go down. It is good that private and social housing — where they can be interrelated and intermixed — go hand in hand. From that, many good things stem.

With regard to the first part of Mr Dallat's question, if he has an area in his constituency in mind, I am prepared to take a look at that and discuss it with him. I look forward to hearing more details from him.

Mr McCarthy: In Kircubbin there is land available, and there is a demand for social housing development. Will the Minister therefore encourage the Housing Executive and others to make an immediate planning application? Up until now that has been delayed, because there were insufficient sewerage facilities. That problem has been overcome, and I look forward to more social housing development in Kircubbin.

Mr Morrow: I will be proactive in trying to address housing needs in the social sector wherever they are — Kircubbin or elsewhere. It would not be right to go into speculative land purchase where there is no present urgent need, but if there is a present urgent need and the rest of the infrastructures such as water and sewerage are in place, then that is an area in which I will be proactive.

Mr Berry: What are the Minister's targets for new social house building over the next three years?

Mr Morrow: The current public expenditure assumptions and projections of private finance that housing associations will attract will enable a start to be made on approximately 1,200 units in each of the next three years.

Play Areas for Children

2. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister for Social Development if the Housing Executive will enter into partnership arrangements with local district councils and community groups to provide play areas for children. (AQO 1377/00)

Mr Morrow: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive already works closely with district councils and community groups in providing sites in Housing Executive estates for play areas and will continue to do so.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat. Gabhaim mo bhuíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra agus cuirim fáilte roimhe. Tá mé ag seasamh dár bpáistí uilig agus mé ag labhairt ar an ábhar seo.

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive has abandoned many play areas in housing estates throughout the Six Counties, and responsibility for the maintenance of the existing equipment and the installation of new apparatus has had to be undertaken by councils working with community groups. Will the Minister ensure that the Housing Executive displays greater interaction and input in order to develop safe and imaginative play areas?

Mr Morrow: Local district councils are responsible for play areas in housing estates. While the Housing Executive's primary responsibility is the provision of social housing, it also recognises the needs of its tenants and provides social facilities such as shops, community centres and play areas in many of its estates.

Ms Lewsley: Lisburn Borough Council has a good working relationship with the Housing Executive, and the council has a children's play strategy into which the Housing Executive had an input. A trust has now been set up whereby the Housing Executive, the local council, community groups and many statutory agencies have become involved. Will the Minister's Department consider this as a model of best practice, and will he urge his Department to support that?

In relation to the integration of different types of housing, especially for young children with disabilities, will the Minister take on board the issue that there should be facilities available for these children?

Mr Morrow: I can say an emphatic "yes" to that question. Whatever his or her circumstances, no child should be disadvantaged. If there is an area where we as a Department can be involved, we will be. However, I must return to my original answer that play areas are the responsibility of local district councils.

Mr Beggs: Will the Minister acknowledge that partnership arrangements can bring a sense of community ownership and subsequent respect for community-owned play areas? Is the Minister aware of successful play area partnerships that have been established in areas such as Newtownabbey, specifically in the New Mossley area? What steps has the Minister's Department taken to identify other sectors of need in order to assist areas such as Larne and Carrickfergus, where there is a relatively new and emergent community infrastructure, to make them aware that this is one method of improving the local community environment?

Mr Morrow: My Department and I are always looking at ways in which we can be innovative and create schemes whereby facilities such as children's play areas can be extended. The Member's comments are interesting, and I will come back to him on this matter.

Housing Associations: Monitoring

3. **Mr McGrady** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the steps he is taking to provide regulation and monitoring of Housing Associations by the Housing Executive in the forthcoming Housing Bill and to make a statement. (AQO 1366/00)

Mr Morrow: I have no plans to make provision in the forthcoming Housing Bill for regulation and monitoring of housing associations by the Housing Executive. Regulation and monitoring are the responsibility of my Department, and that has been the case since housing associations were required by law to be registered some 25 years ago. Over that time housing associations have grown, developed and taken on new responsibilities. I am entirely happy with my Department's role in supervising housing associations, and I see no point in change for change's sake. I see no reason to alter the present arrangements, which are working perfectly well. There is close co-operation between my Department and the Housing Executive to ensure that housing need is met, and that, of course, is my primary concern.

Mr McGrady: The Minister's assessment of his departmental relationship with the housing associations, and the relationship between the Housing Executive and the associations, is not shared by many. I have listened to his statement with some surprise and alarm. It was intended, from his predecessor's time, that the Housing Bill would include provision for the Housing Executive to have regulatory and overseeing facilities on the housing associations, whose work on the ground varies considerably in quality, cost effectiveness, management and, sometimes, allocations of tenancies. I urge the Minister to reconsider this position and — if the Bill is already drafted — to introduce amendments to bring forward what was a proven concept.

Mr Morrow: I know this subject is dear to Mr McGrady's heart, because he has raised it on a number of occasions. Nevertheless, the current system is effective and is supplying the need on the ground. I have listened carefully to what he has said, but I do not envisage any change in this matter in the new Housing Bill that will come before the House in the near future.

Mr Armstrong: Can the Minister tell the House how many houses were constructed under the direction of housing associations in the last three years? Can he also provide numbers of current active housing associations by constituency? Perhaps I am asking a wee bit too much.

Mr Morrow: The Member is asking for a fair wee bit. However, the answer that I gave to Mr Berry was

that housing associations would try to provide something in the region of 1,100 or 1,200 new units. I will get the exact figure for the Member and respond in writing.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that the supplementary question is supposed to be relevant to the oral question as stated on the Question Paper.

Housing Executive House Sales

4. **Mr McHugh** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail if there has been an increase in the backlog of Housing Executive house sale applications since processing has been changed from regional offices to a central processing office in Craigavon. (AQO 1416/00)

Mr Morrow: Since 1 April 2000, when responsibility for processing house sale applications was transferred from regional offices to a central processing office in Craigavon, the backlog of applications in the region has been reduced from 372 to 99. This refers to people waiting more than the target time of 10 weeks for an offer to be made to a prospective purchaser.

Mr McHugh: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. He will agree that any backlog will increase the amount of expenditure for those waiting, especially the house buyers who have some difficulty with other issues. I would have assumed that centralisation would have created some difficulty by isolating or distancing those in the Department trying to deal with difficulties in areas that they were not familiar with. Can the Minister tell buyers, or future buyers, that this will not happen, and that the new structure will work more efficiently than that which was in place?

Mr Morrow: The quick answer is that it is not anticipated that a backlog will reoccur. Work continued on processing applications, and the reorganisation of the office has provided the flexibility to deploy resources as required. I cannot say that there will never be a backlog. Nevertheless, I do not anticipate one, as I believe that the measures now in place are adequately dealing with the situation. One must bear in mind that it has reduced the number waiting from 372 to 99. That speaks for itself.

Income Support and Attendance Allowance

5. **Mr Gibson** asked the Minister for Social Development to confirm that the maximum a single unemployed person can obtain, combining income support and attendance allowance, is £75.59. (AQO 1375/00)

Mr Morrow: The amount of income support and attendance allowance that a customer is entitled to varies according to individual circumstances. I am unable to comment on individual cases without detailed inform-

ation. However, I will be happy to look into particular cases if the Member provides the appropriate details.

3.45 pm

Mr Gibson: Is the legislation that the Minister is using equality-tested against section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998? Although the figure given for the maximum amount that can be obtained by a single unemployed person is correct, a person who voluntarily ceases employment and chooses to look after an elderly parent will receive much less than the basic minimum wage.

Mr Morrow: Under the Department's equality scheme, we are committed to the screening of all social security policies as a prelude to the preparation of equality impact assessments in instances in which policies are perceived to have a differential impact on the categories referred to in section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

The Member feels that there may be inequality. It is difficult for me to comment without knowing all the details of the matter. If the Member will pass details of the case on to me, we will investigate it thoroughly.

Strabane 2000

6. **Mr Hussey** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the role of his officials in their advisory capacity to Strabane 2000. (AQO 1379/00)

Mr Morrow: My officials have provided general advice and information to Strabane 2000 on urban regeneration. That has included details of the Department's regeneration policies and advice on structural and organisational issues relating to the establishment and implementation of regeneration strategies.

Mr Hussey: I thank the Minister for his detailed reply. Projects such as Strabane 2000 need to be clearly non-party political and fully inclusive, embracing the whole community, as well as the statutory bodies, agencies and authorities. On that basis, I willingly lend my support to Strabane 2000, but I am dismayed, as, I am sure, is the Minister by an incident at a "Pride in Our Town" sub-committee meeting of Strabane 2000.

Mr Deputy Speaker: This is an opportunity to ask questions. The Member must come to his question, as this is not an opportunity for statements.

Mr Hussey: I am coming to the question as quickly as I can. At the meeting to which I refer — this is what I want the Minister to address — Cllr McNulty of Sinn Féin challenged the presence of two officers from Strabane RUC's community affairs team in a blatantly party political fashion, aided and abetted by the SDLP chairman, Cllr Eugene Mullen. The officers were excluded from the meeting. I hope that the Minister will investigate that disgraceful incident with Strabane 2000 and Strabane district command unit of the RUC. Will he also consider whether it is appropriate for officials from his Department

to maintain their advisory role in the absence of an apology to the two RUC community affairs officers concerned?

Mr Morrow: I have listened carefully to what Mr Hussey said. It is difficult for me to comment on a particular case, but I will have the matter investigated. I want to see what my Department's role is and what repercussions there might be from the incident. I shall get back to Mr Hussey on the matter.

Mr McMenamin: As a member of Strabane 2000, I express my disappointment that the incident occurred.

Strabane 2000 was set up to revitalise Strabane town centre, involving local elected representatives, the Chamber of Commerce and Government Departments. We also employed professional advisers to help redesign our town centre to make it environmentally friendly for residents and attractive to visitors. We are beginning to see the results. Will the Minister's Department do its utmost to promote Strabane?

Mr Morrow: We will. The Department has already committed some £15,000 towards the cost of consultants employed by Strabane 2000. It has earmarked £100,000 this year to assist with the redevelopment of two sites in the town centre. That demonstrates, in no uncertain terms, the Department's commitment to Strabane, and I hope it also reassures the Member.

Mr Carrick: With regard to the primary question as opposed to the supplementaries, have officials acted in a similar way and given similar advice to other groups in Northern Ireland?

Mr Morrow: Officials have given similar advice and guidance to other groups involved in urban regeneration.

Home Adaptations

7. **Mr Poots** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the current waiting time for occupational therapy reports for those needing adaptations carried out to their homes. (AQO 1382/00)

Mr Morrow: The occupational therapy service can receive referrals for adaptations to houses from sources other than the Housing Executive. The Housing Executive holds information only about cases where the initial approach has been to its district offices or grants offices. Of these, at the end of March 2001, there were 3,270 referrals comprising 1,063 from public-sector tenants and 2,207 from private-sector applicants. Some reports are returned in under four weeks, but the majority are received between five and 40 weeks, with about one third waiting more than 40 weeks.

Mr Poots: How does this compare to previous years? We as elected representatives often have to face people with serious illnesses who come to us complaining that they cannot get adaptations carried out in a reasonable

time. How can this list be reduced further so that people will not have to wait so long for necessary adaptations?

Mr Morrow: We are continually looking at this sort of situation, but from the date of referral until 31 March 2001, reports on 301 cases were provided in under four weeks; 576 reports were provided in between five and 12 weeks; 572 reports were provided in between 13 and 26 weeks; 479 reports were received in between 27 and 40 weeks; and 1,342 reports took more than 40 weeks. We are always endeavouring to reduce the time period, and we will be devoting our energies to that in the future as we have done in the past.

Dr Hendron: I know that the Minister will accept that there is a very close link between social development and health, social services and public safety, but will he accept that the problem is the shortage of occupational therapists across Northern Ireland? I know that the number of occupational therapists is to be increased by the Health Minister, but does he agree that many people, and especially the elderly, need only minor adjustments such as handrails to their homes?

While I have great respect for the profession and ability of occupational therapists, it does not require a professional person to say that an extra handrail is needed for the home of an elderly person in his 70s or 80s. I could give many other examples. It would be tremendous if the Minister could join with the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the two Departments could work together; there is a great deal of suffering across Northern Ireland.

Mr Morrow: My answer will be deemed long and convoluted, but it is important that it be given. A group comprising the Housing Executive and officials from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has examined and reported on ways in which the service can be improved. The report recommended the immediate establishment of a joint media group to develop and implement an action plan to deal with information issues, to devise a step-by-step guide with timescales and performance targets for the entire adaptations process and to agree priorities.

In addition, it was proposed to extend the list of minor works which did not require assessment by an occupational therapist and to introduce a simple screening tool to allow Housing Executive staff to assess requests for heating adaptations. Occupational therapists would thus be free to deal with more complex cases. On 1 March 2001 the Housing Executive began to process cases, estimated at 1,700, requesting heating adaptations. I hope that assures the Member that work is in progress to deal with the more minor things he mentioned.

Mr Close: Can the Minister advise if it is policy in the case of severely physically and mentally handicapped young persons that an occupational therapist's report cannot be acted upon until they have reached the age of

16? If so, does he not agree that this is bureaucracy gone mad? In many cases of which I am aware, the needs of the young persons are self-evident long before that age is reached. In the intervening period they are forced to live in conditions which are totally unacceptable in 2001.

Mr Morrow: I assume that the question is based on evidence which is already known, but that may not be the case. If the Member feels that someone in his constituency has suffered as a result of this, then I would like to hear from him. We can take a long hard look at the matter. If that is the case and it is borne out after investigation, then something should and will be done.

Rent Arrears and Antisocial Tenants

8. **Mr Shannon** asked the Minister for Social Development to give his assessment of the new scheme introduced last November to address rent arrears and anti-social tenants. (AQO 1396/00)

Mr Morrow: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive last year produced a detailed action plan to deal with both debt prevention and recovery. This included the introduction of a debt counselling service, more emphasis on repossession where debtors have the means to pay but refuse to do so and greater publicity about the action taken to recover debt. In the new common selection scheme introduced on 6 November 2000, there are disqualification criteria which permit a landlord to disqualify certain applicants from housing. For example, under the scheme the Housing Executive can disqualify an applicant who owes an amount equal to or greater than four times the full weekly rent and rates in relation to a previous tenancy and who has not made an agreement to repay.

Another example is where the Housing Executive is satisfied on reasonable grounds that in the last two years the applicant was guilty of serious antisocial behaviour.

I am satisfied that these measures will help to address some of the problems of rent arrears and antisocial behaviour. I am acutely aware, however, that the actions of a few tenants can be costly, both financially and with regard to the physical and social damage they inflict. I will therefore monitor the situation to determine if further action is needed.

Mr Shannon: The six months are just up. Can the Minister indicate the numbers of tenants with rent arrears in the period 1 November 2000 until 6 May 2001? The timescale might prevent the Minister from answering. Furthermore, can he indicate whether there has been a downward trend in the numbers of antisocial tenants? Does the Minister agree with all the Members that the antisocial behaviour of some tenants has become quite atrocious and is a scourge upon society, especially in the Housing Executive estates represented by many of us? I welcome the fact that the Minister will monitor the situation, but what action will be taken through that process?

Mr Morrow: I agree with the Member's saying that antisocial tenants who cause havoc in social housing developments are unacceptable. He asked if I believed it was on the downward trend, and the honest answer is that I do not. We will, however, check our statistics for figures relating to that matter, and I will have them passed on to him.

I also refer him to the fact that a new Housing Bill is being brought forward. That legislation will in parts deal specifically with antisocial behaviour. When that legislation has gone through the Assembly, we can refer to it to deal with the very things which concern the Member and all of us here.

4.00 pm

Housing Selection Process

9. **Mrs Courtney** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline how the new housing selection process will work. (AQO 1414/00)

Mr Morrow: Applicants are placed on a waiting list from which offers of tenancies of Housing Executive and housing association properties are made. Points are awarded to an applicant depending on certain factors such as current home conditions and security of tenure. As a general rule a tenancy is offered to the applicant with the highest points.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The time is up.

Mr B Hutchinson: On a point of order under Standing Order 19(2)(b), Mr Deputy Speaker. The Member for South Down, Mr McGrady, asked a question. Unfortunately I did not hear the end of what he said. However, I think that there was an inference in it, which is not allowed, about malpractice by the voluntary housing groups. The Minister should be given an opportunity to respond. Please read Hansard tomorrow and make a ruling on that, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Yes.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

NO CONFIDENCE IN MINISTER OF EDUCATION

Mr Speaker: Order. A valid petition of concern in respect of the motion of no confidence in the Minister of Education was tabled on Thursday 3 May. Having checked the petition, I regard it as fulfilling the requirements of Standing Order 27 with regard to the vote that is to take place at the conclusion of the debate today. Any vote on the motion will be on a cross-community basis. Members wishing to inspect the petition of concern may obtain copies from the Business Office.

Mr P Robinson: I beg to move

That this Assembly has no confidence in the Minister of Education, Mr Martin McGuinness MP.

I move the motion in the name of the Member for North Belfast, Nigel Dodds, and myself.

At about eight o'clock on the morning of Thursday 27 January 1972 a car with five police officers was travelling along Creggan Road towards Rosemount RUC station. One terrorist gunman standing in an alleyway opened fire on it. About 40 or 50 yards further down the road two other terrorists, one with a Thompson sub-machine gun, also opened fire on the vehicle. The car was hit about 17 times. As a result of that terrorist attack two police officers were murdered and another injured. One of the men who was brutally murdered came from your constituency and mine, Mr Speaker. He was David John Montgomery, a 20-year-old Protestant from Cregagh. Peter Gilgunn, a 26-year-old married Roman Catholic RUC sergeant with a six-month-old son from Belcoo in County Fermanagh was murdered with him.

The cowards who carried out the attack were following the orders of the then adjutant of the so-called Derry brigade of the Provisional IRA. That Londonderry terrorist group has long been regarded as one of the most murderous and evil, even by the blood-stained, loathsome standards of that organisation. It has been responsible for dozens of murders of innocent people.

Adjutant, of course, is not the entry level for terrorist recruits. Before a command is given, recruits have to earn their bloody spurs. This adjutant rose through the ranks, and, according to newspaper reports, he did so with speed and determination, plying his terror trade with ruthlessness and fury. Again, it was reported in newspapers that, as a trigger man, he was responsible for the death of over 12 soldiers. However, security sources would put the figure much higher than that.

He was an officer in the IRA in Londonderry when hundreds of killings were ordered, and it was only the

vigilance of the security forces, the ineptness of his own terrorist gunmen and bombers and the hand of God that reduced the tally.

He did not remain in this local command for long. He catapulted himself up the organisation structure, and eventually he became the terror group's chief of staff. He held that position from 1978 until 1982. During that period alone, the IRA, under his command, murdered 327 people, and he remains one of the seven members of the IRA's Army Council.

A document was sent to my home recently, and I read it out in the House of Commons. The document outlines the present Army Council membership of the IRA. It indicates that the chief of staff is Thomas Murphy, and the assistant chief is Brian Keenan. The other members are Martin McGuinness, Gerard Adams, Martin Ferris, Patrick Doherty and Brian Gillen. The headquarters staff are as follows: the quartermaster is Kevin Agnew; the adjutant general is Martin Lynch; Bernard Fox is in charge of the engineering department; the director of education is James Monaghan; the director of finances is Patrick Thompson; the operations officer is Sean Hughes; the director of intelligence is Robert Storey; and Patrick Murphy and Kevin McBride are in charge of internal security — although I suspect that they will have to get new jobs after this. These are the people in charge of the Provisional IRA today. That information is on the record at the House of Commons, and it is now on record in this House.

In the early days of the Assembly, I made a reference in the Chamber to IRA/Sinn Féin. The now Minister of Education rose on a series of points of order and objected to any relationship between the IRA and Sinn Féin's being mentioned. He demanded that you force me to withdraw the reference, Mr Speaker. Happily you did not. In the light of the facts that are now available, the public will look at those weasel words, and I hope that we will never again have the pretence that Sinn Féin and the IRA are anything other than synonymous. We should never again listen to the Minister of Education or his Colleagues dodge questions about the IRA by insisting that they do not speak for them.

According to that document, Mr McGuinness is a member of the Army Council of the IRA, which has sanctioned the murder of thousands of men, women and children in and outside Northern Ireland. Now, while still a member of the IRA's Army Council, Mr McGuinness is the Minister of Education with the responsibility for moulding the minds of thousands of young people.

Last Friday another murder occurred in Belfast. Patrick Daly, a 38-year-old father of four, was shot in front of his partner and 12-year-old daughter. Apparently, up to 10 bullets were pumped into him, and he was left lying dead on the street. Again, the security forces understand that the IRA is responsible. This assassination will have

been sanctioned by the IRA's Army Council. The Minister of Education combines his duties in this House with membership of an Army Council that makes decisions to murder human beings.

Last week Mr McGuinness admitted that he was a leader of the IRA in 1972. However, he did not tell us what his present position in that organisation is. He cannot build a convenient wall around one day in January 1972 and answer questions on his activities that day, while blocking out awkward questions about his role in the IRA before and afterwards. His action exemplifies the sheer double standards that he shares with his associates. They demand that the facts be unearthed about incidents that concern them, but he will refuse to give any details about his activity, and that of the IRA, in the periods before and after Bloody Sunday.

He says that he is giving evidence "to get to the truth of what happened on that day". However, he does not want to help anyone get to the truth of what happened at the hands of the IRA on all the other days. He demands to know the identity of soldiers involved in the city that day, but he will refuse to reveal the identities of his IRA colleagues who were in the city on that and other days.

He complained in the 'Belfast Telegraph' last Monday that the army is "trying to get away with murder". Surely that is a charge that could equally be made against him. He claims that he wants to give evidence so that he can help the families to come to terms with what has happened. However, he refuses to give evidence about his actions and the activities of his fellow travellers that would allow the families of thousands of IRA victims to come to terms with their loss and hardship.

Are Nationalists the only people entitled to inquiries? Are Unionist deaths and the deaths of members of the security forces less worthy of investigation? Are the families of Unionist victims and members of the security forces not entitled to the opportunity to ask questions and get answers about the circumstances of their loved ones' murder?

Mr Speaker, I demand an inquiry into the activities of the Provisional IRA in the north-west of our Province during the period when the Minister of Education was in command of that terrorist organisation. People have the right to know the full details, not the selective propaganda droplets offered by Mr McGuinness and the IRA. The Attorney-General may have provided some limited immunity from prosecution to witnesses appearing before the Saville Inquiry, but an admission made outside the inquiry, at a press conference, is not covered by that shield. Therefore, there is no bar to a prosecution of Mr McGuinness. His admission at the press conference is evidence that can be used in a court of law.

In the light of the lengths that nations go to in order to ensure that those responsible for war crimes are tracked down and brought to justice, the victims of IRA

atrocities demand action. The heinous crimes carried out by the IRA over the last 30 years rank alongside the worst of those brought before war crimes tribunals. In neither case should position or expediency protect those responsible for such grotesque murders. However, the Minister of Education has enjoyed protection from prosecution in Northern Ireland for many years. While the evidence piled up against him, the Establishment wanted him to stay out of prison, as they were negotiating a deal to buy off the IRA through him.

That is in spite of evidence from people such as Rose Hegarty, the mother of Frank Hegarty. Mr McGuinness lured her son back from England, gave her repeated assurances of her son's safety and informed her that while her son would have to attend a meeting across the border, "nothing would happen to Frank". Mr McGuinness even told her that he would bring him home himself. Frank Hegarty never returned home alive. He was shot and his body dumped by the roadside. The families of all those who are the victims of the IRA, under the leadership that Mr McGuinness now admits, should now take action against him in the courts.

His statement and our motion drew different responses, and I want briefly to deal with some of them. Sinn Féin/IRA's response to this motion was to describe it as a DUP pre-election stunt. Yet the timing was Sinn Féin/IRA's, not ours. They determined when and how Mr McGuinness made his public statement. We simply reacted to that statement. If it is an election stunt, it is Sinn Féin/IRA's election stunt.

4.15 pm

There were several strands of reaction to the Minister of Education's statement. First, there were those who welcomed what they described as "the Minister's open and frank confession". The truth is that it was not a confession, it was a boast. He wears his IRA leadership as a badge of honour. He gloats over his association with that terrorist organisation. He has not come clean. He is only providing a snippet to suit his propaganda purposes and aid the IRA's attempt at revisionism.

IRA demands for inquiries are not an attempt to find the facts; they are an attempt to rewrite history and justify its campaign of murder and destruction. There was no glimpse of repentance in Mr McGuinness's statement. It was not accompanied by an apology — indeed, it did not even refer to the crimes that he might have committed in that organisation, nor did it list them. Critically, there was no commitment to leave behind his association with that terrorist organisation. His statement was entirely self-serving and cynical.

Secondly, there were those who considered that there was nothing new in the Education Minister's admitting holding a leadership role in the IRA. I will leave the difference between an allegation and an admission to the side, as I do not want to rest my case on that distinction.

I have long known of Mr McGuinness's position in the IRA and the activities in which he was engaged. I know of his continuing role in that organisation, and of the IRA's unbroken terrorist activity.

With that knowledge, I opposed, at the time of the referendum and ever since, any role for Mr McGuinness or his unrepentant associates in the Government of Northern Ireland. No one by their vote would put in to Government someone in whom they had no confidence. No one would set up a Government in which it was an obligation to provide places for people they considered completely unfit to hold office. On that basis I must conclude that the Ulster Unionist Party either knew about Mr McGuinness's IRA association but considered that in spite of his record and previous relationship with the IRA, he and his Sinn Féin/IRA colleagues were suitable candidates for ministerial office and had confidence in them — except, it seems, at election times — or that the Members on the UUP Benches did not know, or were uncertain, of the nature and extent of the relationship that Sinn Féin has with terrorism.

It may be hard to understand, but if there is a change of heart, here is an opportunity to vote accordingly. We all face the question —

Mr Speaker: I must ask the Member to bring his remarks to a close.

Mr P Robinson: Is our society going to turn a blind eye to the activities of the "Bogside butcher"? Are we going to continue with this unseemly and immoral sham? This House can decide whether it has confidence in Mr McGuinness — I do not.

Mr Kennedy: This is a very important debate. How much time has been allocated to each Member?

Mr Speaker: It has been agreed through the usual channels that the proposer will have 15 minutes, the person winding-up will have 10 minutes, the response from the Minister, either by himself or on his behalf, will be 20 minutes, and all others will have five minutes.

Mr Kennedy: Then I must hasten on.

It is clear that events have, in their own way, overrun this motion. The actions outlined by my party Colleague and leader, the First Minister, in the House this morning clearly create new circumstances for this motion. It is very clear to the people of Northern Ireland and the Members of this House that a timetable is in place whereby the Republican movement must live up to its obligation or face the consequences.

Through the many changes and political shenanigans of recent years, the Ulster Unionist Party has attempted to bring political stability to Northern Ireland and its people. The people of Northern Ireland, by and large, recognise those efforts. They understand the risks and appreciate what the Ulster Unionist Party has sought to achieve in all of this. We have given opportunities for

those from paramilitary groups to mend their ways, to change and to effect change. It is a matter of grave regret that they have not responded to those challenges.

It is a matter of huge regret that SDLP members have not lived up to their obligations over many months and years. They have not wanted to carry any burden for the agreement or for the political process. They have simply attempted to get a free ride on the back of the Ulster Unionist Party. This morning's events will clearly put the SDLP in the position of having to make its mind up. The indication by the SDLP that it will not be supporting the motion means, in real terms, that the motion is doomed to failure. Much could be said about that, but I must say to the SDLP that time is fast running out. The party must, therefore, take its stand, and we look forward to that.

I have, as Members will know, opposed the Republican movement inside and outside the House. I have attempted to do that in practical, political ways, as have my party Colleagues. We will continue to do so.

I want now to deal with the status of the current Minister of Education. We remember the reaction, in particular in the Unionist community, when that appointment was made. The political parties made that appointment. It was their choice, and people did not know who that individual would be. Nevertheless, it did cause major shock waves in the Unionist community.

Martin McGuinness's membership of the IRA is probably the worst-kept secret in the history of Northern Ireland. Everybody knew; the dogs in the street — to use that phrase — knew. It has been well documented and known. The question that has to be put to the Minister of Education — and I pose it now — is whether he is still a member of the IRA. He will have the opportunity to answer that in specific terms in the debate today.

Anybody can be a Minister in the Assembly, given the amount of officials in place and the help that exists. It is also important to say that the doctrines of the main Christian faiths, in Northern Ireland and elsewhere, depend on forgiveness — but forgiveness comes after repentance. It is clear that the Minister of Education has not repented. Therefore the Ulster Unionist Party can have no confidence in the Minister of Education. The motion cannot and will not change his status, and the Ulster Unionist Party will pursue its own strategic aims to ensure that proper democracy is restored to the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr P Doherty: A Cheann Comhairle, go raibh maith agat. The DUP in its motion is calling for the exclusion of the Education Minister. On many previous occasions, the DUP has called for the banning of Sinn Féin on the grounds that it believes that our party supports violence.

Let us have a look at the DUP's own record and its own history. Let us go back to the same period — *[Interruption]*

Are members of the DUP afraid of their own history, of their violent past and sectarian background?

As long ago as 1969, before the founding of the DUP, the Cameron report was highly critical of Ian Paisley. The report stated

"In the face of the mass of evidence from both police and civilian sources as to the extent to which the supporters of Dr Paisley and Major Bunting were armed at Armagh and on the occasion of the People's Democracy march to Londonderry, it is idle to pretend that these were peacefully directed protest meetings."

Cameron concluded

"Both these gentlemen and the organisations with which they are so closely and authoritatively concerned must, in our opinion, bear a heavy share of direct responsibility for the disorders in Armagh and at Burntollet Bridge."

That is the view shared by almost all Northern Nationalists. Other Unionists often blame Paisley and his associates for stopping the demand to concede civil rights and stopping the progress of Unionism within the Six Counties.

Since the DUP was founded two decades ago, it has marched with the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and the Ulster Defence Association (UDA); it has organised a series of strikes in conjunction with Loyalist paramilitaries; it has helped establish Ulster Resistance; it has taken over towns in conjunction with armed and masked Loyalists and it has supported the procurement of weapons by Loyalists. We understand that the DUP stands for bigotry and sectarianism. Which part of the word "hypocrisy" does it not understand? It has always supported the use of violence, as long as it is directed at Republicans and Nationalists, and it has always been prepared to threaten violence to advance its own narrow political agenda. It has openly colluded with Loyalism and incited violence against Nationalists for nearly 30 years, and it has consistently indulged in anti-Nationalist and anti-Catholic diatribes.

I will list the organisations with which the DUP has been associated: the National Union of Protestants and the Ulster Protestant Action Group, part of whose manifesto says:

"To keep Protestant and loyal workers in employment, in times of recession, in preference to their Catholic fellow workers"

Mr P Robinson: Mr Speaker, is there an alternative agenda of which we have not been made aware? The motion on the Order Paper is a motion of no confidence in the Minister of Education. We are almost four minutes into Mr Doherty's speech, and no reference has been made to any of the issues contained in the motion. It might be useful if he touched on it once or twice.

Mr Speaker: The Member will have heard that heartfelt plea.

This is a motion of no confidence; it is not an exclusion motion, which is a different kind of motion. The Member started his speech by talking about this as being an exclusion motion.

Mr P Doherty: Peter Robinson does not like to hear his past record made public.

It has been involved with other associations: Protestant Unionists, the Ulster Constitution Defence Committee, the Ulster Protestant Volunteers, the Ulster Workers' Council, the United Unionist Action Council, Vanguard, the Independent Unionist Group, the Orange Order, the Apprentice Boys of Derry, the UDA, the UVF and the Red Hand Commandos.

A Member: The Boy Scouts.

Mr P Doherty: You probably attempted to corrupt the Boy Scouts as well.

Ian Paisley was elected MP for North Antrim in the seventies. That August he was calling for the rearming of the RUC, the reintroduction of the B-Specials and internment against Nationalists. He was pictured marching with masked Loyalist paramilitaries during the Ulster Workers' Council strike in May 1974. In 1975, William McCrea officiated at the funeral of a UVF man who was killed blowing up the Miami showband. In 1976 Clifford Smyth stated that when he was secretary of the United Ulster Unionist Council, Peter Robinson approached him in June of that year with a suggestion that that party should set up a paramilitary wing. A senior UDA figure also stated that they were approached—[Interruption]

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

4.30 pm

Mr Ford: Sinn Féin's attitude to the fact that this debate is taking place today seems to be a little surprising. As Mr Peter Robinson said, the entire issue was started off by Sinn Féin spin-doctors drip – feeding Mr McGuinness's role in Bloody Sunday to the press. He subsequently made a statement to the Saville inquiry, and then made a statement publicly. However, Sinn Féin Members are saying that we should not be allowed to discuss such an issue in the Chamber. It seems to be acceptable to have it in the papers at their whim, but not to have it discussed in the Assembly.

Last week, I was surprised to find that within an hour of the Business Committee meeting's ending, three journalists rang me up asking not how I voted, but why I voted the way I did. I understood that Business Committee meetings were confidential.

Let me make it quite clear that I believe that my role in the Business Committee is to help form an Order Paper which contains business that is relevant for the Assembly. I find it difficult to suggest that an issue of this level of concern is not one that the Assembly ought to debate. If the activities of Mr McGuinness can be

discussed on buses, in bars and over teacups, they should surely be suitable for discussion here. It appears that we have, in Sinn Féin, a desire for a type of Stalinist state in which all criticism of Ministers is banned. That is not my idea of an inclusive system of government. I voted to list the motion, because it is important enough that it should be discussed.

Let us look at the motion. On the face of it, the motion is one of no confidence in a Minister. That is what anybody might have believed until they heard the proposer start to speak. Actually, there was nothing in the debate that referred to the activities of a Minister. It was entirely an attack on an individual and on an individual's past record. It is nothing to do with his role as a Minister, which is surely the only way in which a motion of no confidence in a Minister could have been competently proposed. Indeed, I suggest that as regards his performance as a Minister so far, Mr McGuinness is by no means the worst we have seen in this place, either in its current incarnation or in its previous ones in this Building. Of course, that was not the point of the debate.

Nobody should be in any doubt about where my party stands on the issue of political violence. Nobody should be in any doubt that we have been opposed to paramilitary violence from the day of our party's formation. It is absolutely clear that there are plenty of people in the Chamber who will point the finger at Republican violence and conveniently forget their own records and those of their Colleagues over the years.

I do not wish to go through the same list that Mr Pat Doherty produced, but it seems to me that the threats that accompanied the Ulster Worker's Council (UWC) strike, the Third Force and the dog licences up Slemish mountain are not unconnected with the prospect of political violence. Indeed, it seems to me that the word "hypocrisy" might just possibly be suggested in respect of the behaviour of some people in pointing fingers and ignoring records amongst their friends.

Assembly Members are well aware of what the agreement provided as regards how the institutions would be set up. Some people did not like it, but the great majority of us accepted that the new institutions were being set up to be inclusive; people accepted that and backed us in a referendum; they wanted a new start.

Today we have seen behaviour that is typical of the DUP. They want to attack, to complain and to criticise. Some of it is directed at Sinn Féin, but their real target remains the Ulster Unionist Party. Whether the timing was theirs, this has certainly come very conveniently as an election stunt for them. Indeed, the UUP leader's response earlier today shows that, perhaps, he now feels the need to outdo the DUP. Mr Kennedy almost admitted that.

I ought to warn the DUP about the dangers of their approach. They want to wound the UUP and the

agreement, but they clearly do not want to bring it down. They love this place too much; they want a working Assembly, and they believe in devolution. If they provoke the kind of reactions that they got from the UUP leader's statement earlier, they might find that he and his party Colleagues will bring down the agreement and destroy the Assembly that they actually love.

Let us remember that the UUP have the capacity to destroy the agreement, which the DUP clearly do not. Sadly, it appears that the DUP's antics in bringing the motion have been matched by the UUP. The DUP muck-slinging about Sinn Féin has already been replicated by Sinn Féin's muck-slinging about the DUP. The people who returned us to this place on a wave of optimism three years ago deserve rather better than the debate has proved. The motion should be rejected.

Mr Boyd: I support this motion of no confidence in Martin McGuinness. This is a very solemn matter. The pro-Union community is completely opposed to an Executive that includes in it the architects of the Republican terrorism that has been directed against us for 30 years while the IRA retains its arsenal and its structures for use at its discretion. Such a situation is totally unacceptable.

Martin McGuinness and his colleagues in Sinn Féin/IRA do not share the common desire of ordinary people in Northern Ireland for stability. They are committed to a revolutionary principle. For Martin McGuinness, the Assembly is merely a transitional stage in that revolution, and whether that struggle is defined as armed or unarmed depends on the degree of violence that the Government are prepared to tolerate in the name of a so-called peace process. In the 'The Irish News' on 23 June 1986, Martin McGuinness, the Minister of Education, was quoted as saying:

"Freedom can only be gained at the point of an IRA rifle and I apologise to no one for saying that we support and admire the freedom fighters of the IRA".

After the Londonderry City Council elections on 16 May 1985, the so-called Minister of Education, Mr Martin McGuinness, also stated

"We don't believe that winning elections and winning any amount of votes will bring freedom to Ireland — at the end of the day it will be the cutting edge of the IRA that will bring freedom".

Let us examine the attitude of the SDLP. The SDLP is a party that throughout 30 years of terror has constantly condemned violence but has not hesitated to profit politically from it. This motion presents SDLP Members with a clear choice between supporting the democratic process and the integrity of the rule of law or endorsing Sinn Féin/IRA's participation in the Executive while retaining its terrorists' arsenal and structures. If SDLP Members support Martin McGuinness in Government, as they clearly do, they render themselves indistinguishable from Sinn Féin/IRA.

Martin McGuinness and his Sinn Féin cohorts tell us that they are interested in human rights, yet the instruments of torture in the IRA's armoury are many and varied. They include guns, explosives, baseball bats, golf clubs, nail-studded clubs, pickaxe handles, hammers, sledgehammers, hurley sticks, axes, hatchets, drills and many others things.

The pro-Union community rejects an Executive that includes the architects of terrorism such as Martin McGuinness, who has revelled in his IRA role. Such a situation is totally unacceptable.

I quote from 'The Informer' by Sean O'Callaghan, one of Sinn Féin/IRA's and Martin McGuinness's previous cohorts.

"The so-called Minister, Martin McGuinness, has been an active Republican since 1970. He was Chief of Staff of the IRA from 1977 to 1982. He has been a member of the IRA Army Council since 1976. He has held the position of OC Northern command".

In August 1993, Central Television's 'The Cook Report' named him as Britain's number one terrorist. That is the man who now holds the position of Minister of Education in our Executive.

The IRA Army Council chooses the chief of staff. It has two primary responsibilities: to ensure that the IRA has the equipment to wage war and that the organisation operates at maximum efficiency. According to the informer Sean O'Callaghan, no chief of staff in recent years has carried anything like the internal influence of Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness. The IRA Army Council sanctioned the Canary Wharf bomb. Right up to the present day, Adams and Martin McGuinness have been firmly in charge of the Republican movement.

The IRA has murdered over 2,000 people in the last 30 years. Its lethal murder machine has got Martin McGuinness and Barbara Brown into the Executive, and not the ballot box, as they try to dupe many people into believing. The clear message today is that the innocent victims of terrorism still suffer. Their agony and suffering is compounded by the presence of unrepentant terrorists such as Martin McGuinness in the Government of Northern Ireland. Martin McGuinness, who by his own admission was a commander in the Provisional IRA, has been part of an organisation that has presided over the murders of over 2,000 citizens in Northern Ireland for which no apology has ever been forthcoming.

The crisis in education funding is a direct result of the 30-year terrorist campaign by the provisional IRA. That organisation will continue to murder, maim and carry out its criminal activities while it remains fully armed and intact. I call on all Unionists here to reject Sinn Féin/IRA representatives in the Government. We have endured 30 years of violence and terror. If the Assembly sends out the message that violence pays, we shall be heading for the abyss. If this motion fails, the message from the Assembly will be that democracy has died in

Northern Ireland and that violence is rewarded with ministerial positions. I support the motion.

Dr Farren: I do not believe that the motion is directed against one individual Minister. At the heart of the motion lie issues directly related to the overall aims and objectives of the Good Friday Agreement and the intent to undermine that agreement. Over and above the detailed arrangements and commitments that it contained, the Good Friday Agreement, signed just three years ago, was a signal of a new start to be characterised by a determination that the only means by which disputes would be resolved would be through the democratic process of political dialogue based on the principle of consent.

The new start was also to be characterised by a spirit of reconciliation and of reaching out and trying to understand and respect each other as individuals and as members of their respective communities. To make that possible a new political partnership was to be forged between the communities, a partnership represented in the new political institutions by Unionists and Nationalists in the Executive and working together at Committee level.

As a member of the Executive I am proud and pleased, if somewhat disappointed, at the progress that we have made. I am pleased that the Executive have brought representatives of three parties, the SDLP, the Ulster Unionist Party and Sinn Féin, into a close and effective working relationship. I am proud of the Executive's record in the short time since it took office and proud that it has begun to demonstrate a capacity to leave historic differences aside and address the many social and economic challenges facing us.

The Executive's record on dealing with the current agriculture crisis is widely acknowledged to be positive and reassuring. Their record on primary, secondary and tertiary level education has also been seen as positive, and their record in economic development, health and in promoting the equality agenda and respect for cultural differences has begun to show what can be achieved when we work together.

I am also proud of the positive manner in which the Executive have been perceived and received by the wider community. Working with David Trimble and his Unionist colleagues is an exciting and challenging experience. It has not made me any less committed to the objectives of the SDLP, objectives that include working through agreement for the ultimate unity of the people of this island. All members of the Executive continue to hold to their ultimate objectives. I am sure that that is as true for Martin McGuinness and Bairbre de Brún as it is for my SDLP Colleagues and Members from the Ulster Unionist Party.

Some of my disappointment arises from the fact that the DUP Ministers have chosen not to join the Executive fully, although it should be appreciated that they are only half out. Both DUP Ministers correspond with the

rest of the Executive members individually and collectively. They seek our advice, comment and agreement on matters pertaining to their portfolios, as we do with them. They work with my SDLP colleagues and myself, with the Sinn Féin Ministers and with the Ulster Unionist Party Ministers and have, therefore, after a fashion, begun working the new arrangements. It is a pity that they do not more openly acknowledge that and do not fully embrace the responsibilities that they undertook when they took the Pledge of Office.

In the Executive I have found the Education Minister, Martin McGuinness, to be a very good Colleague who discharges his responsibilities in a satisfactory manner. With his area of responsibility very closely related to mine, it is essential that we work together. Consequently I have come to appreciate his commitment to making a positive difference to education services.

It is not only in the Executive that a new start is being made. This is also reflected in much of the work at Committee level, but above all the signals going out from the Chamber are being positively received in the communities, beyond our borders and beyond our shores.

The events of Bloody Sunday and Martin McGuinness's decision to appear before the Saville inquiry are the immediate cause for today's debate. I would like to think that Minister McGuinness, no less than anyone else, acknowledges that to the pain of Bloody Sunday can be added the pain caused by many other killings for which the organisation of which he is now acknowledged to have been a leader was responsible.

4.45 pm

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member's time is up.

Ms McWilliams: I quote from a recent publication from South Africa on truth and reconciliation

"It lies in people acknowledging, however haltingly, in whatever limited a way, at least something of what they did. Reconciliation means the nation, and the world, acknowledging that these terrible things happened."

Terrible things happened in Northern Ireland. As Maya Angelou, the wonderful black writer, said

"History cannot be un-lived, but if faced up to with at least some courage it need not be lived again."

Today we are discussing our desperate attempts not to repeat the events of the past. Mr Speaker, you coined a phrase during our peace negotiations:

"How often does the violence of the tongue lead to the violence of the gun?"

There is no monopoly of blame or shame in the Chamber. Different parties face each other, throwing boulders of blame and shame at a time when the people of Northern Ireland desperately need to hear a voice of confidence coming from the Assembly, instead of a voice of no confidence. Is that all we can serve them up?

Just jumping on people and attempting to put them out of office, or even to have people threatening to leave office will get us nowhere. We need to send a different message about the new contract, as Dr Farren stated. My party is one of the signatories to the Good Friday Agreement, and we developed a new contract — a new commitment that the past would not be repeated and that the future would bring us some stability. The Minister of Education has brought us stability through the reforms that he has put forward. It is on that basis that he should be judged today, because the no confidence motion relates to Mr McGuinness as a Minister. For many years, as a parent and as a citizen of Northern Ireland I have looked forward, and I will continue to look forward, to the reform of our education system. If there is anything that we should have no confidence in it is that dreadful, painful, shameful examination — the 11-plus — which we impose on our young children.

I also hear certain MPs and Members from across the Chamber throwing allegations about who is related to whom. I say to them that I stand on my own two feet and not on the basis of being related to anyone. Judge me by the politics of a cross-community coalition that is built on diversity and difference. Those are the politics I would like to see in Northern Ireland.

Yes, it is time to move on. It would be good to hear that the guns could be left as was written one day on the notice board of Stormont Presbyterian Church:

“Let them rust in peace”.

If we are to move on, then we could all start to build a little peace and begin with a little bit of confidence in the competence of Ministers carrying out their duties in the Assembly.

If I had any difference with the Minister of Education it was about the realpolitik of Northern Ireland — the differences I have had with him on private finance initiatives, where I have seen the sale of hockey pitches and public property. It is not about the confidence I have in him in trying to bring about a different way forward for education. I have confidence in the Minister of Education, and I will continue to do so.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr McCartney: At present, Johnny Adair, after being convicted in due process, is where he ought to be — in prison. Martin McGuinness is the self-confessed adjutant of the Derry brigade at a time when, in its murderous activity, it was responsible for the deaths of dozens of people and bombing the guts and heart out of Londonderry. He is the Minister for Education, responsible for shaping and moulding the future of our young people.

Over the last 30 years the IRA and its fellow-travellers have committed acts of indescribable brutality. They have caused the deaths of thousands of innocent people. Many of their most callous deeds have been perpetrated against

civilians. Kingsmill, Bloody Friday, Teebane, Enniskillen, Darkley, La Mon and the Shankill bombings bear witness to the violence of their conduct. Innumerable innocent individuals, from Pakistani caterers to teachers and bread servers, were all designated legitimate targets, and that was sufficient to justify their murder.

As the recent murders in Derry and Belfast illustrate, the IRA continues to reserve the right to be judge, jury and executioner while its masked thugs continue to beat, brutalise and intimidate. The same alleged freedom fighters have, since 1969, destroyed and damaged property worth billions of pounds. Their political legacy is the thousands of victims who live physically crippled or mentally impaired, and mothers, widows and orphans who are left with nothing but grief and ruined lives.

In a civilised society, which is governed, I hope, by the principles of democracy and subject to the rule of law, one might reasonably expect the perpetrators and their supporters to be treated as moral and political lepers. However, the reverse is proving to be the case. They are admitted to Government; they are placed in authority; they dictate the future of our children's education and the health of our young and old people. They are elevated to positions of authority.

Martin McGuinness has come a long way since, as a butcher boy and IRA second-in-command in Londonderry in 1972, he gave press interviews behind the lines in the Bogside. Now he gives interviews as the Minister responsible for shaping the education of Northern Ireland's children. As other Members have pointed out, he has scaled equally dizzy heights in those inextricably linked organisations, Sinn Féin and the IRA. However, for him and his party the goal of political legitimacy cannot emerge solely from the gun barrel. It remains to be fully achieved. In this regard the democrats of pan-Nationalism in the SDLP and the Alliance Party are those to whom the words of the book of Revelation might apply:

“Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth.”

They are assisting in giving these people a political legitimacy that no real democrat would entertain.

I see my friend, Dr Joe Hendron. He has some specific, personal experience of the activity of these democrats. Are they not ashamed? I believe that they are decent people and that they are essentially democrats. What are they doing? They are supporting and legitimising the activities of people who are not in the business of reconciliation. If they were, they would not retain the weaponry with which to threaten democrats in society at large. I have no hesitation in supporting this motion, because I am a democrat. I carry no baggage of a violent or sectarian nature. If it were Johnny Adair who was sitting in place of Martin McGuinness, my views would be exactly the same.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: People in this country are asking what has happened to democracy. On a programme this morning, a lady said that there are terrible arguments over the man who committed the Great Train Robbery. That lady asked what had happened in Northern Ireland. It has been suggested that Ronnie Biggs should serve the rest of his sentence, but in Northern Ireland those guilty of terrorist acts are in the Government of the country. What has happened to democracy?

I am happy to be at the receiving end of Sinn Féin's comments. Typically, it produced a document that was rejected by the majority of Unionist people — the Cameron report was mentioned by Mr Pat Doherty. That inquiry was not sworn, and its findings were riddled with untruths and lies and attacked by all sections of the community.

There was another inquiry — the Scarman inquiry. That was a different kettle of fish. Every man had to take an oath and be cross-examined. It is a pity that Mr Doherty did not read what the learned judge Mr Scarman said about me and the findings in that inquiry. He would have discovered that it was entirely different from the picture that he draws.

I am well known in this Province. I submit myself to the people, and they vote for me in larger numbers than for any other politician. I can stand to my mandate. I welcome attacks from those who have attacked better people than I. They did not attack them with their lips but with bullets and bombs.

A convicted terrorist and a self-confessed commander of the most bloodthirsty and murderous gang of the IRA, the Londonderry brigade, sits as the Minister of Education in this House. He tells us that the Saville inquiry needs him, for he alone can tell the truth. However, his credentials for truthfulness curry no favour with any right-thinking people, neither Protestant nor Nationalist. We know all about this man. We know his deeds and what he has said. He stands indicted by himself.

Today, the blood of innocents stains him. He has destroyed families by his direction of the Londonderry brigade of the IRA on its wicked, murderous ploys. He has destroyed families. He has destroyed the peace of men and women, boys and girls, fathers and mothers and sisters and brothers. That brigade butchered their loved ones in a most atrocious and bloody way.

There is a voice speaking today here — the voice of the bereaved, those whose loved ones were done to death by this bloody monster in Londonderry. They have a challenge to put to the House — “Let us now hear the real truth.”

The Minister told us that the Saville inquiry wants to cover up murders. However, evidently today he does not want to have his murders, or those who did them at his command, uncovered. The people of Ulster will speak in a few days, and they will give their answer to him and all of his ilk.

5.00 pm

Mr Weir: I have no confidence in the Education Minister, and I will follow the logical consequence of that position by voting in favour of this motion. Yet again we have a motion which, unfortunately, will be deemed to have failed, irrespective of the votes cast. That is because the SDLP is riding like the seventh cavalry to the rescue of its Colleagues across the Chamber; it does not matter what way the vote goes, as it will be deemed to have failed. As a Unionist, I would say how glad I am that we have power back in our own hands.

I agree with some Members opposite on one point only — that this debate should not be taking place today, because there should be no need for it. Sinn Féin/IRA, the PUP and the UDP are linked with paramilitary organisations that have not decommissioned or disbanded, and they should have no place in the Government of Northern Ireland. There should be no need for a vote of no confidence in Martin McGuinness, because he and his Colleagues should not be in Government in the first place.

We are also told that there is no need for this debate, because we should draw a line under the past. We are told that we are now in a new inclusive society in which we should forget about all past atrocities. It seems very strange to have that attitude when you marry it with the Republican commemorations of the twentieth anniversary of the hunger strike; when you see the vast fortune going into the Saville inquiry on one incident in the troubles; and when you see compensation for terrorists who were killed on active service. It seems that you should forget the past unless it is in the interests of Republicans, in which case the past is very much to be brought to the forefront.

We are told by Mr Ford that, so far, this has not dealt with the role of Martin McGuinness. However, the character, behaviour and background of any Minister are vital to his capacity to do the job. In the last 20 years some Ministers have been forced to resign their positions at Westminster. For people such as Cecil Parkinson or David Mellor it was because of personal indiscretions. In the case of Nicholas Ridley it was because of remarks made about a foreign country. In the case of our previous Secretary of State it was because of question marks over whether he had told the truth about the Hinduja brothers' passport application. Many of those resignations were justified on the basis of those Ministers' transgressions, but how much greater, therefore, is the need to remove a Minister whose organisation has been responsible for hundreds upon hundreds of murders?

The previous Member who spoke mentioned the return of Ronnie Biggs, who is rightly going back to prison. However, what would be the response if the Prime Minister were asked to include Ronnie Biggs in his Government? Perhaps Ronnie Biggs does not have

as much blood on his hands as the Minister opposite whom we are debating today. It would be akin to a previous Prime Minister putting the Kray twins in Government, if they were still alive. That would be the moral equivalent of putting Mr McGuinness and Ms Brown into the Government of Northern Ireland. No democratic system in the world would tolerate having people whose organisation has committed murder after murder involved in its Government. On television programmes about the Kray twins the excuse is occasionally used that at least they looked after their own. Whatever the dubious nature of that claim, it is one allegation which cannot be levelled at Sinn Féin/IRA or the Minister present.

If Sinn Féin/IRA look after their own, try telling that to Rose Hegarty, and try telling that to the hundreds of Catholics who were brutally murdered by the IRA, and you will see the type of background that the current Minister has. But it is not just a matter of the past; we need to look at the current situation. We have a terrorist organisation that is fully armed. A private army and a private police force are operating. People are subject to punishment beatings on a daily basis, and, on some occasions, they are killed.

There is a private army that still has not decommissioned even a single bullet. It is because of his current links, as has been said, that we have no confidence in this Minister. I urge everyone in this Chamber to strike a blow for democracy today and show that they have no confidence in Martin McGuinness as Minister of Education. I urge Members to support the motion.

Mr A McGuinness: Let us be clear. This is not a motion of no confidence in the Minister of Education, it is a motion of no confidence in the Good Friday Agreement. It is a proxy motion, put down by the DUP to undermine that agreement and this Assembly. It is a device of the DUP to distract attention from the achievements of the Good Friday Agreement in the face of the general election that was called today. This debate is, in short, part of the DUP's electoral strategy for the next four weeks.

This is not a motion of no confidence in the Minister of Education. It is a clear attack on the agreement. This debate cannot be about the Minister of Education's performance in office. He has performed without any serious criticisms such as might have led to the bringing of a motion of no confidence. I can think of no issue that could reasonably account for this motion's having been tabled today. I have listened very carefully to the contributions from the DUP Benches and from the DUP leader. I have heard no charge relating to the performance in office of the Minister of Education. No charge has been brought, and neither has any point of substance been raised in relation to the discharge of his duties as Minister of Education.

If the only substantive reason for this motion of no confidence is that he admitted in a preliminary submission

to the Bloody Sunday tribunal that he was in the IRA and that he intends to give oral evidence to that effect, that reason is insufficient. While such an open and direct public admission is rare for someone involved in paramilitarism, in this instance I have to say that it was hardly shocking or surprising. Apart from Mitchel McLaughlin, the whole of Derry and possibly the whole of Northern Ireland suspected or believed that Mr McGuinness was a member of the Provisional IRA. What is so incorrect about his admitting his membership to that tribunal?

It would have been worse had he failed to make a public statement to the tribunal so that it might get on with its task of determining the truth about Bloody Sunday. For the Minister of Education not to give evidence and not to make a candid admission would have been a serious omission. It would have been a breach of faith with the relatives and families of those who died that day, because it is they who have carried on a persistent search for the truth. Mr McGuinness's submission was a necessary duty, which he performed.

The search for truth about Bloody Sunday — and about the troubles generally — is a necessary part of the healing process which can contribute to the strengthening of peace in our society and bring about ultimate reconciliation between our two traditions. The process of finding truth about our tragic past will help to purge and ease the pain of the last 30 years. The Minister's contribution to the Bloody Sunday inquiry is a small part of that.

I oppose the motion.

Mr C Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The most bizarre dimension of this motion is that it has been proposed by former DUP Ministers. They themselves have singularly failed to earn the confidence of anyone outside their own backward-looking party.

Indeed, perhaps they failed to find confidence in their own party. It is an added irony that these two replaced Ministers apparently gave up their posts as part of a rotation policy, and yet the Ministers who replaced them have now been in position for almost twice as long. That can only lead to three possible conclusions. First, the Ministers were incompetent and had to be permanently replaced. Secondly, the party leader looked down the ranks and, seeing no more ministerial prospects there, decided that he must stick with the two people that he nominated. Thirdly, the policy is a hypocritical sham to mask full participation in the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement.

There is nothing original or surprising in DUP hypocrisy. The DUP is opposed to Sinn Féin and the SDLP in Government; it is opposed to the Good Friday Agreement and the peace process. The motion is supposedly about confidence in Martin McGuinness as the Minister of

Education. However it comes from a party that has failed and refused to reach out to its political opponents; it comes from a party that rejects the entire concept of reconciliation and peace making; it comes from a party whose only agenda is the destruction of the peace process.

In his role as Minister of Education, Martin McGuinness has attempted to reach out to everyone in our community. He has conducted himself with scrupulous impartiality at all times. Most importantly he has concentrated on doing his job, unlike his DUP colleagues whose primary focus remains the destruction of the peace process.

In his short time as Minister, Martin McGuinness has delivered real improvements to the education system. In two successive years under his leadership, we have seen the largest ever investment in the school building programme, amounting to a massive £200 million to build new schools for all of our children. He has instigated a fundamental review of the post-primary education system that will, I am confident, see an end to the iniquitous 11-plus. The ending of school performance tables was welcomed by everyone, except a tame and toothless Rottweiler on the DUP benches. Mr McGuinness launched a fundamental review of school funding with the objective of creating fairness in the distribution of resources for the first time. He allocated additional funding for schools including a £20.4 million windfall in March this year; made massive investment in computer technology for schools including £13.3 million in March 2001; and increased investment in pre-school provision that will deliver places for all of our children by 2003. He is also responsible for the creation of an Irish-medium promotional body and trust fund to deliver on the commitment in the Good Friday Agreement to

“encourage and facilitate Irish-medium education”.

He has honoured his Pledge of Office — unlike those who propose the motion and their Colleagues.

Martin McGuinness is an excellent Minister of Education. That is accepted by all — apart from the DUP. He puts equality at the top of the agenda for the education system. He is delivering on the promises and potential of the Good Friday Agreement. The DUP is opposed to everything that he does; the motion is entirely consistent with that party’s wrecker’s agenda; and, like its entire political strategy, the motion has no chance of success. It sums up the DUP for the majority of our people. We can have total confidence in the failure of the DUP.

Mr Ford said that this important motion needed to be debated. However, later in his speech he lamented the fact that it was a DUP pre-election stunt. Did he not realise that when the motion was put forward? His deputy leader refused to turn up for the last DUP pre-election stunt motion, and, yet, Mr Ford sees the election stunt as a worthy motion to put on the agenda. Therefore the inconsistencies in the Alliance Party’s approach are

something that it must explain to the people. Go raibh maith agat.

Rev Dr William McCrea: We received confusing signals from those parties that are supposed to be pro-agreement; of course that is not unusual. The Alliance Party said that the reason for the motion was to go against the Ulster Unionist Party. The SDLP said that the motion was not against the Ulster Unionist Party but was rather against the Belfast Agreement. Another SDLP Member then said that the motion was not against the Agreement, but against the Assembly itself. They must make up their minds, because the Bible says that

“A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.”

Of course, that sums up the pro-agreement groups as well.

This is a serious matter. I understand that Mr Murphy had to speak in the debate — some time ago, a leaflet left in a photocopier stated that Sinn Féin must elevate Conor Murphy’s position in debates to raise his profile coming up to the election.

I understand why he had to make that contribution and try to come out of the debate with muscles. If that is muscle, it is like a pimple on a bee’s ankle.

5.15 pm

Ms McWilliams said that we must draw a line in the sand — she usually tells us that. This phrase is very interesting, because the reason Mr McGuinness made his statement in the first place was the “line in the sand” of the Saville inquiry. Everything involving the Republicans is investigated, but nothing concerning the Unionists is examined. Those who were out in anarchy are investigated, but those who were simply getting on with their lives are ignored.

Ms McWilliams: Will the Member give way?

Rev Dr William McCrea: No, I certainly will not. We have a costly inquiry, while hospitals are being closed under Sinn Féin. We cannot afford heart operations, but we have an inquiry, aided and abetted by the SDLP, that is so important that £100 million will be spent on it. It seems that the most important consideration is to have this inquiry before we draw the line in the sand.

After the Saville inquiry there will, of course, be another inquiry about Pat Finucane, or any others who belong to the Nationalist or Republican community. However, do not ask any questions about the slaughter of innocent people from this country, Protestant or Roman Catholic, who happened to be members of the security forces.

It has been suggested in the debate that nothing has been said in regard to Mr McGuinness’s position as the Minister of Education. Mr McGuinness happens to be the Minister of Education, but his crimes, which, as an IRA man, he acknowledges, are crimes against humanity,

ones which have affected people across Londonderry and the Province as a whole.

I do not know where some Members have been recently, because they seem to have missed the fact that allegations have been made against the Minister of Education in regard to the allocation of funds. Funds have been allocated to the maintained education sector, and there is deliberate discrimination against the controlled education sector.

Another Member told us that we should not be surprised, since Mr McGuinness has not said anything new. As Mr Kennedy suggested, the “dogs in the street” — or the “cows in the byres” — know Mr McGuinness’s credentials. The only difference is that, for the first time, he has admitted his IRA involvement. For 30 years, he denied that he was a member of the IRA. He and his Colleagues tirelessly stood up and pleaded to the Chamber and requested that you, Mr Speaker, rule as out of order the use by Members of the term “IRA/ Sinn Féin”. They said that there was no link between the two.

Mr McGuinness has acknowledged for the first time that he was a member of the IRA and the Army Council — and as we all know, he still is. In the book of the Unionist population, Mr McGuinness is an unrepentant terrorist, therefore he should not hold office in this democratic institution. It demeans democracy to have a Minister with those credentials.

We listened to Mr Kennedy say that he and his Colleagues had worked with Mr McGuinness. I trust that he and his Colleagues will now remove Mr McGuinness from — *[Interruption]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member’s time is up.

Mr Durkan: I oppose this specious motion of no confidence, as I would oppose a motion of no confidence in any Minister from any party. Contrary to what Mr Conor Murphy said about the performance of DUP Ministers, whom he said had won the confidence of none, I believe that DUP Ministers have earned the confidence of many in carrying out their departmental functions, and rightly so. I have no problem with acknowledging that, and we need to move towards a situation where we can give credit where credit is due. We must also be able to give and take criticism.

Rev Dr William McCrea acknowledges that it is a mere coincidence that Martin McGuinness is Minister of Education. He more or less admitted that it is not in relation to his performance as Minister of Education that this motion of no confidence has been tabled. We must ask ourselves what the situation would have been if Martin McGuinness had made a statement last week announcing that he would not co-operate with the Saville inquiry and that he would not make a statement because he had nothing to do with the IRA and he never had. That would lead to a very different situation, and

there might then have been cause for a motion of no confidence in the Assembly.

Nobody in the House, with the possible exception of Mitchel McLaughlin, could be surprised by what was admitted last week by the Minister of Education. We should welcome the fact that the Minister of Education is co-operating with the Saville inquiry and helping it to establish the full facts of what happened on that day and to clear up many other issues that have been generated and pursued by the inquiry. The important issue is that the Saville inquiry should be helped to fulfil its due purposes and achieve its proper ends. I hope that the evidence given by Martin McGuinness will help to do that, just as I hope that significant evidence from others will also achieve that.

I will not take part in an exercise that demonises Martin McGuinness because of what we know, or think we know, about his past or the assumptions we make about his associations with, or involvement in, events and actions perpetrated by the IRA in Derry and beyond. I do not demonise, and I do not deny that we all make assumptions, and there are facts that we think we know. I do not deny that Martin McGuinness has now made an admission. We knew that when we negotiated the agreement. The SDLP knew that when we advocated that the d’Hondt system would be the means by which Government would be formed. People knew that we knew that, and they also knew that we were making proposal lists in strand one as to how an Executive would be formed, and that it was our intention that if Sinn Féin wished to take up ministerial positions, they could.

Even people who subsequently turned out to be anti-agreement, such as Jeffrey Donaldson, with whom we were negotiating, knew that that was part of what we envisaged when we proposed the formation of the Executive by means of d’Hondt. That raises no new considerations for the SDLP as far as backing a motion of no confidence in Martin McGuinness is concerned. I would be surprised if it raises any new issues for the Ulster Unionist Party. I cannot, therefore, understand some of the remarks directed at the SDLP by Danny Kennedy during the debate.

We are here neither to demonise Martin McGuinness nor to lionise him. My Colleagues have rightly reflected that he serves well and responsibly and does a good job as Minister of Education. I also acknowledge that. I hope that Conor Murphy’s remarks on Martin McGuinness’s significant record in terms of school funding allocations is also an endorsement of some Budget allocations that underlie those particular announcements by the Department of Education. It is important that we do not lionise Martin McGuinness simply because he made a statement last week. Some over-the-top praise for his statement, for instance from the Secretary of State, has not helped and has added to the sense of hurt and frustration felt by many people.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mrs Nelis: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. My immediate reaction when I heard about this motion was that the boys from Ballygobackwards were at it again. The DUP's roundabout of motions of exclusion and no confidence are as numerous as the roundabouts in Ballymena and Coleraine, which says something about the politics of those places. The motion sums up the failure of the DUP to accept that Her Majesty's Government, the Government that they allegedly give their loyalty to, has remortgaged its political relationship with this island.

The document — the endowment plan for the new arrangement — is the Good Friday Agreement. There are those who are still not mature enough to engage in the real challenge of that arrangement, which is making politics work. They have wasted their time and the taxpayer's money with such motions, which are a play to the gallery of sectarianism and hatred and a symptom of the politics of failure. Instead of facing up to the challenge of creating a future of equality and justice for all the people of this island, the DUP has consigned itself and its supporters to waiting forlornly like Samuel Beckett's tramps on a country road for the great Godot to come. It is the theatre of the absurd.

All this whingeing and moaning about terrorists in Government — by British definition the world is coming down with terrorists in Government. Nelson Mandela was a terrorist, George Washington was a terrorist, and Jomo Kenyatta was a terrorist. This is not about terrorists in Government, it is really about the DUP's running away from its past and refusing to face up to the reality. It is a vote-rallying call.

Gregory Campbell wants to know what Martin McGuinness was doing on Bloody Sunday. The relatives of those murdered and the people of Derry know what Martin McGuinness was doing — he was walking along with them, demanding civil rights for his people. Gregory Campbell knows that because British intelligence and the RUC — his friends in Special Branch — have told him. He knows that at the time of the Bloody Sunday march there was a team present from the British Ministry of Defence headquarters responsible for taking telefilms. Their task was to provide maximum photographic coverage of the march and everything that happened on that day and, indeed, the days before.

The "Widgery whitewash" tribunal had possession of that film in 1972. If it had delivered a just verdict we would not be spending money now. We would not still be searching for the truth. The British Government have refused to produce that film, and no statements are available from the persons who filmed the event — why? Are they afraid of what it will show? The important question is not about Martin McGuinness and what he was doing. The relatives of those murdered on Bloody

Sunday want to know what the British military and political establishment was doing on Bloody Sunday. Who was directing the Paras when they were gunning down people fleeing from CS gas and people with their hands in the air?

Peter Robinson and Gregory Campbell want to know what Martin McGuinness was doing on the Monday, the Tuesday and the Wednesday. The Nationalist people of the Six Counties want to know what Gregory, Peter, and Paisley were doing on the Mondays, the Tuesdays and the Wednesdays during their time in Ulster Resistance and the Third Force. When is the DUP going to have the guts — for they are a gutless party — to admit its part in Ulster Resistance? Was Peter Robinson second in command to the Rev Paisley for instance? How many Nationalist and Republican people were murdered as a result of Ulster Resistance's terrorism? When are we going to hear from the DUP of its role in murder before its members walked away from it — leaving young Protestants to face the consequences? Paisley talks about prisoner releases — they never even went to prison; they had not got the guts to go to prison. They put on their red berets, walked young Protestants to the top of the hill and left them stranded there.

At least Martin McGuinness is facing up to the truth, and we are proud of him for it. Our children are privileged to have in place a man in the mould of Nelson Mandela.

Mr Speaker: I am afraid that the Member's time is up.

Mr Campbell: Much has been said today about the timing of the announcement of Martin McGuinness's decision, at long last, to speak to the Saville inquiry.

5.30 pm

Last week the Saville inquiry wrote to me asking, and I quote:

"that you have evidence that Mr McGuinness was personally responsible through his active involvement in the IRA for the deaths on Bloody Sunday and many more at other times. The Inquiry would like to speak to you about what you know about the involvement of Mr McGuinness in the events of Bloody Sunday."

That letter was dated 25 April; it arrived with me on 26 April; and, hey presto, on 29 April, Mr McGuinness decided to make it known to the public that he was at long last going to give evidence to the Saville inquiry. I may have had little influence over the sequence of events, but I will leave others to judge the merits of Martin McGuinness deciding to give evidence to the Saville inquiry.

The issue is not whether Martin McGuinness is a suitable person to be Education Minister inasmuch as how he conducts himself in the office of Minister of Education between 9.00 am and 5.00 pm. The issue is whether Martin McGuinness is a suitable person to be Minister of Education because of his background, his

activities, and his adherence to the philosophy of violence and murder. That is the issue.

Very often, in the Chamber and elsewhere, people have raised the nonsensical issue that DUP members do not wish to co-operate with Nationalists and Republicans because of their political allegiance. Dr Farren was partially, but not completely, correct. We have co-operated with Nationalists on many occasions, and we will continue to do so. Despite what I have seen and have experienced of the triumphalism and sectarianism of Nationalist representatives, which very often comes to the fore, they do not support murder. Therefore we can speak and co-operate with them.

Members of the now defunct Irish Independence Party were unapologetic Republicans. I co-operated, spoke and negotiated with them, not because I have any love whatsoever for the Republican philosophy — I abhor it — but they did not support violence or murder. However, there are those who do, and Martin McGuinness is one of them. That is why we will not have any dialogue or debate with him.

There is a very sad individual in a back room of the UUP who has to count up the number of Committee meetings that take place so that every week, or month, the UUP can issue a statement indicating the number, whether it be 600, 800 or 1200. The UUP does not say that in all of those Committee meetings, we do not have dialogue or debate; we do not confront, negotiate or give any legitimacy to the spokespersons for terror — because that is what they are. We will never ever do it.

They must make the decision. Are they democrats, or are they terrorists? That question was not satisfactorily answered last week. It is not about what Martin McGuinness was doing on Bloody Sunday. The question is that if he authorised the Provisional IRA not to use their guns on Bloody Sunday, did he also authorise them to use their guns on the Thursday before Bloody Sunday, when two innocent policemen were murdered? We can have no confidence whatsoever in a person who advocates murder and terror. The DUP will never ever give legitimacy to people or a party like that. I am confident that the Unionist community will recognise that failure to give any legitimacy to them.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: I understand that heretofore when a Minister rose to reply he got 20 minutes. If it is not a Minister who is replying, is he limited to five minutes?

Mr Speaker: When a Minister is replying, he or she is generally given 10 minutes per hour of debate. On this occasion Mr McGuinness has asked his nominating officer, who is the person who put him in as Minister and the only person outside who could refuse him, to answer on his behalf. Therefore, he will have that time at his disposal.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Who asked Mr McGuinness who was going to reply for him, and who decided that if it was not a Minister, he would be allowed the same time as a Minister?

Mr Speaker: The question came through the usual channels. That is the way in which most of these matters are negotiated. I made the decision as to who was acceptable.

Mr C Murphy: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Can you confirm that when we discussed the speaking allocation for this debate in the Business Committee meeting at lunchtime today, all Members agreed that the respondent — whoever it might be — would be allowed 20 minutes to speak? That included Members from the DUP, who now profess to be shocked.

Mr Speaker: The timings were agreed. However, it may not have been clear whether the respondent would be Mr McGuinness. I did not discuss who the respondent would be. It might have been a reasonable assumption that it would be Mr McGuinness. However, there was complete agreement about the timings.

Mr Dodds: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I am grateful that you have provided clarification and rebutted the usual misinformation from Mr Murphy. I note that a precedent has now been set of discussing Business Committee business on the floor of the Chamber.

There was no reference to substitute Members, or to the Minister's running away and scurrying into a corner and allowing his leader to speak for him, rather than answering himself. The understanding was that the Minister would speak. The normal rules would apply on that basis.

Mr Speaker: I was taking that as a point of order, but it seems that the Member was giving a ruling on the point of order, rather than asking for one. That is something that the Chair guards rather jealously.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. If this takes place now, is it a precedent that on any other occasion when a Minister does not want to reply, whomever he nominates will be allowed 20 minutes, or 10 minutes for each hour of debate?

Mr Speaker: A Minister may ask one of his or her ministerial Colleagues to reply in a debate. That is reasonable in other circumstances. This is not an Executive matter in the same way. This is a question of the appointment of a Minister and of confidence in that individual. It is not unreasonable that the nominating officer, whom I recall nominating Mr McGuinness for the education portfolio, should reply on his behalf. Should one of Dr Paisley's Colleagues be in the same position, they could not pick anyone more eloquent than himself to speak on their behalf, as nominating officer and party leader.

Mr Adams: It is proper that I should speak today as the person who proposed and nominated Martin McGuinness as the Minister of Education. I am here to defend his position. — *[Interruption]*

There was not a whisper in the Chamber when the DUP were speaking, but if anyone else tries to speak — especially any female Member — you have a bay of discontent, bad manners, heckling and so on. Tá a fhios ag na daoine sin gur breá an tAire é an tUasal Mac Aonghusa. Chruthaigh Conor Murphy sin nuair a bhí sé ag caint faoin obair atá déanta ag Máirtín Mac Aonghusa go dtí seo. Níor dhúirt Teachta ar bith de chuid an DUP oiread agus focal i gcoinne Máirtín Mac Aonghusa mar Aire.

Cén fáth? Cad chuige nár dhúirt siad focal amháin ina choinne mar Aire? Mar tá a fhios acu go bhfuil sé ag déanamh a dhíchill mar Aire agus go bhfuil sé ag déanamh a dhíchill ag an am chéanna le próiseas na síochána a chur chun tosaigh.

The Speaker: I am not only having difficulty hearing with this ear, I am also having difficulty hearing with the other ear. This corner was keen that I should have a translation so that I would understand whether matters were in order. *[Interruption]*

I will give a ruling on that to the Member when I hear the translation. Mr Adams, please continue. — *[Interruption]*

Order. I am not taking a point of order at the moment. I will take it at the end, because this is becoming silly. — *[Interruption]*

I am not taking any further points of order on that until the end of the speech.

Mr Adams: Pat Doherty gave some quotes and some of the history of the DUP. William McCrea called for Thatcher to sanction the bombing of IRA headquarters in Dundalk, Drogheda, Crossmaglen and Carrickmore, and some eejit — may I use that term? — some fear amaideach, is shouting “Hear, hear” when I requote that. Dr Paisley said that power comes from either the ballot box or the barrel of a gun. Gregory Campbell said that the Free State should be brought to account. He said that there should be a disciplined Protestant army, determined to take whatever action is necessary to tackle Republicans, North and South. Jim Wells said that we would have no problems with the IRA, that if left to ourselves, we would soon weed them out.

Then we get to the friends who have been killed. This is in the middle of the “Smash Sinn Féin” election campaign, and where did that go? Was Sinn Féin smashed? Even on the back of the killing of Sinn Féin members Bernard O’Hagan and Eddie Fullerton, we had the then Lord Mayor of Belfast, Sammy Wilson, asking if the council would be prepared to congratulate all those who had done a good job on both sides of the border. He also

referred to Sinn Féin voters in North Belfast as sub-human animals. He said that what we needed was a policy of extermination, shoot-to-kill, or whatever.

Of course, at an Ulster Resistance rally, Ian Paisley and Peter Robinson were pictured with Alan Wright and Noel Lyttle, who was later arrested in Paris for selling missile parts to the South Africans in return for weapons supplied by a South African diplomat. In Bangor, Ian Paisley said that there were many like himself who would like to see the agreement brought down, and would we not be fools if we were not prepared. Then there was Brian Nelson, the common factor in the killing of Brian Finucane and many others, and there was Ulster Resistance.

When I read that, I said to myself that this is sad, depressing reading. Then I said to myself that William McCrea has a mandate. I do not agree with the man, but he has a mandate. Ian Paisley, Peter Robinson and the rest of them have a mandate, and I have to accept that. I have to accept that I have a responsibility to try to work with these people.

Now what is this about? It is not about a vote of no confidence in the Minister. There has not been one word about Martin McGuinness’s role as Minister of Education, and he said very clearly this morning on the record, through the Cheann Comhairle, that he had ceased to be a member of the IRA. If he had not admitted that he was a member of the IRA, and if he had not come forward and offered evidence to the Saville inquiry, would he be more acceptable as a Minister? Is Bairbre de Brún more acceptable as a Minister? No. Is this not about having a Catholic, an uppity Fenian about the place? Let us get real about this.

This is obviously aimed at the UUP and is part of the ongoing battle within Unionism.

At the beginning of this period in our history, the Poet Laureate, Seamus Heaney, described it as a space in which hope could grow. At another time, David Trimble said that just because someone has a past, it does not mean that he or she cannot have a future. That goes for Unionism as well.

5.45 pm

We could rail against the record of the Ulster Unionist Party. Where was John Taylor, the Minister of Home Affairs, at the time of the Bloody Sunday killings? Why did Ian Paisley cancel his counter-demonstration? We could rail against all of that. However, if any of us is to have a future, we should not forget the past. I do not profess to be a Christian clergyman, and I do not lead a church, but there has to be some sense of forgiveness, some sense of people’s reaching out, looking back — *[Interruption]*

If that is what Members want to talk about, let me say that there have been 30 years of war in this part of this

island, and before that there were 50 or 60 years of institutionalised violence by the state against citizens here. I regret that. I have said, on record, at Republican funerals that I regret the fact that Republicans have hurt other citizens, because I accept that which some Members do not: that all of us have a responsibility to put together a solution.

The problem with the DUP, some members of the UUP and others, is that they do not think that they have any responsibility for what has happened here since partition. They think that it is nothing to do with them. They crow like juvenile delinquent schoolboys when there is an attempt to try to engage with them. The learned lawyer echoes all of that and then tells us that he is not a bigot.

Where do we go from here? I was sceptical about these institutions, but I believe that they are working, notwithstanding the First Minister's removal of the rights of the Ministers of Education and Health. Sinn Féin came into this space, which we thought that DUP Members would be comfortable in, in an attempt to try to put the past where it belongs — behind us. Now where do they want to go? They want to go back into the past.

I have been in prison. Dr Paisley and Peter "the punt" Robinson have been there as well. Young loyalists have talked to me and said that they are sorry that they ever listened to the rantings of some of those who, at that time, were representing the Democratic Unionist Party.

Let us try to look at this debate in terms of what it is. It is part of the DUP's trying to prevent change. It is my view — and people may crow or yo-ho about this — that the time will come when DUP Ministers, as is their right, will work with Sinn Féin Ministers. It is my view that the people who are now protesting so much about the new dispensation will actually be part of that, because we know that they are semi-detached.

In fairness to the UUP, we know that it had the courage to go into the negotiation chamber and try to work something else out. Where was the DUP? It was not there. It is here now because its members are well paid. They work with Sinn Féin, the SDLP and the other parties in all these institutions, and they like it.

As a leader of Sinn Féin, what do I say here as I come forward and try to make sense of this? I am trying not to rise to the baiting from the Opposition Benches. I am trying not to rise to the awful racist, sectarian and anti-Catholic bile that is in some of these quotations. All I can say is that the old days are finished — they are over. The people of this island want to build a future where Ian Paisley's children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren live with David Trimble's children and all of the rest of the people on this island and try to carve out something decent. Whose fault is it for the last 30 years?

A Member: It is the IRA's fault.

Mr Adams: Some people say that it is the IRA's fault. What is the solution? Some people are saying that the solution is to exterminate those who have, as they see it, the responsibility for the problem. However, how are the vast majority of people on this island trying to put it all together? They are trying to put it together by accepting the hurt and the difficulties that were faced and by upholding Martin McGuinness's right to be a Minister. He has a mandate that must be upheld in the same way as the rights of the other Ministers are being upheld.

I call upon Members to reject the motion. I do not wish to patronise Unionists, but do they want to go back to what we are trying to come out of? Do they want to be part of the politics of spitefulness and nasty remarks and killing and all of that? Do they want to go back to plastic bullets and internment?

I asked a friend of mine who is a cainteoir dúchais, a native speaker, what he thought about the motion. In his own way he made some sense. He said:

Anois silim go bhfuil an t-am ag an DUP agus ag an Uasal Paisley maithiúnas a thabhairt san am a chuaigh thart agus sna rudai a tharla. Ba chóir dó comhoibriú anois le tír úr a dhéanamh dó féin agus dá chuid páistí. Imtheochaidh an salachar leis an tsruth faoin droichead agus glanfaidh an t-uisce arís.

He was speaking to Dr Paisley. He said:

"I think now that it is time for the Democratic Unionist Party and for the gentleman Paisley to make some good out of the time we now have and some forgiveness for the time that has past, and to make sure that these things never happen again."

He also said that it would be better if we all co-operated to make a new society, a new country — [Interruption]

Mr Speaker: Order. Members have pleaded for a translation when Irish is spoken. It would be helpful if Members would listen to it.

Mr Adams: He said that it would be better, speaking to yourself, to co-operate now to build a new society, a new country for yourself and for your children. He also said that like a stream running under — [Interruption]

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Members are told over and over again to address the Assembly through the Speaker, but here we have some idiot addressing me in Irish. Is that in order? Is that the sort of debate that Members are looking for?

Mr Speaker: Dr Paisley, I have repeatedly called on a number of Members from your party to observe the same proprieties — [Interruption]

Mr P Robinson: So do the same to them.

Mr Speaker: Order. I have also called on Mr Adams's party and all of the other parties to do the same. If I were to call on every occasion when the DUP broke the rules, we would never get anywhere in any of the speeches. It is the case that Members from the DUP as frequently observe the rule in the breach as in any other form.

Mr Adams: My friend went on to say that it would be better that all of the hurt would go like a stream under a bridge and be cleaned in the process.

He said that after he had read what Dr Paisley had said on the Shankill Road — a part of my constituency. Dr Paisley asked the people of the Shankill Road what was wrong with them, because there were papists living at 425 Shankill Road, 56 Aden Street and 38 Crimea Street. I forgive the Rev Dr Ian Paisley for those remarks. — *[Interruption]*

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: Liar.

Mr Adams: Let him face up to his responsibilities and let us all build a decent island, an Ireland of equality where we can all be comfortable in our own place. Let us put all of this behind us and reject this motion. Go raibh maith agat.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Is it in order for a Member to make an accusation in the House, as a result of a letter, that has no foundation in fact? I represent a large constituency made up of Protestants and Roman Catholics. I defy them to find one Roman Catholic whom I do not serve.

Mr Speaker: Order. It was often the case when Our Lord was asked a question that he responded with another. Is it in order for one Member, from a sedentary position, to call another Member a “liar” in a parliamentary Chamber?

Mr P Robinson: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I am sitting down here, and I heard no one call the Member a liar. I heard them refer to the person who made the remark which was being quoted by a Member as being a “liar”. There is a difference.

Mr Speaker: There may well be a difference, and I will make that decision from the Chair. Members from that corner are good at putting points and answering points of order themselves, which is convenient, but out of order.

Mr C Murphy: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I am glad to hear that you will look into the remark. From this side we clearly heard the word “liar” shouted at Mr Adams. You have ruled on this matter before, and I trust that you will follow that precedent.

Mr Dodds: Listening to Mr Adams speak about moving forward and forgiveness, one would not think that members of the IRA have been the butchers of innocent people in Northern Ireland for 30 years. Not only is Mr Adams a proxy speaker, but he is a deviser and implementer of proxy bombs. Last weekend the Daly family — and the previous weekend in Londonderry the O’Kane family — had family members murdered in broad daylight by the organisation of which the Member is part and parcel. This is the hypocrisy, the nauseating sanctimoniousness and righteousness of the person who still fronts an organisation which holds on to all its terrorist weaponry in Northern Ireland. If he really wants

to move forward, why not make a gesture today? Why not throw his weapons away and come into the democratic fold? Why does he remain wedded to a terrorist paramilitary organisation? It is because he is so wedded, and he stays wedded, that we have tabled this motion today.

Mr Speaker: Order. I draw the attention of the Member to the point of order raised by his party leader when referring to me.

Mr Dodds: When you did not follow that through, Mr Speaker, I was under the impression that you had allowed me sufficient licence to proceed.

Mr Speaker: The Member knew very well that I had not.

Mr Dodds: I listened carefully to your ruling, and that is exactly why I proceeded in the way in which I did.

When the Member talks about baiting, racism and sectarianism, he may have been referring to his Colleague Mrs Nelis, because every time she rises in the Chamber, bile, sectarianism, racism and bigotry flow out of her. Perhaps he could have a quiet word with her instead of lecturing others.

We hear a lot of talk about moving forward and not going back, about our having forgiveness, and so on. Yet we have calls for inquiries into the Finucane case and the Hamill case. There is £100 million to be spent on the Bloody Sunday inquiry.

6.00 pm

Mr Adams: On a point of order, a Cheann Comhairle. I want to draw your attention to the gestures being made by the Member. I do not want to be involved in pantomime, but I want to bring his actions to your attention.

Mr Speaker: I will try to observe and to listen as best I can. It is not always easy.

Mr Dodds: The proud leader of the Republican movement is worried about a gesture across the Chamber. He wants you to look into it. How are the mighty fallen. The “soldiers of Ireland” must be saying “Well done, Gerry, for raising that point in the Assembly.” This is what we have come to, and he is the one talking about not turning this into a farce.

We were being accused of silly behaviour and politicking. The reality is that people in Northern Ireland, and in Ulster, would have been astounded had this Assembly not decided that this issue was one that should be debated as soon as possible after the confession of the Minister of Education — albeit a self-serving and limited confession.

The leader of the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition said that people do not want this motion of no confidence to be debated. I do not know where she lives or whom she represents, but people on the ground are demanding that this corruption of democracy — having a self-confessed

terrorist in our Government — should be brought to an end as swiftly as possible. That is why we saw it as our duty to bring this motion forward as soon as possible.

Mr Weir has already mentioned the reaction to other Government Ministers who were guilty of far less. They were hounded from office. An Austrian Minister, the leader of the Freedom Party, has been hounded because of remarks that he is alleged to have made in support of Nazi activities. People are implementing sanctions against him, and yet we are expected to listen to sanctimonious rubbish about the need to move forward in relation to having a self-confessed terrorist in our Government.

The reality is, as Mr Peter Robinson said, that we know of Martin McGuinness's role in the leadership of the IRA. That is why we opposed the setting up of an Executive with IRA/Sinn Féin in it. That is why we put down an exclusion motion to put Sinn Féin/IRA out of the Government of Northern Ireland. This is not a last-minute motion that was put down because of an election. This is something that is ongoing, because our role in the Assembly is to harry Sinn Féin and expose its members for what they are.

I urge and challenge any true democrats in the House, regardless of their party, to ask themselves whether it is acceptable for the Minister to remain in office. Would it be acceptable in any European democracy, or anywhere else, for someone who has confessed to being the adjutant of a terrorist organisation to remain in office? He has never indicated when he left the IRA, if ever. There is a list of crimes ascribed to that organisation which were carried out when he was in a leading position. Did he think that that would not be challenged and that it would not raise serious concerns that would lead people to demand that he should be voted out of the Government of Northern Ireland? I do not think that that would be the case at all. However, in Northern Ireland, despite the fact — *[Interruption]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I do not know who has the mobile phone or musical instrument — nor whether it is in the Gallery or in the body of the House — but I ask the person responsible to please attend to it.

Mr Dodds: It may be one of the “foot soldiers” ringing to congratulate the leader of the Republican movement on his tremendous speech.

I take Mr Durkan's point about some of the comments on Mr McGuinness's so-called “coming clean”. He is not coming clean at all. He has made a self-serving statement limiting his involvement and painting the IRA as having been engaged in no shootings and in nothing illegal at all. We are expected to believe that its members were out bombing and murdering people on any other day, but that on that one day — even though the people were under attack — they decided not to do anything.

It is quite simply incredible. McGuinness, of course, needs to be investigated. There should be an inquiry into his involvement and those of other IRA Army Council members named today in illegal terrorist activity.

IRA victims do not believe that this confession is somehow going to help the healing process in Northern Ireland. They do not believe that it is part of that process for someone to escape justice or to gloat over the murders of innocent people.

The SDLP's Mr Maginness said that the DUP did not table the motion in order to get Martin McGuinness out of Government, but that rather it was an attack on the Belfast Agreement. That simply disguises the fact that the SDLP have decided to align themselves with Sinn Féin/IRA, to scurry behind them, to ride to their rescue and to vote to keep Sinn Féin, terrorist, IRA Minister McGuinness in the Government of Northern Ireland. However, their true motivation will not be lost on the people of Northern Ireland.

The Alliance Party and the Women's Coalition tell us that the Minister has done nothing wrong as Minister of Education. The analogy is, of course, that if he were dishonest, or a paedophile, that would not really enter into the equation — as long as he was doing his job. That is the equivalent of what they are saying. The fact that he is a murderer and is someone who guided the instigation of terrorist acts should simply not come into it, even though he has a job that involves formulating policy that moulds the minds of children in Northern Ireland. It is utter rubbish.

The Alliance Party and the Women's Coalition tell us that they have to be judged on their merits. The people will judge them on their merits on every single occasion that they ride to the rescue of the Republican movement and back Republican, Sinn Féin/IRA in the Chamber. They will, no doubt, get their answer at the local elections. They are not putting forward any candidates for the Westminster elections — I wonder why.

The lie was stated that the DUP is somehow working with IRA/Sinn Féin. My Colleague, Mr Campbell, answered that. We will not be working with, fraternising, associating with, wining, dining or otherwise discussing anything with IRA/Sinn Féin. That is the position, and no amount of spin or talk will change that.

Members should note that I have spent most of my time dealing with the positions of Sinn Féin/IRA, the SDLP and others. However, the Ulster Unionist Party managed to get the grand total of one Member to speak — and I am still not sure, after he finished speaking, what the exact position of his party is. I hope that when the vote is taken that his position, and the position of his Colleagues, will be clear. He talked about a timetable now being in place to deal with the issue of Sinn Féin/IRA in Government. However, this is the third or fourth timetable we have had.

The time for action is now — not after the election. I ask the Ulster Unionist Party to go into the Lobbies, vote no confidence in Martin McGuinness and join with the DUP in voting to exclude Sinn Féin/IRA from the Government of Northern Ireland.

That is the true test — not to wait until after the election to see how that goes in order to fudge the situation, as has happened so many times before. People see the IRA being compensated. They see terrorists coming out of jail. They see terrorists in Government, and they see nothing in return. Now is the time for action.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member's time is up.

Question put.

The Assembly divided on a cross-community basis:
Ayes 31; Noes 45

AYES

Unionist:

Fraser Agnew, Paul Berry, Norman Boyd, Gregory Campbell, Mervyn Carrick, Wilson Clyde, Nigel Dodds, Boyd Douglas, Oliver Gibson, William Hay, David Hilditch, Derek Hussey, Roger Hutchinson, Gardiner Kane, Danny Kennedy, Robert McCartney, William McCrea, Maurice Morrow, Ian Paisley Jnr, Ian R K Paisley, Edwin Poots, Iris Robinson, Mark Robinson, Peter Robinson, George

Savage, Jim Shannon, Denis Watson, Peter Weir, Jim Wells, Cedric 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, Denis Haughey, Joe Hendron, Gerry Kelly, John Kelly, Patricia Lewsley, Alban Maginness, Alex Maskey, Donovan McClelland, Alasdair McDonnell, Barry McElduff, Eddie McGrady, Martin McGuinness, Gerry McHugh, Mitchel McLaughlin, Eugene McMenamin, Pat McNamee, Francie Molloy, Conor Murphy, Mick Murphy, Mary Nelis, Dara O'Hagan, Eamonn O'Neill, Sue Ramsey, Brid Rodgers, John Tierney.

Other:

Eileen Bell, David Ford, Kieran McCarthy, Monica McWilliams, Sean Neeson.

Total Votes	76	Total Ayes	31 (40.8%)
Nationalist Votes	40	Nationalist Ayes	0 (0.0%)
Unionist Votes	31	Unionist Ayes	31 (100.0%)

Question accordingly negatived.

Adjourned at 6.21 pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Monday 14 May 2001

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

ASSEMBLY BUSINESS

Mr Speaker: Order. During Question Time on Tuesday 8 May, the Deputy Speaker, Mr McClelland, was asked to rule on whether Standing Order 19(2)(b) had been breached during a supplementary question by Mr McGrady to the Minister for Social Development. I have read Hansard Volume 11 No 1, pages 21 and 24, and I am satisfied that Mr McGrady was asserting variability of quality in the work of housing associations. The Member's remark was not, in itself, an allegation of malpractice, and I do not believe that a breach of that Standing Order occurred.

Later that day, during the debate on the motion of no confidence in the Minister of Education, I was asked to rule on an allegation that Rev Dr Ian Paisley had made unparliamentary remarks from a sedentary position. I remind Members of my previous ruling of 4 December 2000, recorded on page 425 of Hansard, that unparliamentary remarks made from a sedentary position are no more acceptable than those made from a standing position.

I have examined Hansard and found some ambiguity over whether Dr Paisley was referring to Mr Adams, the Member speaking at the time, or to the person being quoted by Mr Adams. Mr Peter Robinson made clear his view of to whom Dr Paisley was referring, but I have also previously ruled that no Member may make an interpretation of what another Member said. I therefore call on Dr Paisley to say to whom he was referring and to clarify his remark.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: Page 40 of Hansard clearly shows that what I said was in relation to the letter and to the accusation made in it.

I was not referring to the Member. I was referring to the man whom he quoted as having made the very serious statement that I was trying to set up Roman Catholic people, probably to be murdered.

Mr Speaker: A remark can be unparliamentary only if it refers to other Members. If, as Dr Paisley has clarified, he was referring not to Mr Adams but to the man whom

Mr Adams was quoting, then the remark cannot be deemed to be unparliamentary.

Dr Paisley also rose on a point of order, contending that the remarks were not true and that they were an incorrect quotation of him. That in itself would be unparliamentary. Therefore, I ask Mr Adams whether he accepts Dr Paisley's contention that the remarks that he quoted were not remarks that Dr Paisley had made.

Mr Adams: I accept your ruling on the matter but draw your attention to when Dr Paisley made his interruption. I had said that

"Dr Paisley asked the people of the Shankill what was wrong with them, because there were papists living at 425 Shankill Road, 56 Aden Street and 38 Crimea Street. I forgive the Rev Dr Ian Paisley for these remarks."

Then he interrupted to say "Liar".

Secondly, I believe that what I read is an accurate reflection of a report of remarks made by Dr Paisley at that time.

Mr Speaker: The Member has said that, at that point, he was not quoting from the person from whom he had earlier been quoting but was speaking in his own right. That is a clarification of Hansard. However, Dr Paisley's point is that the report was not factually correct and that that is not what he said. That is what the Member maintains. To quote a Member as having said something that he or she did not say is unparliamentary. Dr Paisley has said "This is not what I said." It may be that someone else put it in a newspaper, but I have often said that newspapers are not entirely reliable in some of these matters. Does Mr Adams accept Dr Paisley's contention that he, Dr Paisley, did not say the things that he was quoted as having said?

Mr Adams: I do not accept his contention. I note what Dr Paisley has said, but I only have his assertion about this. I believe fundamentally that he addressed the word "liar" to me and not to anyone else.

Mr Speaker: I will have to give further consideration to the matter, because when a Member says quite clearly that the report that another Member is quoting from is not true, it is normal practice to accept that. The Member is saying that he does not accept the contention that the Member makes and that it is not a true report. It may be a report that was given in all good faith — indeed, if it were not, that would be unparliamentary — but that is not the question. The question is whether the Member now accepts Dr Paisley's contention that he did not say these things and that they are not true.

Mr Adams: I do not accept his contention, but I have noted what he has to say. In fairness to him, I will check the report, and if it is then my view that I am wrong, of course I will come back and make that clear.

Mr Speaker: I will make two points, and the Member will be given an opportunity to respond.

Whether it is a correct quotation of a newspaper report is not actually the point, because the newspaper report may not be true. That would be the reporting of an untruth, if one accepts what Dr Paisley has said.

The Member will, of course, have an opportunity to reflect, as will I, and to review Hansard. I emphasise the view about what would constitute unparliamentary language. Whether a report is true is another matter.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: I do not need the forgiveness of a man of the ilk of the Member for West Belfast. I never made any such statement, and if he was so keen to search for and get one, why did he not bring the proof? Other matters were mentioned, and we now have Hansard to refer to. I will be making a personal statement to the House about other matters that are incorrect and untrue.

Mr Speaker: I ask Members to reflect on what they have said and what has been said. I will be reflecting upon the matter, studying Hansard and taking a view on what Members subsequently say. I hope that I have made the position clear. If any Members are in doubt, they should consult 'Erskine May'.

During the same debate on 8 May, my attention was drawn to an allegation that a Member made gestures across the Chamber. These were not observed by the Speaker. I asked for the videotape of the proceedings to be viewed, but no gestures were recorded.

There are some circumstances where gestures between Members would be a return to a more primitive form of communication. Sometimes it may be the only direct form of communication between Members, and in such circumstances it may be interpreted as an advance. I have consulted 'Erskine May', and there is no indication of what may constitute unparliamentary gestures. They do not seem to have needed to rule on this matter in other Chambers. It is difficult enough to identify unparliamentary words, without trying to identify unparliamentary gestures. One could understand that there would be some gestures that would not only be unparliamentary but would also be extremely rude. I hope that such behaviour would not become practice in the Chamber.

On page 389 of the current edition of 'Erskine May', the Speaker rules on the question of Members using diagrams to elucidate their statements. The Speaker has said that

"Members should be sufficiently articulate to express what they want to say without diagrams."

I trust that I may refer to this as a precedent for gestures or hand signals. I emphasise that Members should communicate only through the Speaker — and in words.

Mr Adams: Tá mé buíoch díot ar son na hoibre a rinne tú faoi mo ghearán. Ach ar chuir tú aon cheist ar an Uasal McCartney? I appreciate the work you have carried out in investigating my complaint. Did you ask

the Member, Bob McCartney, about the gesture he made?

Mr Speaker: I did meet with Mr McCartney; I always try to be in touch with any Members on whom a ruling is going to be made in order that they can be in the Chamber if possible.

It is not always possible actually to speak with such a Member, but I do try to make contact with him or his representative. However, I was able to make contact with Mr McCartney and meet him.

12.15 pm

The Member and the House know that it is not appropriate for me to divulge what happens or is said between a Member and the Speaker. I treat such meetings less as time in the confessional and more like appointments I would have had during my previous professional practice. However, as a result of that meeting, I am satisfied that no untoward intent was meant by any of the gestures or gesticulations made in any part of the Chamber at that time — I am content about that, and I think that I have followed the matter up with some due diligence.

I trust this is of some reassurance to the Member — although perhaps not a full reassurance. Members from all parties often have conversations with me, and it would be wrong to divulge those conversations other than as I have done.

Mr Adams: Further to that point of order. It may be appropriate for you, as a former psychiatrist, to use those rules. I welcome your ruling about hand signals or gestures. However, my Colleague gestured towards me as if pointing a gun and pulling the trigger, and I want that on the record.

Mr Speaker: As Mr McCartney has been referred to, I will give him an opportunity to respond.

Mr McCartney: I am grateful, Mr Speaker. I find it ironic — almost a macabre joke — that the president of a party inextricably linked with an organisation reeking with blood should suggest —

Mr Speaker: Order. An accusation has been made. If the Member wishes to respond to the specifics of that — to whether the accusation is true — he may do so briefly in context. However, this is not an opportunity for a speech on the matter.

Mr McCartney: I accept that.

The Member suggested that I made a gesture as if pointing a gun, and that needs explanation. After a particularly unctuous speech by the Member, in which he talked about cleansing streams flowing under bridges, he sat down, looked across the Chamber at me and put up his hands as if in resignation or supplication — looking hard at me. I indicated to him by gesture — because I do not converse with the representatives of terror — the

following: shaking my head, which meant “No”, and making a gesture with my hand, which meant “guns”. I will have discussions at any time with any representative of a political party, whatever his previous background, when he no longer fronts organisations armed and dedicated to terror, whether Republican or Loyalist. That explains entirely my response by gesture to the good Mr Adams, who had just made this horribly unctuous address.

Mr Speaker: Order. I trust that the House can see my dilemma. There appears to have been no direct communication through the Chair on this occasion, and what communication there was was by way of hand signals. I am hesitant to intrude upon that. I call on the House to communicate through the Chair and to do so in words, since I cannot hope to convey the meaning of gestures.

Mr Adams: I want to welcome what is obviously a big advance in communication for the Member. However, I reject entirely his explanation.

Mr Speaker: Order. Sadly we must bring this matter to a close and give the Minister an opportunity to communicate to us on the very serious matter of foot-and-mouth disease.

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

FOOT-AND-MOUTH DISEASE

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers): I regret that it has taken 20 minutes to get to this very serious issue, about which people are extremely concerned. There has been some unfortunate point scoring, but as you say, Mr Speaker, if there is communication, at whatever level, that is all to the good.

Because I have been awaiting the final test result from the laboratory in Pirbright, Members will not have received a copy of my statement in accordance with Standing Order 18(1). I apologise for that. Copies are available from the Business Office.

I want to spend a little time bringing Members up to date with the current Northern Ireland foot-and-mouth disease position. I would then like to refer briefly to my policy on movement controls before explaining something about the testing work that my Department is doing, which seems, judging from the media coverage it occasionally gets, to be poorly understood.

The position remains as it has been for some weeks now, with a total of four confirmed outbreaks – one at Meigh, County Armagh; two at Ardboe, County Tyrone; and one at Cushendall, County Antrim. In addition to those confirmed outbreaks, we receive from farmers and vets regular reports of suspicious symptoms, which we thoroughly investigate. We are also performing blood tests on sheep to determine whether any of them have been exposed to, or are harbouring, foot-and-mouth disease. I shall say more about that in a moment.

As Members will be aware, we have been investigating one suspect case relating to sheep at Ballycastle that were exhibiting some suspicious symptoms. Samples have been at Pirbright for testing, and I am happy to confirm that the definitive results — which I received this morning — are negative.

My Department’s vets are continuing to follow up a number of tests that require further investigation. For reasons I will explain in a moment, we can expect that pattern to continue over the coming months, but, as far as those particular investigations are concerned, it is fair to say that we are not unduly worried about any of them at present.

That sums up the present situation. Encouraging though that is, I am acutely aware of the effects that the livestock movement controls have had on the industry since I had to ban all movements just before Easter. Over the last three weeks or so, I have been able to ease that ban progressively. Doing so is a balancing act between the risk of spreading the disease and allowing some semblance of normal farming practices. I have, therefore, permitted the movement of certain livestock in certain circumstances, provided that the necessary disease control conditions are met. I have agreed that my Department

will meet the costs of veterinary certification in those cases.

Assuming there is no radical change in the underlying disease situation, further relaxation of the movement controls will be permitted next week. I have already announced the relevant details, in response to calls from Members and from the industry, to allow people to plan accordingly.

I have also announced a further limited welfare disposal scheme for cull sows, which at present have only very limited market outlets available. Members may also be aware that, following representations to the European Commission, I have secured a concession in relation to the completion of integrated administration and control system (IACS) forms in Northern Ireland. While the deadline for the submission of those forms is tomorrow, 15 May, farmers will have until 30 June to make amendments to their forms.

Finally, I have been conscious of the difficulties that the foot-and-mouth disease controls pose for the beef special premium scheme. My staff have been unable to carry out the necessary inspections and ear notching. Therefore I have arranged that when movement controls are relaxed on 23 May and farm-to-farm sales resume, farmers will be able to phone, fax or write to the Department and, on the basis of the relevant ear-tag numbers, establish the premium status of the animals that they are considering buying.

I hope that Members will agree that those measures represent a reasonable response to the industry's most pressing needs.

I want briefly to clarify the blood testing programme that my Department is currently undertaking. It is a screening programme designed to determine whether foot-and-mouth disease is still present in Northern Ireland. It is likely to extend over the coming summer to all the areas where sheep are traditionally kept. We are starting with the surveillance zones and any related tracings before moving out to the main sheep areas.

The testing is known as serology testing, and it looks for antibodies to the foot-and-mouth disease virus. The presence of those antibodies means that the sheep has been exposed to the virus at some point. Such sheep do not have clinical foot-and-mouth disease, so the discovery of antibodies does not constitute an outbreak.

They do, however, pose a potential threat to other livestock, which could in turn develop foot-and-mouth disease, so our policy is to slaughter them.

The serology testing is carried out by my Department's veterinary science division at Stormont, which has the capacity to handle 10,000 tests per day. Over 82,000 blood samples have been processed up to 10 May, 43,000 of those in the previous week. This is only a screening test, and it is not 100% accurate. It will produce some

false positives. That means that all positive results from serology testing are sent to Pirbright for more exacting tests, and this process can take up to one week. Unfortunately, some of these cases have been picked up by the media and presented as Northern Ireland's next outbreak. That announcement is at best premature, and at worst wrong. We are not complacent when such a result emerges. The flock involved will be visited, restricted and clinically examined, and additional blood samples may be taken. As we are dealing with a screening test which is a relatively blunt instrument, we can expect to see flocks restricted in various parts of Northern Ireland over the next few months. There will also be an occasional sheep cull. None of this means that we have serious fears that the flocks in question are infected; it means that we are taking no chances.

Looking further ahead, I intend to reopen the case for Northern Ireland to be regionalised for foot-and-mouth disease control purposes. The results of the serology-testing regime will be crucial in achieving that status and reopening our export trade.

Even though we have had no new outbreaks for several weeks, it is vital that we keep up our guard. We have been here before, just prior to the Ardboe outbreak at Easter. While we still do not know how the disease got from Meigh to Ardboe, it is certain that illegal movement of livestock was to blame. It is important that farmers continue to practise fortress farming, and that everyone continues to adhere to the movement controls that are in place. Our biggest threat continues to be complacency.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development (Rev Dr Ian Paisley): I welcome the Minister's statement and thank her for letting us know that this statement would be made.

The House will be happy about the good news from Ballycastle. We are thankful to Almighty God that the disease has not affected Ballycastle, because with sheep running on the mountain tracks, it would have been impossible to contain the disease. Is this the final statement from Pirbright?

I welcome the forms. Do they go with the forms being filled out by farmers using the mountains in south Down? In 2000, the Minister helped farmers in that area. Will those farmers be helped in the same way this year?

How is the process of compensation advancing, and how many farmers have already been compensated?

Ms Rodgers: Full testing has been carried out for Ballycastle, and that is the final result.

The situation in the Silent Valley in south Down remains as I have previously explained. The force majeure concession cannot be applied in 2001 because the grazing ban has now been in place for some time and must be taken into account. Farmers were aware of that in time to make other plans. Consequently, the farmers affected

cannot claim the Silent Valley land in their integrated administration and control system (IACS) land declarations for 2001.

As far as I am aware, the compensation paid to date is almost £1.3 million, and that is just in the Meigh area and that of the south Armagh cull. No other compensation has been paid to date, but I hope that it will be fairly soon.

12.30 pm

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development (Mr Savage): It is gratifying to note that there are no more outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease and that that is the final report from Pirbright. I also welcome the news that the cull sow scheme has started to get under way. It is long overdue. There are many things that one could say about the present situation. Dr Paisley raised the issue of compensation for farmers affected by this disease. I hope that something can be done about that fairly soon.

We can all learn from what has happened. We should be starting to think about a common enforcement policy between the North and the South. There seems to be a variance between the actions of the two Departments.

I have been taking many calls over the weekend about the Minister's decision to ban horse racing, especially at Downpatrick. I ask the Minister to look very seriously at that, because this is an industry that has come through a lot. There are so many people involved in the horse racing world. If they do not get a race or two, all their work over the last year will have been to no avail. The situation in the South is totally different to what it is up here. I know that she is very conscious of the regionalisation system, but I ask the Minister to look seriously at horse racing.

Ms Rodgers: In relation to a common enforcement policy North and South, I am very much aware of the need to co-ordinate our efforts throughout the island in order to ensure that we are not faced with similar difficulties again. I have, as Mr Savage will be aware, asked the vision group, or a sub-committee of the group, to look at the lessons to be learned. One of the things that they will be looking at is the need for the tightening up of legislation on ear tagging. I am in discussion with Minister Joe Walsh about those very issues, because they are looking at the same things. We will be co-ordinating our approach, because I think that that is important, and I take the point.

I also take the point that horse racing is an important industry. I had a meeting last week with the industry on the possibility of resuming horse racing. The Executive will be considering the matter this week, and at that point I will be in a position to make a further announcement.

Mr Bradley: The Minister's statement contained a substantial amount of good news, particularly from Pirbright, and I thank her for it. My question is about the

temporary regulations regarding the dos and don'ts of the imminent sheep-shearing programme, which is causing a good deal of concern. Has there been a review of the original restriction, or is a review being considered?

Ms Rodgers: I am aware that the difficulties with sheep shearing are causing welfare problems. The season is upon us, and it cannot wait. It also creates real risks, particularly for those farmers who no longer do their own shearing and have to bring in contract shearers. I do not have to spell out the risks of having contract shearers moving from farm to farm. I am reviewing the situation. My officials have been working on protocols. I hope to have the protocols in place by next Wednesday, so that sheep shearing can then begin in, I repeat, extreme welfare cases only because of the risk.

The protocols will be in place and will be in the farming papers, but where farmers are doing the shearing themselves, they will be given advice about the procedures to follow. Licensed contact shearers will be given very strict protocols about cleansing and disinfection when they move on to the next farm. However, I am aware that this is a very real problem; it is being reviewed, and I hope that it will be dealt with very soon.

Mr C Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's statement and the news that the recent testing has proved negative. The Minister indicated that she and her officials do not know precisely how the disease got from Meigh to Ardboe, and that indicates that they are firm in the belief that the disease originated in Meigh. What evidence is there of that, and is there any evidence of where the outbreak in Antrim originated?

Finally, is there any indication yet of when the marts will be reopened for sales? Although farm sales may be welcomed, there is a severe loss of business as a result of the closure of marts, and it does not benefit farmers to have to sell on a farm-to-farm basis. There is much greater benefit from selling in the mart scenario.

Ms Rodgers: In relation to Meigh and Ardboe, I was simply making the point that we had one case in Meigh and that the next case was in Ardboe. I am not saying that there is a connection but rather that we have not been able to establish whether the disease came from Meigh to Ardboe and, if so, how. I am not making any assumptions except that illegal trading was clearly the cause of it. We have traced back all the possible legal traces, and it did not come from those sources. Members can draw their conclusions from that.

In relation to marts, Members should understand that we have not completed serology testing, and even when we have completed it, we will not be in a position to know that we have dealt with the infection that is in the sheep flock. To reopen marts before we are sure of that would be taking too much of a risk.

I understand and recognise the difficulties, and that is why we are taking the step next Wednesday to allow farm-to-farm sales. I also understand that the owners of the marts are looking at other ways of facilitating sales, perhaps video sales, for instance. Certainly I am anxious to look at that as soon as it is possible to do so without risk, but, at present, we are quite a bit away from that.

Mr Ford: I too welcome the Minister's statement and the continuing efforts that she and her Department are making. The Minister referred to extending serology testing to all areas where sheep are traditionally kept. My understanding was that serology testing was to be extended to the whole of Northern Ireland, particularly in the light of what she has just said to Mr Conor Murphy.

Can the Minister say whether this is indeed to happen and, if so, what is the anticipated timescale? Would it be possible to have any trade in sheep before the tests were completed? This could take until the autumn and would probably present major problems until then.

Secondly, with regard to a potential mass burial site, which we pray will not be needed, have any sites been identified yet, and should I believe the words of Sam Foster or David Burnside in that Nutt's Corner is a possible location.

Ms Rodgers: Having tested the sheep flocks in the surveillance areas, we move on to the glens, Sperrins and lowlands. We intend to get to all sheep flocks, because otherwise we could not be certain that we had dealt with all possible infection. That testing will take some time.

In relation to a burial site, as the Member will be aware, the Executive decided that we need contingency plans for the worse-case scenario, and my Department was asked to employ a consultant to identify possible sites.

Work is in progress on that. I do not yet have a final report, but the Executive will discuss the matter this week. However, with regard to Nutt's Corner, no burial site has been identified or decided upon.

Ms Morrice: I thank the Minister for her statement. It is valuable for the House to be kept informed of the situation. The Minister has permitted the movement of certain livestock in certain circumstances. What impact will that have on the movement of animals between England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and on cross-border movement? Is the Minister satisfied that the controls in place at ports, et cetera, are effective enough to ensure that the disease does not continue to spread here?

Ms Rodgers: I am not considering allowing the movement of animals from Great Britain to Northern Ireland, because as the Member will be aware, the situation is much worse there than it is here. I am not even considering such livestock movement. I am trying to deal with the difficulties being faced by Northern Ireland's

farming community because of the present movement restrictions.

Rev Dr William McCrea: I thank the Minister for her statement. Farmers are facing some practical problems. Following a cull they are left with meal, which in some cases is worth thousands of pounds. Will farmers receive compensation for that? Some farmers have also had to make workers redundant after a cull, and redundancy payments have had to be made. Will they be compensated for that?

May I ask the Minister if there is any news about rate relief for the livestock market providers, given the redundancies that have occurred in those markets? Will they get rate relief? We do want the markets opened as a matter of urgency, but in the meantime can Members be assured that the livestock market owners will get financial relief?

Ms Rodgers: I thank Mr McCrea for his questions. Unfortunately, meal that has been left over comes into the realm of a consequential; it is not a direct result. However, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development will pay for any meal that it has confiscated due to fear of contamination. As the Member will be aware, consequential compensation is being looked at on a national level, and I will ensure that Northern Ireland is not treated any less favourably than anywhere else in the United Kingdom.

The redundancy of some workers is an unfortunate consequence of the present terrible situation, and it is a matter for the Department for Social Development. That Department has made special arrangements to help people in such situations, and one person has been designated to deal with the farming community. People who have been made redundant will get some assistance from the Department for Social Development.

The Department of Finance and Personnel is working on rate relief, and it is hoped that it will have something very soon. I appreciate Mr McCrea's point about the marts that have been put completely out of business. That matter is being looked at by the Department of Finance and Personnel, and it is hoped that there will be progress there soon.

Mr J Wilson: Can the Minister say how many holdings adjacent to the McCambridge holding at Newtowncrommelin were culled?

Did any of the culls prove positive for foot-and-mouth disease?

12.45 pm

Ms Rodgers: I do not have the statistics to hand, but I will write to the Member with the information.

Mr McGrady: I thank the Minister and her Department for the work they are doing in this respect and also for

this morning's progress report, which, it is hoped, points the way to a complete return to normality.

I refer to the answer the Minister gave to the Chairman of the Agriculture Committee regarding the sheep farmers in the Silent Valley and the Mourne. Will she confirm that had there been proper consultation with the Minister for Regional Development last year, then the doctrine of force majeure could be used this year also? Notwithstanding that historical fact, will she re-examine the situation as a matter of priority for the double and treble jeopardy in which the Mourne and Silent Valley sheep farmers are engaged?

In response to the Deputy Chairperson of the Agriculture Committee, I make a special plea with regard to the horse racing in Downpatrick and also at Down Royal in Lisburn. They have wisely postponed their meetings and have now obtained from the Jockey Club the dates of 1 June and 2 June. Taking into account all the protocols they have put in place, it is imperative that the Minister give the green light to that event. Otherwise that company, the Maze company and much of the horse-breeding, rearing and training fraternity in the North will go into bankruptcy.

Ms Rodgers: In relation to the force majeure, my officials have been in consultation with officials in the Department for Regional Development since the decision was announced. However, once the information was relayed to the farmers that their sheep would not be allowed onto the mountain, force majeure could not be used this year, as the sheep farmers were warned well in advance.

In relation to horse racing, I take Mr McGrady's point. I know that it is an important issue. The Executive will be considering the matter this week.

Mr Berry: The Minister has announced a further limited welfare disposal scheme for cull sows. Can the Minister confirm that the fixed amount for cull sows is only £30? If this is the case, surely that is inadequate compensation for the farmers.

When does the Minister intend to re-open Gosford Forest Park in Markethill? As she is aware, it has been closed since the outbreak and is causing much concern and distress in the area with the loss of tourism and business. I am aware that there are animals in the vicinity and that that is the reason for the closure. Surely something can be done to alleviate this problem and get Gosford Forest Park reopened.

Ms Rodgers: The cull sow welfare scheme was initiated in response to demands and concerns expressed by the industry. As I understand the situation, the factory concerned would not be able to take all of the cull sows. The opportunity exists to bring the cull sows to the factory or to put them into the welfare scheme. There is not much difference in price. The same price for the cull sow scheme is being paid in GB.

There are susceptible animals in Gosford Forest Park, and that is the reason the park has not yet been opened. Above all, the Department has to be seen to be abiding by its own guidelines, and I will continue to be guided by the veterinary advice on that matter. I do recognise the problem, but everyone has problems at this time.

Mr Hussey: I welcome the good news contained in the Minister's statement. The Minister will be aware that I had a written question down, believing that the Agriculture Committee was dealing with the costs of veterinary certification for movement certificates.

Will the Minister request her officials to look at the administration of this so that payment can be made directly to the vets, rather than burdening the farmers with additional administration?

Ms Rodgers: My understanding is that the vets are dealing directly with the Department and that the Department is paying the vets. That is, and should be, the case. If there is some misunderstanding about that, I will be able to clear it up. I made the position clear at the industry meeting 10 days ago. The farmer does not pay the private vet, but the vet is paid directly by the Department on production of the necessary documentation.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for her statement, and I welcome her comments on the efforts to regain regionalisation for those parts of Northern Ireland that have had no foot-and-mouth disease so far. Does the Department of Agriculture have any guidelines for those people, particularly the candidates involved in the local government or Westminster elections?

Ms Rodgers: My Department has been in touch with the returning officer. He has agreed to issue the Department's guidelines to all the candidates with the rest of their papers. Candidates and canvassers are asked to abide by the guidelines. This means staying away from farm land and farm animals. I do not need to spell out that people traipsing from farm to farm would be extremely risky. I want to underline that, because there are sheep on some of the farms, and we are concerned about the sheep flocks.

I imagine that people seeking election — and many of them are in this Chamber — will already be aware of the guidelines and will adhere strictly to them. However, there may be some candidates who are not as aware of the risks as those of us who are in the Chamber. It is important that all know that the guidelines apply to canvassers and candidates as well as to ordinary members of the public. We are no different.

Mr Paisley Jnr: I too welcome the Minister's statement and the good news about the tests on flocks in north Antrim, as will many people in that area. I understand that compensation has been paid for only 11,000 of the 46,000 animals that have been culled to date in Northern Ireland. Can the Minister explain what has caused the

delay in paying three quarters of those who have lost animals?

I understand that 10,000 serology tests can be carried out per day. Is the Minister convinced that she has adequate resources to deal with the extensive serology testing required? How soon does she expect to have those tests completed?

Finally, can she tell the House whether the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has traced all the sheep that were unaccounted for at the beginning of this crisis — and which appear to lie at the heart of this disease — so that we can ensure that the disease does not spread any further? I also endorse the comments that have been made by several Members, right across the House, about the equestrian industry. I hope that special relief can be given to that industry so that those involved do not lose further income.

Ms Rodgers: I thank Mr Paisley Jnr for his question. There is no delay in the compensation payments. They are being processed, and they will be paid out as soon as that has been done. We have accounted for all of the sheep that came in the consignment that caused the initial concern.

They have all been accounted for and have been culled or had already been slaughtered in abattoirs.

I cannot remember the other question.

Mr Deputy Speaker: It concerned resources for serology testing.

Ms Rodgers: When we initially began the serology testing, we clearly had to get up to speed. The problem was not the capacity to do 10,000 tests a day, but rather the capacity to take 10,000 blood samples a day. We have brought in private vets to help and are also bringing in other people in the Department who have expertise in taking bloods.

We are almost at 10,000 tests a day. I am happy that we are able to deal with that number. Clearly it would be better if we could do 20,000 tests a day, but 10,000 a day are as much as we can deal with. Unfortunately, it will take a few weeks to finish the serology tests.

Mr Armstrong: I welcome the cull sow scheme, which will alleviate many of the stock problems on the pig farms. It is very disappointing that the fixed amount is only £30 — again, somebody is making a great deal of money out of the farmers. However, it is very good news that the farmers have up to 30 June to complete the IACS form.

Will the Minister consider letting beef cattle that would be over-30-months old before the 10 km area ban is lifted move to abattoirs on welfare grounds? I believe that her officials, and a meat plant, are in favour of that type of operation's happening this week.

Ms Rodgers: The issue to which the Member refers is being addressed under welfare considerations. I anticipate that some limited direct slaughter from the 10 km surveillance zone may be possible.

Mr Kane: I report to the Minister, and to the House, the enormous sense of relief among the tourist trade and the farmers following her announcement that there has not been a further outbreak at Murlough in north Antrim.

Can the Minister confirm that there is a determination to progress the farm-to-farm sale of livestock from 23 May? What measures will be required of farmers to ensure that that is done with as little risk as possible? These transfers are desperately needed and are a welcome development for farmers' cash flows and animal management and welfare.

Ms Rodgers: The details and protocols of the farm-to-farm movement of animals on 23 May will be in the farming press at the weekend. In addition, I will be having my regular meeting with the industry and getting the information out to the farming community through that. The union, in particular, will be made aware of the situation.

Mr Leslie: In common with the other Members for North Antrim, I echo the considerable sigh of relief following the news that there was not a further case of foot-and-mouth disease in the Ballycastle area.

I commend the Minister and her Department on the serology programme. I must say that processing 43,000 tests in a week is a very impressive figure — I trust that the testing is, indeed, robust. The Minister has pointed out that the testing may produce false positives, but I trust that it will not produce false negatives. The results of the testing so far seem to completely contradict the view of the rumour factory. That is a great relief, and I hope that that will continue.

To what does the Minister attribute the confirmed outbreak in Cushendall?

Does she consider that this resulted from the illegal movement of animals, and, if so, where did those animals come from?

1.00 pm

Ms Rodgers: The results of blood tests so far confirm our suspicion that there is blatant infection in the sheep flock. Fifty-five cases recorded with the ELISA titres were sent to Pirbright, as they were inconclusive or false positives. Of those, three proved positive on the Pirbright test, which meant that although they did not have the disease, they had been exposed to it. In the case of one inconclusive result at Pirbright, we have restricted the herd and are clinically inspecting and resampling it.

With regard to the three positive results that were found, one small flock of approximately 64 sheep was culled, and the other two had already been culled under the precautionary measures. We are discovering that

there is a danger in some cases, and we are getting to it little by little. I cannot answer the question about the Cushendall outbreak, because we have not reached its source. However, it is being investigated and followed up. In those cases we follow up all known connections with any other flocks or movements, but we can run into a blank wall. This is not necessarily the fault of the farmer concerned, but it can suggest that somewhere along the line there has been illegal movement. However, I cannot say at present.

GAME PRESERVATION (AMENDMENT) BILL

First Stage

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Foster): I beg leave to lay before the Assembly a Bill to amend the Game Preservation Act (Northern Ireland) 1928.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

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

FAMILY LAW BILL

Consideration Stage

Mr Deputy Speaker: Members will have a copy of the Marshalled List of amendments detailing the order for consideration. The five amendments all relate to clause one and have been grouped together for debate.

Clause 1 (Acquisition of parental responsibility by father or step-parent)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan): I beg to move amendment 1. In page 2, line 10, leave out “section 13”

and insert

“paragraph (a), (b)(i) or (c) of Section 18(1).”

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 2 (clause 1): In page 2, line 23, leave out “Accordingly” and insert “The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 shall be further amended as follows”. — *[Mr Durkan]*

No 3 (clause 1): In page 2, line 23, at end insert

“() in Article 3(4) (circumstances in which the court must have regard in particular to matters listed in Article 3(3)), after sub-paragraph (a) there shall be inserted —

‘(aa) the court is considering whether to make an order under Article 7; or’;” — *[Mr Durkan]*

No 4 (clause 1): In page 2, line 24, leave out “of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995” — *[Mr Durkan]*

No 5 (clause 1): In page 2, line 30, leave out “of that Order “ — *[Mr Durkan]*

I also want to take this opportunity to speak to amendments 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Amendment 1 corrects an inaccurate reference to the legislation in Scotland dealing with the joint registration of births by unmarried parents. There has been some confusion about the appropriate sections of the Scottish legislation to which this Bill should refer.

Amendment 2 is a drafting amendment and is consequential to amendment 3. Although amendment 2 is a drafting amendment, it does not stand alone. Amendments 3 to 5 depend on amendment 2’s being passed. Amendment 3 is the only substantive amendment to clause 1.

It requires a court, when making an order under article 7 of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, to have specific regard to the best interests of the child. In particular, it requires the court to take account of the wishes and feelings of the child when making a parental responsibility order in favour of the child in respect of an unmarried father or a step-parent. This amendment

flows from the Committee Stage of the Bill, and I am happy to take it forward.

Amendments 4 and 5 are, again, purely drafting and technical amendments following from amendment 3. They in no way alter the substance of the Bill. They reflect the way in which amendment 3 has been drafted.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Dr Hendron): I am very pleased to support the amendments brought forward by the Minister in relation to the principle of the best interests of the child. I am particularly pleased that the Committee's report on the Family Law Bill, which deals primarily with the acquisition of parental responsibility by unmarried fathers and step-parents, enjoys the unanimous support of the Committee. I thank all the members for their industry and commitment in considering the detailed and sometimes complex arguments in relation to this short but significant Bill.

On behalf of the Committee, I also extend my appreciation to the Committee for Finance and Personnel for its co-operation in affording us the opportunity of scrutinising the Bill, which makes appropriate amendments to the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. The Committee further wishes to place on record its gratitude to the 16 individuals and organisations who provided such a high standard of detailed written and oral evidence.

The Bill, although short and containing only five clauses, was widely accepted as significant but complex, and, in addressing three broad areas, it provoked a series of arguments relating to sometimes competing equality and human rights issues. It was with particular regard to the rights of the child that the Committee sought the amendments to clause 1 that have been brought forward by the Minister. They basically reinforce article 3 of the 1995 Order, which states that courts must place paramount consideration on the best interests of the child when making a decision on its upbringing.

The Bill relates to three broad areas. First, it provides that an unmarried father who jointly registers the birth of his child with the child's mother shall have parental responsibility for that child. It also provides for a step-parent to apply to a court for an order conferring parental responsibility on the step-parent in relation to a child of his or her spouse.

Secondly, the Bill creates a statutory presumption of paternity where a man was married to a child's mother at any time between the child's conception and birth, and where he has been registered as the child's father in the Register of Births, Deaths and Marriages. In both cases, that parental responsibility may be terminated only by a court order.

Thirdly, the Bill updates the law by enabling courts to direct the taking and testing of bodily samples to prove

or disprove a child's parentage. Currently, the courts are confined to directing the taking and testing of blood.

The backdrop to this Bill lies with the Government's recognition of the changing patterns of family life. Fewer people are marrying, and increasing numbers are choosing to live together. In 1999, almost 7,000 children were born outside marriage in Northern Ireland, representing 30.3% of all live births. Of those, 4,487 — 64.5% — were jointly registered by the unmarried father and mother.

Under the 1995 Order, unmarried fathers can acquire parental responsibility for their child only by entering into a parental responsibility agreement with the mother of their child, or by obtaining an order from the court. However, the level of take-up through these mechanisms has been low. In 1999, less than 200 parental responsibility orders were made in respect of unmarried fathers.

Nonetheless, it appears that that trend does not reflect unwillingness on the part of unmarried fathers to assume parental responsibility, given that substantial numbers of live births outside of marriage are registered jointly by the mother and father. As current legislation does not confer parental responsibility on the unmarried father who registers the birth of the child, the vast majority of unmarried fathers have no formal relationship with their children.

It is, therefore, widely accepted that clause 1 of the Bill is fraught with difficulty; it involves competing human rights and equality arguments. Some say that the Bill discriminates against unmarried fathers by not granting them automatic parental responsibility for their children. The Committee acknowledges that the rights of unmarried fathers are firmly embedded in the rights of children and mothers.

In that context, the Committee had particular regard to the case of *McMichael versus UK*. The European Court of Human Rights found that the rights of an unmarried father were not infringed by the fact that he did not have parental responsibility. The court upheld the UK Government's view that the non-automatic granting of parental rights to unmarried fathers was a justified interference in family life to protect the rights of mothers and children from unworthy or abusive fathers.

Therefore, favouring a degree of caution, the Committee took the view that any differential treatment between parents on the basis of gender or marital status in articles 8 and 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights was reasonably justifiable on the basis of the need for protection for mothers, fathers and children.

The Committee was content with the provision in clause 1 for a step-parent to apply for a court order conferring parental responsibility for a child of his or her spouse. It accepts that in many second marriages a strong bond is built between a step-parent and a child

who may have lost contact with the natural parent. From a practical perspective, for taking decisions with the other parent on the child's education and welfare, it is important that a legal relationship be established between the step-parent and his or her new children.

The fact that the natural parents will continue to have parental responsibility and can alert the court to objections that they may have — objections that it must take on board — provides for fair representation and should help to guard against the absent natural parents being sidelined. The inclusion of the best interest test, for the court to consider when making an order to confer parental responsibility on the step-parent by way of the proposed amendment to clause 1, is most welcome. The rights of children lie at the heart of the Bill. Consequently, there is a clear duty to protect their best interests.

The Committee is satisfied that the Bill provides a mechanism for the courts to divest unmarried fathers and step-parents of parental responsibility, which is viewed as a sensible safeguard to protect children and mothers from violence, abuse and intimidation. The Committee also considered the argument that the Bill should provide equally for married parents to lose parental responsibility where the circumstances warrant it. However, the Committee was satisfied with the current provision in such circumstances, whereby parental responsibility can be held additionally by the health and social services where it is felt that the child is suffering significant harm and will be taken into care.

The Committee considered the arguments for the Bill to have retrospective effect but concluded that that could impose unfair obligations on the unmarried father who had not registered his children with the intention of securing parental responsibility. On the other hand, an unmarried father can avail of the existing procedure of entering into a parental responsibility agreement if he wants to establish a legal relationship with a child born prior to the commencement of the new legislation.

Several witnesses made compelling arguments for the acquisition of parental responsibility to be linked to the provision of emotional and practical care, direction and guidance to the child. Some proposed that the definition of parental responsibility in the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 be amended.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Although the Committee accepts the arguments against redefining parental responsibility, particularly because this would have effects outside the Family Law Bill, it strongly agrees with the many witnesses who stressed the importance of developing an effective, high-profile and widespread publicity campaign about its implications.

1.15 pm

A public information document about how to obtain parental responsibility must be made available to all

new parents, and the document must set out what parental responsibility entails in clear terms. The publicity campaign must place as strong an emphasis on rights and powers as it does on the duty to provide emotional care, direction and guidance for the child. The importance of showing respect and support to the mother should also be highlighted.

Clause 2 is accepted as a sensible provision. It puts the common law presumption that a man who is married to a woman between the conception and birth of a child is the father of that child and the new legal presumption that any unmarried man who is registered as the father of a child is the father of the child on a statutory footing. The Committee was satisfied that the Bill provides for the presumption of paternity in both instances to be rebutted on the balance of probabilities.

Clause 3 is a welcome, technical measure that will provide the courts with additional powers to help determine the parentage of a child in a less invasive and distressing way. Existing mechanisms allow for blood samples to be taken only from the child or putative father. However, the new legislation will provide for courts to direct that bodily samples, such as saliva or hair, be taken for the purposes of scientific tests to determine parentage.

The Committee was satisfied with the Office of Law Reform's assurance that, under article 3 of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, a court shall have regard to the wishes and feelings of the child in relation to tests for determining parentage. Members were satisfied with the general principle that responsibility for the costs of determining parentage will be decided after the event. If a parent with care instigates proceedings to obtain a declaration of parentage and is successful, the absent parent who has disputed parentage will pay the costs.

I commend the Bill, as amended, as a progressive and balanced piece of legislation that takes account of the rapidly changing basis on which people are choosing to live together by encouraging unmarried fathers to have meaningful and legal relationships with their children. The Bill sensibly seeks to recognise and accommodate changes in family structures. However, the Committee is satisfied that it contains safeguards to ensure that the rights of children are promoted and not compromised.

Mr Speaker: I would like to say something to ensure that a precedent is not established here. The Chairperson referred not only to the matter under debate — the amendments to clause 1 — but to a number of other clauses as well, for which he provided explanation and comment. This is a reasonably short Bill, and it was not necessarily an unreasonable thing to do at this juncture. However, it is important that it should not set a precedent. Chairpersons, when dealing with one clause, cannot, for instance, take into account the following 65 clauses that some more substantial Bills may have.

The Member referred to the Bill as amended. I have little doubt about what the House will do, but at this point it is not amended — he should have referred to the Bill as presented.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):

I welcome Dr Hendron's comments on the amendments and some of his broader remarks. I am glad that he is able to record the Committee's support for the amendments as well as for the broad purposes of the Bill. The Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety scrutinised this short but significant Bill thoroughly, and that thoroughness was reflected in Dr Hendron's coverage of the issues that were of particular concern and interest to the Committee.

I am grateful for the role that he and Committee members have played, and, like him and his Committee, I am grateful for the role of the Committee for Finance and Personnel in allowing scrutiny in this particular way. I welcome the fact that the Committee has been able to give the Bill some thought and that its thinking has facilitated some of the amendments before us. I am glad too that the good working relationship that I have previously acknowledged between the Office of Law Reform and the Committee for Finance and Personnel has been matched by the relationship between the Office of Law Reform and the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

Mr Speaker: Amendment 1 — moved or not moved?

Mr Durkan: Moved.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment (No2) made:

In page 2, line 23, leave out "accordingly" and insert

"The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 shall be further amended as follows" — *[Mr Durkan]*

Amendment (No3) made:

In page 2, line 23, at end insert

"() in article3(4) (circumstances in which the court must have regard in particular to matters listed in article 3 (3), after sub-paragraph (a) there shall be inserted —

'(aa) the court is considering whether to make an order under article 7; or';" — *[Mr Durkan]*

Amendment (No4) made:

In page 2, line 24, leave out "of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995" — *[Mr Durkan]*

Amendment (No5) made:

In page 2, line 30, leave out "of that Order" — *[Mr Durkan]*

Clause 1, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 2 to 5 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Long title agreed to.

Mr Speaker: The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

CODE OF PRACTICE ON ACCESS TO WORKERS DURING RECOGNITION AND DERECOGNITION BALLOTS

The Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Dr Farren): I beg to move

That the Code of Practice on Access to Workers During Recognition and Derecognition Ballots, laid before the Assembly on 13 April 2001, be approved.

I refer to the draft code of practice on access to workers during recognition and derecognition ballots as the draft code. It was laid before the Assembly on 13 April 2001 and is subject to the affirmative resolution procedure of the Assembly. I will provide background information for Members.

From 8 March 2001, under the trade union recognition process, trade unions were given a statutory right to seek recognition for the purpose of conducting collective bargaining in the areas of pay, hours, holidays and other agreed matters. There is also a right for employers to seek derecognition of a trade union where the statutory acceptance criteria no longer apply. Where disputes arise about recognition, they may be referred for adjudication to the Industrial Court, the Northern Ireland body equivalent to the Central Arbitration Committee (CAC) in Great Britain.

The draft code corresponds closely with that in operation in Great Britain from June 2000. It is important to emphasise that that code only comes into play in limited circumstances, when the Industrial Court orders a ballot to be held. That would happen at the later stages of the adjudication process on trade union recognition. The court will give notice to both the employer and union that a ballot is to be held. The aim of the draft code is to provide practical guidance to both employers and employees about the issues that arise in such circumstances.

Given the purpose of the legislation, focus is placed on the rights of unions and workers in relation to employers. However, it is important to appreciate that that rests on the presumption that a voluntary agreement should always be preferable. That presumption is demonstrable at every stage of the adjudication process and in the code of practice. It follows that unions and employers are expected to show good faith and act reasonably and responsibly throughout the process. If the question of recognition comes to be resolved by ballot, which implies at least some degree of impasse in resolving it, the draft code sets out how employers and trade unions are expected to conduct themselves before and during the ballot arrangements.

The code itself does not impose legal obligations, and failure to observe it does not, in itself, leave anyone open to legal proceedings. However, it is important to appreciate that provisions of the code are admissible in

evidence, and are to be taken into account before any court, tribunal or, indeed, the Industrial Court itself, where considered relevant. It is also important to appreciate that full consultation has taken place in Northern Ireland on the code's content. I understand that there is general and widespread acceptance of its provisions. The code itself has also been subject to some discussion and deliberation in the departmental Committee.

I commend the code to the Assembly.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Mr Carrick): Members of the Committee are grateful that the Department consulted us on the draft code of practice, enabling us to examine it in detail and to highlight several concerns.

The Committee notes that the code of practice should take effect only towards the end of a potentially lengthy adjudication process, based on the Employment Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1999, which gives new rights, principally to workers and trade unions. However, there is also a right contained in the legislation for employers to seek derecognition of a trade union. Both the legislation and the code of practice presume that a voluntary agreement is always preferable. Unions and employers are expected to act reasonably and responsibly throughout the process. The Committee welcomes the fact, in the light of its response to the Minister, that that duty is now more explicitly stated in the code.

Members also questioned where more guidance was needed in the code to cover situations when agreement cannot be reached on access to workers. We have noted the Minister's response that a more prescriptive approach may be neither practicable nor successful in that area, given that individual circumstances are likely to be highly varied. We also note that the Industrial Court panel has been empowered to stipulate access provisions in such cases when necessary.

1.30 pm

There are also potential difficulties for employers when any multiple-union applications are made. We have noted that the industrial court will not accept competing applications on the presumption that it would not be appropriate for it to adjudicate on that matter, nor to become involved in inter-union disputes.

In Great Britain, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) has confirmed its commitment to resolving such inter-union issues before application stage. In Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (NIC-ICTU) expects to adopt a similar stance. Multi-union applications are very much the exception rather than the rule, and they are likely to remain so.

I approve of the principles contained in the code and note that an almost identical code of practice has been operating in Great Britain since June 2000. Very few

cases have needed to proceed as far as a ballot, and there has been no indication of difficulties with the laid-down procedures.

The Department is aware that the code cannot be a static document and will need to keep pace with developments. The Minister has given a commitment that this area will be closely monitored over the coming months to ensure that the intention of the code is being delivered. The Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment Committee looks forward to receiving the results of that monitoring in the future and will be keen to ensure that the code of practice is operating effectively in Northern Ireland. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr Dallat: I support the motion, and I thank the Minister for bringing it to the House. As indicated, the nature of the legislation dictates that it will come into force only in the very rare circumstances when voluntary agreements between employers and unions cannot be reached. One hopes that the voluntary route would be used more often. Indeed, that has been the case in Britain. The motion recognises the preference for voluntary settlements and facilitates that. However, it also sends an important message from the Assembly that it will, if necessary, empower the unions to have access to their members.

We must not forget that the unions have played a key role in the development of labour relations and in the evolution of modern industry and commerce. We salute the work of the unions in many fields, which has transformed the rights of workers, not simply in terms of pay, but also in conditions of employment, health and safety and as partners in the development of successful businesses. Unions will continue to play a key role as we enter a new era, which is fraught with difficulty but also brings exciting challenges.

We have concentrated in the Chamber recently on the issue of skill shortages in certain sectors. The Committee is currently looking at the relationship between industry and further education. These are good times for the economy — unemployment is at an all-time low, and there are many more people in employment in Northern Ireland than ever before. Nevertheless, progress brings with it problems — real problems in which the unions have a critical role to play.

However, we must not forget the bad times. Just over 10 years ago, unemployment stood at more than 15%. Economic times were not so good, and industrial relations may not have been as good either. It is important that we bear that in mind when considering the motion.

Dr Farren: I express my thanks to the Members who have spoken, particularly those on the Committee for the consideration they have given to the code of practice and for the general support they have expressed for that. I have been pleased to take account of some of the

comments that have come from Committee members, and those have been incorporated into the code. I want to emphasise that the code represents a further step in the strengthening of rights on both sides in the work place — the rights of employers and, significantly, the rights of people in the workforce and the rights of the trade union movement.

In recent years, we have seen a series of measures adopted with respect to industrial relations and employment legislation that have sought to strengthen those rights. The code will be monitored, and I want to emphasise the voluntary approach to recognition and derecognition. The code will indicate how both sides should proceed on those rare occasions where the voluntary approach has not resulted in a positive outcome.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Code of Practice on Access to Workers During Recognition and Derecognition Ballots, laid before the Assembly on 13 April 2001, be approved.

SOCIAL SECURITY (NEW DEAL PILOT) REGULATIONS (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2000

Mr Speaker: Since not all Members may be familiar with our procedure on Statutory Rules, I remind the House that a Statutory Rule which is subject to confirmatory procedure becomes law once it has been laid before the Assembly. However, it will cease to have effect unless it is approved by the Assembly within a specified period. This particular Statutory Rule was made on 27 November 2000 and will expire on 27 May 2001 unless it is approved by the Assembly.

The Minister for Social Development (Mr Morrow): I beg to move

That the Social Security (New Deal Pilot) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 (SR 369/2000) be approved.

I seek the Assembly's approval for a set of regulations that support the New Deal pilot scheme for people aged 25 and over. There is a range of New Deal schemes. They are aimed at specific groups such as lone parents, disabled people and the younger long-term unemployed. These regulations are to specifically support a pilot scheme for unemployed people aged 25 and over.

These pilot schemes are part of the welfare-to-work strategy and the efforts to tackle long-term unemployment. They have been operating in Northern Ireland since 30 November 1998, testing a variety of innovative ways of helping unemployed people into work. They are aimed principally at those who have been unemployed for 18 months or more. However, there is provision for people unemployed for less than 18 months and who face particular difficulties in returning to the labour market. The pilot schemes have provided individually tailored help designed to address barriers to work that had been identified, including lack of recent work experience and lack of relevant skills.

There were no new places on the New Deal pilot schemes after 21 March 2001. From 1 April new provision for the long-term unemployed was introduced across the United Kingdom under the enhanced New Deal for 25 plus. The new programme is designed to reflect the lessons learned from the pilot schemes, ensuring that a range of help is always available and investing more in advisors to enable them to provide continued support. The Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment administers the pilot schemes and the enhanced New Deal for 25 plus.

To facilitate the operation of the New Deal pilots for 25 plus, changes were made to social security regulations. This ensured that people could participate in the pilot schemes while continuing to meet the conditions for receipt of jobseekers' allowance, and also provided for sanctions for non-attendance under the programme. Under the

provisions of the Jobseekers' (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, the regulations underpinning New Deal pilot schemes can be in operation for only 12 months at a time, but they can be renewed as required.

They first came into operation on 29 November 1998 and were renewed in November 1999. The regulations before us today renew the provisions that were already in place, enabling the pilots to continue for a further twelve months and to take people into the scheme until 31 March 2001. Entrants to the scheme up to that date may remain on that scheme for the full twelve-month period.

I do not propose to explain the detail of each individual regulation, but I shall, of course, be happy to respond to Members' questions. The New Deal pilot regulations prescribe the categories of people who are required to participate in the New Deal pilots and the impact on their benefits of non-participation or leaving the programme without good cause. They also ensure that payments that participants may receive as part of the pilot, including top-up payments for childcare and self-employed earnings, will not affect their benefit.

The only substantive change from the earlier pilot regulations is that these regulations now define the date on which the last participant could join, which was 31 March 2001. Technical changes reflect the introduction of joint claims to the jobseeker's allowance from 19 March 2001 and the fact that some people could enter the pilots for a second time. I hope that this opening explanation has helped Members. I commend the regulations to the Assembly.

Mr O'Neill: I rise to lend my support. This House should be glad to give its support to the introduction of this Statutory Rule. However, the Minister might be able to clarify a couple of questions for me. Regulation 5 stipulates that a person may be penalised by losing out on benefits if he or she fails to participate without good cause. I was unable to ascertain the definition of "good cause". I want the Minister to identify that, if possible.

Will each case be judged on its own merits? How will that be measured? It may seem a small point, but these things can sometimes cause quite a lot of difficulty for people and their benefits.

I welcome the Minister's reference to childcare costs and people's eligibility to continue to receive them. However, it appears from the Statutory Rule that this applies only to lone parents. What about couples? Is there any variation here? There have been some cases in the past where childcare allowance has been affected. For example, if it were established that a couple could access costs when one of the parents is on the New Deal pilot, the regulation would have to allow for childcare costs so as not to affect the job seeker's allowance (JSA) of the second parent. That may sound difficult to absorb, but I hope that the Minister can pick it up.

Under regulation 15, will the payments be disregarded if another parent is on benefits? I would appreciate clarification of these small points today or when next possible.

Mr Morrow: The requirements of the programme are spelled out very clearly to participants at all stages. No one is sanctioned by accident. Sanctions are a direct result of things that people do or fail to do. Operations systems are in place to ensure that people are treated sensibly and fairly. The law provides for people to be able to demonstrate good cause and provides them with the right of appeal. With hardship payments to protect the most vulnerable, I think that the system as a whole just about strikes the right balance. It is not only firm but fair.

Mr O'Neill has also raised a point to which I do not now have the answer. I assure him that I will come back to him with a full and detailed answer in writing.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Social Security (New Deal pilot) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 (SR 369/2000) be approved.

1.45 pm

PUBLIC HEALTH/HEALTH INEQUALITIES

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms de Brún): I beg to move

That this Assembly welcomes the commitment in the Programme for Government for all Departments and their statutory agencies to work resolutely and energetically together to tackle the root causes of preventable disease and disability and to reduce inequalities in the health status of different groups in our population.

Tá gliondar orm an rún a thabhairt os comhair an Tí inniu. Beidh a fhios ag Teachtaí go bhfuil ár meánionchas saoil níos faide ná mar a bhí ariamh — 77 mbliana i gcomparáid le 47 mbliana tá céad bliain ó shin. Ach níl staid fhoriomlán ár sláinte go maith. Táimid oiread agus trí bliana chun deiridh ar an chuid is fearr de réigiúin na hEorpa; tá básanna den ghalar corónach croí beagnach dhá uair chomh hard leis an mheán Eorpach; tá ár ráta báis de ailse scamhóg do mhná dhá uair níos airde ná an meán agus é ag méadú leis.

Níl sna rátaí báis ach forbhreathnú leathan. Nuair a fhaigheann duine bás de cheann de na riochtaí seo, go minic i ndiaidh tréimhse fada de thinneas agus de mhíchumas, fágtar cuid mhór eile faoi mhéala. Baineann an fhulaingt le teaghlaigh, cúramóirí agus cairde. Caitheann an eacnamaíocht agus an tseirbhís sláinte anseo na billiúin de phuntaí ar thinneas agus ar mhíchumas inseachanta.

Tá a fhios againn ó thaighde leighis agus ó eispéireas tíortha eile gur féidir a lán de na básanna agus den fhulaingt a chosc. Is féidir seo a dhéanamh tríd an dul chun cinn sa leigheas agus tríd sheirbhísí cúraim agus cóireála a eagrú agus a mhaoiniú. Ach níos tábhachtaí arís, trí pholasaithe agus chlár trasna an Rialtais agus trí ghníomhaíocht ar fud na sochaí.

Is dó sin atá an Coiste Feidhmiúcháin tiomanta.

Is eol do Theachtaí na héagothromaíochtaí móra atá sa stádas sláinte i ngrúpaí éagsúla an daonra anseo; éagothromaíochtaí atá ceangailte go soiléir le dálaí sóisialta agus eacnamaíocha daoine. Is léir ón fhianaise gurb í an bhochtaineacht an chontúirt is mó don tsláinte — i mbeagán focal, dá shaibhre tú, is amhlaidh is faide do shaol agus is lú an chontúirt go mbuailfidh tinneas ainsealach nó míchumas thú. Tá seo amhlaidh d'airde dhréimire na n-aicmí: de réir mar a théann duine suas an grádán sóisialta thig feabhas ar a shláinte.

Tá cúig bliana de fhad saoil ar meán ag an ghrúpa socheacnamaíoch is toiciúla anseo ar an ghrúpa is lú toice. Idir fir, tá oibrithe neamhoilte trí huair chomh dóiche le bás a fháil roimh 65 ná gairmithe nó bainisteoirí. Tá páiste sa ghrúpa is lú toice 16 huair chomh dóiche le bás a fháil i ndóiteán tí agus cúig huair chomh dóiche le gortú a fhulaingt mar choisí le páiste ón ghrúpa bairr.

Ach is i measc Taistealaithe is géire atá na difríochtaí seo le sonrú. Tá a n-ionchas saoil beagnach 20 bliain faoi sin an phobail shocraithe. Tá páiste Taistealaí faoi bhun 10 mbliana d'aois 10 n-uair chomh dóiche le bás a fháil ná páiste socraithe. Níl ach 10% de Thaistealaithe os cionn 40 agus níl ach 1% os cionn 65.

Níl áit gan a ról a bheith aici: is sna bardaí toghchánacha is mó díothacht atá na rátaí báis is airde. D'fhéadfaí 2000 bás anabai a chosc gach bliain dá dtiocfadh linn stádas sláinte na ndaoine sin a bhfuil cónaí orthu sna comhairlí ceantair is measa rátaí a ardú go dtí sin na gcomhairlí is sláintiúla

I am delighted to have the opportunity to introduce this motion in the House today. Members will know that our average life expectancy now is longer than ever before — 77 years, compared with 47 years a century ago. However, the overall state of our health is still not good. Compared with other regions in Europe we are as much as three years behind the best. Deaths from coronary heart disease are nearly double the European average. Our lung cancer death rate for women is already twice the average, and rising.

Death rates only give a broad overview. For everyone who dies from conditions such as I have mentioned — often after a long period of illness and disability — many more face enormous personal tragedies. The suffering extends to families, carers and friends. The annual costs of preventable disease and disability to the economy and the Health Service run into billions of pounds.

We know from medical research and the experiences of other countries that much of the death and suffering can be stopped. It can be stopped by advances in medicine and in the organisation and resourcing of care and treatment services, but, more importantly, it can be stopped through Government policies and programmes and by action across society. That is what the Executive have committed themselves to do.

Members will be aware that there are substantial inequalities in the health status of different groups in the population here which are clearly linked to people's social and economic circumstances. There is clear evidence that poverty is the biggest risk factor for health. The better off one is, the longer one can expect to live and the less likely one is to be ill or suffer from a chronic disease or disability.

That applies all the way up the class ladder. Average health prospects improve as one moves up the social gradient. The most affluent socio-economic group here live on average five years longer than the least affluent. Among men, unskilled workers are three times more likely to die before the age of 65 than professionals and managers. A child in the least affluent group is 16 times more likely to die as a result of a house fire, and five times more likely to be injured as a pedestrian, than a child from the top group.

Travellers and their health status are an extreme illustration of that point. Travellers' life expectancy is almost 20 years less than that of the settled community here. A traveller child under 10 years is 10 times more likely to die than a settled child. Only 10% of travellers are over 40 years, and only 1% is over 65 years.

The point can also be illustrated by location. Electoral wards with the worst deprivation also have the highest death rates. Two thousand premature deaths each year could be prevented if we could raise the health status of those living in the district councils with the worst rates to that of those of the healthiest.

Although those facts have been neglected for many years, they should not surprise us. Poorer people have less money to spend on the physical sources of health such as food and comfortable housing, and their children are less likely to achieve the educational qualifications that are the key to their pulling themselves up the social ladder. They live and work in more difficult conditions; they have borne the brunt of the conflict, and they lead more stressful lives. They are excluded from the benefits of prosperity that the rest of us take for granted, and, in a culture that places so much emphasis on success and achievement, they are more likely to suffer from low self-esteem and to feel powerless and depressed. Those factors bear down on the same group of people, and the damage that they do to health is cumulative.

This health gap — the inequalities in health between rich and poor — is an affront to the principles of equality and social justice that unite us. Members cannot ignore that.

For all the reasons that I have given, the Programme for Government recognises the need for major improvements in the health of our people. One of the Executive's central priorities under the heading "Working for a Healthier People" is to focus on

"reducing preventable disease, ill-health and health inequalities".

To achieve that, the Programme for Government commits the Executive to develop a cross-cutting public health strategy which maximises efforts to improve health and well-being and to reduce health inequalities across all sectors.

This holistic approach is vital if the Assembly is to bring about the improvements in health that need to be made. It is estimated that 70% of the factors that affect our health are outside the responsibility of the Health Service. The 30-year gain in average life expectancy over the last 100 years has been achieved through improvements in areas such as education, pay and working conditions, housing, food safety, water supplies and waste management.

In July last year, the Executive agreed that as Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, I should take the lead in drawing up a new public health strategy to realise the commitments in the Programme for

Government. The Executive agreed that all Departments would work closely together to ensure success.

As a first step, I re-established the ministerial group for public health, of which I am chairperson. The group is made up of senior officials from all Departments. Through this group, each Department is making its contribution to making the strategy work. Each member of the group will assume responsibility for taking forward action in his or her Department.

Last November, the group launched its consultation document. It set out the Executive's proposals for the new approach and invites all interested parties — which means everyone — to comment on them. We decided to call the process 'Investing for Health', because we recognised that by making a little extra effort now we would be able to secure substantial health gains in the future.

The purpose of 'Investing for Health' is twofold. First, to improve the health of our people by bringing our health standards up to at least those of the best regions in Europe. Secondly, to reduce the inequalities in living and working conditions that cause ill health by raising the status of those with the worst health to the level of those with the best.

'Investing for Health' addresses the wider social determinants of health. It aims to improve health by improving social and economic conditions, living and working environments and people's ability to cope with difficult circumstances. It complements and reinforces the work of other cross-departmental initiatives, including the action we are taking to ensure equality across the groups identified in section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and the new targeting social need initiative.

'Investing for Health' will succeed only if it engages energies across the community, including the general public. For this reason, we have initiated an unusually wide-ranging consultation process. As well as inviting written responses to the document, we are seeking to engage individuals and groups who may have had difficulty in making their voices heard. Often, these are the very people who experience the worst health, and it is by helping them that the most improvement stands to be gained. To this end, we have designed and are running the consultation project in partnership with a federation of voluntary and community organisations, the community development and health network. We are keen to hear the views of as many people as possible about what affects their health, what can be done to make it better, who needs to take those actions and how they will work together.

My officials have recently given presentations on 'Investing for Health' to a number of Assembly Committees. I see those meetings and today's debate as a very important part of the ongoing process of 'Investing for Health'. The consultation process will continue until 31 May. We extended it from 10 April due to the impact

of foot-and-mouth disease on public meetings, particularly in rural areas. We will make announcements on the outcome of the strategy later in the year.

'Investing for Health' is a continuing, long-term project and process. There is much to be done, and priority areas for action need to be identified. Overall, the consultation document focuses on poverty and inequality, since poor people suffer the worst health. Beyond this, we propose three priority groups for action: the very young, to ensure that babies and young children get the best start in life; children and young people, to equip them with the knowledge, skills and self-esteem to make responsible choices in their lives; and older people, both to extend life and to improve the quality of life in those added years.

'Investing for Health' also proposes that action should be organised around settings where people spend much of their time, such as homes, schools, workplaces and communities. The document suggests seven priority topics, factors which we know contribute substantially to death and illness. For each of those topics we know that properly resourced and effectively organised action can produce results. We recognise that transforming 'Investing for Health' from a vision to a reality will be a challenge. The document sets out areas where action is required to ensure success.

2.00 pm

As chairperson of the ministerial group on public health, I will co-ordinate efforts across Departments on behalf of the Executive. The other Members of the Executive and their Departments will ensure that health factors are given due consideration in their areas of responsibility, and they will take the lead in those areas.

Because we recognise that all Departments' activities have important implications for health, we are putting proposals together for assessing the health impacts of new policies and programmes. That will enable us to minimise their health risks and maximise their health benefits.

We have also proposed that four health and social services boards should lead local 'Investing for Health' partnerships. These would draw together the key interests in each of their areas. There are already good examples of such a partnership approach in the health action zones and, at local level, in healthy living centres. We intend to build on the best of existing good practice.

'Investing for Health' sets out an important and challenging agenda for action. It is a great opportunity for all of us to work together to make real improvements in the health of our people. It provides the Administration with an excellent opportunity to promote the public interest by breaking down the barriers to co-operation between Departments and their agencies.

I am delighted to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the officials from all the Departments on the ministerial

group, which has already shown enthusiasm in working together on the new approach. I look forward to hearing Members' views during the debate, and I assure them that these will be considered carefully. I ask Members to join us in carrying forward this approach and to support the motion.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr Gallagher): I support the motion, and I am sure that none here could disagree with its content. However, it remains to be seen whether there will be the strong commitment and necessary resources from all Departments. We look forward to next year's report on the targets and how they have been met.

The Programme for Government makes a commitment to raising the quality of the Health Service and tackling issues of poor performance. As we discuss this motion, we are all embarking on consultation on the issue of primary care and awaiting the report of the review group on the acute hospital service. We hope that it will be possible to put in place measures that will deliver a better primary care service to patients and take a greater variety of health care closer to people on the ground.

In relation to the review of acute hospital services, we know that our waiting lists are the worst in the UK, and they continue to increase. There are a variety of issues surrounding waiting lists, not least the odd situation that some hospital units lie vacant while others are working above capacity. That is exerting a particular kind of pressure. On the other hand, some hospital units have spare capacity but are unable to increase the intake of patients due to lack of money for specialist staff. The Health Committee will be looking at issues like that when we measure the targets in the Programme for Government a year from now.

Another concern is what the Minister referred to as "equality of access". That is a major issue, whether it relates to access to GP facilities, accident and emergency facilities, surgery or any other service. It should be the policy and practice of all Government Departments to ensure that all members of the community have equal access and fair treatment. That applies to the activities of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in particular.

The unacceptably high levels of unfit housing have been mentioned in debates on the Programme for Government. Everyone knows that there is a direct link between the quality of housing and the quality of an individual's health. Levels of unfit housing are still too high in rural areas, especially in the west of the Province. People are living in appalling conditions in those houses. At the same time, because of the legislation on closing orders, those people are being told that they should not be living in those houses and by doing so, they are breaking the law. Given these serious health and human

rights issues, the legislation on closing orders must be given a high priority.

We are also awaiting a report on the Ambulance Service. Throughout the North of Ireland, especially in rural areas, there is a great deal of dissatisfaction with the present service. I welcome the commitment in the Programme for Government for an improved ambulance service, and that is a key area that must be addressed in the coming year. Members of the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee would also like to see a much improved level of service as quickly as possible.

There are many concerns about general health, and many recent reports will have been brought to the attention of Members. Cases of TB are on the increase. Many parents have voiced concerns about the safety of immunisation. We need a campaign to address those concerns about immunisation. Once they have been discussed, we must send out a positive message and make clear to parents the need to immunise their children and the inherent benefits.

The issue of men's health has previously been discussed in the House. A seminar on men's health is due to be held in the Long Gallery on 12 June, and that should be of interest to all Members. Twice as many women as men live beyond the age of 75, a fact that requires further work and investigation.

The Programme for Government contains a welcome commitment for additional occupational therapy staff. The figure is quite specific: the aim is to have 20 additional staff within the next year. It is hoped that that will happen, but there is still a major problem. We must ensure that action continues for a number of years to decrease radically the waiting times for housing adaptations.

Recent reports remind us that smoking is on the increase, particularly among young girls. That brings us to other health matters, such as young mothers and the risks of smoking during pregnancy. We must address smoking more effectively to turn around this increase.

Dr Adamson: I commend this motion. Belfast is one of many European cities struggling with the concept of integrative planning for health development. A number of issues and developments in the city have combined to have a major impact on the population's health. The consultation process on 'Towards a City Health Plan' produced in June 1998 resulted in the identification of four broad themes and provided the opportunity for a common framework for strategic planning to respond to the health concerns of the citizens of Belfast. These themes were outlined in the 'Belfast Healthy Cities Annual Report' of 1999 and included the following strategic aims: to improve public transport provision in a co-ordinated approach to planning in the city of Belfast; to develop a comprehensive integrated information system to increase citizens' accessibility to information and increase a sharing of information between the public sector bodies in Belfast; to provide the people of

Belfast with opportunities for lifelong learning, increasing participation from disadvantaged communities in the formal education system and responding to local learning needs; and to improve the mental well-being of the citizens of Belfast with an increase in counselling services for the well-being and improvement of those with mental health problems.

The key role of the Belfast healthy cities programme was to facilitate the establishment of intersectoral strategic planning groups to support the development of integrated planning on all these themes. It has been the most difficult stage of the process to date, struggling with complex issues and with structures in the city which create barriers to integrated planning. There has, however, been real progress with two of the strategic planning groups — communication and integrated information and mental well-being.

Belfast healthy cities programme has had a major impact on the way in which organisations and individuals think about health. Direct links are now being made between health and transport and information and education, to name but a few. The key task for healthy cities over the years has been to facilitate the establishment of intersectoral strategic planning groups to begin a process of developing integrated plans for health. It is an ambitious task but one which Belfast healthy cities has endeavoured to take forward. Many challenges and barriers have been, and will continue to be, encountered along the way. The concept of partnerships for health led by the World Health Organisation's healthy cities project implies a common goal and vision and requires new skills, new structures and a major shift in cultures and traditions.

As the Minister so eloquently stated, the new Administration here provides a real opportunity to make a radical move towards the lateral interdepartmental thinking which would enhance the climate in Belfast and Northern Ireland as a whole within public sector bodies to develop visible joined-up plans and address the fundamental social injustice and inequalities of health. The steps taken by Belfast healthy cities are early developments in that process. It has been a new learning experience for the individuals involved, and it has brought with it a mixture of creativity, innovation and the inevitable frustration. A change in the strategic direction of the organisation resulting in an evaluation and Belfast's redesignation to the third phase of the World Health Organisation's European healthy cities have resulted in a draft three-year strategic plan entitled 'Integrative Planning for Health Development 2000-03', which is also available for comment.

2.15 pm

In the meantime, Belfast has contributed significantly to WHO European healthy cities network business meetings, with participation for the first time by politicians and a number of new organisations from the city.

Significant progress is also being made in the mentoring of Bosnian cities, and Belfast will continue to support the establishment of a healthy cities network in Bosnia and throughout Europe.

The Minister for Social Development (Mr Morrow): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this important debate. It is clear that my Department's responsibilities impact extensively on health and issues of well-being. It has a key role in targeting social need by tackling disadvantage, improving housing, delivering social security benefits, providing child support services, strengthening and developing the community infrastructure and regenerating the most disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods.

I shall outline some of the important work of my Department. We will consult on comprehensive strategies to address the problems of multiple disadvantage in urban areas. The strategies will target action in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods and establish new neighbourhood structures as partnerships of the community, voluntary, private and public sectors. They will seek to commit the Government to long-term support for neighbourhood regeneration and support action to improve long-term health prospects.

A prerequisite for meaningful neighbourhood regeneration is the strengthening of local communities. We propose to do this — particularly in the most disadvantaged areas — by building a sense of community, encouraging and supporting all forms of community development, strengthening areas with the weakest community infrastructure and introducing community support plans through district councils to underpin the work of local voluntary and community groups.

I am pleased to say that in addition to proposals for new strategies, my Department has for many years been active in dealing with health-related issues in disadvantaged areas, particularly in Belfast and Londonderry. Good and effective working relationships have been developed with the relevant health boards on a range of programmes and initiatives, from a focus on disability through child-related early-years programmes to the health needs of minority groups.

Members of the Assembly will know that providing decent, affordable housing enhances good health and well-being. This has an important role to play in building communities and tackling social exclusion. Research tells us that deprivation is predominantly concentrated in Belfast, the west, Newry and Mourne and Moy. That is why programmes such as new TSN have sought to promote an integrated approach to tackling the needs of these communities. The improvement of public and private sector housing and the renewal of run-down estates are recognised as part of the programme. Northern Ireland has a good story to tell in this respect. Only 2.4% — and I emphasise that figure in relation to some things which have been said today — of Northern

Ireland Housing Executive stock is classed as unfit, compared to 7.3% in England and Wales.

We must not, however, rest on our laurels. Further investment is required to eliminate unfitness and to avoid its recurrence. Getting the necessary resources is crucial to success. When lobbying for additional funds last year, I was particularly pleased to secure £8.5 million for the housing budget. Without that, a number of important programmes, such as disabled adaptations, would have had to be reduced. That would have affected the standard of living of the most vulnerable members of the community.

Having a decent home is one thing. Heating it is equally important. Reducing fuel poverty is a key priority for my Department. Fuel poverty — the inability to afford to adequately heat a home — is a terrible blight on society. Living in cold homes can damage people's quality of life and health, as well as imposing wider costs on the community. While the risks from cold-related ill health apply to all people, groups such as older householders, families with young children, disabled people and those with a long-term illness and on low incomes are especially vulnerable, particularly when they have to spend long periods of the day — if not all day — at home. That is totally unacceptable. Therefore I am dedicated to bringing fuel poverty to an end.

I have taken the important step of introducing a new home energy efficiency grant scheme called Warm Homes. Starting in July, the high-risk groups that I mentioned earlier will have insulation and central heating installed in their homes to improve the home's heating. The concept is being piloted in parts of Northern Ireland and has already proven successful, with considerable improvements in comfort levels and reductions in fuel bills for the most needy. I commend the Warm Homes scheme as a sign of my commitment to promoting good health, well-being and social inclusion.

In many respects, good housing is the keystone for addressing many social problems. A good house provides peace of mind, contributing to the overall sense of well-being and creating a feel-good factor. Nowhere are the links between housing and health more obvious than in the travelling community. Their living conditions contribute to poor health, low life expectancy and a higher than average infant mortality rate. Their children stand more chance of being hospitalised with minor illnesses than children in the settled community do. My Department is addressing that problem by providing travellers with the type of accommodation that they need. At the moment, it concentrates its efforts on travellers who require bricks and mortar accommodation in either settled estates or in group housing schemes.

A new housing Bill will extend my Department's role, as it includes provision to transfer responsibility for providing and managing sites for travellers in mobile

home accommodation to the Executive. Many of those sites will require work to bring them up to an acceptable standard. They will also need a continuing supply of finance to fund routine maintenance. If the Programme for Government is serious about reducing inequalities in the health status of different groups, my Department must be given additional resources so that it can speed up that process, make progress on group housing and be ready to take over permanent sites.

Getting financial help to those who most need it through the social security system is another vital element in ensuring a good standard of health in the community. My Department is taking the lead by implementing a major programme of change and improvement to the welfare and labour market services in Northern Ireland. The welfare reform and modernisation programme will continue to improve the health and well-being of our citizens in three ways: by providing clear and accessible gateways to benefit and labour market services for all; by tackling potential child poverty; and by helping the disabled to get the support that they need to lead a fulfilling life with dignity.

The reform of the child support scheme, to be introduced by April 2002, will provide prompt and accurate assessments of maintenance. It will introduce improved arrangements for the regular and reliable collection of that maintenance and its payment to the parent. The new system will be easier for clients and staff to understand. It will be transparent, responsive and accessible. It will get money to children more quickly and will be easier to enforce. The new scheme calls for a radical change in culture, service and approach. Maintenance assessments will be calculated accurately in days. Money will flow to parents and children within weeks, and defaulters will be pursued quickly and effectively. The introduction of those reforms will provide direct support to families to ensure that children are raised with an equal level of financial security regardless of whether their parents work and fulfil their responsibilities.

Old people are among the most vulnerable in society. A major reform of the pension system will see improved advice and support services for pensioners. Steps will be taken to ensure that pensioners receive the support that they are entitled to in the minimum income guarantee. To prevent people becoming dependent after retirement and to help them make provision for the future, simplified processes and incentives will be used to encourage working people of low to medium income to build up an adequate pension. The New Deal project will develop measures to assist those with disabilities or long-standing illnesses who are currently dependent on benefit to move into training or work. It is accepted that continuing unemployment can have a detrimental effect on health and well-being.

There are important developments at the delivery end of the social security system, and the ONE service,

which we will be piloting from 14 May 2001 in Dunganon, is a practical example of a joined-up Government in action. This service will combine welfare services that are provided by a number of agencies including the Training and Employment Agency, the Child Support Agency, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the Rates Collection Agency and the Inland Revenue, as well as the Social Security Agency. It will offer a single point of entry to the welfare system for people of working age and will provide help and advice on work, training and the benefit system, linking work-focused interviews to the claims process.

Another innovation is the partnership between the private sector and the Social Security Agency which aims to revolutionise benefit processing. The 10-year contract between the agency and private sector construction businesses is designed to deliver new telephone and technology solutions and better information management. The transformation of the three disability benefits — disability living allowance, attendance allowance and invalid care allowance — will begin in the autumn and will be fully implemented by March 2002. Plans will then be developed to introduce similar improvements to incapacity benefits.

The extensive and challenging programme that I have outlined demonstrates both my commitment and that of my Department to alleviating the problems caused by poor health standards. It is my intention that my Department will continue to play a full and useful role in this area, together with other Departments.

Mr Speaker: I remind the House that we must move to Question Time at 2.30 pm. If Mr Hutchinson has not finished speaking at that time, he will be recalled at the beginning of the next section of debate.

Mr B Hutchinson: I support the motion, especially after hearing what the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Minister for Social Development had to say. What they have said proves that when people have control and can make decisions for their own areas, the right decisions can be made for Northern Ireland. I had some difficulty with the wording of the motion. As a Whip, I am entitled to attend Business Committee meetings. Last week I pointed out that it was not clear that the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety was talking about investment in health. Neither the representative from the Executive nor one of her Whips could confirm that that was what she was talking about. However, in her speech, she did say that she was talking about investment in health.

It is great that we can begin to talk about joined-up Government, the Programme for Government and the way that we spend money. There are a number of layers in the structure of the Health Service; these include trusts and boards. Too much money is spent on managing health when it should be spent on administering health.

We need to make speedy decisions on how to move forward in health provision and on how to cut out the bureaucracy.

The Minister for Social Development understands the connection between life expectancy and standards of working conditions, housing, education, waste management and water supply. These are the problems in his Department which impact on health. I am pleased that he has recognised the need to do something about health problems. The Minister made it clear that he could not address the problems without additional resources. We all know that those resources are needed, and it is up to us to find them. One way to do that is by restructuring the Health Service and cutting out all of the bureaucracy.

Elderly people are put into different brackets. For example, one bracket would cover people aged 60 to 69. However, people are put into those brackets up until the age of about 90. The amount of money spent on elderly people increases for each bracket. I think it was the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety who spoke about inequalities caused by social background.

2.30 pm

It is nonsensical to spend £1 on sixty-year-olds in north or west Belfast and the same amount on people in north Down, although I know that there are areas of disadvantage in north Down — I could name a number of estates in Bangor where people are totally disadvantaged. The life expectancy of people on the Shankill, the Falls, the Oldpark Road or the New Lodge Road is shorter than that of people who are well off. We must turn the formula around and spend £5 on people in those areas at a very early age, reducing it to £1 as they get older.

We must look at how we actually spend the money. Instead of dividing it among electoral constituencies, we need to ensure that we actually spend it on those people who are disadvantaged and who have reached old age having grown up in a disadvantaged situation. We need to turn the situation around.

Finally, there is no provision for young people under the age of 18 with mental health problems in north and west Belfast, because there is no money. The Minister must look at that.

Oral Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Mr Speaker: Question 1 has been withdrawn.

Single Equality Bill

2. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to give an assessment on the arrangements for consultation on the Single Equality Bill. (AQO 1451/00)

14. **Mr Gallagher** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to give an assessment on the arrangements for consultation on the Single Equality Bill. (AQO 1479/00)

The Deputy First Minister (Mr Mallon): The principles and values of equality and human rights are central to the Good Friday Agreement and are fundamental to the Programme for Government. We are committed to promoting equality of opportunity and to ensuring that discrimination is tackled through the provision of strong laws and effective public policies. Through our Programme for Government, we are committed to the introduction of a Single Equality Bill.

Consultation on the Bill will be in two phases. The first consultation has begun and will continue until early August. This initial consultation will address the scope of, and the general issues covered in, the proposed Bill. The second phase will take place next year. That consultation will address the detailed measures contained in the Bill and will incorporate an equality impact assessment and regulatory impact assessment.

The current consultation document will be available on request in different languages and different formats to cater for those with particular needs. Seminars will also be held in different locations across Northern Ireland, and additional meetings will be offered to interest groups concerning the content and scope of the Bill, in addition to the invitation for written comment. I am content that the consultation process planned for the Bill will offer a full opportunity for people who wish to comment to do so.

Mr McCarthy: Does the Deputy First Minister have any idea how we escape a mindset whereby we do not consider people's needs until we pigeonhole them and put them into a group? Should not equality be as much about individuals as it is about groups?

The Deputy First Minister: That is a very pertinent observation. The reality is that most interest groups in Northern Ireland do coalesce. They form groups, and it is the obligation of the Administration to consult with those groups. However, any individual can make either a written or a verbal submission to the consultation. We

would welcome the freshness of an approach such as that recommended by the Member.

Mr Gallagher: To what extent will the Single Equality Bill strengthen our existing equality laws?

The Deputy First Minister: The consultation document on the Single Equality Bill makes clear that we are committed to promoting best practice in equality of opportunity and human rights. The Single Equality Bill will not involve a reduction in the protection offered by current laws. Rather, it is designed to build on existing equality legislation in preventing discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity for everyone in our society. We will do everything we can to ensure equality of opportunity, and the Bill will undergo the strictest scrutiny to ensure that that happens.

It will also help us to harmonise, as far as practical, all existing anti-discrimination legislation. As no reduction in the level of protection is being contemplated, harmonisation, in many cases, should strengthen the existing laws.

The Bill will also implement new European Directives on equality. This will necessarily involve strengthening our laws, in many respects, to prohibit discrimination on the grounds of age and sexual orientation. In addition, the Bill will allow us to consider other recent developments in Britain, Northern Ireland and the South of Ireland. Again, this is likely to strengthen the legislation.

Mr McFarland: Will the Deputy First Minister outline the contribution of the Equality Commission to the development of the Single Equality Bill?

The Deputy First Minister: We are very pleased with the positive contribution the Equality Commission in Northern Ireland is making. We have been considering its recommendations on race relations and disability law when planning for the Single Equality Bill. We are also looking forward to hearing its views on the consultation document itself. It is planned to hold meetings to discuss the Bill with the commission.

North/South Ministerial Council: Environment

3. **Mr McGrady** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister when the next North/South Ministerial Council sectoral meeting on the environment will take place and if he will make a statement.

(AQO 1425/00)

The First Minister (Mr Trimble): A North/South Ministerial Council sectoral meeting on the environment is scheduled to take place on 15 June. In accordance with paragraph 52(6) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Minister of the Environment will make an oral report to the Assembly as soon as reasonably practicable afterwards.

Mr McGrady: I thank the First Minister for that information. Is the First Minister aware of the additional

marine pollution into the Irish Sea from the mass burial sites for animals culled because of foot-and-mouth disease at Great Orton in Cumbria and Berkshaw near Lockerbie? The effluent liquid of blood, fats and grease from decomposing animals is being pumped into the Irish Sea from these sites. What I suspected has now been confirmed to me by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, albeit with alleged caveats as to licences and treatment.

Will the First Minister take this matter up at the next North/South Council meeting on the environment and, as a matter of urgency, either in the British/Irish Council or directly with the Minister concerned?

The First Minister: First, obviously the British /Irish Council would be a more appropriate vehicle than the North/South Ministerial Council for dealing with discharges into the Irish Sea in Cumbria, although an opportunity to discuss the matter will arise at the next meeting.

So far, no discussions have taken place at North/ South Ministerial Council meetings about the disposal of blood and liquid waste from foot-and-mouth carcasses into the Irish Sea from the Great Orton burial site. The treatment and disposal of such waste in England is a matter for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, so that matter too would seem to be more appropriate for discussion in the British/Irish Council.

The Environment Agency advises the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on the environmentally safe disposal of these liquid wastes. Officials in our Department of the Environment have been advised by the Environment Agency that liquid wastes from the Great Orton burial site are collected and treated to eliminate the risk of spreading the foot-and-mouth virus. We are told that the waste is taken by tanker to waste-water treatment sites at Workington and that the treated liquid is discharged into the sea through a three-kilometre outfall, which is subject to computer modelling for its effectiveness in dispersal. I further understand that the Environment Agency regularly samples the discharge to ensure that there is no adverse environmental impact.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: If the First Minister is really serious about achieving the decommissioning of murder weapons, should he not stop these North/South meetings altogether? It is in the Republic that immunity for these murder weapons is given. Without the Republic's co-operation, there would be no hiding place for these instruments of genocide of the Ulster Protestant population. Surely those weapons are detrimental to the environment. Perhaps this is another way for the First Minister to boost the SDLP.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: He has already boosted that party this morning by declaring the result of an opinion poll.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: That opinion poll gave the SDLP a 2,000 majority over Sinn Féin candidates.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member will resume his seat. I must draw the attention of the Member and the House to the fact that the environment spoken of in the question is not the political but the natural environment.

The First Minister: I congratulate the Member for managing to get so much into a supplementary question on a North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) environment sectoral meeting. I must point out to the Member that the Ulster Unionist Party has been active on that issue, and it has most recently taken action last Tuesday. We are still waiting to hear of anything at all that the DUP is going to do on the subject.

Mr McClarty: Have beaches and bathing waters been discussed at the NSMC environment sectoral meetings? Will the First Minister comment on the quality of Northern Ireland's beaches and bathing waters?

The First Minister: Included in the last NSMC environment sectoral meeting on 23 February was a discussion of the work undertaken by the working group on water quality. The water quality being considered on that occasion concerned rivers rather than beaches. Of the beaches in Northern Ireland recommended by the Marine Conservation Society's 'Good Beach Guide 2001' — there are 11 in total — only one has any problem meeting the water standards. Of the 10 sand beaches, the Member will be delighted to know that six are in his own constituency — two at Benone, two at Portrush and one each at Portstewart and Whiterocks. When I go up for the North West Fest on Saturday afternoon, I hope to visit at least one of them.

Community Relations Council

4. **Mrs E Bell** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to consider making the Community Relations Council a non-departmental public body and to make a statement (AQO 1460/00)

The Deputy First Minister: We recently received the report of the regular triennial evaluation of the Community Relations Council. The report recognised the importance of the council's work in tackling divisions in our society. It made a number of recommendations aimed at further improving the council's effectiveness. The most significant was that the council should become a non-departmental public body. We will be considering that recommendation seriously in the context of the forthcoming review of community relations policy.

Mrs E Bell: Does the Minister agree that, with the high level of sectarian violence that we are seeing on our streets, it is vital that we have a strong, independent Community Relations Council that will support those people and groups who are working tirelessly to bring safety to their communities?

The Deputy First Minister: I fully agree with the sentiments of the Member. The events of the past weekend highlight the way in which that is needed. I believe that the entire Assembly will join with me in condemning the unwarranted attacks on young Australian tourists. It is an isolated event, but it is appalling that our tourist industry, having already been hit by foot-and-mouth disease, should have a further black mark against it at this time. I take this opportunity, in the context of the question, to say to people visiting Northern Ireland that they will find a welcome and a great generosity here. That should not be distorted by those actions.

I agree with the Member that we need a dynamic community relations approach. We need to do that in a hands-on way. The review that is beginning should lead to that type of approach, which is absolutely essential.

Mr O'Neill: Who will be conducting the forthcoming review? When will it commence? Can the Minister tell us what the terms of reference will be?

2.45 pm

The Deputy First Minister: The review will begin before the summer — anytime now, assuming that our summer is not over already — and will be taken forward under the chairmanship of Dr Jeremy Harbison. It has lengthy terms of reference, from which I shall specify three key points: to review the background to and the development of existing community relations policy; to identify the aims and objectives of existing community relations policy and the policy instruments used to achieve them; to examine, in the light of relevant developments, the recently completed evaluations of the district council community relations programme and the Community Relations Council, and to decide whether the aims of community relations policy remain appropriate, and whether changes to existing policy instruments are required.

We need a review so that we can arrive at a dynamic approach to the issue — it has long been with us. The Community Relations Council has served us well, and I hope that it will continue to do so. Perhaps the needs of 2001 are different from those of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Child Poverty

5. **Mr Ford** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to detail the steps taken, in respect of the children's fund, to ensure that children in Northern Ireland achieve parity in relation to the Chancellor of the Exchequer's targets on the reduction of child poverty in the UK. (AQO 1448/00)

The First Minister: In March 1999, the Prime Minister set a target of halving child poverty in the United Kingdom in 10 years and eradicating it in 20 years. As well as benefiting from national initiatives designed to achieve that target — for example, the introduction of the new

children's tax credit — the Executive are committed to playing their role in meeting the Prime Minister's target. Our Programme for Government makes clear our commitment to combating social exclusion and poverty, with a particular emphasis on children.

The children's fund is one of a range of initiatives that will help tackle child poverty. Its principal objective is to provide support for children in need and for young people at risk. The Executive are making £29 million available over the three years to March 2004 for the children's fund. That compares favourably with the amounts allocated to the Chancellor's children's fund.

Mr Ford: I am glad that the allocation from the Executive programme funds is significantly better than the Chancellor's initiative. Does the First Minister agree that the operation of the Barnett formula is a major issue? The formula should be revised to a needs-based system, so that when the regions of England complain about getting inadequate funding, this Executive can ensure that such funding is not taken away from Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

The First Minister: I agree with the Member to some extent. There is much ill-informed comment about the Barnett formula, including the piece by William Rees-Mogg in 'The Times' this morning. Clearly, he does not understand the nature of the formula. I agree that we should consider needs. We pay the same taxes as other citizens of the United Kingdom, and we are entitled to the same quality of service. We should receive sufficient funding to deliver that quality of service, even if that means more money here or less money there.

We must consider the issue of needs, in particular, very carefully, before rushing into a review. The review must be managed properly and to our benefit. When I said that our children's fund compared favourably with the Chancellor's fund, I meant, of course, that it compared well on a per capita basis.

Dr Adamson: Will the Executive use new targeting social needs (TSN) policy to target child poverty in Northern Ireland?

The First Minister: Any action to alleviate child poverty must be targeted on the sectors in which poverty exists. Every policy should take into account all relevant considerations. The information that is available through New TSN criteria will be taken into account as appropriate. However, I must emphasise that child poverty is largely dealt with through the tax system; the Chancellor's child tax credit is a key way of doing that.

Child poverty is also a reflection of adult poverty. The best way of tackling that is to get people into good, well-paid employment. In that — as well as in a whole host of matters — providing good employment is the answer to a large part of the problem.

Mr Speaker: I encourage all Members to address each other through the Speaker.

Ms Lewsley: The Minister has already answered some of my question in that our children's fund will, relatively speaking, be considerably higher than that of the Chancellor's children's fund. Can the First Minister verify that the amounts of money available through our children's fund initially will be increased in the next round?

The First Minister: The short answer is "yes". We will have more in the later rounds.

Human Rights Violations

6. **Mr Poots** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister what consultation it has had with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission on the issue of human rights violations by paramilitary organisations. (AQO 1433/00)

The Deputy First Minister: I thank the Member for the question. We have not discussed this matter with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission.

Mr Poots: That is quite an astonishing answer, given the debate that took place in the Chamber, and given the Knox report, which referred to the see-no-evil-hear-no-evil attitude to punishment beatings carried out by paramilitary organisations. This has been particularly evident in the past three weeks when the IRA carried out two murders. The First Minister and the Deputy First Minister still sit in Government with an IRA commander from the area where Mr O'Kane was murdered. What are you going to do about it, Mr Mallon?

The Deputy First Minister: We welcome the commission's condemnation of so-called punishment attacks and its intention to explore ways of ensuring better co-operation in efforts to tackle the problem. The research quoted in the commission's statement shows clearly that the scourge of such attacks is all too prevalent — at a terrible cost to individuals, families and communities. It highlights the need for a police service that is accountable and a criminal justice system that has the support and confidence of everybody it serves.

Although criminal justice and policing are reserved matters, the Administration will do all that it can to tackle the underlying social problems that can, and do, contribute to crime, and to ensure that the needs of the victims of violence are met through high-quality effective services. Many organisations are involved on the ground in attempting to address these issues, and the Executive's commitment to victims is outlined in the draft Programme for Government.

Mr Byrne: I welcome the Deputy First Minister's comments. What steps are being taken by the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to

ensure that there is compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights?

The Deputy First Minister: The Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister is committed to furthering a culture of human rights and responsibilities throughout the Northern Ireland Departments and the public authorities for which they are responsible. The human rights unit is actively fostering relations with a wide range of external bodies, for example, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and the main universities, to support the aim of improving community relations, and building a stronger community.

All of the Northern Ireland Departments have taken steps to prepare for the full implementation of the Human Rights Act 1988. That has involved assessment of the existing legislation, policies and procedures for compliance with the Convention; building human rights- proofing mechanisms into the policy and legislative development process; training staff in awareness of the Convention's rights, and working with associated public bodies to help them to prepare for implementation.

Mr Leslie: Does the First Minister agree that the planning of murder or attacks against political opponents by Government, or by those who are a party to Government, should be a priority item for investigation by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission?

The Deputy First Minister: Murder is murder, irrespective of by whom it is carried out. It is equally abhorrent, irrespective of from where it stems. I believe that it is not just a matter for the courts, it is not just a matter for the Human Rights Commission, but it is a matter for everyone to build a society in which these dreadful attacks have no place whatsoever. That will be the ultimate answer, and each and every Member of the Assembly can play a role in influencing the community towards that type of real peace, which is the only peace that will last.

Mr Speaker: I do not see Mr Séamus Close in the Chamber, and, therefore, the question in his name falls.

Disposal of Classified Information

8. **Dr McDonnell** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to detail its policy on the disposal of classified documentation.

(AQO 1469/00)

The Deputy First Minister: The Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister follows established procedures to ensure that classified documentation is disposed of securely. 'A Guide To Records Management', issued by the Public Records Office, states that a first review should be carried out when records are 10 years old. The Public Records Office then monitors records found by the Departments to have no further administrative value and thus ensures that nothing of potential long-term historical or research value is destroyed.

Unless a disposable schedule specifically sanctions destruction, no records can be destroyed without such monitoring taking place.

Dr McDonnell: Does the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister have any concerns about the possible abuse of responsibility when confidential files are being tidied up? Could the excuse of tidying files up be used to remove and conceal information that should not be removed or concealed? I am concerned about all that in Departments, but I am particularly interested in the culling of potentially embarrassing notes or information on files such as personal files in the Civil Service or social welfare files. There is an opportunity there, and I am concerned about that.

The Deputy First Minister: Neither the First Minister nor I are aware of the premature or wrongful destruction of documents. Any Member who is aware of any such action should make the circumstances known to us. It would be the responsibility of any Member who has any information in relation to any matter of this nature to make that information known so that it can be immediately investigated. If the Member has such information, I await it with great interest.

Executive Funds: Distribution

9. **Mr Neeson** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to detail its plans to distribute Executive funds in the near future.

(AQO 1447/00)

The First Minister: The first allocations from the Executive programme funds were announced by the Minister of Finance and Personnel on 2 April. Sixty-two proposals totalling £146 million over the next three years have received funding from this round. Those included support for children through a range of interventions in education and social services; key infrastructure projects such as the Toome bypass and the A8 Belfast to Larne route; new measures in agriculture on farm waste management and organic farming; key investment in e-government and libraries; and programmes in areas such as adult education and victims' support.

It is our intention to have a second round of allocations later in the year, with allocations in most cases being made in the autumn. We are already looking at how we can improve the process of allocating resources in the light of our experience from the first round of funding.

Mr Neeson: I want to thank not only the First Minister for his answer, but also Séamus Close for providing the opportunity to have my question answered. Bearing in mind that infrastructure is such an important element of the Executive funds, if a worthwhile proposal were to come forward to develop a natural gas pipeline to the north-west, would serious consideration be given by the Executive to provide financial aid for that?

The First Minister: One of the objectives of the fund is to provide for key infrastructure. Infrastructure that relates to power is quite important from an industrial point of view. We are very interested in the provision of gas, not just to the north-west, but to other parts of Northern Ireland as well. The Member will know that the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is keeping in close contact with his counterpart in the Republic, because there is value in having a North/South link on this and on other measures that would open up and liberalise the energy market generally. If, in the course of doing that, key projects or key ways arise as matters of Government expenditure, then we will look very closely at those.

3.00 pm

Mr Speaker: Mr Neeson mentioned that he was grateful to Mr Close for not coming in. The Chair sees it from a different perspective to that of the House. It is inappropriate for Members not to be present when their name comes up for questioning.

Mr Kennedy: I welcome the First Minister's reply. Are funds allocated on a piecemeal basis, or is there a strategic plan? Can the First Minister assure the House that departmental Committees will be consulted and will be involved in the allocation of Executive programme funds?

The First Minister: The concept of Executive programme funds was to reflect the key priorities of the Administration, which can be seen in some detail in the Programme for Government. Those key policies were the basis on which the Executive programme funds were decided.

The Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister acknowledges that the time for the initial allocations was so limited that Assembly Committees were not given as much opportunity to consider them as we would have liked. It is hoped that the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister will be able to have a more detailed and leisurely consultation with the relevant Committees next time around.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Sewerage Systems

1. **Mr McFarland** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of town and village sewerage systems that are discharging untreated sewage into the sea around the coast of Northern Ireland.

(AQO 1457/00)

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Campbell): There are discharges from 89 sewerage systems to coastal waters including Foyle, Larne, Belfast and Strangford Loughs. Fifty-four of those discharges

receive treatment or are long sea outfalls. The remaining 35 receive minimal or no treatment. All discharges to coastal waters are required to comply with the regulatory standards set by the Environment and Heritage Service under the Urban Wastewater Treatment Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995. Those regulatory standards are being applied on a phased basis and come into effect on 31 December 2005.

A significant programme of work is already under way to upgrade treatment facilities, and projects costing in excess of £100 million are planned. Each of those are programmed to commence over the next three years. They will provide treatment for 22 of the untreated discharges as well as improving the quality of some existing treated discharges. The remaining untreated discharges will be upgraded, if required, to meet the regulatory standards.

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

Mr McFarland: Does the Department for Regional Development have any responsibility for untreated sewage discharges from stand-alone seaside dwellings that are not connected to an established system? How does the Department for Regional Development interface with the Department of the Environment in monitoring the discharge of wastewater into the seas?

Mr Campbell: If the hon Member can furnish me with details of any specific seaside dwellings, I will undertake to investigate them.

In the normal course of events the Department for Regional Development liaises with the Department of the Environment and any other relevant Department on this issue.

Mr McGrady: I listened carefully to the Minister's reply, and he did not mention south Down, a major tourist area. However, I know that that was an oversight. May I draw to the Minister's attention the disposal of raw sewage into the sea in that area, particularly in the unique and unusual case of the Ballyhornan and Bishopscourt area? That area is a "new village", but it was built 50 years ago. It is now privately owned, but it was built by the Ministry of Defence without planning regulations and without regard for water, sewerage and road regulations.

The residents there simply cannot bring those up to standard for adoption. Will he take a special look at this to "demilitarise" the effects of Ministry of Defence errors? There is no other way that those people can achieve modern water, sewerage and road facilities.

Mr Campbell: The hon Member is right when he says that I did not mention the scenic and tourist region of south Down, but I also did not mention the equally beautiful scenic resorts of the north coast — for the obvious reason.

There are a series of locations in which, under the regulations that will take effect — particularly at the end

of 2005 — we will have to upgrade facilities. This is an important issue. By that time we should have either begun development or have given serious consideration to implementing the regulations. I will investigate the area that MrMcGrady has mentioned, and I will write to him concerning the present position in that area.

Mr Kane: Can the Minister give the up-to-date position regarding the North Down waste water treatment works?

Mr Campbell: That issue has been raised on a number of occasions, and I have answered several questions about it. There have been many difficulties with the system of the wastewater treatment works for North Down.

In my last report to the House I indicated that we had visited the Eastbourne area on the south coast of England to see a modern, state-of-the-art wastewater treatment works and how it was operating with the support of local residents.

I had undertaken to write to North Down and Ards Borough Councils to get a representative from each to liaise with my officials in the process of determining the location of the North Down wastewater treatment works. I can tell the Member that that has been done, and both councils have responded positively to my invitation.

It is to be hoped that the required series of meetings will take place over the next few weeks. I hope to be able to finalise the correspondence between North Down and Ards Borough Councils and Water Service officials

Portaferry Road/Comber Road Newtownards: Link Road

2. **Mr Shannon** asked the Minister for Regional Development to confirm a start date for the link road between Portaferry Road and Comber Road in Newtownards. (AQO 1463/00)

Mr Campbell: As the Member will be aware, the proposed link road between the Portaferry Road and the Comber Road is phase one of the Newtownards southern relief road scheme. The scheme is not included in the Department's major works preparation pool, but it is currently being considered for inclusion in the 10-year forward planning schedule. I hope to announce details of that schedule later this year. At present I am unable to confirm a start date for phase one of the scheme.

Mr Shannon: The response is not what we wished for. Will the Minister advise us about the road traffic surveys that have been carried out in the area over the past few months? They indicate that there is a large amount of traffic using that road junction, and the long queues of traffic each day confirm that. Would it not be appropriate to bring forward the link road in the light of the chronic congestion at the junction?

Mr Campbell: I understand the concern, but I am not in a position to announce the commencement of the

scheme. I understand the frustration felt in many areas, including the area in Strangford that the Member referred to and other areas for which schemes have been shelved because of lack of funds. I find it harder to understand how criticism can be levelled when there is an announcement for a scheme, and that seems to have occurred on some occasions. There is a case for this scheme, but that applies to many other schemes, and the limited resources available to me mean that we have to prioritise them.

The scheme is currently being considered for the forward planning schedule. I can advise the Member that phases 1 and 2, at present day prices, will cost in excess of £2.7 million.

Mr Taylor: The Minister's reply will come as a great disappointment to the people of Newtownards and the surrounding district when he begins to talk about a 10-year programme. Ards cannot wait that long for this necessary link road. I ask the Minister to reconsider his answer. He must recall that five years ago this road was originally in the five-year programme and was then dropped by some of the direct rule Ministers in favour of the Newry bypass. We now ask our new devolved Minister to start giving priority to important towns such as Newtownards and to reinstate this road as a matter of priority.

Mr Campbell: I thank the Member, and it is good to see him back in the Chamber. I have no difficulty in accepting that people want to see schemes put into place. Local representatives will campaign, pressurise, and lobby to get schemes put into place, and that is why they are elected. Some do so more consistently than others.

My job is to ensure that the maximum amount of resources is available to carry out the greatest number of schemes possible. Where demand exceeds resources then there has to be some prioritising. The 10-year forward planning schedule applies to all road schemes throughout Northern Ireland that are presently not in the major works preparation pool.

It was my immediate predecessor, Mr Peter Robinson, who put the major works preparation pool into place, which permitted us to get so many schemes so far advanced. I am endeavouring to further those schemes and to get additional resources so that we can put more schemes into the major works preparation pool and into the construction programme, so that they are completed as fast as humanly possible.

Mr McCarthy: The Minister was speaking for so long that I thought I might not get the opportunity to put my question. I am absolutely disappointed at his response. This link road has been on the agenda for many's a year.

I thank the Minister for visiting Comber last week. Had we thought quickly enough, he might have visited this particular area then, because there was a one-way system operating in Court Street, and Newtownards was completely blocked off. He would have seen at first

hand what we have to endure. I urge the Minister to go back to his officials. This is delaying the redevelopment of that part of Newtownards.

Mr Campbell: I am happy to deal with all queries. I am trying to progress each of these schemes. The Member invited me to Comber, and I was happy to respond. I have been going to Comber on a regular basis for the past few weeks. It is easier to respond when I am invited than when I am not, but that is another issue. I will take on board the matter that the Member has raised, and I will go to my officials with it. However, I come back to the issue that cannot be avoided. If we have a significant number of road schemes — which we do — and we have a limited budget for those schemes, it is impossible to undertake all of them as quickly as the Members and I would like. Therefore we have to prioritise. I will speak to my officials, and I will inform the Member of the outcome of the deliberations.

3.15 pm

Antrim to Bleach Green Rail Link

3. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (a) when the Antrim to Bleach Green rail link will be reopened and (b) what marketing strategy is being put in place by Translink to generate new rail traffic, particularly from the north-west. (AQO 1438/00)

Mr Campbell: Scheduled passenger services are due to start on the Antrim to Bleach Green railway line from Sunday 10 June 2001. That will significantly reduce the journey times to Belfast from stations on the Antrim to Londonderry line. For example, the journey from Coleraine to Belfast Central should take just one hour and 17 minutes, compared to the current shortest journey time via Knockmore of one hour and 45 minutes.

Translink has advised me that while it has an ongoing marketing programme for the promotion of the entire Northern Ireland railway network, a major marketing communications strategy is currently in progress specifically for the promotion of the Antrim to Bleach Green line. That strategy highlights such benefits as reduced journey times and increased levels of passenger comfort. It will include an introductory discounted fares promotion to stimulate usage of the new line. Translink has previously targeted areas such as the north-west of the Province with marketing initiatives, including two-for-one offers. It will continue to explore such opportunities now that we have enhanced journey times between Londonderry and Belfast.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Minister for his answer and breathe a sigh of relief that this new service will be implemented at last. Does he agree that it is essential that a first-class, high-speed rail service between our two principal cities should be put in place at the earliest

opportunity? Will he assure the House that his Department has briefed the Executive, London and Europe on the funding so that the Belfast to Derry line can become a critical part of an all-Ireland rail infrastructure, promoting commerce, tourism and a cleaner environment?

Mr Campbell: There is no doubt that the reduction in commuting times that I referred to, for example the 28-minute reduction from Coleraine to Belfast Central, will be significant and will benefit commuters. Other Members and I will campaign for a steady increase in resources to make all commuting times more speedy and comfortable, whether from Londonderry to Belfast, or Belfast to Newry and thence to the Republic and Dublin.

There are resource implications. The First Minister and the Deputy First Minister ought to be in no doubt about the resources required. We received £105 million through the railways taskforce to upgrade the network over the next three years, but only after significant pressure was applied by me and by my predecessor.

I agree with the Member on the issues that he raises about Northern Ireland Railways. Any process that will lead to upgrading the service between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland would have to be agreed upon between this Administration and the Administration in Dublin. I have no difficulty in promoting that.

Mr K Robinson: The Minister has let several cats out of the bag that I shall follow up in future.

Does the Minister agree that it is time for the saga of the opening of Mossley West station to be brought to a successful conclusion? Will he ensure that the 80 newly created park-and-ride spaces there will be brought into operation as speedily as possible?

There has been investment of £815,000 in the station, with further investment of £150,000 on a pedestrian bridge at Mossley West and £7,000 worth of damage caused by vandalism. Will the Minister assure the House that the station will be included in Northern Ireland Railways's (NIR) timetable immediately and that it will be adequately served, particularly in the rush hour, by trains that are specially adapted for commuters?

Will he say if the station will be subject to a positive, proactive advertising campaign to ensure a successful launch of this long-awaited form of transport?

Mr Deputy Speaker: You are developing an argument rather than asking a question.

Mr K Robinson: With respect, the Minister knows about this subject and will, no doubt, have a great deal of information to provide.

Mr Campbell: I am wondering which of the six questions I should start with.

The Member is correct when he says that I am aware of Mossley West. He is also aware of the replies that I

have sent him in the past few days on this. There has been a series of difficulties with Mossley West, which Translink is trying to resolve.

I have encouraged Translink to be as flexible as possible, because the station is an asset to the people of his constituency and further afield, and we want to use it as quickly as possible. I will do what I can to help resolve the matter, and I have made Translink aware of that. The Member has written to me on several occasions about Mossley West, and I am determined to get the station operational as quickly as possible.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Members should ensure that their questions are concise and that they are questions rather than speeches.

Mr Ford: I shall try to be more concise than the last Member who spoke. I remind the Minister that the people of Templepatrick and Muckamore will want a service when the Bleach Green line opens. If he is seeking to generate traffic he should certainly consider those two stations but consider increasing the rolling stock for the Knockmore to Antrim line to ensure that people will add to the traffic generated in Crumlin, Glenavy and Ballinderry.

Mr Campbell: I sometimes feel that I am responding to a veritable wish list, but that is what my position brings with it. Over 200,000 passengers will benefit from reduced journey times in the first year after the Bleach Green line and station are opened. A station is also proposed for Templepatrick.

The other issues that the hon Member raised are matters that I want to discuss with Translink. They will be resolved gradually — they cannot be resolved today or next week — and must be resolved satisfactorily.

I am committed to trying to put in place a first-class railway system for as many people as possible. That is a clear commitment of which the £105 million over the next three years is a clear example. I hope to build on that for the future.

Hoax Bomb Warnings and Terrorist Attacks (Cost to Public Transport)

4. **Mr Poots** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost to public transport of hoax bomb warnings and terrorist attacks. (AQO 1431/00)

Bomb Threats on Railway Lines (Financial Losses)

8. **Mr Neeson** asked the Minister for Regional Development what financial losses have been incurred as a result of bomb threats on railway lines in Northern Ireland so far this year. (AQO 1446/00)

Mr Campbell: With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will answer Questions 4 and 8 together.

NIR estimates that between January and March of this year some £500,000 worth of additional costs and revenue losses were incurred as a result of bombs and bomb threats on railway lines. Those costs will be met by my Department, which funds NIR's running cost deficit.

That means that there will be around £500,000 less to spend on worthwhile projects in Northern Ireland this year. The most recent disruptions in the current financial year will increase the losses from £500,000, but it is too soon to estimate by how much. The disruption in services also causes great inconvenience to passengers and creates difficulties for Northern Ireland Railways staff.

Mr Poots: Does that figure include the cost of the petrol bomb attacks on buses throughout Belfast and other areas of the Province? What could have been provided by the Department for Regional Development if that extra money were available rather than it's being used up paying for hoax bombs?

Mr Campbell: It might be useful if I briefly itemise how that £500,000 is made up. Approximately £250,000 is due to lost passenger revenue, mainly on the cross-border Enterprise service, and about £200,000 is incurred in bus substitution charges. A further £50,000 or thereabouts is included to cover staff overtime costs and lost revenue from freight crane hire.

I hope that the issue to which the Member referred in the latter part of his question will be addressed by every public representative in the Chamber and beyond. It is totally and utterly reprehensible that a service that provides for the whole community in Northern Ireland can be disrupted to the extent of £500,000 in the first few months of this year. I hope that every Member will condemn utterly such attacks.

Mr Neeson: Every Member condemns the hypocritical activities of paramilitaries. Does the Minister agree that such activity can only damage the North/South tourism industry, which we want to see developed, particularly in the difficult circumstances of the foot-and-mouth disease crisis? Will those losses and damages affect the purchase of the second-hand rolling stock from the Gatwick line?

Mr Campbell: There is no doubt that the inevitable result of those attacks will be a reduction in tourist revenue and in the number of tourists coming to Northern Ireland. There can be no doubt about that. I cannot comment upon whether the attacks are designed to achieve such an end, but that is the inevitable consequence. With regard to the amount and consequence of the £500,000 being diverted, the public service obligation which the Department for Regional Development paid to Northern Ireland Railways for 2001-02 was £12.5 million. The £500,000 would be in addition to that money and, therefore,

would not affect the services to which he refers. However, if the attacks continue, that £500,000 will escalate in a few months' time. That is money that could be much more usefully applied to building and promoting existing services rather than jeopardising them, which may happen if the situation continues to escalate.

Mr Bradley: With regard to railway closures, one is tempted to ask "When will they ever learn?" In the Newry area during the 30 years of futility we had to contend with weekly closures of the Dundalk to Newry railway line. So I understand the sentiments.

Therefore, will the Minister confirm that he will not be deterred by those deplorable acts? In his reply to Mr Dallat he confirmed that he was committed to the continual upgrading of the Dublin to Belfast rail link.

Does that also include his commitment to the upgrading of Newry railway station?

3.30 pm

Mr Campbell: In answer to Mr Dallat — and I reiterate this to Mr Bradley — I want to upgrade all of the railway service in Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, the £105 million allocated in the Budget six months ago provided for only the consolidation option — almost a misnomer — contained in the task force report. It does not enable me to upgrade all of the line. However, in future years I will be bidding for sufficient funding to enable me to begin a gradual upgrading of the line.

In the past the hon Member has raised the issue of Newry railway station, and I have no doubt that he will raise it again. I will undertake to pass his comments to Translink, who have operational responsibility for such matters.

ENVIRONMENT

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 2, in the name of Mr Dallat, has been withdrawn.

Planning Applications

1. **Mr M Murphy** asked the Minister of the Environment to confirm that, where a planning application is deemed flawed, the applicant can re-apply without prejudice to the original application and to explain how a fresh application can be considered "without prejudice".

(AQO 1443/00)

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Foster): Under planning law, an applicant is entitled to submit as many applications as he or she wishes for determination by my Department. Each application must be considered individually and on its own merits, taking account of existing regulations and policy guidelines, and in the light of any comments received. On this basis, all planning applications are considered "without prejudice", although

regard would be given to any previous decisions for the same proposal and to any change in relevant considerations in the intervening period.

Mr M Murphy: I thank the Minister for his response. Will he undertake positive initiatives to improve the weakness in planning applications for mobile masts? I refer particularly to the mast that is under dispute in Jerrettspass, Newry. Everyone wants to pass the buck. Will the Minister take account of the demands of the residents of the area in deciding his Department's future policy in dealing with such matters? Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Foster: I am aware of problems concerning a mobile phone mast in the Jerrettspass area. I have met residents and public representatives on the issue, and my officials are in discussion with Crown Castle, the agents for the developer. It is a matter for Crown Castle to decide whether to submit fresh proposals. To date no proposals have been received.

In parallel, my officials are examining the feasibility of taking discontinuance proceedings, although a detailed planning case would be necessary to justify such action. I must emphasise that discontinuance may not be a practical option, and people should not have false hopes. I would also re-emphasise that my Department can only take enforcement action against unauthorised development. The mast in question received prior approval, and our very firm legal advice is that the Department has no grounds for challenging its validity.

Mr McGrady: With reference to the telecommunications mast at Jerrettspass, I wish to place on record my thanks to the Minister for receiving the delegation of the residents, Newry and Mourne District Council and myself.

However, I am very disappointed with his reply concerning the lack of urgency in the consideration of the discontinuation notice. The history, as the Minister knows, is that incorrect co-ordinates were given for the siting of the mast and that initial approval was therefore misconceived and misdirected in public. The subsequent rejection was a contradiction of the first decision. Are we now in a situation where wrong planning decisions — whether administrative or policy based — cannot be corrected?

That seems to be what the Minister was saying. If that is the case, justice can be done only when the policy is changed. The residents were not able, under law, to make representations about the first application because it was wrongly addressed in the advertisements placed by the Department — not the applicant.

Mr Foster: I assure the Member that I am not being lax — I can do only what I am allowed to do under law. I understand the people's feelings, because I met with residents, the Member and other public representatives.

The decision to grant the first prior approval application on 12 June 2000 was made taking account of all the relevant factors at that time, and the absence of objections, undoubtedly due to the wrong address being in the advertisement, was a relevant factor. The decision to refuse a subsequent prior approval application on 21 February 2001 took account of representations from objectors when the correct address was published.

Although the objectors were mainly concerned with health issues, many raised significant concerns about the visual amenity of the proposal. The representations on visual amenity persuaded the divisional planning office to take the view that, on balance, the proposal was detrimental to the area. The office decided that the proposal lacked any features that would allow it to be satisfactorily integrated into the local landscape.

I sincerely regret the Planning Service's failure to ensure that the original application was advertised with the correct address. It did not give local residents the opportunity to voice their concerns. I have asked for a full report on the case, with recommendations on the measures that could be taken to prevent a recurrence. I am moving as fast as I can on the matter, but, as I said in my previous answer, any discontinuance action will take some months to complete. In the meantime the Department has no powers to remove the mast or interfere with its operations.

Mr McFarland: Where such masts are of concern on health grounds does the Department of the Environment consult with and take advice from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety?

Mr Foster: The health issues that arise from telecommunications equipment are a matter for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, and that Department's advice is taken into account when planning policy is framed. I must emphasise that responsibility for giving permission for the masts does not lie solely with the Planning Service; it is subject to other exigencies.

Following recent consultation, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety confirmed that it would not raise any further questions about health when the emissions from individual masts are within the International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) guidelines. That decision is based on the fact that the level of exposure to radio frequency radiation from individual masts is a small fraction of the level permitted by the ICNIRP guidelines.

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety plays a big role in the matter. The Department of the Environment looks at the aesthetics, the presentation and the erection of masts, but there are health issues that are not its responsibility.

Brownfield Sites (Definition)

3. **Ms Hanna** asked the Minister of the Environment what definition of brownfield sites his Department uses.
(AQO 1467/00)

Mr Foster: The definition of "brownfield" that refers to used by the Department of the Environment's Planning Service is sites in the built-up areas of settlements that have potential for development, and that includes previously developed land, undeveloped land and vacant buildings. That reflects the approach taken in the draft regional development strategy (RDS). I understand that the Department for Regional Development will consider a more precise definition of "brownfield" in the final RDS and when preparing the subsequent regional planning policy statement on housing and settlements. My Department will make an input to that process.

My Department supports the intention of the draft regional development strategy to increase the share of housing in existing urban areas to protect the green belt. However, I am also aware of residents' concerns that increasing development in existing urban areas should not result in unacceptable town cramming — that is vital. My officials will respond to the Department for Regional Development on those matters for the final regional development strategy, and the issues will also be taken into account when they are preparing further planning policy guidance on housing development in cities and towns.

Ms Hanna: I am sure that the Minister shares my concern that regardless of whether gardens are included in the definition or there is an exact definition of "brownfield", it is difficult to quantify how much brownfield there is. We may need a more refined planning policy in that area, especially before there is more development on the Belfast metropolitan area plan.

Mr Foster: I have been aware of the Member's concerns about parts of the city for some time, and I understand them. It is not currently feasible to accurately measure past performance on the share of housing in the existing urban area. Monitoring arrangements will be put in place to check progress. The Planning Service undertakes urban capacity studies as part of the preparation of development plans to assess the potential for an increased share of housing in urban areas. Housing lands supplied in the urban areas consist of undeveloped lands and brownfield and recycled land and buildings. The Department for Regional Development will provide more guidance in the forthcoming regional planning policy statement on housing in settlements. That will facilitate discussion on the appropriate classification to be used for the identification of brownfield sites.

Mr K Robinson: I welcome the Minister's statement, and I draw his attention to three very successful sites on the Glenville Road, in Whiteabbey and at Bleach Green, where former mill sites and their dams have been used for modern housing. Does the Minister agree that it is better to encourage that approach rather than that of constant apartment and town house applications that swamp areas such as the nearby Jordanstown?

Mr Foster: I know that the Member has concerns about his area. The potential of each urban site for housing would have to be assessed against all prevailing and relevant planning policies. In particular, the Department is concerned that increasing the share of future housing within existing urban areas should not give rise to town cramming — of which I believe the Member is fearful.

I am aware of concerns expressed about the redevelopment of housing in existing residential areas. However, high-density brownfield development must have a contribution to make towards protecting the green belt. I can assure the Chamber that, as far as the planning division is concerned, every application is examined on its own merits and under the requirements of the policies. Nothing is done without due consideration's being given to it.

The draft estimates for housing growth are high — an additional 160,000 dwellings are needed by 2015. That will put additional pressures on all areas, including brownfield and greenfield sites. I understand that the regional development strategy will provide housing growth indicators up to 2015 for district council areas. Those totals will be allocated to specific locations by the Planning Service through the development plan process and consultation with the public and district councils.

There is a big surge in demand for homes and development, but planners are aware of the concerns in different areas. In some parts of the country, people feel that there is not enough development, but others feel that far too many houses are being built. It is difficult to balance the situation.

Rivers Bann, Lagan and Foyle: Water Quality

4. **Mr J Wilson** asked the Minister of the Environment if, pursuant to the recent report by the World Wildlife Fund, which singled out the Rivers Bann, Lagan and Foyle as needing remedial work to improve the water quality, he will undertake to implement its recommendations and to make a statement. (AQO 1430/00)

Mr Foster: The World Wildlife Fund Water and Wetland Index Report assesses water quality across Europe. It is mainly based on data provided by national environmental authorities. My Department's Environment and Heritage Service provided the data for Northern Ireland. The WWF's report expresses concerns about future compliance with the water quality objectives of the new EU Water Framework Directive as they become applicable. The report identifies, on a sample survey basis, water quality problems for the upper Bann and Lagan and, to a lesser extent, the Foyle. My Department is aware of those problems and is addressing them as part of wider plans to comply with the EU Directive. The Directive requires member states to have management plans in place for all river basin districts by 2008. Action plans must also be implemented to maintain or improve the

water quality within all catchments. The overall objective is to attain what the Directive describes as good quality status for all waterways by 2015.

A key aspect of the Executive's Programme for Government is the protection and enhancement of the Northern Ireland environment. In that context I have secured significant additional resources to meet, among other things, Northern Ireland's EU obligations, including implementation of the various stages of the Water Framework Directive by the required dates. That will effectively meet the WWF's recommendations.

3.45 pm

Mr J Wilson: Does the Minister agree that it is not good to read headlines announcing that some of Northern Ireland's rivers and lakes are among the most polluted in Europe? He mentioned three rivers — the Bann, the Foyle and the Lagan. The WWF report also singled out Lough Erne in his constituency, and Lough Neagh in mine.

Is he satisfied that the Environment and Heritage Service possesses sufficient sanctions that it can use against the Department for Regional Development's Water Service if that organisation does not achieve established standards within a reasonable time?

Mr Foster: The Public Accounts Committee report on river pollution dealt largely with pre-devolution matters. It reflected the period when the environmental responsibilities of the old DOE were badly under-resourced. I am pleased to state that with the help of colleagues, and the support of the Environment Committee, I was able to secure additional resources that will allow a substantial increase in staffing. Nobody wants to see pollution of waters. We are all very much against it, but it is due to under-resourcing and understaffing.

The number of water quality unit staff will increase from 44 to 77 over the next two years due to the moneys that I have received. The number of people in the water policy team and environmental policy division has been increased by five. Twenty of the additional staff will be deployed to implement the EU Water Framework Directive.

Following a review, the extent of the river network that is monitored by the Environment and Heritage Service has more than doubled from 280 sites to 600 sites. That will enable 5,200 kilometres of river to be classified biologically and 4,200 kilometres to be classified chemically.

A fees and charges scheme will be introduced shortly to enable full recovery of the Department's costs in administering the discharge consent system. This is the line with the "polluter pays" principle. We must get on top of the issue, and the Directive will ensure that we do. I assure Mr Wilson that we are concerned about the matter. I am delighted that we are increasing our staff, because we will then have more resources to fight against the difficulties that we have had over the years.

Housing Developments: Retention of Sport and Recreation Areas

5. **Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the steps he is taking to ensure that sport and recreation areas are retained within housing developments. (AQO 1461/00)

Mr Foster: Existing development plans and those currently under consideration by my Department provide for specific areas of existing open space, sport and recreation. Consideration of each individual planning application is informed by these plans. District councils, as the statutory providers of open spaces, are key consultees in the process.

My Department is currently consulting on two draft planning policy statements (PPS). They are PPS8: Open Space, Sport, and Recreation, and PPS7: Quality Residential Environments. The drafts set out proposals for the protection and provision of open space, and I expect publication of the final versions in the summer months. When finished, the policies will provide relevant contacts for the preparation of development plans and the consideration of planning applications.

Mr Shannon: The Minister talked about the draft proposals, but will he tell us what changes may occur? Will those changes ensure that developers will pay for the recreation and sporting land that has been set aside? Will the drafts consider the possibility of developers providing and paying for football pitches or tennis courts for example? Will the draft proposals take into account those people who live close to football pitches or the recreational lands that have been set aside? Will the land be screened so that sport will not interfere with their quality of life?

Mr Foster: We will be watching these issues very carefully. My Department has responsibility, under the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991, for formulating and co-ordinating policy to secure the orderly and persistent use of land, including open space.

However, responsibility for the direct provision of such open spaces rests with the local councils. At present, that matter is addressed through the development plan process whereby the Department and district councils agree the level of provision that is considered to be appropriate to that particular area.

Raloo Village

6. **Mr Neeson** asked the Minister of the Environment to provide an update on his plans to designate Raloo Village as a conservation area. (AQO 1449/00)

Mr Foster: The Member raised this question with me in the Assembly last June. I reported then that the Department's resources for this area of work were already fully committed, and I could not, at that stage,

indicate when work on this project might start. That continues to be the case. No further resources have been allocated to that area of work, and I am unable to say when I might be able to do so. I should, however, like to make the point that the Larne area plan 2010 states that my Department

“will resist any proposals which will affect the essential character of the settlement.”

Mr Neeson: The Minister is aware of the determination of residents of Raloo village. Even as we speak, the construction of new developments is damaging the ancient and historical nature of the village. If the Department is going to be thrán, I assure the Minister that the residents will be even more thrán. A small amount of money is needed to carry out this project, and it is about time that it were made available in the present financial budget.

Mr Foster: When considering planning applications for development in Raloo, the Department will take into account those matters that are of relevance to the village's potential as a conservation area. I appreciate the Member's concern that the work on the designation has not yet started. I am sure that he will understand that the Planning Service must operate within the confines of its available resources.

The Programme for Government gives priority to reducing the backlog in planning applications and progressing the area plan programme. I believe that those are the right priorities, given the resources allocated by the Executive to the Planning Service. I subsequently investigated the residents' concern that buildings had recently been erected on the basis of outline planning permission. I can confirm that there has been no building on outline approval only.

Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991: Draft Amendment Bill

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Berry's name appears next on my list. In his absence I will move to the next question.

Water Quality in Larne Lough

8. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (a) those agencies that are involved in the monitoring of water quality in Larne lough and (b) which agency takes the lead in managing the water quality of the lough. (AQO 1487/00)

Mr Foster: My Department's Environment and Heritage Service is the lead agency for water quality management in Larne lough. It is also responsible for monitoring rivers which discharge into the lough and the regulation of effluent discharges to it. Under the EC Shellfish Waters Directive (79/923/EEC) the Environment and Heritage Service also monitors the waters of the designated shellfish area in Larne lough. It uses the

Industrial Research and Technology Unit of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for sampling and laboratory analysis.

It is also responsible for identifying non-consented discharges to Larne lough. It is assisted in these duties by staff from the Northern Group Environmental Health Committee and the Fisheries Conservancy Board. All data that are derived from the monitoring programmes in the Larne lough catchment are available from the Environment and Heritage Service.

Mr Beggs: Is the Minister aware of the continuing increased levels of pollution in Larne lough, as determined by shellfish sampling, and that that emanates primarily from sewage from the Department for Regional Development's Water Service? Is he also aware that there may be a need for tertiary treatment to protect the shellfish industry in the lough? Will he ensure that this is drawn to the attention of the Department before it forces the closure of the lough and, ultimately, becomes liable to prosecution under European legislation?

Mr Foster: Following public consultation, part of Larne lough was designated under the EC Shellfish Waters Directive in November 1999. Monitoring data is being collected to determine whether water quality meets the requirements of the Directive. In future, standards for discharges into the lough will need to be set at levels that will enable the water quality standards required by the Directive to be met.

I understand that a shell-fishery company operating in Larne Lough has expressed concerns about the impact of water quality on its business. However, since the matter is currently the subject of litigation against the Water Service of the Department for Regional Development, it would be inappropriate for me to comment further.

Standards of effluent discharges from Water Service waste water treatment plants are set by the Environment and Heritage Service of the Department of the Environment and placed on the public register. Those standards are being progressively reviewed in line with the standards and target dates set out in the EC Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive. By the end of 2005, all treatment plants will have standards and targets that meet the requirements of the Directive.

Waste Management

9. **Mr Byrne** asked the Minister of the Environment to give an assessment of waste management difficulties, particularly the problems associated with the disposal of fallen animals (excluding those culled as a result of foot-and-mouth disease) in many parts of Northern Ireland.

(AQO 1436/00)

Mr Foster: Following a detailed assessment of the significant waste management difficulties facing Northern Ireland, the Department of the Environment published a

comprehensive waste management strategy in March 2000, a copy of which is available in the Assembly Library. Fallen animals are not currently covered by the strategy, because they are classified as agricultural waste and do not come into the controlled waste regime. However, the EC Waste Framework Directive requires the extension of the control regime to agricultural waste.

The Department of the Environment and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development will collaborate in the preparation of an agricultural waste strategy. It is planned to have that strategy completed and incorporated into the overall waste management strategy at the first review point in 2003.

I am advised that a fallen animals liaison group, involving officials from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the Department of the Environment and representatives from local government, has been investigating that issue. The matter is currently being reviewed by that group to take account of the new EU proposals on animal waste.

Mr Byrne: Does the Minister recognise the difficulties that are caused in rural district council areas when fallen animals are callously dumped by farmers at, or near, skip sites? Often, members of the public contact councillors about this, and they, in turn, request that environmental health officers examine those sites. That causes a great problem for district councils, officials and council workers who may have to rectify the situation. Will the Minister give an assurance that he will make provision for collaboration and consultation with district councillors so that a more effective policy can be developed?

Mr Foster: That is an important question. I have been well aware of that problem for a number of years in my council, just south of where Mr Byrne comes from. The fallen animals are generally under the terms of the EC Animal Waste Directive. That is a matter for the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

I acknowledge that some irresponsible farmers have sought to evade their responsibilities by dumping carcasses on roadside verges, in waterways or on publicly owned land. That is undoubtedly a reprehensible practice. Aside from the nuisance and unsightliness it causes, dumping carcasses in that way can have implications for health. Accordingly, information on dumped carcasses brought to the attention of my Department is passed to the relevant district council. The problem of dumped carcasses has formed part of the deliberations of the fallen animals liaison group to which I have referred. That is primarily a matter for the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. I assure Mr Byrne that we will liaise where we can. However, when a health issue is involved, the district council must take responsibility.

Mrs Carson: Can the Minister give any idea of the cost that results from the dumping of cattle in sensitive

areas and in waterways? That is a problem in the Fermanagh and the Shannon/Erne Waterway areas. What is the extent of the cost to the Department of the Environment, and how is it financed?

Mr Foster: I cannot give any costs off the top of my head. It is very difficult to have the information collated and to give a definitive cost. If I can establish what that cost might be, I will write to the lady in question and inform her of the situation as it stands.

It is the responsibility of the environmental health department of the district council, and it will take its costs into consideration. I will write to the Member if I receive more information.

4.00 pm

Roadside Advertising Hoardings

10. **Mrs E Bell** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the action he is taking to counter the continued expansion of roadside advertising hoardings and to make a statement. (AQO 1459/00)

Mr Foster: The Department's policy on roadside advertising hoardings is set out in policy design principle 9 of the Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland. In that there is a presumption against the display of advertisements in open countryside to protect the rural landscape and prevent traffic hazards. Under the Planning (Control of Advertisement) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1992, the display of a roadside advertisement is an offence unless the consent of my Department has been granted. In assessing whether to initiate court action, my Department is guided by legal advice, the impact of advertisements on visual amenity and any road safety issues identified by the Department for Regional Development. If, after assessment, my Department concludes that an advertisement is unacceptable, it normally takes court action. At times, persuasion can work.

Mrs E Bell: Does the Minister agree that the erection of such hoardings should be subject to planning legislation? When going from Belfast to Bangor you are inundated with hoardings of different kinds, in fields or by the roadside. North Down has a special task force looking into that. Will the Minister consider that for all areas, because sooner or later the tourist industry will complain.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Time is up. The Minister will not be able to answer the questions now, but I am sure he will send a written answer instead.

PUBLIC HEALTH/HEALTH INEQUALITIES

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly welcomes the commitment in the Programme for Government for all Departments and their statutory agencies to work resolutely and energetically together to tackle the root causes of preventable disease and disability, and to reduce inequalities in the health status of different groups in our population. — [*Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety*]

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

Mr McCarthy: I welcome today's debate on inequalities in the Health Service of which there are too many, and I am pleased that the Executive are determined to tackle them all. I will point out some that exist in Northern Ireland.

Preventable measures are most welcome. The effects of radon gas cause more than 60 deaths a year in Northern Ireland. I am disappointed by the lack of urgency to tackle that problem, although I am thankful that the issue of smoking is being tackled.

I would like to draw the Minister's attention to the problems that cancer patients experience in Belvoir Park Hospital, where equipment often breaks down. Everyone knows that machines fail, but the machines in question are not due to be replaced for a long time, so cancer suffers wait longer and travel further for vital treatment. They should not have to wait one hour longer, let alone days or weeks, for treatment. Action should be taken immediately to see that machines are modernised and replaced frequently.

We are also deficient in our treatment of rheumatoid arthritis. That is a debilitating disease that can strike at any age. Drugs exist to treat this condition but are not available in some instances because of the cost. We must not sentence sufferers of that disease to pain and disability as a cost-saving measure. If drugs are required, patients ought to receive them. Those are only two instances of inequality in healthcare that have come to our attention recently, and no doubt there are many more.

The debate gives us an opportunity to discuss care for the elderly. As we grow older and our bodies become more infirm, we face more obstacles in our daily lives. That is wrong and unjust.

We do not need additional obstacles in our health system. Unfortunately, that is exactly what happens. We know that older patients are often placed at the bottom of waiting lists. Their concerns are not being met properly. They do not receive first-rate services in all instances. That is a disgrace and should not be tolerated. It seems that age can become a deciding factor in whether one lives or dies. That is an inequality that we must overcome.

Thanks to the recommendations in the Sutherland Report, we hope that nursing care will be free in all

nursing homes from October 2001. Those most in need will get help. Westminster has recognised that nursing care must be provided as a matter of course. However, it has not embraced another Sutherland Report recommendation that said that personal care must also be freely available, determined only by need and paid for by the general taxation. The fact that they have not accepted that recommendation is unfair and will mean that there will be inequalities.

Growing old should not mean growing in fear, worried about how one will pay the cost of living in dignity. For many years, the elderly in our society have been afraid that with ageing, they will be forced to sell their homes or their possessions and use any money that they have saved to provide for the basic help that they may need as their bodies grow infirm. To combat that fear we must embrace the Sutherland recommendations in full. Nursing and personal care must be made available based on need and nothing else.

In many ways, the problems faced by our elderly are part of the larger problem of an inadequately funded care in the community programme. Westminster has not provided the resources that are necessary for people to be taken care of in their homes, whether they need that help because they are disabled, mentally ill or elderly. The Government have declared that the need that is brought on by age does not entitle one to basic help in living a dignified life. In that way, they do not have to fund it. Surely that is an inequality and is wrong.

We should not make the lives of our elderly any more difficult by denying their basic right to having their needs cared for, but that is what we are doing at present. Current practice is simply not good enough. We place people in nursing homes because they need help, but our system cannot provide that help to them in their own homes. They spend nights in the hospital because there are no support staff to assist them when they are discharged. In short, our system is not based on their needs, wants or desires, but gives them a service that they may not want. It is most unfair.

The Government's response to Sutherland's idea of providing care based on need is to argue that although they have the money to do this, making personal care universally free is not the best use of resources. They prefer not to spend money to ensure that our elderly can lead lives that are as independent and fulfilling as possible. That is contrary to what every Member of this House stands for. Surely we in Northern Ireland can do better.

If the Executive want to fulfil their pledges on inequality and targeting social need, they must act in the best interests of the elderly in our population. Denying free personal care is not unfair just to the elderly. It is specifically unfair to those, for instance, who suffer from Alzheimer's disease, a medical condition that leads

to more and more disability and inability to care for oneself. Dementia is a symptom of that disease.

Currently, the Government refuse to fund the care needed to alleviate that symptom. That is in complete contrast to how it treats the symptoms and outcomes of any other disease. That response by the Government says that because someone is old, they do not need to provide the necessary personal care. The person can provide it him or herself. That surely must be totally unfair and unjust. We must and can do better. We must treat the elderly with respect and dignity but also fairness. We must provide for their needs. We must implement the Sutherland report as far as possible, to provide free personal care and support to our elderly and the people who care for them. We must bring that measure of equality to our Health Service.

Finally, I wish to support the many things that Members said this morning about equality in the Health Service, which the Minister also mentioned. Now that we have the opportunity, let us do it now. I also welcome the Minister for Social Development's contribution to the debate. Together all Departments have a duty to stop all those inequalities, and I am sure that they will eventually be successful. On my party's behalf, I support the motion.

Mrs Carson: Through the Programme for Government we hope to have joined-up Government here. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety will take the lead in health. I welcome the Executive's commitment to the Programme for Government, through which all Departments will work together to tackle the causes of preventable diseases and disability. A holistic approach to that should reduce serious pressure on hospital beds and help to reduce waiting lists. However, what is the action plan that will enable that admirable objective to be realised?

Reducing inequalities in the health status of different groups is an excellent aim, but of what groups? We have to find out yet, have we not? How many groups will be identified, and how will the inequalities be tackled? A list of the groups of people who feel excluded from equality of treatment is extremely large. Will pensioners have true equality of treatment, and how will ethnic minorities be treated? Will they get equality? What about our poor practitioners who do not speak the language of many of the ethnic minority groups who are now here? I am talking not only about the Irish language but about Koreans, Portuguese and other minorities.

What about expectant mothers? Will they have equality of access to maternity services across Northern Ireland? What about Fermanagh and South Tyrone? No later than last Monday, an expectant mother from south Tyrone gave birth in an ambulance as it travelled to Craigavon. That was our fear when the South Tyrone Hospital was closed down, and it is coming to pass.

About a year ago, we were told that ambulance staff were being trained in obstetrics, and I asked whether we were to expect mothers now to have children at the side of the road. Well, that is what we have heard about already. As a result of the heavy emphasis in the health strategy that favours urban areas to the detriment of rural ones, incidents such as that will happen again and again. There is too much emphasis on urban areas, and that affects our ambulance call-out times.

The Ambulance Service needs to be considered, because it is a bit thin in rural areas. There was a critical accident last weekend in Fermanagh and South Tyrone, and the ambulance took exactly 21 minutes to arrive — not 20 or 22, but 21 minutes, so it escaped censure. That is too fine a line to have in a serious emergency.

Much has been said about the need for equality in health matters in areas of economic disadvantage. Centralisation by health authorities is compounding the problems by differentiating between urban and rural areas. That is especially highlighted because practically all major hospital services are located east of the Bann. That has brought about inequalities in the entire area west of the Bann, not just for specific groups but for the whole population there.

Equality of provision is vital if we are to create a healthier population, but I wish to know exactly what action plan the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety will use to bring this about. How will that Department co-ordinate with all the other Departments? Reducing inequalities in our health status must also include reducing inequalities in the provision of medical care, and that must also extend to reducing administration in hospitals and addressing the perception that patients are numbers to be processed rather than people to be tended.

4.15 pm

Hospital hygiene and nursing staff care need to be of the highest standards to reduce the risk of patients contracting infections.

With the involvement of all the Departments in that review I look forward to a reduction in our health inequalities. The Department's efforts should concentrate on Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland has to look at its own problems and put its house in order before looking at the problems in the Republic of Ireland.

I support the motion and look forward to increased equality of treatment west of the Bann as well as in the rest of Northern Ireland. I also look forward to seeing an example of joined-up government.

Ms Lewsley: I welcome the Programme for Government's commitment to interdepartmental co-operation in addressing the underlying causes of preventable disease and disability. However, there is little evidence of such Departments getting their houses in order to eliminate

current inequalities, never mind interdepartmental co-ordination to tackle those issues.

Northern Ireland has a significantly higher proportion of people with disabilities per capita than the rest of the United Kingdom. As such we need to develop and implement a comprehensive package to deal with the basic factors behind the issue. As has been mentioned, there is still a high incidence of health differentials between the rich and the poor. If one looks at a map of Northern Ireland and marks out the areas of high unemployment and poverty, it is evident that those are the areas that also suffer the greatest disadvantage in healthcare, low awareness of preventable disease, poor diet, less health education and poor access to health services that are taken for granted in areas that are better off. All those issues are interrelated.

Statistics show an increase in incidences of asthma and coronary and respiratory illnesses in those areas.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and the Public Safety and the Deputy Chairperson of the Health Committee, Mr Gallagher, have mentioned many inequalities in health status. However, there are also inequalities in provision between the health boards. Patients in the Southern Health and Social Services Board can avail of a neurocybernetic prosthesis system for epileptics, while those a few miles up the road in the Eastern Health and Social Services Board cannot. Why is that?

Infertility treatment is also class-oriented, because many couples on low incomes cannot access it because of the high costs of private treatment.

Other areas of long-term illness, or hidden long-term illness such as rheumatoid arthritis, do not receive the same type of funding or attention as chronic long-term illnesses such as the cancers. Will the Minister set out a strategy for dealing with patients with those long-term illnesses and provide the funding for the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis and other less recognised long-term illnesses? Limited respite care for people with disabilities, the elderly and those suffering from long-term illnesses is causing much distress.

Care in the community is underfunded and often varies greatly between geographical areas. The Assembly must look at the low rates of benefit for carers. Despite extensive savings on resources and their invaluable contribution in caring for their relatives and friends, many carers suffer extreme financial hardship and are caught in the poverty trap because they have to depend on the benefits system.

Carers contribute much to the community and deserve support and recognition for their work. Without them the pressures on an already overburdened system would be impossible to cope with. Over the years, with the reduction in social services provision for care in the

community, these people are often left with sole responsibility for someone who is ill or disabled. The carer can become isolated and suffer from low self-esteem and low self-confidence. Caring for someone should be recognised as a profession and not taken for granted because it is seen as a family responsibility.

Carers are often put on hold or are totally forgotten about when caring for a relative or friend. They deserve our respect and recognition. They need support in return for their invaluable contribution to society. None need that support more than the growing number of children who, from a young age, take on the responsibility of caring for a parent, or even parents, through circumstance rather than choice.

Day care for people with learning disabilities is essential and is a basic human right. It should be mandatory to reduce social exclusion and to provide people with training and more job opportunities. The impending crisis we face as a result of the reduction in European funding, means that many voluntary and community groups in the sphere will cease to exist. The increased pressure on existing service provision and on the individuals concerned could cost society dearly. Closer co-ordination between the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Department of Education is needed to alleviate that hardship.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee talked about immunisation and vaccination. However, 5,000 children across Northern Ireland have neither been tested for tuberculosis nor given the BCG vaccination. Admittedly, there has been a drop in the number of cases of TB here, but there are still instances. We could easily find ourselves in the same situation as a town in England that had an outbreak of TB not so long ago. What action is the Minister's Department taking to address that?

Many of the issues cannot be taken in isolation. They are not just health issues but have to be viewed in terms of human rights, equality, education and social development. They need to be tackled on an interdepartmental basis. I support the motion.

Rev Robert Coulter: I support the motion and welcome the statement by the Minister. I commend the Executive on their initiative for an interdepartmental approach to healthcare. The concept that health is the sole domain of healthcare practitioners has been around for far too long. It is great that the consultation document 'Investing for Health' recognises that the health of the community is the concern of the whole community. The old maxim that prevention is better than cure is very relevant today. The Executive's initiative to involve all Departments in making health central to all our activities should be supported by everyone.

Health education must begin at primary school, or even at nursery school. Children should be brought up

to believe in their community's health, not just in their own or in their family's health. When that attitude is instilled in the mind early in life — although it may take some years to develop — it will result in the health of the community becoming central to everyone's thinking.

However, there are one or two problems. Consider the pollution in some of our rivers and in our countryside. Private companies are correctly penalised for creating that pollution, yet Government agencies escape with an apology when raw sewage escapes into the rivers. Will the Minister and the Department see to it that Government agencies do not get away with polluting the countryside, leaving private companies to pay the bill?

I am a little cynical about the boards working in partnership. People in the trusts, and particularly the regional hospitals, tell us that they cannot get the boards to agree on the amount of money to be given to update essential equipment. How will the Minister and her Department make sure that the boards will work in partnership? A new spirit of co-operation among the boards, rather than one of competition, will guarantee the health of the community.

It is not just the environment. The whole of the Health Service in Northern Ireland needs to be looked at from top to bottom, or vice versa. It is an indictment of the nature of our Health Service when we are told that some cancer patients will die without even seeing a consultant, or when we are told that someone had to sit for eight hours in an accident and emergency unit because that was the only way that the GP could have that patient seen by a consultant. Something has gone sadly astray.

We are faced with the increase in the elderly population. That will demand greater powers for the Health Service if we are to cope. Yet I am encouraged; 'Investing for Health' — the health of the community — is something to be commended. I commend the Department, the Minister and the Executive on the initiative. Together we go forward to a better and healthier community.

Dr McDonnell: I, in common with other Members who have spoken, would like to add my appreciation for the fact that this motion is being debated today. I welcome the commitment of the Government and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to work energetically to tackle the root causes of preventable disease and disability and to reduce the inequalities in health status of our different population groups.

Perhaps I speak with a touch of cynicism, although I mean no disrespect to the Minister or anyone engaged in the struggle. When I first looked at this document I thought that it was good, decent, sound and that it reflected the way we wanted to go. However, after a second look, I said to myself "How much will we achieve? Does this mean anything, and, more importantly, will it ever mean anything to the vast majority of our people." I am

talking about the ordinary people at street level who could be referred to in some circumstances as working class — people at the poorer end of the social spectrum.

Although I am concerned about the poor levels of health, health promotion and disease prevention across Northern Ireland, particularly among the working-class people, I am concerned about the plight of people in that socio-economic group in inner-city Belfast. My concern stems from knowledge gained while working for 20 years as a full-time GP in the inner city, and I continue to work there part time as circumstances here permit. Making my observations from that position, I view the health and disease promotion programme as all too often being middle class in its attitudes and values. Often it imposes these values on a working-class problem, which is not a solution for success. Often the language and expectations are different, as is the access to wealth.

Those who have resources can access better quality food, living conditions, housing and everything else. At a simple level it is easy to give someone a lecture on the dangers of the lard content of the Ulster fry and the risk it carries for coronary heart disease.

However, in many cases, people do not have — or do not perceive that they have — the option to adopt a healthier diet.

4.30 pm

As a doctor in inner-city Belfast, I noticed that many of the resources, facilities and programmes operated out of relatively middle-class bases, such as Finaghy, Dunluce Health Centre and Holywood Arches. Although Holywood Arches Health Centre was adjacent to Sydenham and the working-class area of east Belfast, much of its catchment area was the area around Stormont. Such facilities were excellent for people with cars, but, in many cases, they were inaccessible, because the bus routes were unsuitable and, quite often, the people who needed to get to those facilities could not walk to them.

I worked in the Health Service on the lower Ormeau Road. We worked in the original health centre in three old terraced houses. There were few resources and only limited facilities to serve a deprived inner-city community that crossed the divide. We covered the Markets area, Sandy Row, Donegall Pass, lower Ormeau, Annadale and the lower Ravenhill Road. Those were the people who could not access the facilities that they needed. Not only were those areas deprived, but they were hammered by the troubles and the social unrest of the last 30 years.

In that period I and others like me struggled to obtain recognition and investment for that deprived inner-city community from the former Department of Health and Social Services. For all those years, we were on a continuous merry-go-round. I first started discussions about a new building 16 or 17 years ago. The present building has been condemned for health and safety

reasons, but we must survive in it. There are no modern facilities. Indeed, the support services that we had have been taken away. I am not talking about my own practice; I am talking about a facility that, at one stage, served most of south and east Belfast. It has shrunk as other people have picked up some of those services, but, by and large, it still delivers a service of sorts to the deprived inner city. There has been pain, grief, worry and stress in that area. The problem is far too important to be entrusted to the Department. The problem is not one of bureaucracy or architecture; it is about providing services for people, and that is where our Health Service falls down.

People could, perhaps, accuse me of pursuing self-interest; that is not so. I intend to withdraw entirely from general practice in the next year or two. However, I want to see adequate resources and healthcare provided for people in the inner city. Judging by what I have seen, there is too much morbidity and ill health in that area. Too many people die young from a whole range of illnesses. Many cases could have been treated or cured, had they not been neglected. Although much of the neglect is the responsibility of the patients themselves, the lack of access to facilities and the absence of a welcoming centre in that area mean that the treatment of cancers, heart disease and other illnesses is put on the long finger.

I do not want to be emotional or sentimental about it. There are gaps, and we do pay a lot of lip service. I am not accusing our current Minister, because this has gone on for many years. However, until something is done about similar situations we will not have done anything for the Health Service, and we will not have the Health Service of which we want to be proud.

We can say that we have lots of wonderful programmes and policies. Those dealt with issues such as women's health — an issue that particularly concerns me. While the programmes and policies are available, they can only penetrate those who can access them intellectually and physically. Many programmes miss working class people in the inner city totally. They pass those people who have been battered for the past 30 years by social unrest.

At times over the past 12 years I have been conscious about the problems in women's health and of the fact that a mere male can do only so much. During that time I enlisted three female partners in order to set a high priority on women's health. We tried every possible way of communicating with the female population, but we could only get a 55% uptake in our cervical cytology efforts. Short of physically grabbing people in the street we could not get beyond that figure. People felt that they could not avail of that service. The Department of Health expected us to have a 75% or 80% uptake. We tried to communicate in ways that we thought people could relate to, but they declined the tests. There is an issue about how we communicate with people and

encourage them to avail of proper healthcare after we have provided the appropriate facilities.

Some years ago we thought that we were doing very well. I had one male partner and three female partners, and we were all gung-ho on women's health. We decided to congratulate ourselves by auditing on our perceived success, and we interviewed 200 women between the ages of 45 and 55. We were quite sure that we would get a tremendous result of about 80% satisfaction because the women were in the surgery every week and, therefore, they had to be healthy.

However, the reality was that they were there every week as messengers for mothers, fathers, grandmothers, grandfathers, children, husbands or grandchildren. They were there as the contact point — the communicator. In many ways they were the secondary providers of healthcare for their families. From the 200 women we interviewed we found that approximately four were in reasonable health. The rest had problems.

I do not want to go into the gory details, but in this day and age, some of the problems were unforgivable. Many of the women had a significant degree of incontinence as a result of injuries received while giving birth 20 years before, or as a result of a clumsy or bad delivery. Many suffered from mental illness such as prolonged post-natal depression, which had not been diagnosed at the time.

One of the great revolutions in the Health Service was the provision of community psychiatric nurses 12 to 15 years ago. However, the service has been cut back to the point where it is barely viable. Community psychiatric nurses were a godsend 15 years ago, yet the service is now tight.

I have given you two examples of conditions that are unforgivable. I could say a number of other things. We pay a lot of lip service. We have a lot of nice reception areas and fancy brochures on breast cancer, cervical cancer, ovarian cancer and a whole array of things specific to women. We have to start putting this into real action and into a form that communicates to working-class people in deprived inner-city areas.

I have said enough, but I would like to switch to the other end of the spectrum before I finish. We spend a lot of time talking about cancers. Thank God, we are steadily winning the war against cancer, and the percentage curability of cancer tends to go up and up — not fast enough, but it is increasing. I am proud of my involvement — however limited — with the new cancer set-up in Belfast City Hospital. I believe that we will, in due course, have a world-class centre there.

I am distressed, however, that, in many such cases, we can be penny wise and pound foolish. Members are probably familiar with the gastroscope, the telescopic instrument that is passed down into the patient. That has

been modified, and a version has been produced with ultrasound. It can produce a heart echo or a picture of a baby before it is born and can give an exact picture of a tumour. It is one of the most modern and essential pieces of equipment for diagnosing and assessing the treatability of cancer of the oesophagus, the stomach or the gullet. The surgeon knows exactly what he often has to treat.

That equipment costs about £120,000 or £130,000: we do not have one. I raised the matter with people in Belfast City Hospital and was told that efforts to gather together free funds have produced £90,000 to £100,000. In some cases, people are vulnerable to surgery. They have tumours in the oesophagus or the stomach, but they are perhaps not up to surgery. The surgeon needs to know what he or she is faced with before starting surgery and whether surgery will be too life-threatening to undertake at all. The only access to that equipment on the island of Ireland is in Dublin, and I understand that, in some cases, patients have been sent by taxi to Dublin.

We must get our act together. I emphasise that my concerns are in no way attributable to the current Minister, who has been in the job for less than two years. I support the motion; I say, "Hurrah! Let us get to grips with this!" We should get into more detail, and we need more papers on health. We should take a serious, practical look at the big gaps in provision and at the lack of funding. We must consider how we can provide a health service that meets the needs of people, without promising the world and only delivering half — or less.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms de Brún): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tugaim mo bhuíochas do gach Teachta a labhair sa díospóireacht. Tá an-áthas orm gur spreag an t-ábhar oiread díograise, agus chuir mé suim sa mhéid a dúradh.

Dhearbhaigh an díospóireacht tacaíocht an Tionóil do chur chuige láidir trasroinne le sláinte ár bpobail a fheabhsú; cur chuige a chuireann cúiseanna sláinte agus easláinte go hiomlán san áireamh agus a athníonn go gcaithfidh dul i gceann éagothromaíochtaí sláinte go diongbháilte.

I am grateful to all the Members who contributed to the debate, and I am delighted that the subject has engendered so much enthusiasm. I listened with interest to all that was said. The debate confirmed — as, I hope, will the vote — the Assembly's support for a strong cross-departmental approach to improving the health of our people that takes full account of the causes of ill health and recognises the need to act resolutely to tackle health inequalities.

Several issues that were raised during the debate served to reinforce the argument that health improvement cannot be left to health services alone, or to Departments alone. That is why it is so important that all Departments and all sectors and agencies work

together. The ministerial group on public health, which is made up of officials from all Departments and I chair, has designed a consultation process that is well beyond the usual and will engage all sections of society.

4.45 pm

Several Members pointed to the need to improve specific services or ensure that sufficient resources are available to strengthen them. I assure Members that I support the case for adequate funding for all aspects of health and social services including mental health care for young people, the Ambulance Service, community care, primary care, acute hospitals and all other aspects that were mentioned.

It is especially important to ensure that health services are of a high quality and fully accessible to those who need them most, including people who live in isolated rural areas. My Department's equality scheme sets out how it will pursue access for designated equality groups. I outlined in previous debates steps that have been, and are being, taken by my Department on rurality, and Executive Colleagues outlined other steps during the debate on the Programme for Government.

'Investing for Health' is not just about treating disease or caring for the sick, vital as those things are. It is not a matter of traditional health protection activities, such as immunisation or improving food hygiene. It is not confined to the traditional health promotion messages to which Dr McDonnell referred to. It goes beyond the traditional approach to health education with its focus on persuading people to change their behaviour. It is not confined to the professional disciplines of public health medicine, health promotion or environmental health. The World Health Organisation defines health as

"a complete state of physical, mental and social well-being and not simply the absence of disease".

Public health has been defined as

"organised social and political effort for the benefit of populations and individuals while also involving health promotion and personal responsibility for health."

It is important, therefore, that the emphasis in the consultation document is on the wider social determinants of health.

I am pleased to tell Members that the World Health Organisation contributed to the consultation on 'Investing for Health'. Its comments are extremely supportive and endorse our proposals as an excellent example of the World Health Organisation's preferred approach.

Mrs Carson and other Members asked what we will achieve in practical terms. Effective monitoring and accountability arrangements will, of course, be essential to the success of the strategy and to ensuring that it goes beyond a consultation document, a discussion and a strategy. The ministerial group on public health consists of senior officials from all the Departments, and it has

been fully involved in developing the strategy. Group members will, in their respective fields, continue to play a key role in supporting its implementation. The ministerial group on public health that I lead will also consider, in the light of the consultation responses, what additional monitoring arrangements are needed for the new interdepartmental approach to ensure that the strategy happens and produces results.

Unsurprisingly smoking was referred to. It is one of the priority topics identified in 'Investing for Health'. I share the Member's concern about the number of young women who are taking up smoking. Our death rate from lung cancer among young women is already twice the western European average. The Health Promotion Agency has co-operated with the Midland Health Board region in the South to target smoking among young people through a television advertisement. We also looked at the importance of tackling smoking among young girls at school on an all-Ireland basis. The Department of Health and Children in Dublin has nominated a representative to our working group on tobacco that is developing an action plan to tackle smoking.

I thank Dr Adamson for his contribution about the positive role that the Belfast healthy cities project is playing. That project is much in keeping with the proposed approach outlined in 'Investing for Health' by focusing on the wider social determinants and working to broaden participation in action for health. I am pleased to hear about the progress that is being made, and I anticipate that the healthy cities experience will be built on as the investing for health process moves forward.

Mr Billy Hutchinson highlighted the need to maximise efficiency in the Health Service. Management and administrative costs in the health and personal social services (HPSS) are already closely monitored and controlled in order to maximise the resources that are available for care. Those costs amount to less than 2% of health and social service boards' total expenditure, and an average of 4.5% of the expenditure of trusts. Of course, it is paramount that we stress not only the need to get more resources for health, social services and public safety but to make the best use of those resources once we have them.

I agree with Mr Gallagher's comments on the significance of the rise of TB. I assure him that the number of cases of TB is not increasing here. In the year 2000 the number of cases here was at its lowest ever. The schools BCG vaccine and TB testing programme has recommenced this term, starting with children who are due to leave school this year. Other children who have missed the BCG vaccine will have the chance to get it from September.

On Mr McCarthy's point about radon, I am informed that the Environment and Heritage Service has offered 90,000 free radon measurements to households, but so

far only 20% of households have taken up that offer. If a measurement is above the action level set by the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB), remedial action is recommended, and grant assistance might be available. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is responsible for ensuring compliance with health and safety legislation in public buildings, workplaces and schools.

In regard to the safety of the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine, my Department issued new information materials for parents and professionals in April. I agree with Mr Gallagher, who raised the point, and with other Members, that we must all stress the benefits and the necessity of immunisation.

A common theme that runs through all the issues raised by Members is that there not only needs to be action within the realm of health and social services, but also on issues that do not respect organisational boundaries and that demand integrated strategic solutions.

I am happy to report that good progress has already been made on the cross-departmental approach to addressing health issues. People have asked whether that would be a new beginning. Mr Morrow highlighted some of the actions that his Department is taking, and I am grateful to him and his officials for their contribution to the process. The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and I recently signed a joint statement of intent to address the issue of workplace health. The cost to the local economy of illness is immense, and we are committed to a programme of action to make workplaces healthier. I know that work will be done to establish an occupational health forum to meet these needs.

My Department has also been working closely with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to address the serious issue of stress in rural communities. Officials in my Department have been working with the Department for Regional Development to pilot a health impact assessment of that Department's regional transportation strategy. Those are examples of how, by working together, we can make a significant contribution to improving people's health. Through 'Investing for Health' we will be identifying further opportunities for such an approach. That will involve close consideration by all agencies of the positive steps that they can take to promote health, as well as the monitoring of any negative factors that impede good health. Monitoring will be part of the strategy development.

'Investing for Health' aims to improve health by broadening participation and action through partnerships which include community groups, voluntary organisations, businesses and statutory partners. It is important that people tell us what they need during the consultation period and during the implementation of the strategy.

The Members who have highlighted that also have a vital role to play. I hope that Members will feel stimulated by today's discussion to encourage the many people that

they come across to respond to the consultation in a variety of forms. We have opened this up beyond the normal consultation processes — written responses and public meetings — by encouraging contributions through videotape or audio tape and other discussion forums. We have had a photographic exhibition sponsored by the 'Belfast Telegraph', and we have had sponsorship of drama from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and others. There are a variety of ways in which people can make their views known.

I hope that the Members who have shown such interest today will also encourage people to make their views known, both before the end of the consultation process on 31 May and as the implementation of the strategy develops in the future. I also encourage them to ask people to think about what more they can do in their own lives to help improve the well-being of their families, friends and communities.

At the outset of today's debate I said that I wanted the consultation process for 'Investing for Health' to be truly inclusive. Everyone has the right to have their voice heard on issues that affect them, and no issue has more universal relevance than health. Therefore I encourage everyone to contribute. I will be taking into account all the views put to me, and they will be used to draw up proposals for the implementation of the strategy, which I intend to put to the Executive in the autumn. Those will be published, together with a report on the outcome of the consultation process, and there will be an equality impact assessment.

The next step is to ensure, as Members have said, that we have sufficient arrangements and resources in place to ensure effective implementation of the strategy and effective monitoring arrangements to see how it is brought forward. My intention is that it will come into effect from April 2002.

I thank all the Members who took part in today's debate. I hope that I have managed to address the issues they raised. Officials will scrutinise the record of the debate and, if there are points that I have missed, I will write to the Members concerned.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly welcomes the commitment in the Programme for Government for all Departments and their statutory agencies to work resolutely and energetically together to tackle the root causes of preventable disease and disability, and to reduce inequalities in the health status of different groups in our population.

Adjourned at 4.58 pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Monday 21 May 2001

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

ASSEMBLY BUSINESS

Mr Paisley Jnr: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: The Member is fast out of the blocks, but there is another matter which requires attention before I come to his point of order. Mr Cedric Wilson has asked to make a personal statement to the House.

Mr C Wilson: During the course of business on 1 May I left the Chamber at a time when the Deputy Speaker was dealing with a point of order. I wish to apologise to the Chair. It was not my intention to show any disrespect to the Deputy Speaker or the Chair.

Mr Speaker: Mr Wilson has taken the proper course of action in making this statement, and it is noted by the Chair.

You had a point of order to raise, Mr Paisley.

Mr Paisley Jnr: You will be aware, Mr Speaker, that on 2 February, and again on 12 March, the Director of Finance and Personnel for the Assembly wrote to all Members expressly forbidding the use of any room for election campaigning. It has been brought to my attention that the Deputy First Minister made part of his election video in this Building, in a room overlooking the Prince of Wales entrance. Will you conduct an investigation into what I believe is a breach of the rules and, indeed, the conduct to which Members — especially a Deputy First Minister — should adhere?

Mr Speaker: I am aware that a fellow Speaker in one of the other devolved Assemblies took the opportunity to advise members of the regulations and requirements in the Chamber. As far we are concerned, as the Member says, regulations and advice have been furnished by the Director of Finance and Personnel for the Assembly. If Members are concerned about their own observation of the regulations, or of any other Member's, they should, in the first instance, draw that concern to the attention of the Director of Finance and Personnel for the Assembly. I ask the Member to do that if he has particular concerns of the kind he describes. If some problems remain after that, if they are drawn to my attention outside the Chamber,

I will certainly give advice as to how they might be properly followed up.

I trust that is clear for Members.

DEFECTIVE PREMISES (LANDLORD'S LIABILITY) BILL

Final Stage

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):
I beg to move

That the Defective Premises (Landlord's Liability) Bill [NIA 5/00] do now pass.

This Bill has now passed through the various stages of scrutiny, and I would like to take this further opportunity to place on record my thanks to the members of the Committee for Finance and Personnel who have given this Bill detailed investigation and consideration.

I reiterate the comments I made at Consideration Stage. This is a limited but, I think, useful law reform measure, designed to clarify and materially widen the ambit of a landlord's liability for failure to repair defective premises. A legal anomaly has been dealt with, and when the legislation comes into force this time next year, we will have a regime of liability which has existed for nearly all landlords in England and Wales since 1974.

The reasons why landlords of restricted and regulated tenancies do not fall within the scope of this reform at this time have been thoroughly debated, particularly at Committee Stage, and I believe that all those associated with this Bill have reached a consensus that to exempt such landlords is just about the right thing to do at this stage. Obviously it is not an ideal situation, but with the current state of the private rented sector, particularly in relation to grants and enforcement issues, it would be unfair to impose this burden on landlords who cannot achieve normal market rents. However, this situation would be revisited if the proposed review by the Department for Social Development leads to a material change in that sector.

I commend this short Bill to the Assembly.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Defective Premises (Landlord's Liability) Bill [NIA 5/00] do now pass.

ADOPTION (INTERCOUNTRY ASPECTS) BILL

Final Stage

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms de Brún): Molaim Céim Dheiridh an Bhille (Gnéithe Idirthíortha) Uchtaithe.

A Cheann Comhairle, is é príomhchuspóir an Bhille ná Coinbhinsiún na Háige a chur i bhfeidhm anseo.

Sna blianta deireannacha mhéadaigh ar an tsuim i bpáistí ón choigrích a uchtú. Ní suarach iad na buntáistí a thig le páiste ón choigrích a fháil ó bheith á uchtú ag teaghlach anseo. Ní féidir áibhéil a dhéanamh ach oiread ar áthas pearsanta agus sásamh lánúineacha gan chlann a fhéadann baile maith a thairiscint do pháiste ón choigrích.

Is léir go bhféadann mór bhuntáistí a theacht as an uchtú idirthíortha, ach tá sé riachtanach a chinntiú go gcosnaíonn na socruithe atá idir tíortha leas páistí agus go ndaingnítear cearta tuismitheoirí breithe nó cúramóirí eile i dtír dhúchais an pháiste.

I beg to move

That the final stage of the Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Bill [NIA 8/00] do now pass.

The primary purpose of this Bill is to give effect to the 1993 Hague Convention on the protection of children and co-operation in respect of intercountry adoption.

In recent years there has been an increased interest in the adoption of children from abroad. The benefits that such a child can obtain through adoption by a family here can be substantial. Equally, the personal happiness and fulfilment of childless couples who are able to provide a good home for a child from abroad cannot be over-estimated. Intercountry adoption can clearly yield enormous benefits, but it is necessary to ensure that the arrangements between countries protect the welfare of children and secure the rights of birth parents or other carers in the child's country of origin.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Bill [NIA 8/00] do now pass.

Mr Speaker: We come to a series of four Statutory Rules subject to confirmatory resolution. I propose, by leave, to take the first two motions separately, with debates on them if the House so chooses. The second two will be taken together, with one debate if the House so chooses, since they refer to the same substance.

SOCIAL SECURITY (INCAPACITY BENEFIT) (MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS) REGULATIONS (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2000

The Minister for Social Development (Mr Morrow): I beg to move

That the Social Security (Incapacity Benefit) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 be approved.

The Welfare Reform and Pensions (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 made various changes to incapacity benefit. Those included more stringent contribution conditions, the payment of incapacity benefit rather than severe disablement allowance to help people disabled at birth or before the age of 20, and the abatement of the amount of incapacity benefit when an occupational or personal pension was being paid.

These regulations will relax the conditions for receiving the benefit for some disabled people and carers. The contribution conditions will be relaxed for people who were receiving invalidity care allowance immediately before they claimed incapacity benefit. They will also be relaxed for those who receive disabled person's tax credit and earn less than the lower earnings level — currently £72 a week — and for people who received incapacity benefit in the tax year before the one in which they claimed.

The regulations will also make it easier for those incapacitated in youth to qualify for incapacity benefit, particularly a young person who registered for and attended a course of full-time advanced or secondary education or vocational or work-based training for at least three months before the age of 20. That person may be entitled to benefit up to the age of 25. A young person who takes up employment and has earnings below the lower earnings limit for a lengthy period before again becoming incapable of work will be able to requalify and do so for periods beyond the normal linking rules. The normal linking rules are modified for people incapacitated in youth who stopped claiming incapacity benefit and went to work.

The regulations also protect people who return from abroad and were in receipt of benefit in the last tax year prior to the new claim. The regulations provide that the normal abatement of the amount of incapacity benefit when an occupational or personal pension in excess of £85 a week is in payment will not apply to severely disabled people in receipt of the highest rate care component of disability living allowance.

All the changes to incapacity benefit apply only to new claims made after 6 April 2001. Existent beneficiaries at the point of change will not be affected by the new measures. These regulations are entirely beneficial and

will enable a wide range of deserving groups to continue to receive incapacity benefit.

Mr Gibson: What will be the real benefit of those changes to those who are incapacitated in youth?

Mr Morrow: Young people incapacitated early in life will gain as much as £27·60 a week, that is £69·75 long-term incapacity benefit less £42·15 severe disablement allowance under provisions allowing them access to incapacity benefit without their having paid the normal national insurance contribution.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Social Security (Incapacity Benefit) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 be approved.

12.15 pm

SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS UP-RATING ORDER (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2001

The Minister for Social Development (Mr Morrow): I beg to move

That the Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order (Northern Ireland) 2001 be approved.

This is an annual Order which increases rates of contributory and non-contributory benefits, together with the various premiums which form part of the income-related benefits. As usual, the increases are based on changes to the relevant price indicators over the 12 months ending in September. Most social security benefits rise in the usual way, in line with the retail price index, which this year is 3·3%, while most income-related benefits, for instance, income support, housing benefit and income-based jobseeker's allowance, are increased by the Rossi index, which is 1·6%. Pensions and some of the premiums which are part of the income-related benefits are increased by more than these percentages.

More is being done to help people with disabilities and carers. The disabled child premium is increased by £7·40 a week above inflation, from £22·25 to £30 a week. This is a real increase for some of the most needy families in the country. From April the new disability income guarantee was introduced at the rate of £142 a week for a single person and £186·80 for couples. In addition, young adults disabled early in life will benefit from an extra £27·60 a week.

More is also being done to recognise the enormous contribution that carers make. The carers premium is increased by £10 a week on top of the normal up-rating, raising the premium from £14·15 to £24·40. This measure will help many carers on low incomes.

More is being done too for pensioners. The minimum income guarantee was introduced to give more help to the poorest pensioners. This Order raises the guarantee to £92·15 a week. The basic state pension is increased by £5 for single pensioners and by £8 for married couples. Widows and bereavement benefits rise by the same amount. The Order increases rates of benefit in line with inflation and provides additional help for those who need it most.

Mr Gibson: I thank the Minister for this information. What about those whose partners are not able to meet all the requirements of the jobseeker's allowance?

Mr Morrow: Provision has been made for people in that situation. I will write to the Member with full details to answer his question.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order (Northern Ireland) 2001 be approved.

JOBSEEKER'S ALLOWANCE (JOINT CLAIMS: CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS) REGULATIONS (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2001

SOCIAL SECURITY (WORK-FOCUSED INTERVIEWS FOR LONE PARENTS) REGULATIONS (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2001

Mr Speaker: I will ask the Minister to address the next two motions on the Order Paper. Anyone who wishes to speak should refer to either or both motions. After any debate we will vote on the first motion, and then the second will be formally proposed and voted on.

The Minister for Social Development (Mr Morrow): I beg to move

That the Jobseeker's Allowance (Joint Claims: Consequential Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 be approved.

The following motion stood on the Order Paper:

That the Social Security (Work-focused Interviews for Lone Parents) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 be approved. —
[Minister for Social Development]

Mr Morrow: I wish to seek the Assembly's approval for two sets of Regulations. Both arise out of the changes introduced by the Welfare Reforms and Pensions (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 and are required to ensure that parity in social security provision between Northern Ireland and Great Britain is maintained.

The first set of Regulations amends the Jobseeker's Allowance Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996 as a consequence of the introduction of a joint claims regime for certain couples from 19 March 2001. I should first explain that the Welfare Reforms and Pensions (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 contains provisions which require couples to make a joint claim for jobseeker's allowance where neither partner has responsibility for a child.

The Jobseeker's Allowance Joint Claims Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 introduced these provisions on 19 March 2001 and apply when one or both partners were aged between 18 and 24 at the time the requirements came into effect. Under those Regulations, both members of the couple are now required to meet jobseeker's allowance conditions and to be available for, and actively seek, work. They will both receive help to obtain work and will be directed to training programmes or New Deal assistance as appropriate. Joint claims for jobseeker's allowance will ensure that both partners are involved in the labour market, preventing them from adjusting to benefit dependency at an early age. These are young

people without children, in a position to find and take work.

These Regulations ensure that couples who are required to make a joint claim for jobseeker's allowance are treated in the same way as single claimants. This is done through amendment of the principal Regulations: the Jobseeker's Allowance Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996.

The principal Regulations provide for a claimant to be treated as meeting the "availability" and "actively seeking employment" conditions of entitlement for jobseeker's allowance in certain circumstances where, in practice, the claimant is unable to meet the conditions for good reasons.

Regulation 14 of the principal Regulations includes provision that a claimant of jobseeker's allowance can be treated as available for employment if he and his partner are absent from Northern Ireland for up to four weeks, and if his partner qualifies for specified pensioner and disability premiums.

Regulation 50 of the principal Regulations provides that a claimant will be treated as being in Northern Ireland during a period of temporary absence if he is in Great Britain for up to four weeks, or is abroad as agreed for the purposes of attending an interview for up to seven days.

The amending Regulations under discussion today extend these favourable conditions to cover a member of a joint-claim couple who is temporarily absent on the date of the joint claim for jobseeker's allowance.

Regulation 19 of the principal Regulations includes provision that a claimant of jobseeker's allowance shall be treated as actively seeking employment if he and his partner are absent from Northern Ireland for up to four weeks, and if his partner qualifies for specified pensioner and disability premiums.

Paragraphs 2 and 3 of Regulation 2 before us today simply extend these arrangements to joint claimants, so that they are treated as available for and actively seeking employment in the circumstances I have described.

Paragraphs 4 and 5 of Regulation 2 of today's amending Regulations make technical amendments to existing jobseeker's allowance regulations 64 and 65. These amendments ensure that the requirements for a 16-or-17 year-old claimant to be available for and actively seek employment are the same whether he is a single claimant or a member of a joint-claim couple.

We aim to ensure that joint claimants seeking jobseeker's allowance are treated in the same way as single claimants. The changes introduced by the Jobseeker's Allowance (Joint Claims: Consequential Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 will put joint claimants on an equal footing with single claimants as regards labour market conditions for receiving jobseeker's allowance.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Jobseeker's Allowance (Joint Claims: Consequential Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 be approved.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Social Security (Work-focused Interviews for Lone Parents) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 be approved.

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

SOCCER STRATEGY

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McGimpsey): I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the publication of the report 'Creating a Soccer Strategy for Northern Ireland – views of the stakeholders' and notes the progress made on the development of the strategy.

I am delighted to have this opportunity to introduce the future of soccer in Northern Ireland for debate in the Assembly. The debate is very timely given the progress to date on the initiative I launched last October to create a soccer strategy for Northern Ireland. Issues surrounding soccer have been raised and discussed in the Assembly on a number of previous occasions. It would be useful for me to rehearse the background to the soccer initiative and to clarify progress to date.

For some time I have been deeply concerned about the future of football in Northern Ireland. Under devolution, taking up ministerial responsibility for sport has provided me with the opportunity to act on my concerns.

Soccer is in serious difficulties due to a whole raft of problems. Grounds risk closure as they fall seriously short of acceptable health and safety standards. Matches are poorly attended. Clubs are in financial difficulties. There is hooliganism and sectarian behaviour by spectators, and the public has a poor perception of the game. I was convinced that we could and should find ways of overcoming the difficulties. We need to restore to full health the sport that has served all sections of our community for so long and so well.

Northern Ireland can be proud of its rich history of involvement in the evolution of world football. The local game's governing authority, the Irish Football Association (IFA), is the fourth oldest association in the world. The Irish Football League (IFL) is the third oldest league. Therefore it is important to reflect that we are part of a game that was at the very beginning of international football. There was a football association here before there was one in Italy, Germany, Brazil, or Argentina. It is part of our heritage and culture, and that is also something that needs to be borne in mind.

Northern Ireland has produced some wonderful players, but we are now suffering from a shortage of quality players coming through the system. Sadly, the Northern Ireland international team has not participated in the final stages of the World Cup since Mexico in 1986. Football is part of our culture. It has kept going over the past 30 difficult years, serving society well, and we cannot allow it to go to the wall, which is where it is heading if nothing is done to help it.

I believe firmly that there is a potential audience for live football here. The number of spectators who travel across the water to follow the big clubs such as Manchester United, Rangers, Celtic and Liverpool shows that the

potential is there. I do not see our clubs ever competing with the big clubs at that level — or with live matches — nor do I see local football attracting the big crowds that it did in the 1950s and 1960s. Those days are probably over. However, football here can be developed in a complementary way to generate widespread interest and a following for a good-quality and thriving local game.

We have obligations to the younger generation of Northern Ireland, and I would like to maximise the opportunities for boys and girls alike to participate in and enjoy the game. We need to provide the potential for them to progress to the highest levels if that is what they want to do.

When I considered the issues I realised that the way forward was not to deal with them in isolation. The Assembly should look towards a vision for football and see where the game should be in five, 10 or 20 years. What are the issues, and how should we tackle them? What are the problems, and how do we solve them? How can we improve the image of the game and increase spectator numbers? Can we broaden the spectator base to make the game attractive to women and families? What steps can be taken to create a welcoming and family-friendly environment? Can we increase access and participation? How should we go about developing youth football and women's football? What does it take to improve the infrastructure, grounds, facilities, administration, coaching and funding?

12.30 pm

Those are some of the questions that arose during the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure's early discussions about the game. There are no easy fixes. Change will require a great deal of effort, support and resources. However, if the Assembly wants to make football a thriving and successful sport once again, we need to plan now for the future. There is a huge opportunity to develop football, and that would create benefits for the self-esteem and image of our community at home and further afield. I concluded early on that progress could be achieved only by having a strategy for the development of the game. Last October I introduced the "Creating a Soccer Strategy for Northern Ireland — views of the stakeholders" initiative.

Notwithstanding the need for a long-term strategy for soccer, it was clear that some urgent measures were necessary to tackle the most serious health and safety problems at our top sports venues. There is no doubt about the seriousness of the problems. Substantial measures are required to make our sports grounds safe and comfortable for spectators and players. Safety at the grounds and the need to bring those grounds up to the standard recommended in the Taylor report in the wake of the Hillsborough disaster in 1989 are matters which could and should have been tackled more actively under direct rule. However, they were not.

Northern Ireland did not share in the Football Trust's substantial funding for major schemes for grounds improvements that were carried out elsewhere in the United Kingdom in the 1990s following the Taylor report — for which some £600 million was made available.

It was assessed then that Northern Ireland needed over £20 million to comply with the new safety legislation that was introduced in the rest of the United Kingdom as a result of Taylor. Under direct rule we got nothing. The potential for funding has been dramatically reduced, because the Football Foundation that administered those large sums of money and which did so well for the game in England, Wales and Scotland, but not in Northern Ireland, has been replaced by the Football Trust. The football trust is envisaged as an England-only organisation.

Northern Ireland inherited its situation as a result of direct rule. However, Members will recall that last year I introduced an interim measure, the safe sports ground scheme, that was designed to implement urgent health and safety recommendations at football, gaelic and rugby grounds. That work proceeded due to some £5.3 million being made available over three years. I am glad to acknowledge the Assembly's decision to support the allocation of £2 million last year to enable the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure to speed up progress on those improvements.

I am pleased with progress on that front, but I recognise that this is just the beginning and that more needs to be done. Nevertheless, we have a scheme running, and the decision to provide financial support is in our hands. That demonstrates the scope to achieve real progress at local level, progress that could not have been achieved without that local input.

When I announced my plans for a strategy for soccer at the end of last year I intended that the process should be open and inclusive and involve a wide spectrum of interest. The initiative was not just about Irish league football, which undoubtedly has its problems. I wanted the process to look at all levels of the game from the grass roots up.

There have been three important stages to the process. First, I established an advisory panel with a broad range of interests and experience to guide and advise on the development of the strategy. Second, the panel carried out an extensive consultation exercise with interested individuals and groups and the public on the issues facing football and how the game needs to be improved.

On 5 February we published the findings of this exercise in a report called 'Creating a Soccer Strategy for Northern Ireland — views of the stakeholders, which provided the basis for a conference workshop in Newcastle during the weekend of 10 February and 11 February.

I want to place on record my sincere thanks and appreciation to the members of the advisory panel, under

the chairmanship of Billy Hamilton, for the substantial amount of work and effort they have devoted, and are continuing to devote, to this process. The level of time and commitment they have given has been much more than was anticipated.

It is not my role, nor the panel's, to lay down how things should be. Therefore it is imperative that there is a broad consensus from the football family on ideas about how the game should be developed. The panel's role is to provide advice as we move along and to facilitate and guide the process that will translate the ideas into a strategy for action for the future.

I commissioned the 'views of the stakeholders' report to help identify difficulties in the game. I understand that copies have been made available to Members. I wanted the initiative to be open and inclusive, hence the commissioning of widespread consultation and the publication of the findings. Unsurprisingly, the exercise has generated, in the words of the consultants, "an extraordinarily high level of interest and passion." It is a valuable record of what people think about the game. Issues such as the standard of facilities, structure of the game, standard of play, youth development, media, hooliganism and sectarianism have come forward as a result.

We invited delegates to take part in a conference workshop in Newcastle. This provided an opportunity to bring together 68 representatives of the key stakeholder groups, including representatives of the Assembly Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure, to debate the issues and begin to develop ideas.

I would again like to place on record my appreciation to everyone involved for participating in that weekend. Having taken the ideas that emerged at the conference we are currently at the crucial stage of working on recommendations for the future. The advisory panel and my officials are actively engaged in discussions with representatives of football interests at various levels, including the Irish Football Association (IFA), the Irish Football League (IFL), the players and the media to formulate proposals across a range of issues. These discussions are an important part of the process and will contribute to the report that I expect to receive from the advisory panel by the end of the summer. My intention is to use that report as the basis for publishing a draft strategy document in September for widespread consultation.

It would be improper and unwise of me to anticipate the advisory panel's recommendations, but I can give an indication of progress on some of the issues the report is likely to address.

Members of the panel have led several working sessions involving different interest groups. I am aware that proposals have been produced for consideration by the panel for a youth development policy setting out agreed objectives and structures for the future of youth

football in Northern Ireland. The proposals have been produced through representatives of the Irish League clubs, all of the football associations and the Sports Council, working together towards a common purpose.

The media, the IFA and the IFL have worked together to come up with practical solutions for improving media relations. I am told it is intended to re-establish the Professional Players' Association (PPA) from the start of next season. That recommendation is coming from the players as a direct consequence of the soccer strategy process.

Other ongoing work includes looking at ground facilities and health and safety requirements. I expect to receive recommendations on the need for health and safety legislation for Northern Ireland, taking into account the legislation produced in Great Britain. I anticipate that such recommendations will also look at the need for any new legislation to strengthen existing public order provisions to combat unacceptable behaviour at sports grounds, including sectarianism, which has been highlighted as a major issue for soccer.

As I have pointed out in the Assembly on previous occasions, sectarianism is not unique to sport or, indeed, to football. Sport alone cannot solve society's problems. We are, however, addressing this problem within the strategy on a number of fronts. A working group that includes the Irish Football Association (IFA), the Sports Council for Northern Ireland and the Community Relations Council has been set up to identify the issues and to produce recommendations on what future action can be taken to rid football of the scourge of disruptive behaviour. When I launch the soccer strategy for consultation later this year, I expect there to be a range of options for dealing with this problem.

I hope I have given a flavour of what the soccer strategy will address. There are, of course, other issues which I have not yet touched upon and which I expect will also be addressed within the strategy. There is the matter of how football is governed and how senior league football is structured and managed in Northern Ireland. These are big issues, not only for those who support football but also for the organisations at the centre. Individual clubs face problems as to how they might be helped in terms of future management and development in the community.

The subject of a national stadium has also been raised in the context of the soccer strategy. That has implications for sports other than football. The debate is ongoing as to the viability and sustainability of such a project for Northern Ireland. I will be interested to see what emerges from the soccer strategy on the needs of football, and especially international football.

Inevitably some problems will be easier to sort out than others. There will be substantial resource implications for some issues, and it will be up to the football sector to

resolve them. I am confident that the strategy document will provide a direction for the future which we can all encourage and support.

I look forward to receiving the advisory panel's report and to launching the strategy document in due course. Discussions with the Assembly and the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure on the way forward will be an important part of the process. One of the most important aspects of today's debate is that, as local politicians, we are looking at an issue together, and that has implications for our community. The progress we have made so far on the safe sports ground scheme and on the soccer strategy would not have been possible without devolution. There has been a lack of funding over the past 15 years under the football foundation. Local people, local politicians and local soccer interests are talking to each other for the betterment of football and sport in general and our society as a whole.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr O'Neill): I rise to support the motion. Our Committee welcomes the Pricewaterhouse-Coopers report and will support the Minister's emphasis on ensuring an inclusive and transparent process of consultation. As you may recall, we raised the matter of consultation earlier in the year, particularly with regard to a series of meetings held at five separate venues. The Committee was concerned that people who had important contributions to make on the subject may have been excluded from the meetings. The report does not provide details as to where those five public meetings were held.

The report does, however, appear to generate a significant response from those involved in the game and from the public. The interrelated issues that emerged came as no surprise. Lack of finance was perceived as a major problem, and the report indicates that Irish League clubs are facing financial difficulties, deteriorating grounds, lack of sponsorship, poor marketing and image problems. I understand that the Minister intends to address these issues in his strategy for sport.

Will the strategy place emphasis on additional funding and funding sources to support the game? That is required, but adequate financial management and sound business techniques are needed most in the long term. Although finance is important, management techniques are also important to ensure that maximum use is made of the available funds.

12.45 pm

The Committee has taken a particular interest in the allocation of the health and safety funds that were made available under the safe sports grounds scheme. On 4 December 2000, the Minister told the Assembly that an estimated £25 million was required to upgrade our existing stadiums. As he said, £5.3 million has been secured so far to undertake essential work. The Minister indicated that he would like to work on this issue. What plans has

he and the Department prepared to ensure that health and safety funding will continue after the initial phase?

The Committee hopes to visit a number of stadiums in Scotland this year to look at work carried out as a result of recommendations in the Taylor report. As Members know, a great deal of excellent work has been completed using Football Trust money. This is relevant to our situation, and the Committee hopes to explore this area in particular.

The Minister is already on record as having indicated the Department's intention to bring forward legislation to implement the Taylor report. When is this likely to be programmed?

The overwhelming response from the report was that there was a need for one governing body to take forward senior football. It appears that the Irish Football Association (IFA) and the Irish Football League (IFL) fail to work together, and the perceived degree of conflict between them contributes to the negative image of soccer here. For example, we have seen that a sole central authority in the South — joining the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) and the Eircom league — has benefited football in terms of increased crowds and better performances in Europe.

Although the primary aim of the Department's strategy will be the improvement of the Irish league, the ultimate by-product will be the production of a better international team. Will the Minister tell us whether the Department intends to create a unified governing body for soccer? He referred to it as a major management issue in the future, but is he predisposed to go in that direction?

Two important areas highlighted by the report are youth development and community involvement. It is vital to attract young people to the game and provide them with the opportunity to develop their skills. The report highlighted the sense of loss that results from young players being lured away to play for clubs in the United Kingdom, which are perceived as offering better opportunities. Therefore it is essential that the Department's strategy addresses the issues of how the game in Northern Ireland can benefit from the development of our talented young players, and how they can be provided with opportunities.

I was glad to hear the Minister state that the advisory panel has focused on a youth development policy. Would he consider, as part of the strategy, similar coaching techniques to those employed by the Belfast Giants? Many Members may be familiar with this. The Giants hire professional players to coach young people, and this, incidentally, is an excellent way of establishing the sport here. They appear to be having some success already.

This coaching system works in two ways. Young players have the privilege of being coached by someone they admire greatly, and aspire to be like, and the ice

hockey players are contributing to the community. The Committee was impressed when, during a recent public session, it heard evidence from the organisers of the Giants about how they went about their training. Perhaps we should be learning from good practice where it exists.

The area of community involvement is difficult. However, it is valid for the success of the game to establish links and positive loyalties with the community.

Of those questioned for the report, 62% rated the image of soccer in Northern Ireland as “quite” or “very poor,” and only 14% thought that it was “quite good”.

Media coverage appears to be a big issue that needs to be addressed. I am again heartened that the advisory panel has focused on that as a major issue. Has the Minister had any discussions with the television companies about the comments that were made during the preparation of the final report? Such discussions might influence issues even before the advisory panel completes its work.

Unfortunately, media coverage often includes images of sectarianism and hooliganism. While there is no doubt that they come from a small core of people, sectarianism and hooliganism exist at club and international level. The perception, from the report, is that those factors are responsible for alienating people, especially family groups, from the game.

The Committee recognises and applauds the good work of the IFA in tackling this problem at international level. The Minister has been forthright in his condemnation of the sectarian behaviour. He also said that he will examine the need for legislation to deal specifically with the problem as part of the soccer strategy.

The Committee looks forward to being consulted on the draft strategy at an early date. I look forward to hearing the views of other Members. I support the motion.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I must leave the Chamber to attend a Committee meeting. I believe that it is now protocol for Members to indicate that. I will, however, be monitoring the responses given.

Mr Hussey: I too endorse the strategy. During the drafting of the strategy, although the major tendency was to look at problems at a senior level, I welcomed the involvement of representatives of clubs at junior, intermediate and youth levels in the consultation process to introduce a forward strategy.

Although I welcome the Minister’s statement, I seek some reassurance. Mention has rightly been made of youth development. I am sure that the Minister realises that a tremendous amount of youth development in Association Football takes place through the junior and intermediate clubs. Indeed — and I respond to the Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure — tremendous community involvement is generated via the localised set-ups at the lower levels.

I seek assurance from the Minister that the taking forward of the strategy will involve junior and intermediate clubs, and the youth wings, in the strategy’s implementation and the provision of the necessary funding, to assist clubs at the lower levels in improving the standards of play and upgrading facilities.

Mr Hilditch: I support the motion. I thank the Minister for bringing this issue before the Assembly. I welcome the opportunity to note the report and to highlight a number of important issues on the subject.

This debate comes on the back of what was probably one of the most successful days for local soccer in the past 30 years — the recent Irish Cup final, when everything that is good in soccer was highlighted — *[Interruption]*

A Member: Except the result.

Mr Hilditch: — except the result.

The football fraternity eagerly awaits the final report and the recommendations that it will contain. Can the Minister confirm that we are still on course for the soccer strategy to be in place by the autumn?

There was a degree of disappointment that the strategy could not be put in place by the close of this season to allow for some forward planning. However, everyone involved in the game appreciates the depth of consultation that was required. It was probably best not to be rushed; the important thing is to get the end product right.

The ‘Creating a Soccer Strategy for Northern Ireland — views of the stakeholders’ report is a crucial part of the process and must be welcomed. I can identify with many of the issues raised concerning matters over the past 20 years, as I have had various responsibilities as a player, coach, referee, paying spectator and, currently, an administrator.

The report is comprehensive and covers all levels of soccer and the key stakeholders in the game. The only criticism of the process is the contribution of some members of the advisory panel, and they have been made aware of the figures. Some members who were afforded a place on the panel may find participation particularly difficult because of their cross-channel commitments to the game. However, the majority of panel members should be praised for their work, and those who took part in the conference workshop in Newcastle should also be praised. It provided an opportunity for people involved in soccer to get together in an intense environment to give their honest assessment of the failures in the sport. At the end of the three days honesty prevailed, even among those who had gone to Newcastle to defend their organisations and policies over the years. The “look at us and how great we are” mentality was put to bed, and views which, in the past, had gone unheard were taken on board.

The main part of the research and the matters on which we should be concentrating are contained in part three of the report, entitled 'The Emerging Issues'. These are listed in bullet points. Although it has been difficult to prioritise them, they are listed in order of importance — finance, facilities, structure, youth development, community involvement, image, sectarianism and hooliganism. Many of these issues are interlinked. At the top of the list is finance, which is also the common denominator of the other emerging issues. Although it is not within the scope of the research remit to investigate and report on the financial state of Irish League clubs or any other part of the structure of football in Northern Ireland, it might have been prudent to do so, as that would have given us a real insight into the problems facing us.

The Government may provide financial assistance to help with health and safety and other matters, but no one expects Government handouts just to keep clubs solvent. However, the Assembly should know of some factors which explain why many senior clubs find themselves in their current positions. A typical first division club, with a fortnightly gate of between £200 and £300, is left with £25 to £30 after match expenses. That is only for match day. The club then has to find players' wages, ground rent, administration costs and electricity charges, et cetera. On top of that is the burning issue of rates. The rates bill for a typical first division club is over £4,000. That is only for the football side; it has nothing to do with the social club. A club that finds it impossible to meet its weekly commitments is charged rates at a commercial level. A team that plays its last home game on 21 April and does not play another until the middle of August has no income coming through its gates for a quarter of the year.

I call upon the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure and the Minister of Finance and Personnel to deal with this situation immediately. If commercial property is not used, it should not be charged accordingly. Other sources of income are social clubs and sponsorships. A home sponsored game every fortnight would raise between £200 and £300 a game. Social clubs are things of the past. They were successful in the 1970s and 1980s when people were looking for a secure environment in which to socialise. Times and trends have changed, and people are now looking for social entertainment with much more on offer. Time has stood still for many social clubs. They find it difficult to pay their way, never mind contribute finance to offset the cost of sustaining soccer.

It is acknowledged that, in addition to the Government, all stakeholders in soccer should deal with reality when it comes to finance. Most clubs are now gearing themselves to live within their means. I urge the Assembly also to play its part.

There is much to be said on the emerging issues. The report sets them out adequately, and they should be taken on board in time. I have highlighted only one

aspect of the report, but I emphasise that there is much feeling, fervour and passion about football here. A large number of people await autumn, the finished soccer strategy, its recommendations and public consultation.

Mr McCarthy: Once again the Assembly gives locally elected people the opportunity to debate issues that matter greatly to the people of Northern Ireland.

1.00 pm

Today the subject is football. It certainly makes a change from going over and over the old sterile arguments.

The report is informative and timely. Now that the Assembly is in place, we have a real opportunity to change, contribute to and improve football in Northern Ireland. The Alliance Party supports much of this report. We agree that competitions overwork players, who then have little or no time to improve their skills. Realistically, there should be fewer competitions.

The Alliance Party also has concerns about the structure of football in Northern Ireland, both in the Irish Football Association and the Irish Football League. Currently there is a lack of clarity in each organisation's role. Surely a single governing body would make more sense. Not only would it remove overlap in role and responsibilities, it could cut costs by streamlining staff and eliminating duplication.

Under no circumstances, however, can the Alliance Party support any question of cutting the post of the IFA community relations officer, who is doing an excellent job and very important and essential work. That must continue and be supported, and I ask the Minister today to give the Assembly a commitment that it will be so.

The Alliance Party — like the report — calls for a new stadium on neutral ground. We committed to this in the Programme for Government, and it forms part of our manifesto. It makes sense, of course, that to get the best use from any such sporting ground it must be multi-purpose. We do not want a large white elephant — even if it be on neutral ground.

Alliance also supports making available the full amount called for in the upgrading of senior clubs — the whole £20 million rather than the £6 million currently allocated. This money must only, however, be allocated as part of an overall strategy to improve grounds, quality of play and the overall experience for fans and spectators.

The Minister and other Members who spoke earlier agreed that central to improving the experience for fans is the tackling of the scourge of sectarianism. Over 90% of people in the clubs felt that sectarianism had an impact. Over 90% of people perceived to be Protestant thought that sectarianism affected football. It is seen as even more of a problem than hooliganism — and rightly so. It is a problem at international matches and at Irish League matches. It is a problem and does nothing to the credit of Northern Ireland or of football.

I welcome the Minister's commitment against sectarianism and hooliganism. It has to stop. We can tolerate it no longer. I have raised the matter with the Minister in the Assembly. I have made speeches about it, and I continue to make speeches. Extend the Football (Offences Act) 1991 to Northern Ireland. Outlaw sectarian chanting and the throwing of abuse at the pitch, at players and other fans. If the Minister is tired of hearing me say this, let him do something quickly. Only then will I be quiet.

In conclusion, football in Northern Ireland has to become a family-orientated form of entertainment, and the sooner that is brought about, the sooner we can have a thriving and well-supported football and soccer industry. That will give the whole community something to shout about together.

Mr B Hutchinson: I welcome the motion and congratulate the Minister for bringing it forward. I do, however, feel a bit cheated. I always do feel cheated by consultants. The Minister invited consultants to Parliament Buildings. They looked at the clock and told us what time it was. We knew exactly what problems existed in soccer. What we need to do is get on with finding the means to resolve them, rather than spending large amounts of money on consultants' telling us what is wrong.

One of the best documents ever written about soccer is the Taylor report. Paragraph 59 of chapter 2 entitled 'A Better Future for Football' states

"It is not enough to aim only at the minimum measures necessary for safety. That has been, at best, the approach in the past and too often not even that standard has been achieved. What is required is the vision and the imagination to achieve a new ethos for football. Grounds should be upgraded. Attitudes should be more welcoming. The aim should be to provide more modern and comfortable accommodation, better and more varied facilities, more consultation with the supporters and more positive leadership. If such a policy is implemented it will not only improve safety. There will also be an improvement in behaviour, making crowd control easier."

We can assume that every Member, including the Minister, wants to achieve those aims. They must be the basis from which we work.

I congratulate the Minister on what he has done so far and on what the panel has achieved. However, there are many myths about. I heard what Members have said this morning. East Antrim Member David Hilditch has been involved in soccer at different levels, and he probably knows more about the administration side than I do. However, as a football supporter who goes to grounds every week, I know that people continually talk about the amount of games that are played and about how that inhibits the skills of young players. The football season in England ended on Saturday. I am not a Liverpool supporter, but Liverpool played sixty-odd games. There are four local players in the team— Michael Owen, Steven Gerrard, Carragher and Fowler — and I would

defy anybody to tell me that they are not skilful. Those four kids played in most of the games, and we are continually told that it is wrong.

People pick up skills by playing the game at the speed that it should be played at — in a match, not on a training ground. Training ground practice is not the same as a match-day game. Players can practise things at a certain speed on the training ground, but on a match day they can bet that the opposing team will be in quickly to try to stop them from playing. The four kids from Liverpool have proved that. We must get rid of some of the myths.

Another myth is that footballers in Northern Ireland do not coach young people. Where have people been? Linfield and Dundalk football clubs are involved in the Dunfield project whereby the players coach in the community. I am sure that Alban Maginness and the Sinn Féin Member Gerry Kelly know that Cliftonville Football Club in North Belfast has received money to employ a development officer to work in the community. Many teams in Northern Ireland do not have the money to do that. Some teams have found sources to enable them to do it. Of course teams will work and coach in the community, but they must have the money to do so.

We must get rid of these perceptions and myths. People must understand what is really happening in football grounds. We must recognise that for the past thirty-odd years people have committed themselves — from the chairmen and board members of the premiership and first division teams right down to the grass roots — to local soccer through the worst times and with no money. However, the Football Trust was set up in 1958. Anybody who reads the finance section of the Taylor report — a report written in 1989 — will find that the trust was drawing in £9 million a year from the three major pools companies. From 1958 to 1989 about £120 million went into football for British teams. In relation to the trust's powers, the Taylor report actually says

"football in Great Britain and Northern Ireland".

Why did we not get the money? If we did not get the money, we should be asking for some of it now. If we did get the money, why were the grounds not improved? We must ask those questions.

There are several things that we can do. For example, we can look at the time at which football is played. Most people focus on when Linfield, Glentoran, Cliftonville, Distillery or Carrick Rangers are playing. We do not need to focus on that. We need to focus on when other people are playing. Amateur and junior football teams play at the same time that the semi-professional teams play. We must focus on that problem and co-ordinate the games.

It is not just a matter of Government or the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure facilitating the process. We need to tell those in the Irish Football Association (IFA)

and the Irish Football League (IFL) who have responsibility that they must do certain things before the money will be made available. We are not a charity; we are here to save our national sport.

No one can argue that soccer is not a traditional sport for people from both communities. We must get people back into football grounds, and we must improve the quality of play. Most people think that the quality of play in the Irish Premier League is not very good. I watch the games every week, and I can assure Members that the quality is good. However, the League does not get proper media coverage.

There is also a focus on sectarianism. We are told that sectarianism is an evil in sport and that it keeps away the crowds. How does that explain the large crowds who watch Linfield play Cliftonville? Do one team's fans really stay away because of the sectarianism of the opposing fans? There has been little trouble in the past few years. The football clubs have made an effort, as have the IFA and the IFL, and that should be recognised. The way to get rid of hooliganism and sectarianism is to implement the recommendations contained in the Taylor report. The report recommends all-seater stadiums and a ticketing system that means that people should purchase tickets in their own name, that the tickets should be numbered and that people should have to sit in the allocated seats. If that happened, CCTV could show where the trouble was, and it could be quickly eradicated. We must focus on such improvements, but first we must get the crowds back to football.

There has been talk about developing junior soccer. In England, football academies have been set up because of the cost of buying players. The Football Association has set up its own school of excellence. We should do that in Northern Ireland, and we should also set up football academies in each of the six counties. That is the way to develop soccer.

People have suggested that we could restrict the opportunities for young players to move across the water. That is nonsense. Most parents who know that Liverpool, Manchester United, Leeds, Arsenal or Newcastle football clubs are interested in their child get pound signs in front of their eyes. In England, Arsenal paid £1 million for a fourteen-year-old — nobody here can compete with that. We must ensure that players who do not make it in England have somewhere to go in the Irish Premier League if they come back to Northern Ireland.

We cannot compete with the money in England, where clubs get billions of pounds for television coverage. We do not have that potential, so we need to understand what we have, how we can market it and what it is worth. We should not inhibit young players from Northern Ireland, who are the future of the international team, from going to England. If those children will be better players as a result of going over there, that is in the

interest of Northern Ireland. Local clubs must make sure that they get players at the standard that they need.

I accept what Mr Hilditch said about local councils. I did not realise that rates were paid on the football side alone — I thought that rates were paid for the social clubs. We need to address that, but local councils should look at what the football clubs can do for them. We should also consider the fact that local councils subsidise leisure centres and theatres that probably do not draw the crowds that football grounds would, if we packaged football properly. Local councils should look at how they could subsidise football grounds and clubs. Belfast City Council would have a problem, because there are four football teams, but the council should examine ways of resolving it.

1.15 pm

The Minister said that many football fans leave these shores on a weekly basis to go to matches in Scotland and England. I have spoken to staff at the airports and ports, who tell me that approximately 5,500 fans leave these shores every week. If that figure is multiplied by the 38 matches in the Premier League, it gives some idea of how many people from here attend those matches.

It is important that the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure shows leadership. I said earlier that I did not think that we should facilitate this strategy, but rather we should show leadership and tell people what they need to do. I am not advocating dictatorship, but we should resolve problems. I do not want this strategy — and I am sure other Members do not want it — simply because two bodies cannot agree. The Assembly must agree on what should be done and must ensure that people understand what needs to happen.

The document discusses the “image of soccer”, and I am not sure what that refers to. It may be a reference to the quality of play by the teams or individual players, or it may refer to the image the fans bring to the game. Whatever it refers to, the image of football must be improved. Family membership and disabled supporters must be looked after, and grounds must be fitted out to ensure the safety of those people. That is outlined in the Taylor report, and it is important that we work on it.

My recommendation is that we proceed and that we look to the Taylor report for guidance. Did we or did we not receive money, and, if we did, has it been used for ground improvements? The report refers to football in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, so if we did not receive money, we should be asking for it now. Other changes that involve taxes, people going through turnstiles not being charged VAT, and so forth can be dealt with by the British Government at Westminster. Rates can be dealt with locally.

The Government must come up with a scheme whereby businessmen are encouraged to invest in football. The

Taylor report mentions one manager who took his children to a Tottenham Hotspur game where McDonald's burgers were on sale. I do not think that we will get a McDonald's in every football ground in Northern Ireland, but businesses must be asked to start putting money back into football here. Club chairmen and directors must be asked to examine the vision for football. There is a clear vision for football in the Taylor report, chapter 2 'A Better Future for Football', paragraph 59. If we achieve that vision, we will have achieved everything we can for a wonderful game.

Mr A Maginness: Mr Hutchinson said that we need to get the crowds back to football matches in order to lift the game. But how do we get those crowds back, and how do we make the sport popular again? There is no doubt that soccer is universally popular. No other sport has such appeal—from South America to Europe to Africa. Soccer is the premier game in most countries. The Minister said that we were in the lead in the development of modern soccer, and that is true historically. However, something has happened along the line to cause local soccer to fall into decline.

This discussion document is, therefore, very timely, looking as it does at the problems associated with local soccer. This survey does not arrive at any conclusions, but it maps out areas of concern and suggests possible conclusions. The report is very useful indeed, and the Minister deserves great credit for initiating it.

The Minister also deserves great credit from the Assembly for his forthright rejection of any form of sectarianism in sport, particularly soccer, and for the political leadership that he has shown.

A number of issues need to be tackled, and this survey highlights them. Poor facilities is one such issue, and many Members have touched upon it. It is clear from the report that players and the public all regard poor facilities as a major problem. It is also clear from it that football matches, indeed soccer in general, are not seen as family-friendly and are ill-equipped in other ways as well.

There are other reasons for soccer's decline such as the extensive television coverage of high-quality professional football in Britain, Europe and throughout the world. Obviously, that has had an adverse impact on local soccer, because local soccer cannot compete with that. In addition, the attraction of premier league teams in Britain has produced a talent drain here. One cannot blame youngsters for being attracted to English clubs in particular. One could not practically or lawfully prevent youngsters from going across the water to improve their quality of play and their standard of living. There are other factors at work, some of which I have highlighted and are highlighted in the report, factors that are also at work in the Irish Republic and other parts of Britain.

We have unique problems with football. The survey identifies hooliganism and sectarianism as major problems.

One can see from the survey that sectarianism is having an impact on attendance at international football and Irish League games. Sadly there is a division of opinion about the impact of sectarianism. Those perceived to be Protestants say that sectarianism negatively impacts on attendance at international matches by 36%, and those perceived to be Catholics say that it is by 83%.

At Irish League games, in the Protestant community it is seen as 26%, and in the Catholic community, 56%. I use those figures to highlight the fact that the Catholic community is more concerned about sectarianism impacting on attendance at Irish League clubs and international matches. That must be taken into consideration. It is fair to say that throughout the whole community there is great concern about the impact of sectarianism on football. We must address that as a community.

I agree with Billy Hutchinson that we as politicians must give leadership; we must show leadership in relation to sectarianism. Our Minister has given a lead in that regard. Any strategy that we develop in relation to the revival of local soccer must address the problem of sectarianism. I do not pretend that there is an easy solution to this. The issue must be addressed in a practical way before we can develop a more universal appeal for soccer and football in Northern Ireland.

If one looks at the popularity of rugby and gaelic football, one can see that the community has to some extent walked away from soccer. We must examine that to see what is happening, not just in the Catholic or Protestant community, but in the whole community.

It would be useful to look at the emphasis that is put on field sports in our schools. Do our schools put too much emphasis on rugby and gaelic football to the detriment of soccer? I do not see a tremendous emphasis on soccer in any school, whether Catholic or Protestant, controlled or maintained. At both primary and secondary levels, in both secondary intermediate and grammar schools, we should look at the sort of emphasis that is placed on the development of soccer as part of the physical education agenda of those schools. If we do not get that base correct in our schools, then soccer is going to have a continuous uphill struggle. Therefore I suggest that we look at that very carefully.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in this important debate. I warmly commend the Minister for bringing it to the House and also for his commitment to soccer. It is welcome that a Northern Ireland Minister of the Assembly should be so committed to the issue of local football. The soccer strategy for Northern Ireland report and its introduction have been widely welcomed by those in the game.

I agree largely with what the Member for North Belfast, Mr Hutchinson, said earlier. For many years, soccer provided an essential community outlet for youngsters in Northern Ireland to get away from and break out of

sectarian strangleholds. It granted them the opportunity to employ their talents and show their sporting skills in a positive way, rather than engaging in other activities.

The Assembly and the community in Northern Ireland owes soccer a great debt and should be in a position to repay some of that debt.

1.30 pm

We have a great sporting tradition, particularly in soccer, in Northern Ireland. Peter Doherty, Danny Blanchflower — whom, allegedly, I am called after — Pat Jennings and George Best all crossed the sectarian divide. They all played with passion and pride for their clubs and for Northern Ireland. I have always regarded Windsor Park as the home of local soccer and as the national stadium of Northern Ireland. It has never caused me a problem to go there, along with people from all religions and of no religion.

I remember in 1981, in the dark days of this Province, when other events were taking place, the Northern Ireland soccer team provided a real boost for people of both communities and all traditions with its exploits on the field. The team of Martin O'Neill, Sammy McIlroy, Gerry Armstrong and Willie Hamilton provided a cross-community element that was worthy of great support and touched a raw nerve in the passion of local football. That team lifted the spirits and the morale of people in Northern Ireland. I am satisfied that the team and the fans who supported it were made up of the Catholic and Protestant communities in Northern Ireland.

I am surprised and disappointed to hear negative comments from perceived Nationalist elected representatives who are not able to give their support to the Northern Ireland international team. That is a huge mistake. It is incumbent on all public representatives to show proper leadership.

I have heard Kieran McCarthy, the Member for Strangford, on a number of occasions holding forth on the issue of sectarianism. I am not aware, and perhaps Mr McCarthy at some stage will inform the House, what his involvement and commitment to local soccer has been. Is it simply to grab a cheap and easy headline at the expense of those who love and cherish football? I sometimes wonder if Kieran McCarthy would know if a ball were blown up or stuffed, given some of his less informed comments.

Mr McCarthy: I did not play for Ards, but I certainly played —

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Kennedy: No doubt he will inform the House when he gets an available moment.

I have some concern that attempts are being made to undermine Windsor Park as the national stadium of Northern Ireland. We should recognise the very strenuous

efforts made by the International Football Association (IFA) and others and Linfield Football Club in creating neutral conditions and being actively opposed to sectarianism at Windsor Park. I firmly believe that Windsor Park should continue to be developed as the national stadium for Northern Ireland.

Mention of the national stadium project brings forward the idea that it can be a multisport facility. There are considerable objections from the GAA to that. The playing of any other code would appear to rule out the GAA's sharing a multi-purpose stadium. However, that remains to be seen.

I will say in respect of Alban Maginness's comments on the GAA that it is not unfair to remind him that Gaelic sport is almost exclusively Catholic and Nationalist. That is a fair point to raise, and to draw to his attention, when he makes a comparison with local soccer.

A plea should be made and supported for available moneys to be provided to local clubs. I am thinking of Irish League clubs, intermediate clubs, youth clubs — indeed, the full range. I include in that Newry Town football club, Armagh City football club and Loughgall in my constituency. A range of activity is provided, week in, week out, day in, day out, to develop young people's soccer skills and give them an outlet for their abilities.

I want to see schools' football and the football of other leagues cherished and developed. I take the point raised by Alban Maginness that in our schools, a greater emphasis should, perhaps, be placed on local soccer by those in charge. Every encouragement should be given. Broadly speaking, I welcome the strategy. I wish the Minister well and trust that something will be done to preserve and cherish local football.

Mr Gibson: I welcome this report as an interim move. I am rather disappointed that it did not start with the Taylor report of twelve years ago, which is generally regarded as the vision statement for football. It is disappointing to find that PricewaterhouseCoopers did not seem to be aware of it.

I was rather taken aback by the fact that in the executive summary, the report offers no short-term or long-term solutions, nor does it give an estimate of costs. It is hoped that a strategy will emerge from within the sport itself. That was disappointing, given that it was supposed to be an exhaustive exercise in finding out what was going on in local soccer.

I do not want to speak about professional teams in the Irish Premier League. I want to speak about rural teams that often take their names from townlands, teams such as the Dunbreen Rovers, Killen, Killymore, Derg Valley and Beragh Scorchers. These are really the people who live football. They are not paid, but they play a game weekly. Members who talk about the decline of football

should be very aware that in the west of the Province the clamour is for an adequate pitch.

In Strabane or Omagh council areas, there is a queue of people each Monday morning to book football pitches, but there are never enough available. There is a great demand, which means that instead of soccer's being on the decline, it is still the most popular sport.

I am asking the Minister for some very simple help, so that rural football teams in the west of the Province can have changing rooms and shelter at a match. We are not asking for seated stadiums. We are simply asking that football, which is part of the healthy living encouraged by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and so much enjoyed by young people, be promoted.

I am certain that the seven big premier clubs can look after themselves. They can get the money to create an image and can get the sponsorship that will help them develop their talents. Their talent base depends upon the people for whom I am lobbying this afternoon — the little rural clubs. Those clubs create the pool of people to supply the larger clubs.

Why has there not been a development officer appointed to help with the form filling and with developing the clubs in the west of the Province. A school of excellence should be set up in Tyrone and Fermanagh, where there is a very good league. Two or three pages in the local papers are devoted to the activities of the local soccer team every week.

In Omagh, we used to have a very popular competition, called the Battisti Cup. On Saturday afternoons, the whole farming community stopped its work and went to Omagh showgrounds to see all the local football teams compete in the Battisti Cup. The sectarian activity of the IRA killed the Battisti Cup in the 1970s. Because those groups were threatened, the next tranche of lottery funding should be given to local football.

I have already told the Minister that, in West Tyrone, the GAA got 49% of the money, and soccer got 4%. We all know that the GAA is sectarian and exists exclusively for one community. On the other hand, soccer is cross-community, and the next tranche of money should restore the balance and allow teams such as Dunbreen Rovers, Newtown Stewart Rovers, Killymore Rovers, Killen Rovers and Beragh Scorchers to have basic facilities such as changing rooms. That would enable small rural clubs to remain active and would do more to promote football than many of the major professional clubs do. The small clubs really make a contribution, and I encourage the Minister to provide the basic support needed to enable football to thrive.

Mr Agnew: I welcome the opportunity to discuss local soccer. I am heavily involved in soccer at all stages. On Saturday mornings, I am involved in a soccer academy

involving 200 primary school children and six teams, which is completely mixed, both the coaching staff and the children themselves. We take part in soccer festivals, involving teams from all over the United Kingdom and from across the border. On Saturday afternoons, I write about soccer for some of the local papers. I watch teams who play in the first and second divisions.

There is not much wrong with football in Northern Ireland. I hear uninformed discussion about the state of the local game. There are many problems in the game, and the people involved in soccer are aware of them.

1.45 pm

I do not see sectarianism as a problem in the local game. If Members want to know how to make money out of sectarianism, let them go to Glasgow and see what happens there, and they can see how money is made out of racism in soccer if they go to parts of England. Those problems do not exist in local football.

For parents who want to bring their children to a local soccer game the biggest problem is foul language. That is a bigger problem than the perceived problem of sectarianism.

I have travelled to soccer grounds all over the Province reporting on games. I have gone to Donegal Celtic, and there were no problems, even though they made sure that I knew that they knew who I was. Some weeks ago I was at Lurgan Celtic, and I faced no problems there. The club was playing Linfield Swifts in one of the cup competitions. The Linfield team had no difficulty going there, and the Lurgan Celtic people had no difficulty accepting them because they were united in one thing — football. They were all passionately involved in soccer.

I accept that Lurgan Celtic people are all Roman Catholics who live in a Roman Catholic area. That is expected in Northern Ireland. I do not go along with the talk that sectarianism is one of the big problems in local soccer.

The Irish Cup Final was a glorious occasion. There was a bigger crowd there than would be at an international football match. I wonder why. It is nonsense to say that people are staying away from international matches because of sectarianism or because they are at Windsor Park. The product on display is what is keeping the fans away. They do not see the big names. They do not see the George Bests or the Martin O'Neills playing in a Northern Ireland shirt. Those are the sort of players who attract people to a game. Perhaps if England came to Windsor Park, the crowds would go to see Manchester United players playing in an England shirt. That is what attracts people to games. Sectarianism does not keep people away from games.

At present great things are happening in the local soccer scene, particularly at junior level. There are soccer academies from one end of the Province to the other —

not just the one that I am involved in. We were tied up with Coventry City for a long time, and then the Football Association in its wisdom decided that soccer academies should not exist outside a 90-mile radius of a soccer ground. Most of the premier division teams in England can get round that.

The soccer academy that I am involved in has sent several players to Coventry City. Two children that I helped coach have signed for Coventry City. They were coached from when they were seven and eight until they were 15 and 16 years old. Two of them at 17 years of age are now on Coventry City's books, and that is very satisfying. All over the Province, from the north-west to Fermanagh, clubs are heavily involved in coaching children in soccer. We can take tremendous satisfaction from that.

Some Members may be surprised that I was on Cliftonville's books. I stayed there for about a year until the late Davy Bennett told me that I was too small and too light and that Cliftonville was letting me go. I ended up playing for Brantwood for two years until it more or less told me the same thing. I ended up playing for Harland & Wolff Welders and the Civil Service in the amateur league, so I know the local game.

There are good things at all levels of the game: the soccer academies; the coaching; and the involvement of children. Linfield has a tremendous cross-community scheme with Dundalk and has formed Dunfield. It is working. Linfield is bringing children from both sides of the border to play football. Religion does not come into it. The children just want to play soccer. Those schemes are starting to pay off, and that can be seen through the tournaments and soccer academies. Skills are being developed.

I would be foolish, and it would be wrong of me were I not to acknowledge that there are some difficulties in the local game. However, I do not see those difficulties in the way that others see them. At premier division and, perhaps, first division level many of the difficulties have more to do with how the clubs are run. There is a lack of business acumen in the game. In the area that I come from, teams such as Larne, Ballyclare Comrades and Carrick Rangers all have grave financial difficulties. Those difficulties, how they have been managed and the resultant court cases have been documented, and this is not the only area with problems.

There is an argument that some clubs in east Antrim should amalgamate. However, I am not sure if those clubs will want to give up their status. Larne will always want to be Larne; Ballyclare Comrades will always want to be Ballyclare Comrades; and Carrick Rangers will always want to be Carrick Rangers, so holding on to what we have is one of the local difficulties.

It would be wrong not to acknowledge those difficulties. Player's demands have been too great, and they have been paid too much money. However, that is changing,

because there is no longer money in the game, and the stadiums are not as they should be.

So much nonsense is talked about the local game. We went through a period where people wanted to see a premier division club coming to Belfast. That was pie in the sky. It was absolute nonsense. Local football associations determine where teams play. When Derry City wanted to opt out of the Irish League they had to get permission from the IFA. That also applies to teams outside the IFA's jurisdiction who wanted to play outside their own local association — they have to get permission to do so.

Bringing in a premier division team was never going to work, and there were other reasons involved. For instance, Wimbledon — who have been relegated in any case — could have been playing at home against some awful team. The following week they could be playing away. There would not have been any continuity.

It is more important that money is poured into existing stadiums before we think of building a new national stadium. Plenty of them need to be upgraded, and they need to be brought up to the standard set out in the Taylor report, much of which has not been implemented in Northern Ireland. This has helped to create some of the hardship, aside from the difficulties arising from the way some of the clubs have been run. Malfunctioning and maladministration have taken place.

On the other hand, Danny Kennedy mentioned Armagh City and Loughgall football clubs — two junior teams that are exceptionally well structured and well run. They have poured money into their grounds and their clubs; they have new stadiums and new dressing rooms. On Saturday I visited my old club, Brantwood, who are building a new dressing room — although they need a new team more than a new dressing room. Therefore some clubs are progressing and are looking at the idea of involving children from the surrounding areas.

When I was young and played football I was lucky if I got a warm bath. Sometimes, running water was a luxury. I had to wash in the river on many occasions. Sometimes that applied to those of us who were playing at a reasonable level. I remember when I played at Brantwood — and perhaps I should not reminisce in this fashion — we had a Nissen hut and a communal bath. The water was freezing most of the time, and 22 players were jumping into it. Unmentionable parts were turning blue with the cold — so you had to get out pretty quickly. All of that has changed, and no one would dream of going into a dressing room on a park pitch that did not have a proper warm shower.

Some questions have to be asked about the task force. Why have Martin O'Neill, Sammy McIlroy and Iain Dowey not attended a single meeting? Sammy McIlroy is the manager of the international soccer team. I believe he has resigned. Is it because he has an interest in what

might happen when the task force report comes out? I am disappointed that the manager of the Northern Ireland football team did not attend a single meeting.

When David Hilditch and I attended the soccer strategy weekend in Newcastle, it was interesting to note that some of the people from the IFA were reluctant to join us. There was no sign of the international team manager, yet the former manager, Brian Hamilton, was there. He took part in the discussion and the debate. He paid his own way over and certainly went up in a lot of people's estimation. Where was the Northern Ireland team manager?

The game needs to be restructured and reorganised, and I am hoping that the task force will address some of those issues. The biggest difficulty is that the people involved in the game need to look at the game itself. Perhaps the task force report can help those people to change the game from within.

There is a lack of business acumen, and that is one of the most important aspects of the local game that needs to be addressed. Someone has come up with the daft idea that we need a 20-league structure. That is not going to happen. Things like that will not help the game.

Football will continue to flourish in Northern Ireland. Thousands of people will still play soccer on a Saturday morning or afternoon — if we are worried about attendances we may have to vary the times of the kick-offs, as my friend Mr Billy Hutchinson suggested. I am not sure whether that would be the answer. I am quite happy to go to Windsor Park on a Saturday afternoon, as I have a season ticket there. However, more often than not I am on the terraces at Loughgall, Armagh City, Brantwood, Dundela, Carrick Rangers and Larne, covering those games for the local papers. I enjoy doing that, and it gives me an insight into the difficulties that exist in a great game.

We need more money to improve the stadiums, and we also need business astuteness in the clubs, but there is no sense pouring money into clubs if they are not going to handle their affairs correctly. Members know what I am talking about.

Mr Hussey: Does Mr Agnew agree that in the overall restructuring, the junior intermediate clubs must be involved and that the senior clubs should be liaising more with other clubs? I would also like to take the opportunity of correcting one of Mr Gibson's statements. He talked about the lack of a development officer in the Fermanagh and Western league. I assure him that Mr Trevor Erskine, the IFA development officer in that area, works with all the clubs Mr Gibson mentioned and does an excellent job.

Mr Agnew: Mr Erskine has also worked with women's football, and he has probably got more kick out of that than the other sort of football. He played for Glentoran and Dungannon Swifts at one time.

Restructuring is important. The Irish Football Association employs 27 people to run the international team and the Nationwide Irish Cup. The other associations such as the County Antrim FA, the North-West FA, the Mid-Ulster League and the Fermanagh and District all run their own tournaments. One of the IFA's worries in restructuring into a single body is what would happen to all those tournaments. It does not believe that it has the resources or staff to manage all of that.

Football has an important part to play in developing and securing its own future. I fear that there are too many people in the game who are not forward thinking and who want to hold on to their own positions. I have some doubts about what the report from the task force may do. I hope it will encourage the football authorities in Northern Ireland to take the necessary steps to secure the future of local football.

There is no doubt about the future of football in general. More and more children are playing the game than have ever played it before; there are more coaching schemes, and there are more qualified coaches. There are many good things that can secure its future if we can sort out the problems in structure and organisation at the head of affairs in the local game. We need to get rid of some of the dead wood.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McGimpsey): There has been a great deal of interest and passion in this motion, as I anticipated. Many points have been made, and while I noted them, it will be difficult to respond to all of them. Mr Gibson made the point — although I note that he is not present — that he was disappointed because the report came up with no long- or medium-term solutions or costings.

He was mistaken, because this is not the end of the process; it is a progress report on where we are right now. We have had a widespread consultation process with the stakeholders. We had a workshop in February; we have a report, and we are going forward with a number of issues.

2.00 pm

It is important to tell Mr Billy Hutchinson that the costs involved are not attributed to consultants, but they have been incurred in the consultation process and the conference, and they reflect the fact that we went out to meet the community at a number of venues in Northern Ireland. We consulted with grass-roots supporters, stakeholders, the IFA, the Irish Football League and representatives of schoolboy and youth soccer. We looked at areas such as women's soccer and access for those suffering from disabilities. This has been a widespread consultation. It has not been a small subject to deal with, and it has taken time.

I agree that we expected to be ready to publish our draft strategy now. We are about three months late. The

reasons are the size of the subject and the number of topics that have been raised. Most of the topics that have been raised this morning are issues that we are familiar with. It is important that we do this properly.

Mr Billy Hutchinson talked about the Taylor report and the moneys that flowed from it for football in England, Scotland and Wales, amounting to some £500 million or £600 million. The point is that all that money has been spent. It is gone. That money came primarily from the football pools. When the National Lottery came in, the pools revenue went down. By the time we came into operation here about 18 months ago and started chasing the money, it had largely been dissipated.

We are now in a new situation. We have opportunities under the National Lottery, which provides a portion of funding to sport, including football. However, it is true to say that we are left to our own devices to some extent. On keeping funding moving, we are looking at presenting business cases to the Department of Finance and Personnel. We do not expect it or the Assembly to provide all the moneys, but we will be making business cases on funding in the future.

Points were made about the development of rural pitches and playing fields and the smaller and intermediate clubs. I stress — particularly to Members who are local councillors — that the Recreation and Youth Service (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 requires each district council to be responsible for the development of adequate sports and recreation facilities in its own area. It would be appropriate for Members to talk to their local councillors and make those representations to their local councils. It is unfortunate that local councils often do not discharge their responsibilities, but members of those councils come in here and expect the Assembly to do it for them.

Mr O'Neill made a point about the good practice of the Belfast Giants. The Belfast Giants ice hockey team has been a spectacular success, and it has exceeded all expectations. It is important to say that the Belfast Giants are the beneficiaries of a £45 million, state-of-the-art stadium. That is one of the reasons why they are doing so well. Currently almost anything that goes on in the arena does well, whether it be ice hockey or some other form of entertainment. The stadium does a lot for the game of ice hockey, but it also gives us a benchmark to measure the standards that we are aiming for. It demonstrates that families will go out to watch live sports providing the facilities are of the standard that they have come to expect.

A number of areas have been highlighted by the strategy process — for example, media coverage, community development, how to get families in and the creation of a vision for football. These have all been touched on. It was wrong for Mr Agnew to say that there was a great deal of uninformed comment. I have to point out that the

members of the strategy group of the advisory panel are not uninformed.

Consultations through the IFA, IFL, schoolboy soccer, youth and intermediate soccer were very widespread. The Sports Council and education and library boards were also involved. It is wrong to say that those consulted were largely uninformed — it is quite the opposite. As a result, we have a very comprehensive agenda and set of issues to deal with.

The Taylor report, as quoted by Mr Hutchinson, said that a vision for soccer was needed. This is about where we want football to be in 5, 10 or 20 years' time. What are the issues, and how do we tackle them? What are the problems, and how do we solve them? That is what the process is about, not least because football is something of value.

As I said earlier, the IFA is the fourth oldest football organisation in the world. England formed the first association, followed by Scotland, Wales and then here. Football is part of our culture and heritage. It also goes beyond Northern Ireland and is of international value.

I believe strongly that sport does a great deal for our image and self-esteem at home and abroad, and how we conduct ourselves in sport is very important. That is one of the reasons why the advisory panel is looking at best practice in other countries.

The panel went to France to look at their football academies. They are the present European champions and world champions. The panel is seeking to replicate that type of success here. A UK sports institute, which is part of the UK-wide network of institutes of sporting excellence, is planned in Jordanstown, where football will be one of the key sports.

I cannot answer all of the points, because there were so many. However, it is heartening to see such a widespread interest in the House. Indeed, only Sinn Féin failed to make a response. All other parties see football as important and as something that is part of the whole community, regardless of an individual's background.

Mr Alban Maginness and Mr McCarthy mentioned sectarianism in sport. The reason why football may suffer is that the two communities come together in football. They do not come together in Gaelic, because that largely involves one community only. In Gaelic sport, passions are roused, and there are, perhaps, instances of unsportsmanlike behaviour, but you do not get the same level of passion that you do in soccer, because soccer is an interface sport. We all feel strongly about soccer, and that is why it has played such an important role over the past 30 years and has such an important role to play in the future. It is something that gives us all a common purpose.

Other members, such as Danny Kennedy, talked about the future of Windsor Park and of a national stadium. An international sports stadium is one of the nine areas

in the cocktail and is a matter for discussion. Such a facility would be greatly helped by the inclusion of rugby, Gaelic and athletics. However, it may not be possible to include those sports.

Gaelic sports may want to develop their own grounds — they have yet to give us a formal response. Rugby wants to leave Ravenhill but needs to determine its future yet. It is difficult to see how athletics could be merged into an international stadium while retaining the atmosphere required by international football.

We all feel passionately about this, and it has excited great interest among the general public. You only have to look at the attendances and responses we received when we took the travelling roadshow around Northern Ireland, and members of the public discussed the subject with the advisory panel. We hope to have that process completed by September. We will then compile a draft strategy, which will go for consultation to provide us with the action plan. We must get consensus.

Billy Hutchinson said that we should tell the IFA and the IFL what is going to happen and how things are going to be — but that is not the way forward. We have to come to a consensus on this. The football family has a common purpose, which is to make the sport thrive; to reinforce it, sustain it, and improve it. It is not for me or for the House to tell the IFA or the IFL how to improve their sport. Our task is to facilitate discussion and to help and support them in their endeavours to reinforce their sport. — [Interruption]. I am sorry I did not pick up the comment that was made from a sedentary position. I do not know what was said.

It is important that we go for consensus and not prescription. Generally speaking, prescription is counter-productive.

Mr B Hutchinson: I said that if we wait for the IFA and the IFL to have some sort of consensus, we will still be discussing this issue in 20 years time. We need to be prescriptive.

Mr McGimpsey: Although the proof of the pudding will be in the eating — and we have to see this strategy evolve towards the end of the year — it is fair to say that the IFA and the IFL have played a very important part in our discussions so far. I am very optimistic about getting something out of this approach that will provide us with consensus. I do not believe that it will take 20 years for the IFA and the IFL to reach agreement. I have been very heartened by the number of areas that they agree on and by the ideas that they have suggested. Although they have a conservative image I have been heartened by their inventiveness, creativity and approach. It is often a matter of bringing ideas and people together, and that is what we are about. In September we expect to be in a position to bring forward a draft action plan for discussion. I look forward to listening again to the views of Members.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the publication of the report 'Creating a Soccer Strategy for Northern Ireland – views of the stakeholders' and notes the progress made on the development of the strategy.

Sitting was suspended at 2.13 pm.

*On resuming (Mr Deputy Speaker [Sir John Gorman]
in the Chair) —*

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION

Moneydarragh Primary School

3. **Mr McGrady** asked the Minister of Education to outline when capital funding will be made available for the provision of a new build facility at Moneydarragh Primary School, Annalong, County Down.

(AQO 1506/00)

The Minister of Education (Mr M McGuinness): Subject to resources, capital funding can be made available for projects when economic appraisals and sufficient planning have been completed. Moneydarragh Primary School is one of a number of primary schools awaiting completion of an economic appraisal to determine how the school's future accommodation needs can be met. My Department has identified a programme of economic appraisals for maintained schools in the business year 2001-02. I am pleased to say that Moneydarragh is included in the list of projects.

Mr McGrady: I am sure that the Minister is aware from his departmental records that the number of pupils at Moneydarragh has increased quite substantially since 1999. I did not quite catch what he said about the extent to which the appraisal has been carried out. What progress has been made, for instance, in the last three months, and can the Minister give a firm assurance that Moneydarragh will be included in next year's new starts programme for capital expenditure?

Mr M McGuinness: It is vital that we go through the economic appraisal. When we do, planning for the project will proceed so as to ensure that the scheme can be considered for inclusion in any new starts announcement. There are procedures to be followed, and it is vital that the economic appraisal is carried out as quickly as possible so that whatever planning difficulties exist can be overcome. Once we do that, Moneydarragh Primary School will be included for consideration along with the others, and the Member will understand that there are many competing demands.

Mr S Wilson: Has the commander noted the number of times that capital spending has been raised at Question Time and the widespread dissatisfaction there is over his handling of money for that purpose? Does he understand the disquiet, especially in the Unionist community — although I note that a number of Nationalist

representatives have also raised the issue — over the discrepancies in the way that he has allocated capital building funds? When you compare last year's allocations to Protestant schools with those to Catholic schools, you find that the ratio was three to one. This year the ratio was twice that, and the Executive programme funds show that the funding was 10 times greater for schools that cater mostly for the Catholic community. Is the difference in the state of the buildings so great that he can justify those announcements that he makes year after year? Perhaps he can also tell us why half the money spent this year went to areas where four seats are being targeted by Sinn Féin in the election in the west of the Province?

Mr M McGuinness: When the Member refers to me by my proper title I will give him an answer.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Armstrong.

Mr S Wilson: The Minister has been asked a question. The Minister has also admitted that he was a commander. Therefore, whether it is Minister or commander, IRA/Sinn Féin, I would have thought, makes little difference.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Wilson, you are out of order. You have behaved improperly in the manner in which you addressed the Minister. I am not surprised that he has used his position and authority not to answer.

I call Mr Armstrong.

Mr S Wilson: I would have thought —

Mr Deputy Speaker: You are out of order.

I call Mr Armstrong.

Mr S Wilson: It is most unreasonable of you to defend the Minister against —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Please sit down, Mr Wilson. You are out of order.

Mr S Wilson: You, as Deputy Speaker and as a Unionist, find it more in keeping to defend a member of IRA/Sinn Féin, who has admitted that he is a commander, rather than have him answer the question that many people in the Unionist community want answered.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

I call Mr Armstrong.

Mr Armstrong: Will the Minister tell us how he intends to redress the financial difficulties facing rural schools, particularly those with small numbers of pupils?

Mr M McGuinness: I am not sure that this relates to the question posed by Mr McGrady. We are continually reviewing our approach to all of these matters. The issue of small rural schools is something in which I have a keen interest. In fact, I have been looking at this since I took up this position. Many rural schools have problems and difficulties, and I appreciate the huge contribution that rural schools make. I also know and understand that

there are difficulties in those schools in relation to levels of funding. In conjunction with CCMS and the education and library boards, we are continuously looking at how we can alleviate whatever difficulties exist.

The other point is that the small schools support factor in the local management of schools (LMS) formula targets resources at small schools. We have a paper out for consultation at present, and I have no doubt that this is an issue that will be addressed in the course of that. It is vital that as many people as possible contribute, as this consultation is going to make a very important contribution towards ensuring that there is fairness and equality in school funding.

New Targeting Social Need

6. **Ms Lewsley** asked the Minister of Education to outline how he intends to skew resources to those most in need under new targeting social need in the next six months. (AQO 1516/00)

Mr M McGuinness: My Department's actions in relation to targeting social need are already set out in the recently published 'Making it Work, the New TSN Annual Report'. The action plan covers all of my Department's business areas and demonstrates that the education service already targets social need in a range of ways.

Among these initiatives is the TSN element of LMS. Targeting social need is an important element in school funding and is directed at need wherever it arises. In determining the level of resources to the school sector, 5% of the budget is presently top-sliced and distributed on the basis of levels of free school meals entitlement. In the year 2001-02 the total amount distributed in this way will be £40 million. I have also provided an additional £1 million for TSN from the £20.36 million budget addition for schools announced in February.

The consultation document on a common funding formula, launched last month, proposes an increase in the amount reserved for New TSN and greater emphasis on indicators of educational need in tandem with free school meals entitlement as a measure of social deprivation. No decisions — and it is very important that I stress this — have yet been taken in relation to this, and I look forward to the responses to the consultation document.

Ms Lewsley: Does the Minister agree that the new TSN money is really old money dressed up as new, and does he accept that raising this from 5% to 5.5% is totally insufficient to have any real impact on the problem?

Mr M McGuinness: I do not agree that it is old money dressed up as new. At present 5% of the total schools' recurrent budget is top-sliced to target social need, and I intend to increase that amount. It is also important to stress that people should understand that this is 5% on to the LMS formula is only one element among a wide range of TSN programmes supported by

my Department, including the schools support programme, the group one schools initiative, the special educational needs code of practice, education outside schools, support for travellers, pupils for whom English is an additional language and the pre-school education expansion programme. With school budgets under continuous pressure, the additional £4 million put into TSN, which represents a 10% increase, is significant, and I am committed to allocating more resources to targeting 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 very carefully to any proposal on any of those matters.

Mr McClarty: Can the Minister confirm that targeting social need is a priority within his Department and outline the personnel and resources dedicated to taking this forward?

Mr M McGuinness: It is certainly a priority within my Department. I cannot give specific details of the numbers of personnel involved, but I will gladly write to the Member with the information.

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Is the Minister prepared to consider a substantial increase in TSN funding if the consultation proves that this is necessary?

Mr M McGuinness: Yes, I would certainly be prepared to do that, and I think it is vital that this House understands that no final decisions have been taken in relation to TSN. It is important that everyone who has a contribution to make does so, as there is a real opportunity for people to influence the outcome of the consultation process.

Executive Committee

7. **Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Education to detail (a) when he will next meet with the Executive Committee and (b) what issues he intends to bring to the attention of that Committee. (AQO 1497/00)

Mr M McGuinness: I plan to attend the next meeting of the Executive Committee, which is scheduled for 14 June. As for the business items I intend to bring to the Committee, I refer the Member to my answer to AQO 371/00.

Mr Paisley Jnr: Since the Minister's confession that he is a commander in the Provisional IRA, can he inform the House whether he intends to inform the Executive when they next meet — *[Interruption]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Would the Member keep to the subject under debate and omit questions such as that.

Mr Paisley Jnr: Does he intend to inform the Executive when they next meet whether he is still a commander in the Provisional IRA or whether he has relinquished that

position? If he has not relinquished that position —[*Interruption*]

Mr Deputy Speaker: This is not relevant.

Mr Paisley Jnr: It is incompatible to be part of the Government and to be a member and commander of the Provisional IRA.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will you kindly sit down while I am standing.

Mr Paisley Jnr: It is incompatible for him to remain in the Government for as long as he is a commander in the Provisional IRA.

Mr Deputy Speaker: You have opportunities to speak on such matters on other occasions but not when you are asking a question of the Minister.

Mr Paisley Jnr: The question allows that that be asked. The Minister has left himself open, given his answer to my first question and the fact that he is a commander in the Provisional IRA. I believe people are entitled to know whether he intends to give up that position or remain as a Minister.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Kindly sit down, Mr Paisley.

2.45 pm

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education (Mr Kennedy): Does the Minister intend to listen to calls for an extension to the consultation period on the review of the LMS funding formula, and will he bring this to the attention of the Executive Committee?

Is the Minister aware that joint representations have been made to me, as Chairperson of the Education Committee, by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), the Governing Bodies' Association (GBA) and the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) on the issue? How will he deal with the fact that incorrect information was published by his Department in the original document?

Mr M McGuinness: The issue is important to all of us. It is crucial that we complete the process of consultation as quickly as possible. I have set out a time span for that. I was made aware recently that there were concerns about the consultation period. The deadline of 29 June allows schools three months in which to respond. That is substantially in excess of the standard eight-week period for consultations.

Briefing conferences were held at the end of April in each board area to explain and clarify the proposals to schools and to chairs of boards of governors in order to assist them in framing their responses. Forms based on tick-box responses and further written commentaries, if desired, have been sent to all recipients of the document. Those measures should help ensure that schools can stay within the timescale. The end of June deadline is dictated by the school summer break and the need for sufficient

time to consider the responses and discuss any revised proposals with the Education Committee and the Executive. Adequate time must be allowed to make the necessary changes to operational arrangements in the Department and boards to ensure the smooth implementation of a common formula in April 2002.

The publication of incorrect data was a mistake, and that was clearly acknowledged by the Department. All the interested parties were informed, and we have apologised for it.

Literacy and Numeracy

8. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Education why he has revised the targets for literacy and numeracy at Key Stage 1, 2 and 3 downwards and to indicate what plans he has to address this issue; and to make a statement.

(AQO 1533/00)

Mr M McGuinness: As I explained to the Member in my letter of 26 April, the provisional literacy and numeracy targets set in 1998 had to be based on the results of only one year's statutory assessment. They were therefore a best estimate of what might be achievable.

With four years' assessment results now available, we considered that there were sufficient trend data to inform a review of the targets, most of which were, nonetheless, retained. In two cases, the provisional targets were unrealistic. First, the target for the number of pupils achieving level 4 and above in English at the end of Key Stage 2 has been revised from 80% to 77%. Secondly, the target for pupils achieving level 5 in mathematics up to the end of Key Stage 3 has been revised from 85% to 75%. Those changes are not an indication of a reduction in standards; rather, they represent more realistic targets, based on the additional information now available as a result of four years of statutory assessment.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Minister for his continuing interest in the issue. As we come closer to achieving full employment, employers are increasingly dependent on employees who may have serious literacy and numeracy problems. That information has been given to several Committees. Is the Minister aware that those employers have to organise their own classes in basic English and simple arithmetic? He must agree that that is totally unacceptable, given that we already have approximately 250,000 people with serious literacy and numeracy problems. Lowering targets is not the way forward.

Mr M McGuinness: I am aware of what has been said by people in business and industry. I share the Member's concern. The Department is greatly concerned about the issue. There are several reasons for it, including the transfer procedure, which has been shown to have a negative impact on the motivation of pupils who fail to obtain a grammar school place, and the

relevance of the curriculum at Key Stages 3 and 4. Both those issues are being reviewed.

The improving performance of the primary sector provides a firm foundation for improvements in the secondary sector. In order to get this right, it is important that we do the work at primary level and that we be involved in the different processes and projects that identify the difficulties. The contribution made by such things as the reading recovery programme is critical. When visiting primary schools recently, I have been impressed by the number of teachers involved in creating their own reading recovery programmes. I agree with the Member that there is still a considerable amount of work to be done. We are setting about that task.

Mrs Carson: Is the Minister satisfied with his evaluation of the existing policies to tackle the numeracy and literacy problems? What does he intend to do to put realistic targets in place?

Mr M McGuinness: I have recently taken a decision to put in place realistic targets that are achievable. It is important that we continue with the programmes that are available through the education and library boards, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and other education sectors. I am satisfied that we are getting this right and that the programmes now in place can deal with the difficulty. There is much good work that can be done. I am satisfied that we are facing up to what is a clear educational problem that we must move to address as quickly as possible.

Mr McHugh: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Why is progress slower than initially expected regarding literacy and numeracy in the secondary sector? What is the effect of that on underachievement at school leaving stage?

Mr M McGuinness: A great deal of it has to do with the impact of the transfer procedure. We have had discussion and debate on this subject recently. Many educationalists have gone on the record as identifying problems surrounding the 11-plus and our transfer procedure as a major factor in demotivating pupils who cannot gain a place at grammar school. We look forward to the proposals of the Burns review in October, and when we receive a copy of that review, we will look at the proposals and recommendations that have been made. All of that will directly address the issue raised by the Member.

Vandalism

9. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Education if he will seek increased financial assistance from the Executive to address the growing number of vandalistic attacks on local schools. (AQO 1531/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Vandalism costs will be taken into account in the next spending review. However,

those costs are a drain on the resources available for the education sector. We must work with school authorities and local communities to help stamp out this problem.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil leis an Aire as a fhreagra. What was the cost of vandalism to our schools across the five education and library board areas last year? Does the Minister agree that school budgets cannot reasonably expect to withstand these additional costs?

Mr M McGuinness: The expenditure by boards amounted to slightly over £1 million. We have made additional funding available for school security: £4 million has been made available over the last four years specifically for that.

These have taken the form of access controls on doors, particularly to control visitor access, internal audio and visual monitoring systems and intruder alarms. The measures are largely directed towards personal protection of staff and pupils and are determined on the basis of risk assessments carried out by individual schools.

The measures are in addition to the more significant capital works undertaken by boards and individual schools to protect school buildings, which take the form of fencing, closed-circuit television (CCTV), external security lighting, security grilles and windows and the provision of security stores. We are very conscious of the fact that year-on-year there have been burdens on the education and library boards and other school sectors.

All of us deplore any attack on schools, wherever they are. It is vital that people understand the huge contribution that schools make to our society and that elected representatives and leaders in society make it absolutely clear to those who are involved in this disgraceful behaviour that they should desist.

Post-Primary Provision

11. **Mr C Murphy** asked the Minister of Education to outline his plans to proceed with progressive proposals for a new way forward for post-primary provision. (AQO 1535/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The independent review of post-primary education is due to report at the end of October. Following consultation on its findings and recommendations, my intention is to bring forward proposals for change early next year.

Mr C Murphy: The Minister will be aware, as I am sure we all are, that the outcome of these discussions will have massive implications for the future shape of education in the North. Is he satisfied that by the time the recommendations in the report come through, the consultations will have been comprehensive enough?

Mr M McGuinness: The Gallagher and Smith research report of September 2000 entitled 'The Effects of the Selective System of Secondary Education in Northern Ireland' provided information on education in England, Scotland and a number of other European countries. Substantial knowledge of these systems, and of that in the South, also resides within the membership of the review body and the panel of education advisers. The review body has undertaken study visits to the South, Scotland, the Netherlands and Austria to experience their systems at first hand.

Everyone knows that the consultation has been the biggest by far on any educational issue in recent years. The review body has held over 25 public meetings, two open days to receive oral evidence, meetings with representatives of business and commerce and has received over 1,000 written submissions. There has been a huge public interest in the review body's work, and there have been well over a quarter of a million hits on the official web site.

It has been a very intensive consultation process, and I am satisfied that we have done everything in our power to be as inclusive as possible, and to make it as easy as possible for everyone to contribute to what is undoubtedly the biggest issue in education that we face in coming times.

Mr Savage: Will the Minister consider making funds available for transport in rural areas to get young people to school?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Savage, is this relevant to the question?

Mr Savage: Yes, very much so. I was thinking especially of families in the post-primary sector in rural areas.

Mr M McGuinness: Transport is available. If the Member is dissatisfied with any aspect of that I will gladly listen to any representations he wishes to make.

School Governing Bodies and Education and Library Boards: Gender Balance

12. **Mr Neeson** asked the Minister of Education to give his assessment of the gender balance on school governing bodies and education and library boards. (AQO 1511/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Women are underrepresented on schools' boards of governors and on the education and library boards. My Department does not hold details of the gender balance of boards of governors and has a direct involvement in only 10% of the places. In the reconstitution undertaken in 1997, the Department of Education nominated 1,040 representatives, of which 419, some 40%, were women.

Mr Neeson: Will the Minister keep this situation monitored, bearing in mind the importance of the equality agenda? Will he also consider the underrepresentation of those from ethnic minorities on school boards?

3.00 pm

Mr M McGuinness: We will certainly do that; it is vital to keep the underrepresentation of the ethnic minorities to the forefront of our minds at all times. The Member is correct in pointing out that there are huge responsibilities on all Departments, under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement and the equality issues that flow from that, to ensure that we deal with the issue in a proper fashion.

As a Minister, I am very much for encouraging everyone in our society to recognise the rights of women and ethnic minorities, and my Department is consistently pointing out to everyone in the education sector the need to move forward and to make progress as quickly as possible.

Pre-School Provision

14. **Ms Gildernew** asked the Minister of Education to detail (a) the current level of pre-school provision and (b) whether he is confident that he will meet his target of full provision by 2003. (AQO 1520/00)

Mr M McGuinness: In 1997, there were funded places for 45% of children in their final pre-school year. As a result of the pre-school education expansion programme, the level has risen to 75% in this academic year, and it is expected to exceed 85% in the year 2001-02. I remain very confident that by March 2003 a place will be available for all children, whose parents wish it, in their final pre-school year.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Time is up — *[Interruption]*.

Mr S Wilson: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Standing Order 19 refers to Questions. Earlier, during Question Time, you protected the Minister of Education and enabled him to avoid answering a question that is pertinent to the capital spending for schools across the Province — an issue that many people in the Unionist community are concerned about. Could you please tell me — *[Interruption]*.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Are you now making a party political broadcast?

Mr S Wilson: No, I am not. I am asking a question.

The grounds on which you refused to have my question put were that I had not addressed the Minister as "Minister". Hansard will show that I had referred to his dual capacity as Minister and commander. Will you agree to scrutinise Hansard to see that the term "Minister" was used, and will you also inform the House which section of Standing Order 19 states that a Member must address a Minister by his proper title? Do you agree that his proper title is Minister and commander?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 1(2) states

“The Speaker’s ruling shall be final on all questions of procedure and order.”

I rule — and I have no reason to alter my view about it — that that rule applies here. Secondly, I ask you to address the Minister by his proper title. My ruling is final.

Mr McGrady: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker — *[Interruption]*.

Mr S Wilson: Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I accept that your ruling is final, but your ruling must be based — *[Interruption]*.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr McGrady has a point of order.

Mr McGrady: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I ask you to read Hansard and to recall what happened during Question Time today. Standing Order 60(1)(g) describes how wilful disregard of the authority of the Speaker requires certain courses of action. Will you exercise that judgement in respect of the Member who has just spoken and of Ian Paisley Jnr and report to the Assembly as to whether there was a breach of due regard to the authority of the Speaker?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 60(1) states

“The Speaker may, if any Member: persistently or wilfully disregards the authority of the Speaker order the Member to withdraw immediately from the Chamber and its precincts during the remainder of that day’s sitting and the Keeper of the House shall act upon any instructions as he/she may receive from the Speaker”.

That ruling is final, and I am taking no more points of order from you, Mr Wilson. If you raise any more I shall ask you to take account of this and take the necessary action.

Mr S Wilson: Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am not taking any further points of order on this matter.

Mr S Wilson: Mr Deputy Speaker, you have — *[Interruption]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am not engaged in an argument with you, Mr Wilson. I am ordering you not to raise further points of order.

Mr S Wilson: Under which Standing Order did you rule my question out of order in the first place? I am entitled — *[Interruption]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Wilson, you are totally out of order, as I have told you on a number of occasions. I will rather humanely allow you to continue to sit here on the basis that you conduct yourself properly.

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Ulster Hospital

1. **Mrs I Robinson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the level of capital investment required at the Ulster Hospital.
(AQO 1521/00)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms de Brún) Chuir Iontaobhas SSS Uladh agus Otharlann plean forbartha straitéiseach isteach a leagann amach moltaí ar infheistiú caipitil ag Otharlann Uladh. Tá mo Roinn ag cur bailchríche ar a measúnú ar an phlean, a mholann móruasghrádú na hotharlainne ar chostas de thart ar £98 milliún; móruasghrádú a chéimneofar thar seacht mbliana.

The Ulster Community and Hospital Health and Social Services Trust has submitted a strategic development plan which sets out proposals on capital investment in the Ulster Hospital. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety is finalising its assessment of the plan, which proposes a major upgrade of the hospital costing around £98 million phased over seven years.

Mrs I Robinson: Last year the Minister received a report on the capital needs of the Ulster Hospital. It is now May. Can the Minister tell the House when a decision is going to be made? That is what the people who use the hospital need to hear. Can the Minister tell the House how long it takes to read one report, given that her officials met with representatives of the Ulster Hospital throughout the drafting of it, and especially since the Health Department awarded itself £2 million to deal with it?

Is the Minister aware of how bad things are? The accident and emergency department at the Ulster Hospital was built in 1974 to accommodate 25,000 people. Today it is dealing with almost 80,000 people. Is the Minister aware that there are four patients lying on trolleys in one cubicle? Is that acceptable?

Ms de Brún: I thank the Member for her questions. At a meeting on 14 December 2000 with my officials, the Ulster Community and Hospital Health and Social Services Trust set out its strategic development plan for the Ulster Hospital. A draft of the plan was provided at the meeting, and the Department received copies of the finalised document on 10 January. The Department is urgently assessing the detail of the plan, and when that is completed I will consider the options available and announce my decision as soon as possible. That is in keeping with the normal timescale for looking at the details of plans of this complexity.

I recognise the urgent pressures to increase bed capacity at the Ulster Hospital, and £2 million has been

earmarked in the public service agreement to fund an additional 20 adult beds at the hospital.

The trust has submitted an outline business case for the reinstatement of the Jaffa ward to provide that extra capacity. A decision will be taken following an announcement on the strategic development plan and after the individual business case has been assessed by Health Department officials. I am aware of the pressures on the hospital, and I will do everything in my power to ensure that this matter is advanced as speedily as possible.

Mr Savage: The Ulster Hospital is so inundated with patients that there are four people in a cubicle where there should only be one. The same thing is happening in Craigavon Area Hospital.

Mr Deputy Speaker: You must refer only to the Ulster Hospital.

Mr Savage: When does the Minister hope to alleviate the problems in the Ulster Hospital?

Ms de Brún: I refer the Member to my answer to Mrs Robinson.

Mrs E Bell: I am aware that the Minister and her Department know of the current situation in the accident and emergency department of the Ulster Hospital. My Colleague and I were there two days last week during that awful time, as was the Minister's permanent secretary. I believe that other Members also visited the hospital.

As Mrs Robinson has already stated, having seen the situation we urge the Minister to make sure that the timetable is expedited. A lot of things happened: some beds were supplied, and day wards were opened. I ask that this situation does not happen again.

Ms de Brún: I thank the Member for her comments and for the recognition that the permanent secretary of the Department visited the hospital to see the situation and to report to me at the end of last week. As I said to Mrs Robinson, I am very clear that we need to move as speedily as possible regarding this situation and, indeed, with other hospitals that are under pressure.

I reiterate that the situation has arisen through years of continuous and historic underfunding of health and personal social services here. The situation cannot be rectified overnight. Given the work that the Department has undertaken with the Ulster Community and Hospitals Trust and the strategic plan that is now in place, I am confident that we can make a start.

As I said to the Member on a previous occasion, the hospital staff have identified some elements to us as requiring particular attention. They identified an immediate need for the replacement of essential medical equipment and a back-up generator. They forwarded the details of the proposed replacement programme to my Department, the total cost being £1.48 million. I hope that we can

move more speedily on this while taking forward the other aspects of the hospital's needs.

Mobile Health Centres

2. **Mr McCarthy:** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether she has any plans to introduce mobile health centres. (AQO 1510/00)

Ms de Brún: Níl rún agam ionaid sláinte taistil a thabhairt isteach. I have no plans to introduce mobile health centres.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister and her permanent secretary for their quick response when asked to witness the horrendous scenes at the Ulster Hospital. Let us hope that those scenes are never repeated. The Minister has already given us a commitment on that.

Mobile health centres would be of great benefit to the rural community in order to provide equality of access as well as good health services. Should the Minister not be pursuing more imaginative methods in the delivery of general health?

Ms de Brún: I have consulted widely on new arrangements for primary care in 'Building the Way Forward in Primary Care'. That consultation has been completed, and there were no issues raised about mobile health centres or their use. When I have considered all of the responses I will decide on the future arrangements in primary care as quickly as possible.

At present there are a number of incentives to improve access to primary care services in rural areas. These include a rural practice payment scheme, which supports GPs in remote areas, a practice liability payment scheme, which assists essential practices in isolated areas — doctors can be asked to dispense prescriptions for patients who have difficulty in obtaining their drugs and medicines.

3.15 pm

There is an essential small pharmacy scheme, which gives help to pharmacies dispensing low numbers of prescriptions. There are outreach clinics that can bring hospital services to patients in rural areas. Boards can organise development schemes with GPs to improve services locally in response to local needs. We have taken a number of other points on board, as the Member will be aware, in terms of access to health services in rural areas, through the strategic review of the ambulance service, for example, and through the review of acute hospital services.

Executive Committee

3. **Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) when she will next meet with the Executive Committee, and (b) what

issues does she intend to bring to the attention of that Committee. (AQO 1496/00)

Ms de Brún: Beidh mé ag freastal ar an chéad chruinniú eile den Choiste Feidhmiúcháin, atá le bheith ann Déardaoin 14 Meitheamh. Mar a mhínigh mé sa fhreagra a thug mé ar a mhacasamhail de cheist Dé Luain 27 Samhain 2000, ní gnáth trácht poiblí a dhéanamh ar mholtaí atá le cur faoi bhráid an Choiste Feidhmiúcháin nó atá á machnamh aige.

I will be attending the next meeting of the Executive, which is scheduled for Thursday 14 June. As I said in my answer to a similar question on 27 November 2000, it is not the practice to make public comment on policy proposals that are to be brought to the Executive or are under consideration by it.

Mr Paisley Jnr: Given that the Minister has responsibility for health and public safety, does she intend to bring to the attention of her Executive Colleagues any concerns that one of them is an IRA commander? If so, does she believe that that is compatible with being part of the Government of Northern Ireland? Will she take this opportunity to inform the House of her position in the same organisation as her ministerial Colleague?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Minister, since this is not your area of responsibility, you are not required to answer that question.

Western Health and Social Services Board Area (Psychiatrists)

4. **Mrs Courtney** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail her plans to (a) increase the number of psychiatrists in the Western Health and Social Services Board area and (b) reduce the waiting time for general practitioner referrals for this service. And to make a statement. (AQO 1515/00)

Ms de Brún: Tá na boird sláinte agus seirbhísí sóisialta freagrach as measúnú riachtanas áitiúil a ndaonraí agus as ceannach seirbhísí le riar ar na riachtanais sin. Tá leibhéil éagsúla gairmithe meabhairshláinte riachtanach do riachtanais éagsúla, lena n-áirítear síciatraithe, síceolaithe, altraí agus teiripithe saothair.

Health and social services boards are responsible for assessing the local needs of their population and purchasing the services to meet those needs. Different needs require different numbers of mental health professionals, including psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses and occupational therapists. The Western Health and Social Services Board is piloting a project on mental health pressures that will help to inform the best model to meet its local needs. That model should indicate the number of mental health professionals required locally, including psychiatrists, and indicate how best to reduce waiting lists for those services.

Mrs Courtney: I welcome the Minister's commitment to a pilot scheme in the Western Board area. My concern is that there should be sufficient funding available to ensure that the level of psychiatric cover will not be allowed to fall below such a critical level again and that GPs will not have to wait for up to seven months for a referral.

Ms de Brún: Mental health services throughout the North have traditionally been underfunded, and pressures have been increasing as more people use the services. There are limited resources as well as competing priorities, which the Executive have to decide upon. The health and social services boards and I believe in local provision and in the need to improve mental health services. The Western Health and Social Services Board is aware of the need to develop its mental health services and to make the most of the resources available.

I have allocated an additional £2 million this year toward the development of new mental health services. However, the effects of previous underfunding cannot be addressed overnight. I will also continue to argue the case for additional resources so that boards and trusts can continue to improve their delivery of services.

Mr Hussey: I am sure that the Minister is also aware of the impinging factor of the shortage of nurses. She will also be aware of the concerns currently being expressed by the Royal College of Nursing. I am not casting any aspersions on the nurses who have come from abroad to Northern Ireland, but how and when will the Minister address the problem of the shortage of nurses in the Western Board area?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I take it you refer to psychiatric nurses? Did you understand that, Minister?

Ms de Brún: Traditionally, the question has been asked about acute hospital services as opposed to mental health services and the specific point raised by Mrs Courtney. On the issue of the spread of mental health services in the community and acute hospital services, the Western Board is working in Limavady and Omagh to ensure that it has the information and the direction that it needs to take services forward. Nurses from abroad have not been taken into the mental health area as much as the acute hospital area.

Orthopaedic Consultants

5. **Dr Hendron** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what action she is taking to reverse the decline in the number of orthopaedic consultants in Northern Ireland. (AQO 1495/00)

Ms de Brún: Faoi láthair tá 35 mháinlia chomhairleacha ortaipéideacha anseo agus post ag 18 sainoiliúnaí. Thairg triúr lianna comhairleacha éirí as ar na mallaibh ach fanfaidh siad ina bpoist go ceann tamaill bhig eile. De na hoiliúnaithe atá ann, tá ceathrar iarrthóirí féideartha ann

do na folúntais do lianna comhairleacha a d'fhéadfadh a bheith ann sna míonna seo chugainn.

Sna tosaíochtaí do ghníomhaíocht tá tiomantas ar leith seirbhísí a fhorbairt agus fógraíodh dhá phost i máinliacht dhromlaigh le deireannas.

Currently there are 35 consultant orthopaedic surgeons here and 18 specialist trainees in post. Three consultants have recently submitted their resignations but will remain in post for a further short period. Out of the current training pool there are four potential candidates for consultant vacancies that may arise over the next few months. A specific commitment to develop services in fractures and spinal surgery is contained in the priorities for action, and two consultant posts in spinal surgery have been advertised recently.

Dr Hendron: I know that the Minister accepts that there is a serious shortage of orthopaedic surgeons in Northern Ireland, especially in comparison with England and Scotland. Two young, recently appointed consultants have resigned to take up posts in England, while two others will job-share, which means that four young surgeons are leaving the National Health Service in Northern Ireland because they could not get adequate operating theatre and outpatient access in the Royal Victoria, Musgrave Park and Craigavon Area hospitals.

Even more importantly, it has recently been revealed that accident and emergency consultants in Craigavon and Antrim hospitals will cease to attend fracture clinics in those hospitals from 1 January 2002 in order to follow their speciality to Royal College standards. Does the Minister therefore accept that these actions will thrust the Northern Ireland orthopaedic service into a sudden, large and unplanned increase in workload, which could easily lead to a devastating reduction in elective orthopaedic surgery such as hip or knee replacement?

Ms de Brún: Dr Hendron has highlighted a wider problem — the shortage of consultants here, despite an increase of 22% since 1995. Difficulties remain in filling consultant posts in some specific services. With the numbers completing specialist training over the next three years, there is the potential for a further 10% increase in consultant numbers in general. Some local services are badly affected by the loss of even one consultant. Therefore, specialist medical staffing is reviewed regularly.

My officials have been working closely with trust and board personnel to alleviate the current acute staffing shortages. Clearly, the number of orthopaedic surgeons per head of population here is lower than in the NHS in Britain. We have been increasing the number of specialist trainees over recent years, and we will be keeping that under review.

I also understand that there have been difficulties in accessing bed and theatre availability caused by increased demand. The regional spinal surgery service at the

Royal Victoria Hospital (RVH) will begin as soon as the theatres in phase one of the new RVH become fully operational. We hope that that will improve some aspects of the service. However, I totally accept that both foreseen and unforeseen changes are impacting on the service and that we need to keep the measures needed under constant review.

Mr Kane: What action, other than apologising to patients, does the Minister propose to take to deal with the shortage of beds at the Ulster Hospital, Dundonald?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The question was about orthopaedic consultants. Do you want to make your question about that matter, or are you asking something that is not relevant?

Mr Kane: It is relevant.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Is the Minister prepared to answer that question?

Ms de Brún: I fully answered all questions on the Ulster Hospital when I replied to Mrs Robinson. I refer the Member to those answers.

Mr Armstrong: Does the Minister plan to create an orthopaedic consultancy post in the Southern Board area?

Ms de Brún: As I said, we are currently keeping the necessary numbers and locations under review. That is not my intention at present, but I can write to the Member when we have a clearer idea of the way forward.

Surgical Procedures: Waiting Times

6. **Mr Poots** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) the waiting time for cardiac surgery in October 2000, and (b) the current waiting time. (AQO 1498/00)

8. **Mr McGrady** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail her plans to reduce the waiting times for all surgical procedures in Belfast hospitals; and to make a statement. (AQO 1507/00)

Ms de Brún: Le do chead, a LeasCheann Comhairle, glacfaidh mé ceisteanna 6 agus 8 le chéile mar go mbaineann siad araon le hamanna feithimh.

With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will take questions 6 and 8 together, as they both deal with waiting times.

Ag deireadh Mheán Fómhair 2000, bhí 591 duine ag fanacht le máinliacht chairdiach. De na daoine seo, bhí 437 ag fanacht níos lú ná 12 mhí chaighdeán na cairte. Ag deireadh Nollaig 2000, an dáta is déanaí dá bhfuil eolas ar fáil, bhí 570 duine ag fanacht agus 414 acu ag fanacht níos lú ná 12 mhí.

At the end of September 2000, 591 people were waiting for cardiac surgery, of whom 437 had been waiting for

less than the Charter standard of 12 months. At the end of December 2000, which is the most recent information available, 570 people were waiting, with 414 people waiting for less than one year.

I am concerned about the length of time that people are having to wait for treatment. My proposals for action are set out in the framework for action on waiting lists and in the priorities for action. This year, I have set a target of a 50 % reduction in the number of people waiting for longer than the Charter standard and the complete elimination of such long waits by March 2003.

I also set a target for 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. That reduction will have a direct impact on the length of time that people must wait.

Mr Poots: Those are quite alarming figures. Many of the 160 people who have been waiting more than 12 months for cardiac surgery are dying because of the delay. We hear that targets for reduction are being set. How are those targets going to be achieved? How can the Minister demonstrate that those targets can be achieved under the current Administration?

3.30 pm

Ms de Brún: With regard to the number of people who are waiting for operations, one of the factors is that much more can now be done for patients with heart disease, including those who have had previous operations, and the elderly. Consequently, the patients who have cardiac surgery tend to be older and sicker than was previously the case. They often need longer hospital stays in cardiac surgery and in intensive care in the few days following surgery. That has reduced the throughput of patients.

Recruitment and retention of nursing staff trained in cardiac surgery is also a major challenge. This is a very specialised area, and it is a professionally demanding one to work in. The cardiac surgery review is addressing the matter in detail, and it will advise on immediate and long-term actions to help to strengthen the nursing complement.

With regard to improving the situation for cardiac patients while the review has been taking place, I have allocated additional funding for supernumerary nursing posts in cardiac intensive care to support the existing staff and to allow additional nurses to receive specialised training. That will help to increase bed capacity and, therefore, the number of operations possible.

The boards have been using some of the extra waiting list moneys that I have allocated to offer cardiac surgery to patients who have been waiting for a long time for operations elsewhere. That also frees up capacity at the Royal Victoria Hospital for those who do not wish to travel. Angiography facilities will soon be open at Altnagelvin Hospital. That will increase overall capacity

here for this diagnostic testing, and that will help to reduce waiting times.

I have also published a framework for action on reducing waiting lists. I refer Mr Poots to the number of different actions contained in that. That will significantly impact on waiting lists in general as well as on waiting lists for this speciality.

Mr McGrady: I was surprised that questions 8 and 6 were grouped together, because there is not a great similarity between them. My surprise was confirmed by the Minister's answer, which was primarily on question 6. However, the Minister will share our concern that waiting lists appear to be extending and developing, and the problem is not being resolved. Hidden underneath that, there is a further waiting list to get on the waiting list for people awaiting serious and urgent operations.

The setting of targets is wonderful and grand, but there is no point in setting targets unless they are achievable. What new action has been taken to reduce this expanding waiting list? The hospitals are chock-a-block. People cannot even get into Belfast City Hospital, yet this weekend another ward was closed in the Downe Hospital —

Mr Deputy Speaker: You are going a little beyond the question.

Mr McGrady: The question is about waiting lists. These people are on waiting lists to get into Belfast City Hospital. They cannot get into Belfast City Hospital or the Royal Victoria Hospital, yet they are also being chucked out of the Downe Hospital. Where is it all going to end?

Ms de Brún: I thank the Member for his election speech and for his question. An extra £3 million has been allocated this year for action on waiting lists. On top of that, last year's non-recurrent allocation of £5 million has been made recurrent, bringing the total additional resources available for action on waiting lists this year to £8 million. That in itself will make a difference.

With regard to ensuring that the targets for reduction are achieved, the boards and trusts are bringing forward their waiting list action plans for 2001-02. I will want to be sure that practical and robust arrangements for achieving the reductions are in place. I will be closely monitoring progress during the year against the very specific points that were laid out for them in the framework that I issued in September 2000.

These include, for example, setting clear targets for reducing the number of patients waiting and the number of people who fail to keep appointments, thereby enabling others to have appointments. An improvement in efficiency should ensure that as many patients as possible are treated — for example, by making sure that waiting list information is up to date and that co-ordination of services is better, particularly between hospitals and the community. A number of other clinical, managerial and

monitoring arrangements were laid out in my framework statement.

The particular ward in Downe Hospital that the Member refers to was opened in response to winter pressures. The observation ward was open only for the winter period, now at an end.

Mr Shannon: Can the Minister detail her plans to reduce the waiting times for brain and heart surgery? Can she confirm that placements can be made in Scottish hospitals more quickly than in hospitals here?

Ms de Brún: Concerning heart surgery, I refer to my answer to Mr Poots, unless the Member is perhaps talking about some other aspect that I missed. At present, it is easier to get surgery in this speciality in Scotland. That is why those who are willing to travel to Scotland for heart surgery are facilitated by the boards. That reduces the waiting list here for those who do not wish to travel.

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 10, in the name of Mr McMenamin, has been withdrawn and will receive a written reply.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease

1. **Mr McGrady** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail his proposed discussions with the Chancellor of the Exchequer concerning the allocation of consequential loss allowance for those affected by foot-and-mouth disease in the farming, tourist and commercial fields in Northern Ireland; and to make a statement. (AQO 1508/00)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):

Any new resources for Northern Ireland to address business hardship resulting from foot-and-mouth disease would arise only as a consequence of additional spending in England for that purpose. On that basis, we have established with the Treasury that approximately £1 million will be available for measures here. That will be comparable to rate relief measures in Great Britain.

As I have explained to the Assembly previously, the Executive and Departments have been working on preparing a suitable scheme. This scheme was agreed at the Executive meeting on 17 May and was announced by the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister this morning in a priority written answer. I also sent details of the scheme to the Chairperson of the Finance and Personnel Committee, with copies to the Chairpersons of the Committees for Enterprise, Trade and Investment and Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr McGrady: I welcome the written priority answer to my written priority question, explaining the grant aid

in respect of rate relief. However, in view of his reply, can the Minister confirm that the hard-pressed businesses in Northern Ireland will get like for like with Great Britain? I assume that the £1 million to which he referred is based on the Barnett formula. Can he confirm that it will not be an all-time cap but that, if the £1 million does not fit the requirement, the Northern Ireland Executive will, with judicial management, address the shortfall and that no person will suffer unduly as a consequence of a lack of funding for that scheme?

Mr Durkan: I am happy to reassure the Member that the £1 million will come from the Treasury for this scheme to give businesses here similar benefit to the rate relief applied in Great Britain. That money is a Treasury contribution, and those who manage the scheme will not be working to a ceiling of £1 million. No budget has been fixed, because the scheme will be demand-led.

The Chairperson of the Finance and Personnel Committee (Mr Molloy):

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Today's announcement is welcome to farming and related businesses in rural areas. I hope that the scheme will alleviate some of the stress that the farming community has felt. Does the Minister envisage a cut-off time for applications for grant aid under the scheme? Some farms that have been infected or have had animals slaughtered are no longer in operation, and the farmers may not be entitled to housing benefit in the normal way. Can they claim grant aid under the scheme as well? Cattle marts have been identified as an associated industry—and that is welcome—but could events such as horse shows and the people who make their living from attending and exhibiting at those also be part of the scheme?

Mr Durkan: I acknowledge the Chairperson's welcome of today's announcement, and I appreciate the constructive interest that that Committee, and others, have taken in this matter.

Businesses should register for the scheme by 20 June. It is entirely reasonable that a date is set, given that the scheme is meant to address hardship that is manifesting itself now. The scheme is for business relief, so it will not be for domestic rating purposes per se. However, the Department of Finance and Personnel recognises, as has been reflected in debate here and elsewhere, that some farms have diversified, particularly into tourism, and so there are some businesses such as those offering bed and breakfast that, because of their scale, are paying only the domestic rate.

The Department is, therefore, making provision to enable such businesses to achieve commensurate rate relief. However, the relief scheme has not been extended to domestic rates as such; that is not the case in Great Britain either. Members asked the Department to create a scheme to ensure that businesses here were in a no less advantageous position for relief than businesses across the water, and the Department has delivered that.

The point about cattle marts was registered here in previous debates and was covered by today's announcement.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Agriculture Committee (Mr Savage): I welcome today's announcement on behalf of the Agriculture Committee. That Committee heard at first hand of the hardships that are faced by the owners and operators of livestock marts. Today's acknowledgement that the Department closed down the marts and other businesses is welcome.

However, can the Minister detail any additional options that were considered to provide further relief against the ongoing costs of these businesses such as insurance and rent? Will assistance be given towards any capital investment that marts will have to make before they are allowed to reopen? The announcement is welcome to businesses that are related to agriculture, but in the horse world, riding schools have been closed — do they come under that umbrella as well?

Mr Durkan: Obviously any of the equestrian centres that have seen a reduction in turnover because of the foot-and-mouth restrictions will be eligible to apply in the same way as any other business. This scheme is to ensure that businesses that can show hardship are not liable for rates — as with businesses across the water — during the period of hardship. The Department has achieved that.

The Member raised other issues such as grant assistance in other forms and for other problems. This announcement does not cover those issues.

3.45 pm

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mr Neeson): I welcome the Minister's statement, but is he aware that our Committee has received representations from the Northern Ireland Hotels Federation, from people who own bed-and-breakfast facilities and from coach operators? Will the applications be dealt with flexibly? Will small bed-and-breakfast facilities that provide fewer than six places and pay domestic rates qualify for the grant scheme? What plans does the Minister have for an appeals mechanism? That will be important in dealing with such a detailed and sensitive issue.

Mr Durkan: I am aware, as are the Executive, of the representations that various business sectors have made to Committees and directly to Ministers. We have tried to make sure that the arrangements extend assistance to businesses here similar to that offered to businesses across the water. That has been done. Questions are being asked about further assistance, for which there would be no cover from the Treasury or anyone else.

There will be a review mechanism so that anyone who is refused assistance may have the decision reviewed. Smaller bed-and-breakfast establishments, with fewer than six bedrooms, will be eligible for assistance, provided

that they can produce evidence of hardship. We should remember that this is a hardship relief scheme; businesses will have to show evidence of hardship and evidence that the hardship was related to foot-and-mouth disease. To qualify for the grant, businesses will have to prove a 15% drop in turnover. We think that that figure is realistic and that it is not too exacting an indicator of hardship.

Rates Increase

2. **Mr Armstrong** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel in the light of the recent rates increase what consideration he has given to the plight of local community halls, many of which act as a focus of community activity in remote rural areas; and to make a statement.

(AQO 1499/00)

Orange Halls (Derating)

11. **Mr Savage** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he has any plans to derate Orange Halls and premises belonging to the Loyal Orders throughout the Province, as they are essentially cultural venues.

(AQO 1527/00)

Mr Durkan: Mr Deputy Speaker, with your permission, I will take questions 2 and 11 together.

Existing legislation permits rate relief on any hall with facilities that the wider community uses. The degree of relief available is in direct proportion to the use of the facility for charitable and broad community purposes. The review of rating policy will include consideration of all existing relief.

Mr Armstrong: Does the Minister recognise the vital role that rural halls play in the community? How does he intend to alleviate the financial burdens that many such halls have accumulated?

Mr Durkan: We recognise that many organisations and community groups that use and run halls have funding difficulties, and we address those in many of our spending programmes. There are some rate relief concessions available for halls that are used for wider community purposes. In the context of the rating policy review, we will look at those reliefs and at suggestions for revising them.

Mr Savage: I am sure that the Minister is aware that in many country areas the local Orange Halls are the only halls that are available for public use. As those halls fulfil a unique and valuable function, they should be derated. They are primarily cultural venues and, as such, deserve to be derated in the interests of fairness and equity.

Mr Durkan: I refer the Member to what I have already said. There are existing facilities that allow a measure of rate relief to be accorded to halls where they are used for wider community or charitable purposes.

That measure applies only when a hall is used for those purposes. There are no plans automatically to derate any particular category of hall on the grounds that it is used as a cultural venue or anything similar.

Mr Poots: Does the Minister accept that he has made a very unfair ruling, as Orange Halls are essentially cultural halls? GAA halls are used for sporting purposes, and he finds it completely reasonable to derate those, yet he asks that Orange Halls prove that they are being used to set up children's groups, youth clubs, youth meetings, and so on, before they can be derated. Those responsible for the Orange Halls have to provide more information than the GAA has to. Surely it is unfair and iniquitous for the Minister not to derate Orange Halls while continuing to give the GAA full rate relief.

Mr Durkan: I remind the Member that no decision has been taken yet. I am reflecting the current position in terms of the rating regime. There is a rating policy review. That review will look at existing reliefs and exemptions and any possible revisions that may be made to them. Any hall, regardless of who owns or operates it, is eligible for rate relief if it is used for a wider community or charitable purpose. There is not, as the Member suggests, total derating for the GAA. I realise that many halls are used for a variety of activities, perhaps including line dancing. I do not know whether the Member believes that that broader community activity should be eligible for rate relief.

Census Forms

3. **Mr Ford** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (a) the success rate in the delivery of census forms and (b) the return rate to date.

(AQO 1513/00)

Mr Durkan: It is estimated that over 99% of households received a form prior to census day. A census coverage survey that will be carried out later this week will be used to quantify more accurately the extent of any missed coverage. A similar survey was conducted in 1991. It is estimated that over 90% of forms have now been returned. Work is continuing to get all the forms back.

Mr Ford: If the figure were 99%, we could be reasonably satisfied. I have some anecdotal evidence of failure to deliver the forms in parts of Belfast, in particular. I do not simply mean the kind of student rented area that might be considered difficult to deliver forms to, but also some residential suburban areas. What procedures will be in place to follow up nil returns, particularly if householders have attempted to contact the helpline and have still been unable to get forms delivered to them?

Mr Durkan: We appreciate any information that any Member can give us about failure to deliver forms. The helpline has been put in place to try to pick up on that

issue. If Members, in the course of any other activities that they and their party Colleagues might be conducting in the next while that will bring them to people's doorsteps, hear of any instances in which people have not had forms delivered, we hope that they will use the helpline to assist them.

There have been some problems and some people missed, for example, in some newer developments. Also, some areas may have fallen between enumeration district boundaries. We have tried to deal with all of those, and we will try to pick up on any other outstanding issues. Enumerators are currently in the field to follow up on households where there has not yet been a return in order to ensure that there will be the fullest possible return of census forms.

Peace II Funding

4. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to ensure that the Peace II funding will be carefully monitored to ensure equality in the distribution of funding.

(AQO 1525/00)

Mr Durkan: A number of agreed horizontal principles will govern the way in which the Peace II programme will be implemented. These principles address equality and balance considerations. Furthermore, in accordance with section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the special EU programmes body, which is the managing authority for Peace II, has a statutory responsibility to promote equality of opportunity.

Mr Beggs: Will the Minister acknowledge that there are areas of need in every constituency and every council area? Is he aware that of £22.25 million spent by one intermediate funding body, Proteus, none was spent in the Carrickfergus Borough area? Furthermore, is he aware that I flagged up to his Department two years ago that no funding was being spent by that body in Carrickfergus? Given the failure of his Department and the intermediate funding body to act subsequently, how can he assure my constituents that, in the future, Peace II money will be spent fairly?

Mr Durkan: First, the programme, the particular measure and the intermediate funding body to which the Member referred are obviously part of Peace I. In due course, we will be conducting a full evaluation of Peace I. As the Member indicates, at the interim stage there were concerns, reflected by the MEPs among others, that not all areas were getting similar access to funding. In many cases that was as much to do with problems with applications as with the allocations themselves. That needs to be reflected.

Across all measures in Peace II, we are trying to ensure that all areas of need and all sectors are able to make viable applications that are worthy of support. We are determined to fulfil the requirements of Peace II. We

cannot pretend that every single measure under Peace I could be expected to cover every need in every geographical area — it was just not in the nature of the scheme, and it was certainly not within the scope of the funding involved.

Mr Shannon: It is important that we monitor to ensure equality in the distribution of funding — that is crucial. Can the Minister confirm that Strangford Lough is the only area of outstanding natural beauty that does not qualify for Peace II funding on the criterion of disadvantage? Does he agree that places like Killyleagh, Greyabbey, Kircubbin and Portaferry have great social need and should be included rather than excluded as at present?

Mr Durkan: The Member has rightly said that it is going to be important to monitor Peace II. That is why we have put much stronger arrangements in place for the monitoring committees, with much clearer roles. One of their key roles will be to agree the programme complements. We are currently devising them. They have to be agreed by the monitoring committees before we can call for applications for funding.

I should make it clear that under the community support framework, as approved by the European Commission, we are meant to target this programme at areas of social need. There are criteria that we have to be seen to have regard to, and the monitoring committees will want to be satisfied about that as well.

Mr McHugh: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. With regard to monitoring in particular, can the Minister tell me if there will be consultation with local partnerships? Can we move to having more standardisation or a single monitoring system, which would be better for local areas? The last time a lot of irrelevant questions were asked. We need essential monitoring and evaluation of the programme.

4.00 pm

Mr Durkan: As I indicated, we have new monitoring arrangements in place for Peace II in respect of the new monitoring committee. There is also a new monitoring committee for the building sustainable prosperity programme and for the community support framework overall.

We are also moving towards the new Northern Ireland regional partnership board that will not oversee the detailed work of the district partnerships in the same way but will be responsible for promoting and fostering the wider development of partnership and encouraging best practice. In the new models of partnership which we hope to develop, we want to ensure that better partnership models develop in local areas; those models will depend on local agreement. We also want uniformity to help us achieve the highest possible standards.

Gap Funding

5. **Ms Lewsley** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether all Departments have been fully informed about the arrangements for addressing the issue of gap funding and to detail when he made this information available. (AQO 1502/00)

Mr Durkan: Departments have been fully informed and involved in the arrangements for addressing the issue of gap funding since 8 February 2001. That was when the Executive agreed its approach to the issue which I set out in my statement to the Assembly on 12 February. The interdepartmental EU steering group, which is chaired by the Department of Finance and Personnel, discussed the issue at a meeting on 19 February. A working group made up of departmental representatives was then established to manage the arrangements, and it has since met on a number of occasions to review progress and deal with matters arising. I have also been in correspondence with my fellow Ministers.

Ms Lewsley: As the Minister is aware, gap funding provisions are dependent on programme complements being agreed within the timescale set out, which is 21 June. I note that the equality consultation has started, which is important. However, does the Minister agree that there is a need for the complements to be about quality and not just equality? The monitoring committees are expressing some concerns about the clarity and robustness of the indicators that are being produced for inclusion in the complements. Can the Minister update us on that issue?

Mr Durkan: It is important to ensure that high-quality indicators are in place to enable the monitoring committees to measure the effectiveness of the return we are getting on public investment under these programmes.

The special EU programmes body and the Department of Finance and Personnel, as managing authorities for the Peace II and building sustainable prosperity operational programmes, have included targets and indicators for each measure in the initial drafts of the programme complements. Those are being refined in conjunction with the monitoring committees as part of the ongoing consultation on the programme complements. Those targets and indicators will be further quality assured.

New Targeting Social Need

6. **Mrs Courtney** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the progress being made on the review of procurement and to give an assurance that the findings of this review team will reflect the Executive's commitment to new targeting social need and equality.

(AQO 1504/00)

Mr Durkan: The review team has now met on six occasions, and it engaged in a public consultation on 3

May. It has discussed its emerging thoughts with the Finance and Personnel Committee and with officials in Departments. That will assist the team to bring forward its proposals, taking account of the equality dimension, for consideration by the Executive Committee in June. Among other things, the review team's terms of reference ask it to identify the scope to use public procurement to further local social and economic objectives in the context of current EC and international procurement law.

Mrs Courtney: Will the Minister confirm that all Departments and their agencies will be required to conform to good practice models of procurement, thereby ensuring that the people of Northern Ireland have value for money and fairness in all public purchasing, no matter where it is carried out?

Mr Durkan: The original review of procurement carried out prior to devolution showed that there was considerable room for improvement. It will be important to maximise the gains that are possible in terms of value for money and equality for all.

It is important to ensure that guidance on good practice models is promulgated throughout Departments, their agencies and other associated bodies and that procedures are in place to ensure adherence to those guidelines.

Local Strategy Partnerships

7. **Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the progress being made on the setting up of the new local strategy partnerships.

(AQO 1505/00)

Mr Durkan: Arrangements for the implementation of the new local strategy partnerships were discussed at a colloquy in Ballymena on 31 January. It was attended

by all the organisations involved in the delivery of Peace I. Following that, the special EU programmes body (SEUPB) convened a focus group to draft guidelines for the formation and operation of the new local strategy partnerships. The SEUPB has initiated a consultation and information process on these arrangements, including a series of seminars that were held earlier this month. The SEUPB has now issued guidelines on the formation and operation of the local strategy partnerships and on the development of integrated local strategies.

Dr McDonnell: Will these new partnerships be encouraged to develop long-term sustainability, and will we see these structures being fully utilised in areas other than EU funding situations, giving local people a better opportunity to influence issues that affect their lives and that of the community?

Mr Durkan: I do not see the principles of local partnership working as something that can apply only to European funding, to be thrown away once that funding ends. I want to see partnership working become an integral part of how we ensure that local community voices are heard. They influence priorities for spending at local level — not just in respect of European funds, but of all sources of public funding. The input from district councils at a corporate level, and from the statutory agencies that operate at local level, will be important in developing long-term sustainability.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I want to comment on the failure of some Members to appear and ask their questions. In the early part of Question Time there were at least three questions that did not have a questioner. I beg Members to be in their seats by 2.30 pm for the beginning of Question Time.

Adjourned at 4.08 pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 29 May 2001

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

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): First, I apologise for the fact that I have only now placed my statement in the Business Office. I plead Standing Order 18, on the basis that there were certain things that I had to bring up to date in relation to serology.

I am pleased to be able to report that the foot-and-mouth disease situation remains essentially unchanged since I last made a statement on the subject on 14 May. It is now more than six weeks since our second outbreak was confirmed, and there are currently no worrying suspects under investigation in Northern Ireland. As our thoughts turn increasingly to our longer-term strategy, it is absolutely vital for the farming community to keep its guard up.

Farmers must not fall into the trap of assuming that foot-and-mouth disease in Northern Ireland has passed into history. It is too early for that sort of assumption, and if the industry is to get back to normal again soon, it is important that the remaining controls on animal movements be observed to the letter. If that does not happen, we could find ourselves back to square one with further foot-and-mouth outbreaks here. Recent events in Great Britain are a sharp reminder that it would be disastrous for farmers to assume that foot-and-mouth disease has already been eradicated. I was delighted to hear that the Republic of Ireland is now recommencing exports following the outbreak. My objective is that we will soon be able to follow suit.

As I announced last week, I reopened the question of regionalisation of Northern Ireland for foot-and-mouth disease purposes at a meeting with the Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection, Mr David Byrne, in Brussels on 22 May. He was very supportive of our case. So long as we have no further cases of foot-and-mouth disease, and so long as we have satisfactorily

completed the first phase of our serology testing, I am confident that we will be able to secure full regionalisation status for Northern Ireland in early June.

The serology testing, which I explained in my last statement to the Assembly, is proceeding very well. In the surveillance zones, we have now met the EU's testing requirements and are carrying out the final interpretation of the results. This has involved the blood sampling and testing of over 170,000 sheep from over 3,000 flocks.

Almost all the necessary Pirbright examinations have been carried out, with negative results. I await the results from three flocks to complete the serology, thus allowing me to seek regionalisation for Northern Ireland.

My policy throughout the crisis has been to take no chances on the spread of the disease, but I have tried to ease controls on the movement of livestock as soon as it was safe to do so. Two situations continue to cause serious problems — the continued prohibition on the movement of sheep to common grazing and the continued ban on livestock marts. My chief veterinary officer will reconsider common grazing, and I will make a further announcement in the next few days. It is still too early to countenance reopening of livestock marts, but I hope that the support package announced by the Executive last week, which made specific provision for the marts, will go some way toward helping the mart owners. As with all these measures, I will permit the marts to reopen as soon as veterinary advice suggests that it is safe.

Looking further ahead, we will need a recovery plan for the industry, which has been battered by a succession of crises, not just foot-and-mouth disease. In Northern Ireland, the vision exercise is being revisited and updated to take account of foot-and-mouth disease, and it will give an important local dimension to any recovery strategy. The industry has its own ideas of what needs to be done, and my Department has opened discussions with its representatives. Industry representatives will have an input to the vision exercise before a preliminary report is issued in September. All the interested parties will be able to respond to the formal consultation exercise in the autumn. The outcome will be a package supported by the Executive. It should provide a basis for a more secure future for the industry in Northern Ireland.

The UK is considering national measures to help those who have suffered as a result of foot-and-mouth disease. My officials are fully involved in that work and will ensure that Northern Ireland benefits from that exercise. The foot-and-mouth situation is resolving satisfactorily, and, as long as there are no last-minute setbacks, we are on target to achieve regionalisation and can return to normality over the next few weeks. That is the best outcome we could have expected, but it depends on the farming community's continued vigilance over the next weeks and months.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development (Mr Savage): I am glad that there are no more outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease and that we are heading back to normality. We need a recovery plan, which will be welcomed by the farming community. I hope that everybody remains vigilant and helps to control the outbreak. Is there any possibility of an easement on lambs going to marts? That would be a sensible move. Instead of 30 or 40 trailers, one lorry could collect all the lambs at a collection point. That is vital, because lambs are ready, and they need to be killed or they will become too fat. I hope that the Minister will take that on board.

Ms Rodgers: I am considering the provision of collection points at marts so that farmers will be able to deliver lambs there to go on to the marts.

I am looking at that at the moment, and I hope to be able to move on it soon.

Mr Bradley: Every time we meet, the problem seems to diminish. Nevertheless, caution is still the key word. Given the fact that outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease are still daily occurrences in Yorkshire, Cumbria, et cetera, and now that the holiday season is just around the corner, will the Minister detail her plans regarding precautions at our ports to deal with the risk of holiday traffic between GB and Northern Ireland?

Ms Rodgers: I can assure Mr Bradley that we will be keeping up our vigilance at the points of entry, which is the main danger zone at the moment — that and complacency. We will continue with the precautions that are in place, and we will continue to be vigilant at the ports. We ask for co-operation from the public and particularly for people travelling over here, if they have been anywhere near farms or farmland, to go through the spraying procedures that are available at the ports for them. We are also looking at marinas and other areas that could be a source of the infection's entering Northern Ireland.

Mr Kane: How extensive are investigations likely to be following the accusation that Linden Foods has altered carcass grades? Will an investigation be conducted in other processing factories to ensure that the practice is not a common one among processors?

Ms Rodgers: Can the Member repeat the first part of his question?

Mr Kane: How extensive are investigations likely to be following the accusation that Linden Foods has altered carcass grades?

Ms Rodgers: I assure the Member that that will be investigated.

Mr McHugh: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the fact that we are probably moving towards more flexibility and less risk of further outbreaks, given that there are continuing sporadic

outbreaks in England regardless of the precautions that have been taken so far.

Is everything well regarding antibodies in the sheep population at present? If so, can there be more flexibility in the opening of the countryside and the easing of controls? Is anything liable to pop out after, for instance, 7 June?

With regard to the recovery plan, I am concerned that farmers are going to have to take a loss for animals that have passed 30 months in age. It concerns me that that is classed as consequential loss and is for the Public Accounts Committee to look after.

Ms Rodgers: I reiterate a word of caution. I note that Mr McHugh said that we now have less risk. I want to make it clear that I do not believe that we have less risk. There is a danger that the farming community might be a little complacent. There is still a risk, although we have so far managed to contain the spread of the disease.

In relation to the antibodies, there are three cases from the 170,000 animals whose blood tests have been examined at Pirbright. We await those results, but that is only three out of a very large number. We have to continue the serology testing in all the areas outside the surveillance zones, and I will not rest happy until I am totally assured and can assure this House that we have totally eradicated any risk of the disease. I am not yet at that point. For that reason, I am very cautious every time I take a step toward relaxing the controls that we have had.

In fairness, the industry has, so far, appreciated the need to balance the risk of spread with the needs of the farming community. I have managed to make easements that have been welcomed by the farmers, particularly allowing the inter-farm movement that has allowed sales to take place on that basis.

In relation to the recovery plan, which is being dealt with by the vision group, the first step is the opening up of our markets, which, all being well, I hope to achieve at the Standing Veterinary Committee in early June.

10.45 am

With regard to consequential compensation, I think that Mr McHugh is aware that that is being looked at on a UK-wide basis. The Department of Finance and Personnel and the Executive have made an input to that, and we will certainly be ensuring that Northern Ireland gets its fair share of anything that accrues to the industry in the UK. The consequential impact to farmers will be looked at in exactly the same way as that for other people who have suffered because of foot-and-mouth disease. I am very anxious to be able to pay as much consequential compensation as possible, but we have to recognise the limited resources within which we work. I recognise that there is a real problem; the Executive have already moved in relation to rates relief, for the marts in

particular, and we are still inputting to the UK consideration.

Mr Ford: I too welcome the Minister's statement. I especially welcome the fact that today she is able to make a relatively upbeat statement. Without wishing to detract from it, I am slightly surprised that she has made no mention of the precautionary cull of a sheep flock in south Antrim about 10 days ago, and I wonder if she will make a statement on that. With regard to her comments on serology testing, is the Minister confident that we can make the case for regionalisation within Northern Ireland merely on the completion of phase one of the serology testing and that no further test results will be needed? Will she also inform the Assembly whether she has any proposals at this stage for the individual tagging of sheep?

Ms Rodgers: In relation to south Antrim, the Member is referring to a farm where I think we culled 64 sheep — I am not terribly sure of the number, but it was a routine cull. I explained some weeks ago that as we proceeded with serology testing there would be situations where we would be carrying out precautionary culls. I did not think it necessary to raise fears by putting everything in the public domain, although people do need to know that there is the possibility of a precautionary cull based on the results of blood tests.

On regionalisation, I have a commitment from Commissioner Byrne that he will support it unless there are further outbreaks of the disease. The Commission will, of course, require serology testing to have been done in the surveillance zones, and the surveillance zones to have been lifted, before that can happen.

There are no proposals, as yet, on tagging, but we will be consulting with the industry, and we will be considering it because clearly there will be a need for many measures to be taken once we examine what has happened in recent months. Tagging will certainly be one of the issues that we will look at.

Mr Douglas: I too welcome the Minister's statement this morning. The Minister has stated that she hopes that regionalisation can be achieved by early June. If blood sampling were complete, can the Minister state how long it would take to carry out the laboratory tests? We know that there was some initial difficulty in getting staff to take the samples, and I am led to believe there is now some difficulty in the laboratory. Can she give us a time frame, and can she also clarify how soon the restrictions in the 10-km zone might be lifted or eased?

Ms Rodgers: The Department is up to speed on laboratory testing; we are carrying out 10,000 tests a day. That is a considerable amount. Additional veterinary staff are at work taking all the bloods, and that is also a huge undertaking. I am satisfied that everything possible is being done.

Some of the tests have to be sent to Pirbright, and my Department has no control over the time that that process takes. I presume that Pirbright gives priority to suspect foot-and-mouth disease cases, rather than serology testing, and, therefore, it takes longer for serology test results to be returned.

I shall remove the 10-km surveillance zones as soon as I get the all-clear on the serology tests relating to those areas.

Mr Armstrong: I welcome the Minister's statement; each statement that she makes brings us closer to easing the restrictions on the movement of stock.

Are the three flocks for which the Minister is awaiting serology test results all from one area, or is there one flock in one area and two in another? If the three flocks are in one area, cannot the other area have its 10-km surveillance zone lifted first?

I hope that the Stewartstown, Ardboe and Coagh area will be the first to have the 10-km zone lifted. That area is full of beef cattle, and farmers have cattle that are going over age and over fat. The relaxation of regulations on Tuesday 15 May meant that 19 cattle got to Dungannon Meats. Does the Minister consider that other farmers whose cattle are over age will be compensated in the same way as the farmers who were able to move cattle to Dungannon Meats? It is unfair that some farmers receive the full price for their cattle and others lose out.

Everyone is worried about the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in other areas such as Yorkshire. The Department and associated bodies must ensure that there is no relaxation of the controls on people coming into the Province. The Department must be diligent in its efforts to prevent the spread of infection.

Ms Rodgers: The three flocks to which the Member refers are in one area. The 10-km surveillance zones will be removed simultaneously by the EU Commission, and its decision will be based on the completed test results. I hope that that decision will be announced in the next few days.

The Member spoke about losses on cattle aged over thirty months. That loss is consequential on the situation, rather than a direct loss. It cannot be treated any differently to anyone else's consequential losses.

Mr Dallat: The Minister will be aware of the important role played by the Agriculture Committee during the prolonged foot-and-mouth disease crisis. Is the Minister aware that the Chairman, Dr Paisley, left last Friday's meeting to electioneer in Portadown? Will the Minister renew her — *[Interruption]*.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member must ask the Minister questions about her statement. What is being raised is not a question on the statement but is verging on criticism of the Chairperson of the Committee.

Mr Dallat: It is an important point.

Mr Speaker: If that is the only question that the Member has to raise, I must say that it is not in respect of the statement.

Mr Dallat: I was coming to my question, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I am content for the Member to put a question which is relevant to the statement, but this is not an opportunity for him to raise matters that are entirely extraneous to the Minister's statement.

Mr Dallat: I am guided by what you say at all times, Mr Speaker, but I was simply asking the Minister to encourage Members to continue attending Committee meetings while the crisis lasts.

Mr Speaker: The Member may wish to do that, but that is not within the Minister's responsibility, and it is not in the statement.

Mr Gibson: The entire farming community is breathing more easily, because we have been free from foot-and-mouth disease for six weeks. Are the precautions at the ports and airports being stepped up and kept firmly in place because of the sporadic outbreaks and hot spots in Lancashire over the weekend? Can the Minister be more specific and tell us whether regionalisation will be announced on or before 7 June, and whether the markets can enjoy a similar opening date?

Ms Rodgers: I thank the Member for his questions. We will continue to be as vigilant as ever at the ports and airports. I recently spoke to a journalist from Britain, and she said that she was very impressed with the stringent precautions she experienced when she arrived at the airport here. I hope that that will help to reassure the Member. We will not be relaxing our guard.

I cannot say for certain when we will get regionalisation until I receive the final results of the serology tests. I assure the Member that, as soon as I am in a position to do so, I will move on the issue, because I recognise the importance of regionalisation for the industry.

Mr M Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her statement. I am getting a great many phone calls about livestock payments that are long overdue. What is the hold up, given that farmers are currently under a lot of pressure as a result of foot-and-mouth disease?

I was not overly happy with the Minister's statement about the payment for cattle over 30 months old. The Minister must take into consideration the loss to the farmer who has cattle over 30 months old. He is left in limbo, through no fault of his own. The payment for those cattle at market value is half the normal price. She must take into consideration that that is not the farmer's fault.

Mr Speaker: Order. Questions are not an opportunity for Members to make speeches on matters which may be of importance; they are an opportunity to ask

questions of the Minister. If the Member has a further question to ask he is free to do so, otherwise I will ask the Minister to respond.

Mr M Murphy: Go raibh maith agat. That is all.

Ms Rodgers: I presume that the Member is referring to compensation payments. To date we have paid £2.9 million in compensation to farmers, and we have a further £1.3 million processed and ready to issue. The total estimated compensation is roughly £5 million. There are still some outstanding appeals that we are dealing with.

11.00 am

I have, however, allocated additional staff to the payment of compensation, and I expect all payments, subject to queries which have to be cleared up, to be with farmers within a few days.

In relation to the problem of farmers not being able to get over-30-months old cattle out, I recognise and sympathise with their position. The Member said that he is not satisfied with my response, but he is aware that resources are a huge issue and that other sectors have suffered severe consequential loss. It would not be right for the Executive to differentiate between one sector and another. However, if resources are to become available, they will have to come from within the block and from other areas, which Members will have to consider. We will be part of the UK discussions about consequential loss, and I will ensure that Northern Ireland gets its fair share of any compensation available.

Mr J Wilson: I welcome the two component parts of the Minister's statement — the element of caution and the need for continued good housekeeping in farming and the element of hope that it may be possible to relax the bans.

Will the Minister assure us that her Department is taking all necessary steps to bring about a speedy return to normality? We are approaching summer, and the tourist industry needs all the help it can get.

Ms Rodgers: I can assure Mr Wilson that we are taking all necessary steps, including balancing the need for a return to normality with the need to minimise risk. The last thing I want to do is risk a return to square one, which would have severe consequences, not just for the farming community but also for tourism. We are trying to ensure that, as soon as possible, we can allow a return to normal events, especially for angling, a sport that is dear to Mr Wilson's heart.

Mr Byrne: I welcome the Minister's statement and regard it as a good progress report.

Does the Minister have any plans to meet her counterpart in the Republic, Mr Joe Walsh, the Minister for Agriculture, to raise issues relating to the reopening of export markets there?

Mr Rodgers: I take it that the Member is referring to regionalisation. I have no immediate plans for a meeting

with Mr Walsh, although I do speak to him regularly by telephone. My officials are in regular contact as well. I have no reason to suppose that Mr Walsh will not be as supportive as he was during our last efforts towards regionalisation. Commissioner Byrne has given us a commitment, and I am fairly confident that we will be moving to regionalisation shortly, barring any further outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease.

Mr Leslie: I might be deemed to have an interest in the matter I am about to raise.

I thank the Minister for her statement —

Mr Speaker: I suggest that the Member declare his interest before he asks his question.

Mr Leslie: Am I supposed to give details?

Mr Speaker: If the Member is declaring an interest, he would be best to state it at the start rather than at the end of the question.

Mr Leslie: I am not sure what the answer to that is, Mr Speaker, because I do not believe that technically I have an interest. However, because I might be deemed to have an interest, I am simply mentioning it before someone else does.

To get to the substance of the matter, I note the continuing progress in the serology testing, which I welcome and trust will continue at the same rate, because it is essential to restore confidence in our livestock.

I am aware that there is a delicate balancing act between the need to keep up precautions against the spread of foot-and-mouth disease and the interests of other rural industries, particularly in my constituency of North Antrim where the Glens of Antrim and the Causeway coast are significant tourist attractions. Tourism is probably the most important part of its economy. Assuming that serology testing continues at the current rate until the end of June with continuing satisfactory results, will the Minister be in a position to declare these areas safe for all visitors? Will she also be able to work in concert with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Industry, who is bringing forward a package of measures to try to retrieve what remains of the tourist season this summer?

Ms Rodgers: I am aware of the difficulties that have affected that area — and particularly the North West 200. The Member is aware that we have reopened the Giant's Causeway and moved as far as we can on that. It is impossible for me to say exactly when I can relax all the regulations. The guidelines now state that visitors are welcome to Northern Ireland, and to the part of North Antrim to which the Member referred, as long as they stay away from farm land and farm animals. This allows a fair amount of leeway for people to visit various centres. The Giant's Causeway is a case in point — the upper path must remain closed, but the lower path is open because it is not near farmland.

I reassure the Member that I am aware of the efforts that Sir Reg Empey is making and of the £1 million that he has allocated for the recovery of the tourist industry. I am anxious to facilitate that in any way providing we take account of the risk assessment.

Mrs Courtney: I note that the Minister has already raised the question of regionalisation with Commissioner Byrne. However, is she satisfied that the British Government support her efforts?

Ms Rodgers: I am satisfied that the British Government support my efforts to gain regionalisation. The Prime Minister gave me his commitment on that some weeks ago, and that still stands.

Mr McGrady: In common with all Members I welcome the positive statement that we are moving towards normality and the end of this tragedy. Can the Minister reaffirm more positively the question asked by the Deputy Chairperson of the Agriculture Committee about pick-up points for animals being transferred for slaughter? For example, the Strangford-Down Co-operative is based on the concept of a gathering point. It is important, in terms of manpower and cost, to have collection points at marts or other places which can accommodate the farmers in this difficulty. I welcome the prospect of common grazing for sheep being made available in the next few days.

The Speaker may rule me out of order on this, but I also welcome the fact that the racecourse meeting will be held in Downpatrick on 1 and 2 June.

Mr Speaker: The Member is correct — he is out of order on that.

Ms Rodgers: Mr McGrady has already written to me about the Strangford-Down Co-operative. At that time I was not in a position to give him any consolation, but we have moved on. I appreciate the difficulty in bringing small numbers of lambs to slaughter.

In reviewing that situation, I hope to establish collection points at the marts, which will also include the Strangford-Down Co-operative.

BUDGET TIMINGS

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of Finance and Personnel that he wishes to make a statement on Budget timings.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):

With permission, Mr Speaker, I want to make a statement, on behalf of the Executive, on the proposed timetable for the Budget 2002-03.

When I presented the 2001-02 Budget to the Assembly on 12 December 2000, I acknowledged the concerns expressed by the Committee for Finance and Personnel about the time constraints of the exercise. I agreed that we should, in future cycles, ensure that the presentation of the draft Budget should take place as soon as possible after the summer recess.

I want to put on record the Executive's commitment to meeting that target and to set out the proposed timetable for the key planning and financial events between now and December, when the Budget for 2002-03 needs to be agreed.

This statement concerns the Executive's approach to the planning of public expenditure for the year beginning in April 2002. The process runs from now until December, when we will seek to settle an agreed Budget in line with the Programme for Government, which will form the basis of spending plans for all Departments and other public sector bodies.

Some further steps will be taken on that next month, but they are likely to coincide with the completion of spending allocations for the current financial year, which began on 1 April 2001. The final approval of the Main Estimates and the related Budget (No 2) Bill will complete the process for 2001-02, which began last autumn.

It may also help to remind Members of the cycle of events that lead to decisions on financial allocations. Those processes have their roots in the Good Friday Agreement, which prescribed that an annual budget should form part of, and be guided by the principles and priorities of, a programme for Government, which is an expression of the Executive's key policies.

For 2001-02, the Assembly's agreement of the Programme for Government and the Budget that I proposed separately on behalf of the Executive was the culmination of many months of collective effort, involving determined and focused co-operation between the Departments, the Assembly and its Committees.

The production of the 2001-02 Budget was a first major success of our evolving institutions. It provided a visible and tangible demonstration of how positively and constructively devolution can work for the whole community. It was a notable achievement that we must now build on.

Central to that is the establishment of robust procedures to enable the Assembly to discharge its scrutiny role and to exercise its power to modify proposals as required in the Good Friday Agreement and the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The timetable sets out the steps that we propose to put in place to deliver on that commitment between now and December. The key dates are set out in the table attached to the copies of the statement, which have been distributed to Members.

Delivery of this Budget cycle in the available time, within existing procedures, is demanding. It will need careful management if the expectations of Members and Committees about consultation are to be met and if we are to promote equality of opportunity through those measures in line with the agreement and section 75 of the 1998 Act.

We sometimes face constraints because, as I explained in 1999 and 2000, our decisions must be developed into detailed allocations for many budget holders in the public sector. If that is to be achieved for 1 April 2002, we must have a clear outcome from the process before Christmas.

However, the approach that I am setting out today will secure improvements to ensure that the Assembly has as much time as possible to consider the Budget proposals for the following year, in the context set by the Programme for Government, so that proposals can be improved in December and in the future after an acceptable period of scrutiny.

11.15 am

The vote on the Budget each December should be seen as the main authorisation of spending plans, and it follows that we should provide the best possible procedures for that purpose. The proposals set out in the indicative timetable will provide for the Assembly Committees to be involved at the initial stages, starting before the summer, and before the Executive consider a draft Budget. That process was not possible last year.

In addition, there may be over two extra weeks this autumn, compared to the time available in 2000, for the Assembly to scrutinize the draft Budget. However, the timings are subject to change to suit the circumstances required. To achieve this fuller consideration the process will be triggered early — effectively from today's statement. This will be followed by a statement on the Programme for Government and a pre-Budget statement in June. The statements should be made as soon as possible before the summer so that the Executive's indications of the key issues facing the Administration are understood and can be the subject of debate in the Assembly and between Departments and Assembly Committees.

To inform this process we will provide short position reports in June showing the main issues affecting the spending plans of the Executive and the Departments. It

is likely that these statements will coincide with Assembly business on the Main Estimates for 2001-02. They are two distinct processes, and I hope that the timing of the business can be managed in a way which helps that distinction. We will meet to debate and vote on the motion seeking approval of the Main Estimates for 2001-02 and then consider the Budget (No 2) Bill. The key point is that the Estimates concern 2001-02, while the Budget process set out in today's timetable is the beginning of the cycle for 2002-03.

The Finance and Personnel Committee will have an important role in collating and channelling the views of all Committees to me. This will apply, in particular, at the next phase when it can draw together the views and conclusions of each Committee following scrutiny of the report on their Department's financial issues prepared by the Executive. I welcome the Committee's advice and assistance throughout the process and at several key stages especially.

This consultation, which will be part of a wider process, should not be limited to examination of the information presented on Departments' expenditure. It should examine implications for equality and New TSN and be informed by scrutiny of other material available such as departmental plans and the public service agreement targets set out in the Programme for Government.

Committees also need to consider how the priorities set out in the Programme for Government may be refined and developed in the light of experience in the past year and new developments. Many of the policy and organisational issues which Committees have been considering with their respective Departments recently will impinge on the Budget. In this way we can ensure effective examination and identification of changing financial priorities at departmental level and at a wider strategic level through the central role of the Finance and Personnel Committee. The key aim is to ensure that we can meet the Finance and Personnel Committee's request for the draft Budget to be introduced as soon as possible after the summer recess. The timetable before the Assembly today will allow the Committee some time to consult and consider the issues affecting Departments. We want to achieve as much as possible before the recess.

Better information will be available to Committees and to Ministers, and that will contribute to consideration of the issues.

Two stages in the timetable will help to draw the process together. First, it would be helpful if the Committees could give their preliminary views for consideration to the Committee for Finance and Personnel by 6 July. Secondly, if that Committee could provide me with some views by the end of August, it would be possible to take them into account when the Executive are considering the proposals for the Programme for Government and the draft Budget in early September. Neither deadline is a

guillotine on the work, as there will be scope to hear more from all Committees at later stages. Contributions at the times I have mentioned would, however, be particularly useful.

Between the end of August and mid-September, the Executive's work will concentrate on developing and refining draft proposals for the Programme for Government and the Budget, with a view to introducing these documents in draft to the Assembly in late September. That would fulfil the desire expressed by the Committee for Finance and Personnel in its report last year.

If the draft Budget were introduced in late September, rather than mid-October as last year, that would offer more time to Committees for consultation on and consideration of the proposals. They will also have the benefit of the earlier material in the Executive's position reports. Comments could be channelled through the Committee for Finance and Personnel. As at the stages before and during the summer, I shall rely on that Committee to assist by working with the other Committees and channelling views to me.

A further key stage of the work between 24 September and December will be consultation on the equality implications of the proposals. We intend to prepare the way for this by making the Executive's position reports widely available, so that those who wish to contribute will have information before the presentation of the draft Budget. During that period, the Assembly Committees will also consider the proposals for the Programme for Government and the public service agreements.

The Executive will need to review the Budget in the autumn and decide on any revisions, depending on the views expressed in response to the draft Budget. Before that stage is reached, it should be possible to have a full debate on the draft Budget on foot of a motion from the Committee for Finance and Personnel. The Executive will thus be able to reflect more fully on Assembly views than was possible last year.

I would like to hear further from the Committee for Finance and Personnel on the precise sequence of events. As last year, however, it might be best if the Committee were to report to me after that Budget debate. The Executive could then reflect on that report in its review of the Budget, which will also be informed by the concurrent work on the Programme for Government.

The intention is that all the strands of work I have mentioned, including the views of the Committee for Finance and Personnel, the reaction to the equality consultation and the Executive's review of these and other relevant factors will come together in a statement to the Assembly on the revised Budget in early December, leading to an Assembly debate and vote by 10 December.

The Assembly should note that there is no Treasury spending review this year. In some respects, this year's

work will be a transition to the spending review of 2002. That will see the completion of the changes to resource budgeting.

As we consider the issues in this cycle, we can draw on an extensive range of material which includes the public service agreements as set out in the Programme for Government, the details of the Executive programme funds and especially the indicative plans for 2002-03 and 2003-04 as shown in the Budget presented to the Assembly last December.

Given the transitional nature of this year's arrangements, we do not anticipate a major recasting of the Budget, but we will need to address some key issues; hence, the approach that I have described today. Some business must be done in June on the Estimates and the Budget (No 2) Bill for 2001-02. However, that is separate from the Budget process for 2002-03 that is beginning today.

There will be Programme for Government and pre-Budget statements in June on the main issues that must be addressed for 2002-03. Preliminary financial information will be supplied to the Committee for Finance and Personnel and other departmental Committees, and I shall seek the views of the Committee for Finance and Personnel, which will reflect the views of other Committees as well as its own, by the end of August.

The Programme for Government proposals and the draft Budget will be considered by the Executive in early September and introduced to the Assembly in late September, after which the Committee for Finance and Personnel will take evidence from the Department of Finance and Personnel and other statutory Committees on the draft Budget. There will be consultation on the equality implications of the Programme for Government and the draft Budget, and there will be a substantive debate on the draft Budget in November, as part of the Committee for Finance and Personnel's work to collate and channel comment on the Executive's proposals. Our aim is that the revised Budget will be announced to the Assembly in early December and debated and voted on a week thereafter.

I hope that Members find the explanation of the intended procedures and timetable helpful as an indication of what is planned and that it will inform Committees' planning of their programmes.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Mr Molloy): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's statement; it launches the Budget debate. I hope that all Committees will take up the debate with their Department.

Can the Minister assure Members that the statutory departmental Committees will be given adequate time to consider all the stages of the financial process? There was some slippage this year. In future, we should start the

process again at the end of a term. Committees must be able to scrutinise the proposals with their own Department. That has not happened as early this year as we would have liked. Why has that consultation not happened? Were Ministers directed to consult their Department on the proposals?

Will Committees have the opportunity to scrutinise the Supply resolution to ensure that it reflects each Department's needs? Members should be given the opportunity for a debate in October. The date for the debate has moved to November, but the Committee has made it clear that it wants a debate in October, to give it enough time after the debate to produce a report and consult the other Committees.

Mr Durkan: I acknowledge the Committee's input to our proposals on timetable and procedures.

Neither the Executive nor the Department of Finance and Personnel is applying time constraints. I said last year that Committees did not need to wait for me to fire a starting gun to begin consideration of their Department's spending plans. I know that people have a particular interest in seeing which bids succeed and which fail.

However, I hope that the departmental Committees will develop the role that they have to play in contributing to the thinking of Departments. Committee involvement should also help to ensure that Departments make sound plans to underpin bids. Departmental Committees can make a contribution towards that work, even outside the Budget cycle.

11.30 am

I agree with the Chairperson of the Committee that the full debate, on a motion tabled by the Committee for Finance and Personnel, should take place in adequate time before the Committee is due to give a report to me. The precise timing and sequence of events needs to be resolved.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Mr Leslie): I thank the Minister for his detailed statement and for the enthusiasm that he and his Colleagues have displayed for what is potentially a hypothetical exercise. The exercise provides the right template for the future, although the plans for the future might be delayed.

Resource account budgeting is new to all of us. Does the Minister intend to offer a tutorial about the structure of the new accounts? To the best of my knowledge the record of assets that is held by Departments is not ready yet. The new accounts system will have a significant part to play in future planning for Departments, and I hope that it will improve the planning for capital expenditure. When will the figures be available?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for his compliments. I believe that we will use the procedure, and I hope that we do so constructively. The Member's points about the

implications of resource accounting and budgeting are well made. One of our aims is to use the system to enable better planning for the Executive.

I would be happy to consider how to format tutorials on resource account budgeting. We could provide seminars on a request basis for different Committees or by organising parties or Committee Chairpersons. We might consult with the Committee for Finance and Personnel on how best to provide the information.

The published accounts will be available in October 2002. The Valuation and Lands Agency has a role in the ongoing work on assets. When we have further information on the matter we will make that available to the Committee for Finance and Personnel.

Mr O'Neill: I welcome the Minister's statement. Does he agree that his statement is further evidence of devolution of power's working? That process that we have discussed demonstrates the opportunity for the people of Northern Ireland to influence the allocation of resources through the MLAs of all parties. Members work closely together on Committees, although some people say that that is not the case. Our Committee had expressed some concern about the timetable, but I welcome the detail of the programme. We are somewhat reassured, although still a bit concerned, about the amount of time that is available. However, the system is a good step forward, and the template should enable progress.

Mr Durkan: I welcome the comments from the Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure. Through this timetable we have tried to give the Committees more time not only to consider the draft Budget, but also for input and reflection prior to Executive consideration. That is noticeably different to what happened last year.

We want to ensure that through the Committees, MLAs can make a contribution on spending plans in advance. Committees should not have to wait until the draft Budget is available and then work in a purely reactive way. Committees have already done a range of work involving different service areas and programmes, and they have comments on those issues. There is no reason why those comments on spending plans for next year should not have been communicated to the individual Departments. I hope that Committees will welcome the greater amount of time made available to them by this timetable, and that they also recognise the sound material that is already available to them on which they can base their contributions.

Mr Close: I have been particularly critical of the process over the last couple of years. However, I must give credit where it is due. The Minister's statement gives us the opportunity and the ability to move forward in a more efficient manner.

As has already been mentioned, the Budget is the most important issue that can come before the House because

it affects everyone in Northern Ireland. It is important that the procedures are right so that the right expenditure is in the right areas for the people we represent.

Inevitably this is a race against time, and it is important that we get off to a good start. Can the Minister assure the House that through negotiations with his Colleagues on the Executive, the necessary information will be made available to the respective departmental Committees so that initial comments channelled into the Finance and Personnel Committee by 6 July will be meaningful and constructive and will give us the tools to advise him correctly as Minister?

Mr Durkan: I concur with Mr Close's comments about the importance of getting Budget procedures right, not only for the Assembly's own conduct, but also, more importantly, for the good of the services to the community which this Assembly is responsible for providing.

I reiterate that the Committees already have a considerable amount of relevant information for next year. They know where the indicative allocations lie in the revised Budget announced in December 2000. They have material about the public service agreements and the Programme for Government's targets, and also the supplementary information that has since emerged about the Executive programme funds. The Committees have also been informed by their own work in exploring different issues.

In June the Committees will have the benefit of a statement on the Programme for Government that will be followed by a pre-Budget statement, again on behalf of the Executive. The Committees will receive position reports for their respective Departments, and the Committee for Finance and Personnel will receive the entire compendium of position reports affecting all Departments and the Executive as a whole.

The Committees will have that information as soon as it is cleared by the Executive. With this information the Committees will be able to give feedback to the Committee for Finance and Personnel before the Executive even considers a draft Budget, and in many cases before I, as Minister, have had Budget bilateral meetings with my fellow Ministers.

Rev Robert Coulter: Part of my question has been answered, but I too welcome the statement from the Minister. Can the Minister tell us what arrangements are in place to ensure that departmental statements will be with Committees in time for a full and adequate consideration of the issues involved?

Mr Durkan: Obviously the position reports first have to clear the Executive. There will be an Executive meeting on 14 June, and that is when we expect them to be agreed. The following week those position reports will be made available. We cannot do it any sooner than that, because we must ensure that they are first cleared by the

Executive. In addition, they need to be in similar format, because presenting very different types and styles to Committees would make their job harder — and certainly make the job of the Committee for Finance and Personnel harder.

I recognise that given the date set for the Assembly recess it is asking Committees to engage in some concentrated effort to get preliminary reflections back to the Committee for Finance and Personnel by 6 July, but that is something that Committees can and should do. We always recognised that once we had the target of trying to introduce the draft Budget as soon as possible after the recess, we were going to have to work at some lick to get some consideration of it before the recess.

Ms Hanna: I too welcome the Minister's statement and particularly his giving increased opportunities for consideration by the Committees.

Will the Minister say when he expects the needs and effectiveness reviews to be completed, and can he assure us that the improvement that has been started today will continue?

Mr Durkan: The needs and effectiveness reviews were announced to the Assembly on previous occasions, not least at the time of the statement on the Executive programme funds, which also addressed issues outstanding from the monitoring round. We want to use these reviews to help ensure that we are putting adequate resources, appropriately targeted, into the particular services that will be the subject of those reviews and inform our wider approach to negotiations with the Treasury on Barnett. Work is already underway on those reviews. We will certainly be trying to ensure that when we are doing the Budget work in September we will be doing some of that work in the light of the information coming from those reviews.

Mr McFarland: Earlier in the year the Minister announced that his Department and the Economic Policy Unit were to help the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to try to devise a system for tracking funds. Does the Minister now have the information that will allow his Department and the Health Committee to properly scrutinise the health budget?

Mr Durkan: Obviously this is a bit beyond the time-tabling for next year's Budget, but that work is ongoing, as is work on the needs and effectiveness reviews. When the work is concluded the Executive will consider relevant papers from the Economic Policy Unit and me, and information will then be made available to the relevant Assembly Committee.

Mr Byrne: I welcome the statement by the Minister and particularly the timetable that has been set out for the compilation of the Budget for next year. If this process is engaged in properly by all involved, can the Minister confirm that it could result in an integrated

approach to Budget planning and a real start to the process of delivering joined-up Government?

Mr Durkan: If we undertake this timetable and Committees use the opportunities, both before the recess and afterwards, to take advantage of the longer time available for dealing with the draft Budget, we can make a significant improvement to the procedures that have gone before.

11.45 am

It will make a qualitative difference to the Budget that we have. I issue the health warning that because next year will see a spending review and we already have our amounts fixed for the year, there is not going to be the same latitude available to make significant changes. Nevertheless, if we use the new procedures and the more comfortable time frame now available, in future years when we have wider issues for determination we can ensure that the Assembly has as big an influence on the Budget as it wants.

Mr Savage: I too welcome the statement from the Minister. I congratulate him on the work that he has done over the past months on planning and preparation for the future. Budgets are very important, but there are other things which are equally so. I want to draw peoples' attention to one thing. A couple of weeks ago — *[Interruption]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I remind the Member that this is an opportunity to ask questions of the Minister; it is not an opportunity for Members to make statements.

Mr Savage: A number of weeks ago, the First Minister handed you a letter, a very important letter. We may plan whatever — *[Interruption]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The question must be relevant to the statement and not to any extraneous matter such as a letter that I may have received.

Mr Savage: The various Committees have been asked to bring forward proposals by a certain date — 6 July was mentioned by Mr Durkan. Where will the information go if the Assembly does not exist?

Mr Speaker: That is well outside the bailiwick of the Minister. The Member has mentioned 6 July — whether a particular Minister resigns does not affect the Assembly per se at that point. To move outside the statement to ask broader political questions is not a proper use of the House's time. We must leave it there.

TRUSTEE BILL

Consideration Stage

Mr Speaker: No amendments have been tabled to the Bill. The Chairman of the Finance and Personnel Committee, Mr Molloy, said that he wished to speak briefly on clause 1. I do not see him here. I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to take the remaining clauses en bloc, followed by the four schedules en bloc and the long title. Hearing no objection I shall proceed in that fashion.

I see that Mr Molloy has appeared again.

Clause 1 (The duty of care)

The Chairperson of the Finance and Personnel Committee (Mr Molloy): A Cheann Comhairle, I apologise as I was called out by the Clerk. Before addressing clause 1, I would like to take the opportunity to thank the organisations that took the time to write to us, setting out their views on the Bill. I also thank the Minister and ask him to pass on the Committee's appreciation to the Office of Law Reform and its officials who assisted the Committee in its detailed consideration of the clauses. The Committee received advanced briefings on the Bill from officials at the Office of Law Reform, and that enabled us to complete the Committee Stage of the Bill in the period set down in Standing Orders.

The Committee met on eight occasions. Four of those meetings took place before the Bill was introduced to the Assembly. I thank my Committee Colleagues for their work in dealing with the Bill within the set time. The Committee agreed that clause 1 should be recommended to the Assembly for approval. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Durkan: I am pleased that the Committee is content with the Bill. I acknowledge the work that the Committee did on the Bill before it came to the Assembly. I note the thanks expressed by the Chairman on behalf of the Committee, and I will be happy to convey them.

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 2 to 46 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedules 1 to 4 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Long title agreed to.

Mr Speaker: The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

FAMILY LAW BILL

Further Consideration Stage

Mr Speaker: No amendments have been tabled to the Bill. I therefore propose, by leave of the House, to group the five clauses followed by the long title. Hearing no objection, I will proceed in that fashion.

Clauses 1 to 5 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Long title agreed to.

Mr Speaker: The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

CHILD SUPPORT (COLLECTION AND ENFORCEMENT AND MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS) REGULATIONS (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2001

CHILD SUPPORT (INFORMATION, EVIDENCE AND DISCLOSURE AND MAINTENANCE ARRANGEMENTS AND JURISDICTION) (AMENDMENT) REGULATIONS (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2001

CHILD SUPPORT (MAINTENANCE CALCULATION PROCEDURE) REGULATIONS (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2001

THE CHILD SUPPORT (MAINTENANCE CALCULATIONS AND SPECIAL CASES) REGULATIONS (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2001

THE CHILD SUPPORT (VARIATIONS) REGULATIONS (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2001

Mr Speaker: The next five motions on the Order Paper relate to child support regulations. I propose to conduct only one debate. I will ask the Minister to move the first motion, after which we will debate all five motions. The Minister can speak to all five motions at the start. Members who wish to respond to any or all of the motions may respond in that single debate. We will vote on that, and I will then ask the Minister to formally move the other four motions in turn.

The Minister for Social Development (Mr Morrow): I beg to move

That the Child Support (Collection and Enforcement and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 be approved.

The following motions stood on the Order Paper in the name of the Minister for Social Development:

That the Child Support (Information, Evidence and Disclosure and Maintenance Arrangements and Jurisdiction) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 be approved.

That the Child Support (Maintenance Calculation Procedure) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 be approved.

That the Child Support (Maintenance Calculations and Special Cases) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 be approved.

That the Child Support (Variations) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 be approved.

The Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act (Northern Ireland) 2000 sets out the principles on which the reformed child support scheme is based. The Regulations before the Assembly today provide some of the detailed framework for the reformed scheme. The Child Support (Collection and Enforcement and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 extend the methods for collecting maintenance, voluntary payments, and past interest and fees. They make provision in relation to the withdrawal of driving licences as an alternative to prison for failure to pay child support, and for the imposition of financial penalties.

The Child Support (Information, Evidence and Disclosure and Maintenance Arrangements and Jurisdiction) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 extend the Child Support Agency's access to information, provide for notification of criminal offences, and set out the extended jurisdiction to collect child support from certain groups of non-resident parents living abroad.

The Child Support (Maintenance Calculation Procedure) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 provide for the handling of applications for maintenance when liability begins and the rules relating to parents with care who are on benefit.

The Child Support (Maintenance Calculations and Special Cases) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 specify in detail the child support rates and the rules for calculating income.

The Child Support (Variations) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 provide for the variation of the child support rates to reflect exceptional circumstances.

The Assembly has already debated and agreed the broad policy covered by these Regulations in our debates on the Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Bill last year. The Regulations flesh out the provisions of the Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act (Northern Ireland) 2000, and they are inevitably detailed, so I will take a few minutes to explain what each of the packages does.

The Child Support (Maintenance Calculation Procedure) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 set out the detailed rules concerning applications for child support when liability begins. They cover the provision to reduce the benefit of parents with care who ask to opt out of the child support scheme and set the time limit for their explaining their reasons. Of course, some parents with care have good reasons for asking to opt out. Each case will be considered carefully before a decision to reduce

benefit is made. However, if we accept that parents have the main responsibility for supporting their children when they are able to do so, we cannot permit some parents to choose to pass on that responsibility to the taxpayer without sanction.

When a non-resident parent refuses to supply sufficient information for maintenance to be calculated, and the Child Support Agency is unable to obtain the information from other sources, a default rate will be set. The rate is based on the number of qualifying children, and it assumes an average income. The default rate enables liability to be set quickly, and it is not intended to be punitive.

The Child Support (Maintenance Calculations and Special Cases) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 lay down detailed rules for the calculation of maintenance. There are four rates of maintenance to cover the particular incomes and circumstances of non-resident parents. The basic rate applies to non-resident parents whose net income is £200 a week or more. It is based on straightforward percentages of net income — 15% for one child, 20% for two children and 25% for three or more children. Those percentages were chosen because research shows that they are approximately half the proportion of income that most families spend on supporting their children.

The reduced rate applies to non-resident parents with a net weekly income of between £100 and £200. They will pay a lower percentage of income than the basic rate, but it will rise proportionately as net income increases.

A flat rate of £5 will apply to non-resident parents with incomes below £100 a week. Non-resident parents in receipt of most state benefits, pensions and allowances, including income support, jobseeker's allowance and incapacity benefit, will also have a flat rate liability. A nil rate will apply to some non-resident parents, including those with incomes of less than £5 a week — prisoners, students, children and young people on income support and certain people in hospitals and residential homes.

The new scheme also provides for a much simpler definition of income, ignoring some types of income currently taken into account. It is very important that parents with care receive maintenance payments regularly and on time. Where non-resident parents fail to do this, the Child Support (Collection and Enforcement and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 amend the current Regulations to allow the Child Support Agency to consider imposing a discretionary financial penalty.

My Department has no intention of penalising responsible non-resident parents who have a good reason for failing to make a particular payment promptly, but there are those who, without justification, persistently involve the agency in the considerable extra work of pursuing late or missed payments. It is right that a financial penalty should be imposed on those who deliberately avoid paying on time.

The Child Support (Information, Evidence and Disclosure and Maintenance Arrangements and Jurisdiction) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 amend the current Regulations on who is required to supply information to the agency and the purposes for which that information is needed. The agency will be able to ask a wider range of people and organisations for any information they hold that will assist in making or enforcing an assessment.

12.00

The new scheme, like the old, will allow for the maintenance calculation to be varied to reflect exceptional circumstances as set out in the Child Support (Variations) Regulations. Parents with care will be able to apply for a variation where the non-resident parent has substantial resources not accounted for in the calculation. Non-resident parents can apply if they have certain extra child-related expenses to meet.

Most of the Regulations before us today will come into effect for different types of cases when the relevant sections of the Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act are brought into effect. The relevant sections will be commenced for new cases first and, at a later date, for existing cases, once my Department is sure that the new systems are working properly for new cases.

The principles underlying the original child support scheme were sound, and I am convinced that the reformed scheme introduced in these Regulations will enable the Child Support Agency at last to put those principles into practice.

Mr O'Neill: I support the introduction of all of these Regulations. It is important to reflect on the amount of work that has gone into this by Department officials, the Minister and members of the Social Development Committee, who have examined these issues in considerable depth. It is also important to put on the record that there was concern, as the Minister mentioned, about the punitive nature, or the interpretation of some of these rules as punitive, particularly when looking at the maintenance calculation procedures. That issue was questioned in considerable depth and, when one assesses the amount of hardship that families suffer because of abuse and neglect by absent parents, on balance this is a welcome addition to the Department's work.

The child support reforms will at last — and I agree totally with the Minister — put the whole area of child support and maintenance into a new and perhaps more workable system. There is no doubt that the previous one was fraught with great difficulty. This has been one of the better movements that we have seen towards improving the system, and I want to put these comments of support on the record.

Mr Hay: I too welcome the Minister's statement this morning, and I hope it will have an effect on parents

who, for whatever reason, are not taking their responsibilities seriously. How does the Minister plan to deal with a parent who absconds to another jurisdiction, when the other parent is living in Northern Ireland and is finding it difficult raising his or her family?

Mr Morrow: First, I welcome Mr O'Neill's comments. I know that he has taken a particular interest in this legislation from day one, and I welcome his constructive remarks here.

I reiterate that the purpose of all of these Regulations is to introduce a much more efficient and effective system and to ensure that money that should be going to children gets there. From Mr O'Neill's and Mr Hay's contributions I see that they accept that point and see its validity.

When the legislation is passed the Department for Social Development will be in a much better position to "follow" — and I use that word advisedly — those who are in default of payment. Ultimately it is the children who suffer. Whether those who are persistently defaulting are in this jurisdiction or outside it, I assure Members that every effort will be made to pursue them. The Department for Social Development will use whatever means are at its disposal to ensure that those people who abscond to another jurisdiction are made amenable.

Members will agree that the legislation is a tightening-up exercise across the spectrum that can only bring better results than we have had before.

The purpose of the new Regulations is to introduce a new system of child support that will be simpler, fairer and above all do what child support has always aimed to do — get the money to the children who have a right to it. I am pleased that the Assembly acknowledges that, and I welcome the constructive remarks.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Child Support (Collection and Enforcement and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 be approved.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved;

That the Child Support (Information, Evidence and Disclosure and Maintenance Arrangements and Jurisdiction) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 be approved.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Child Support (Maintenance Calculation Procedure) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 be approved.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Child Support (Maintenance Calculations and Special Cases) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 be approved

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Child Support (Variations) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 be approved.

PROCEEDS OF CRIME BILL: REPORT OF AD HOC COMMITTEE

The Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Committee for the Proceeds of Crime Bill (Mr A Maginness): I beg to move

That the Report of the Ad Hoc Committee set up to consider the draft clauses of the Proceeds of Crime Bill, as set out in Command Paper 5066, be submitted to the Secretary of State as a Report of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

It is a gross affront to common decency and democratic values that criminals can openly and fearlessly enjoy and display the fruits of their evil and sinister activities. It is hoped that through the draft Proceeds of Crime Bill they will soon be deprived of their accumulated wealth and that their reign as local crime lords will be a thing of the past.

It is intolerable that any criminal should enjoy with impunity his ill-gotten gains. The Proceeds of Crime Bill will be a major blow against criminals and crime, and it should be welcomed by all right-thinking people. As Members will be aware there has been a significant rise in crime in recent years.

A recent newspaper report stated that the situation has deteriorated drastically since the 1980s. Figures in a recent Government report highlighted the fact that there are now 78 gangs involving 400 individuals engaged in organised crime in Northern Ireland. The Government need to bring forward new measures to tackle these criminals. Innovative measures need to be used against criminals who are increasingly using highly sophisticated methods to profit from their illegal activities.

Over the last eight weeks the Ad Hoc Committee has heard evidence from a number of interested bodies: the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission; the RUC; the National Criminal Intelligence Service; the Criminal Assets Bureau (CAB) in Dublin; Customs and Excise; and the Inland Revenue. During these meetings many issues were raised and discussed in great detail by the Committee.

The draft Bill is being taken forward centrally by the Home Secretary, Jack Straw, and the Committee welcomed the opportunity to comment on the proposals in their draft form. The Proceeds of Crime Bill proposes to bring together, in one Act, the law governing investigations, money-laundering offences and confiscation. In addition it will establish the Criminal Assets Recovery Agency (CARA), which will have both an operational and a strategic role. The Bill seeks to empower the agency to recover criminal proceeds through the use of a new form of civil litigation in the High Court and to exercise taxation functions delegated from the Inland Revenue.

The main clauses of the draft Bill have been arranged as follows: the criminal assets recovery agency; criminal confiscation; civil recovery; taxation; investigations; and money laundering. Central to this Bill is the establishment of the Criminal Assets Recovery Agency. This agency

will operate at a national level through a director who will be appointed by the Home Secretary. The director must appoint a senior official to have responsibility for exercising the agency's functions in Northern Ireland.

The agency has been modelled on the Criminal Assets Bureau, which has been in existence in Dublin since 1996. Over the past number of years it has had considerable success in civil recovery. To date it has recovered IR£17 million.

The Ad Hoc Committee convened a very useful formal meeting with the Criminal Assets Bureau. Members were impressed by the professionalism and the dedication shown by the bureau staff, often in the face of personal threat from criminal elements. The Committee was also impressed by the Criminal Assets Bureau's evident success.

The Committee welcomed the establishment of such an agency to target the growing problem of criminality in our society. The Committee has made a number of recommendations, which are contained in the report. These include: the director's being autonomous and consulting with the key players; objectives and targets being included in the agency's annual plan; the agency staff's possessing a broad range of experience; and, where possible, secondment's being arranged to ensure that adequate use is made of the knowledge base found throughout the agencies that currently carry out these investigations.

12.15 pm

The official appointed to have responsibility for Northern Ireland should be locally based and should rank sufficiently highly within the agency to be able to take decisions on behalf of the agency in Northern Ireland. The Committee felt that a deputy director post would be appropriate.

The proportion of the agency's budget allocated for exercising its functions in Northern Ireland must be sufficient to allow the agency to be effective and successful. There must also be a clear protocol and understanding between the Director of Public Prosecutions — and any future director of the proposed new public prosecutions body — and the director of the new agency.

The draft Bill proposes to extend the current legislation for handling confiscation orders following a criminal conviction. It seeks to amalgamate and strengthen those powers, which are currently split between drugs and non-drugs Acts. The Committee welcomed these provisions and recommended that, in criminal confiscation matters, confiscation orders should only be made only where evidence meets the civil standard of proof.

Civil recovery is a new and imaginative proposal to deal with the problem of criminal assets where criminals have not been convicted of any criminal offence. The draft Bill proposes to create a new right —

Mr Leslie: I apologise for interrupting, but does the Member not mean "where persons have not been convicted

of any criminal offence”, rather than assuming that they are criminals?

Mr Maginness: I thank the Member for his intervention, which is entirely proper. It focuses on the fact that there are people who have not been convicted, but who are suspected of being engaged in criminality. There may not be sufficient evidence to bring a prosecution, or a prosecution may fail. However, there may be sufficient evidence to bring a civil action against such people.

The Bill proposes to create a new right of civil recovery. That means that where it has not been possible to secure a criminal conviction, or it is thought that there is insufficient evidence to obtain such a conviction, the director of the agency will be able to recover or acquire the assets of a person where he can show to the civil standard of proof — that is, on the balance of probabilities — that such assets are the proceeds of crime.

Throughout the Committee’s proceedings, the question was raised as to how that impacted upon a person’s right to peacefully enjoy his property. Equally, many issues were raised relating to punishment without conviction, an area enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights. Following detailed consideration of these matters — and a comprehensive submission was made by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission — we are content with the opinion that a person cannot consider as punishment the removal of assets to which he was not entitled in the first instance.

During the Committee’s visit to Dublin, it was apparent that a number of legal challenges had been made to the existing legislation in the Republic, which is not dissimilar to our draft legislation. However, the Supreme Court in the Republic rejected such legal challenges on the basis that human rights were not being infringed.

I add one health warning: the Republic of Ireland has not yet brought the European Convention on Human Rights into its domestic law. Nonetheless, I am confident that what is proposed in the draft Bill will withstand any legal challenge on the basis of the European Convention on Human Rights. The draft Bill places some limitations on the right of recovery of the director; those should provide further safeguards. This part of the draft Bill is incomplete, and there are several issues on which we were unable to take a view. However, the evidence given by the Criminal Assets Bureau on the benefit of reaching legally binding agreements has convinced us that such provisions must be included in the draft Bill. A recommendation to that effect has been included in our report.

In addition to the right of civil recovery, the director will also be able to raise tax assessments as a means of recovering the proceeds of crime. It is envisaged that that will be the final route available to the director. Preference will be given to criminal confiscation proceedings, then to civil recovery proceedings and, finally, when all else fails, an individual’s tax assessment could be raised. The use

of that method of recovery by the Criminal Assets Bureau in Dublin has proven very effective. Figures provided by the bureau show that raising assessments has produced IR£33 million in the first four years of operation — an impressive figure. We welcome the inclusion of the provisions.

The draft Bill makes provision for three new powers to assist investigations into the whereabouts of the proceeds of crime. In addition to the production orders and search warrants already provided for under existing legislation, the draft Bill introduces disclosure orders. The power will be available only to the director of the new agency, who will be able to require a person to answer questions at interview, to provide information or produce documentation. An order can be issued against a person whose assets are under investigation or against a third party. Secondly, customer information orders will require banks and other financial institutions to provide the details of any accounts held by a person under investigation. Thirdly, account monitoring orders will require a bank or other financial institution to provide transaction information on a suspect account.

The second and third orders will be used collectively, one to identify the suspect accounts and the other to monitor those accounts. All five powers will be exercised under judicial authority. The draft Bill also seeks to amalgamate the current legislation and to remove the absurd distinction between drugs and non-drugs offences. We welcome the introduction of the new powers and the removal of that distinction.

The draft Bill will reform the definition of the criminal offence of money laundering, and it will remove the distinction between drugs and non-drugs offences in this regard. The draft Bill will also extend the financial institutions’ duty to report suspicious transactions to the relevant authorities. We welcome those provisions.

The Bill will go a long way towards tackling the criminality that afflicts society. It will restore the confidence of the general public in the due process of law.

The Ad Hoc Committee endorses the draft Bill, which will provide the opportunity, through a multiagency approach, to recover the proceeds of crime from an ever more sophisticated group of criminals. Those criminals will no longer be able to act with impunity. Society in general will welcome any new legislation that tackles this serious problem and ends the scandal of criminals publicly flaunting their wealth and making a very frightening statement to society — that is, that crime actually does pay.

I submit the report to the Assembly and invite Members to give it their full endorsement. I support the motion.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Committee (Sir John Gorman): I am grateful for the opportunity to say something on this matter — my own background includes law enforcement.

When the Committee visited Dublin, the Chairperson behaved with great perspicacity and dignity and impressed our hosts. I was struck, on that visit, by the co-operation of the various arms of Government. The gardaí, the Attorney General, Customs & Excise, the Inland Revenue and social services combined in a joint action in the interests of the public, keeping down crime and ensuring that criminals were not profiting from the community.

We might find that some arms of our Government are less communautaire in how they approach this problem. I hope that, as a consequence of Mr Straw's intentions and of the recommendation of this Ad Hoc Committee, we might see that sort of liaison, particularly in the intelligence field, which is particularly inspiring and aiding the Criminal Assets Bureau in the other part of the island.

I hope that, whatever may happen to other relationships, the Government of the Irish Republic and the Northern Ireland Assembly will collaborate fully in ensuring that both parts of this island work together in the accordance that we saw in Dublin. I am confident that this will be a most flourishing and useful activity in minimising the drug problem, and the money that goes into that. It will also help to combat the other difficulties with criminality and dishonesty that gain so much kudos and revenue for so many people in this country — not least in the paramilitary field. I support the Bill.

Mr Kane: I welcome the draft legislation. It will be a great asset in bringing the criminal to task. A large number of individuals have led a very affluent lifestyle and are wealthy people who have lived off the community for 30 years. The entire community has suffered because of their bad deeds and will undoubtedly welcome the draft legislation. I commend the draft Bill to the House.

Mr McNamee: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom cupla pointe a dhéanamh faoi thuairisc an Choiste.

I welcome and support the report.

12.30 pm

I also welcome the fact that consultation took place when the Bill was in draft form. Some witnesses who gave evidence to the Committee stated that that procedure should be followed for other pieces of legislation, allowing the public an opportunity to contribute its views at an early stage, prior to legislation's coming to Parliament. However, some sections of the draft Bill, relating to the North of Ireland, are incomplete. Therefore, the Committee's report on the draft Bill can only be provisional upon the completion of the Bill.

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission expressed concerns about the compatibility of the Bill with the European Convention on Human Rights. Legislation introduced in the United Kingdom should comply with the Convention. If the Bill is in contravention of

the Convention, the human rights of the individual may not be protected for the purposes of the legislation.

We also have to consider the legal consequences of non-compliance of the Bill with the Convention. I support the concept that those who have acquired the proceeds of crime should be prevented from enjoying them. However, if the final Bill does not comply with the European Convention on Human Rights, it is open to challenge. If the Bill is not compliant and is successfully challenged in the European court, the whole purpose of the Bill will be undermined. Our report should deal with the issues raised.

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

As usual, the Chairman gave a broad introduction to the work of the Committee, and he referred to the Criminal Assets Bureau in Dublin. However, the European Convention on Human Rights has not yet been incorporated into the domestic law of that part of Ireland. Therefore the legislation in the South may be open to challenge. However, members of the Criminal Assets Bureau were confident that they could deal with any such challenge, given their operation and how they employ the legislation.

Potential for the final Bill to be in contravention of the European Convention on Human Rights resides in assumptions which, under the draft provisions, are to be made when civil recovery is employed. The Criminal Assets Bureau felt that the definition of a person's having a criminal lifestyle was somewhat woolly.

Under European legislation, civil recovery could be viewed as a criminal proceeding. Therefore the Bill has the potential to contravene article 6 paragraph 2, articles 7 and 8 of the Convention, and article 1 of protocol 1 to the Convention. Due regard must be given to those comments to ensure that the final Bill is compliant with European legislation and that it can succeed in the purpose for which it was intended. Sir John Gorman referred to our enlightening and educational meeting with the Criminal Assets Bureau in Dublin.

The innovative interagency approach of the bureau was clearly seen. It is made up of people from the Garda Síochána, the Office of the Revenue Commissioners, the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, customs officials and others with professional expertise in law, accountancy and information technology. Those people remain in the employment of their respective bodies while working with the other elements of the Criminal Assets Bureau to pursue the recovery of the proceeds of crime and to assist in the investigation of the proceeds of crime. There are many lessons to be learned, and countries throughout the world are looking at the establishment and operation of the Criminal Assets Bureau.

The Criminal Assets Bureau has been successful in the recovery of the proceeds of crime and in relation to the taxation of those who have benefited from such

proceeds. More importantly, the bureau has been successful because of the public's perception of it and the public's confidence in its operation. The public is satisfied that the bureau does what it is required to do. The success of the Criminal Assets Recovery Agency (CARA), which will be established under the Bill, will depend on public perception. It will depend on public confidence in the various bodies that will form part of the agency and in the future police service in this part of Ireland. Interestingly enough, "cara" is the Irish word for "friend", but CARA will not be the friend of a number of people.

It would be useful for the public to be aware of one item of evidence that was given to us. Det Supt Thompson of the RUC gave evidence to the Ad Hoc Committee, and he was questioned fairly thoroughly on the need for a Bill and an agency such as CARA. He was asked about the scale of criminal assets and their nature in this part of Ireland compared to those in other places. Det Supt Thompson said that, in relation to the possible origins of assets and property, the RUC would benefit from this legislation in the pursuit of approximately 180 identifiable people.

Det Supt Thompson was also asked whether those 180 people would be believed by the RUC to be from paramilitary organisations, other organisations, or working as individuals. Interestingly, he said that the majority of people whom the RUC would be interested in pursuing for the purpose of denying them the proceeds of crime were individuals who were working on their own behalf. It is also interesting that the scale of criminality and the extent of the proceeds of crime in this part of Ireland are much less significant than those in many other parts of the United Kingdom.

We can take some comfort from that. We often hear about the enormous scale of criminality and racketeering in the North, so it was some relief to hear that it is not as bad as people make out.

I welcome the report, even though essential parts of it have yet to be drafted.

Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Close: In many respects, the proposed Bill builds on and adds to the report of another Ad Hoc Committee — the one set up to look into the draft Financial Investigations (Northern Ireland) Order 2001. Its aims are rather similar, and its targets are the same. We are aiming to curb the lifestyle of those who are financed by illegal, illegitimate and ill-gotten gains. The aim of the Proceeds of Crime Bill, as with the 2001 Order, is to hit those individuals in their pockets, where it hurts.

Society needs the necessary legal frameworks to deny these parasites the trappings of their ill-gotten gains and sordid deals. The Assembly must be seen to be making real progress in cleaning up society.

Mr Paisley Jnr: Does the Member agree that to continue his principle and logic, extending the trappings of Government to certain criminals is also unfair and that the logic that he has rightly applied to this legislation should apply to Government and should, therefore, exclude Sinn Féin/IRA from it?

Mr Close: There is one huge difference between what the Member says and reality. Not for the first time, the Member who has just spoken is somewhat removed from reality. The reality is that those who are in the Government of Northern Ireland, by way of positions in the Executive, are there by the express will and desire of the people of Northern Ireland. That is democracy. The Member, and a number of other Members, may not like it, but the will and the voice of the people must always be supreme.

Democracy does not enter the equation when we are dealing with criminals and those who have milked society through their criminal activity. Criminals want to deny democracy. I want to see society cleared of those people who benefit from ill-gotten gains. Society wants to see the drug barons who profit from the addiction of helpless individuals stripped of their illegal gains. Society wants to see a cracking-down on the money launderers, the fuel cheats and the tobacco fraudsters. They must be made amenable and accountable for their tax evasion, ill-gotten fat bank accounts, foreign holidays, flashy cars and large houses in Northern Ireland and on the Continent.

Over the years, criminals — and what I would refer to as the "smart alec" — have become more sophisticated. Their methods have become more subtle. It is to be regretted that those who are charged with the responsibility of cleaning up society and trying to make these individuals amenable to the law have been losing the battle to a large degree. That is why those who are intent on crimes such as drug smuggling see it as relatively easy pickings.

The proposed Bill goes some way towards redressing the imbalance that is currently in vogue. It is important that innovative thinking be given its head and that new measures be taken and supported by society to help to clean it up. In that respect, I particularly welcome the views of the Human Rights Commission. It is supportive of the measures and suggestions that are being put forward.

12.45 pm

The Bill will establish a Criminal Assets Recovery Agency which will be able to pursue criminal assets in several ways: the confiscation of assets of convicted criminals; the recovery of assets through civil proceedings; and the taxation of persons suspected of having benefited from criminal activity. Such a joined-up approach, which the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson of the Committee have already referred to, is vitally important. I endorse the comments of those who referred to our visit to the Criminal Assets Bureau (CAB) in the South of Ireland. If you ever needed proof of the success of the CAB you

have only to look at the figures. The CAB in the South recognises that crime knows no barriers and cuts across all facets of society, and its impressive figures make it patently clear that there is a need for a joined-up approach.

If we are going to make a real impact in Northern Ireland on the task confronting the Criminal Assets Recovery Agency, adequate resources must be made available. We touch upon these issues in the report's recommendations. However, it is essential that the message reaches the Secretary of State, and through him, the Home Secretary, that Northern Ireland requires the resources to ensure that criminal activity is nipped in the bud and is not given the opportunity to become a many-headed monster. The resources must be made available from day one. The person who is put in charge of the agency in Northern Ireland must be of assistant director status at least and be fully acquainted with Northern Ireland, its people and its organisations. I advocate that the person should be from, and have his roots in, Northern Ireland.

When we took evidence from the police, they pointed out that the effects of drug trafficking and acquisitive crime that is of a highly profitable nature should not be underestimated, and I endorse that view. The impact of such crimes on society, business and individual victims, particularly where organised criminality is involved, has been widely publicised. There is no good argument for allowing individuals to profit from their illegal activities, and it is right that criminals should have their ill-gotten gains taken away. I hope that the House and society will say "Hear, hear" to those comments.

The police also said that it is estimated that 180 people in Northern Ireland have substantial assets from criminal activity. The House must call for those people to be put out of business.

HM Customs and Excise calculate lost revenue in, for example, oil fraud to be around £100 million in 1998. Many people, particularly legitimate petrol retailers who have been put out of business throughout Northern Ireland, would say that that figure is only the tip of the iceberg. New powers are needed to deal with such illegality. The Northern Ireland economy is suffering from a massive haemorrhage because of criminal activity. It is incumbent upon all of us to make sure that the necessary steps are taken and the necessary laws put in place to stop the haemorrhaging.

I endorse the report and congratulate the Chairperson, the Committee members and particularly the staff of the Committee for the excellent work that they did preparing the report in the relatively short time that was available.

Mr Irvine: I concur with Mr Close's comments about the Chairman, the Committee members and especially the Committee staff. This is a sterling piece of work, and when the legislation eventually comes into effect, it will change our lives – although you would not guess that by the numbers in the Chamber today. It will be a turning

point in Northern Ireland. This legislation will allow us to be proactive in the battle against crime and believe that we can win when we continue a battle that we have been fighting with our hands tied behind our backs.

Our fear is that, when legislation is created, people will either not understand it or feel that they are not affected by it. This piece of legislation will most definitely be understood by those who are watching many of the 180 people previously mentioned as masquerading as legitimate businesspeople. Very often they live in middle-class areas and appear to be respectable. Others live in small working-class housing estates, and their wealth can be seen, although their neighbours may not realise that some of the oil paintings are so valuable that they are part of money laundering.

As well as removing assets from those people who have benefited shamefully from crime, the Criminal Assets Recovery Agency will have to deal with those who have assisted them. Legitimate businesspeople, or people who perceive themselves as such, who assist in the laundering of money, should desist, because under this legislation, they will be caught. I have absolutely no doubt of that.

I am not merely pleased with the Bill, I am frankly delighted with it. It will change the whole atmosphere. Ordinary people who live literally yards from me have been watching what goes on around them and asking "Why can somebody not do something about this?". The sterling work carried out by the police and other members of the security services has not been enough to stem the tide of crime. It will be evident quite soon that it is not simply the diligence of individual officers that is important; rather it is the tools with which they have to work. The potential tools in this legislation are quite wonderful and will benefit the security services immensely.

We have heard from those who have visited the Criminal Assets Bureau in Dublin that the degree of public confidence there increased massively when people saw how the bureau goes about its business. Is that not something that we need here? Do we not need to know that someone will protect us and do something to those bad people who are polluting our children?

I commend the police and the Human Rights Commission for their evidence. The police identified approximately 180 people who are, I suppose, quite different in type. There is the gangster who would be a gangster regardless of where he came from. Then there are others who have seen the capacity to make easy money without any constraint. Perhaps there are members of paramilitary organisations who follow the path of benefiting themselves rather than the society that they say they serve. I have watched these people grow and amass a wealth that brings with it power. Today I delight in the fact that that wealth and power have become their Achilles heel.

It is the very way in which we will identify them; it is the very way in which society already identifies them; and it is the very way in which CARA will put them behind bars — or at least, I hope, remove their assets.

We learned about the situation in South Africa, where the security services felt that their hands were tied. They could arrest the criminal, but the criminal accepted that consequence to be how life is. They took the attitude that because they live such a life, they might get caught, they would go to jail, and then they would get out. As the story goes, they accepted their arrest and imprisonment in a very macho way. However, when their assets were seized — their houses, cars, and their capacity to send their children to private schools — when this all came tumbling down around their ears they cried in the dock. There is significance in that story for those who perpetrate ills on this society.

I will go further and say that patriotism is very often the last refuge of a scoundrel. We have watched the old war movies in which there was always a black marketeer. We have seen circumstances in which those in positions of privilege or importance have abused their position. There are paramilitarists in Northern Ireland — I am not sure that we should ever refer to them as Loyalists or, indeed, Republicans — who are a blight on this society. Some will argue that all paramilitarists are a blight on this society — they will say that publicly, but not necessarily in private. However, at what point does society recognise someone to be a chancer, or, as my Colleague described it, a “smart alec”? By this I mean those who say that they are one thing, but who are really involved in it to seek all they can get for themselves.

Members, and many people outside this Chamber, can identify those smart alecs in seconds, in their own areas and communities. There is no longer an excuse for the authorities’ failure to identify them also and to follow this problem through to its logical conclusion by stripping from these people the single thing that allows them to ply their trade in my community — the suggestion that they function on behalf of the community. This proposed legislation would create the circumstances by which those people will cease to be a blight on us.

The American Government with its helicopter gunships cannot stop people from taking drugs. They will try, as will other Governments, to make it more difficult for the criminals involved. That is what I advocate that we do, and the United Kingdom Government, through this legislation, will undoubtedly make things logistically difficult.

However, what is really needed to deal with the issue of drugs, which is only one element dealt with in this Bill, is an education programme to involve people in what is happening in their lives. We need to inform adults, or those who are not au fait with the drug culture, of what is happening to their children, and what the

effects of this will be. This will be not only about legislation. Society will have to do a great deal, and I look forward to the introduction of the legislation which will help us deal with it.

Oil and cigarette smuggling are detrimental to the Exchequer, and potentially, they give criminals money with which to do bad things. However, my fear is that the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, will be more concerned with stopping the loss of revenue on fuel and cigarettes, rather than ensuring that CARA gets the full resources to destroy those who take life through drugs. My fear is that political direction will be CARA’s one Achilles heel. Three Colleagues have already identified the importance of an independent director for CARA — one who is based in Northern Ireland and who preferably has an experience and understanding of the people here. This would create a genuine independence. The director of CARA would determine the direction in which that organisation would move, and political direction based on concerns about loss of revenue would not be the issue.

If the director of CARA had to measure the loss of revenue against children’s deaths, the pollution of our society, the massive increase in heroin use and the lives lost through heroin in north Antrim, it would become simple. And where there is one heroin addict, there is one dealer, then two, then three, and so on. There are 59,000 people in the Ballymena borough and hundreds of heroin addicts. Middle-class people, however, cover up the problem because of their sense of shame and hurt, so we do not have a clear picture of what is happening in the area. Our choice has to be the destruction of those who destroy other people’s lives.

1.00 pm

I will, no doubt, be accused of hypocrisy, but it is important that the power and authority, skill and ability that will undoubtedly be pulled together to create CARA be directed towards the destruction of those who pollute society and cause unbearable pain. We may not be as bad as other places yet, but we should take the proposals on board. I commend the work of the Committee and the report.

Mr Leslie: I am pleased that we are debating these important measures. I had feared that the issue would not receive due attention. This is an important piece of legislation, which may be enforced in Northern Ireland before the rest of the United Kingdom, given that it can go through as an Order in Council because it is a reserved matter. However, there are certain drawbacks in being a guinea pig, and it may be in a less refined form when it becomes operable here. Nevertheless, for the reasons that Mr Irvine has outlined, Northern Ireland society will be pleased to see it in force.

I have a slight caveat, however, I acknowledge that the structure of the law needs to be adjusted in accordance with the changing nature of crime. We are forced to

adopt our own systems to combat the power of those who are able to subvert the system of justice and acquire huge assets by unlawful means. However, should this legislation hit the wrong target, the affected person would be able to show that the legislation was repressive. That may be true, but it is necessary in the circumstances. The Bill should be introduced as emergency legislation, perhaps for an initial period of three to five years and then renewed by Parliament at two-yearly intervals, so that Parliament has to examine the legislation continuously and be aware of how it is working. Having taken the decision to introduce legislation of this kind, Parliament must be robust and ensure that it works in the way that Members have described this morning.

I noted with concern the comments made by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission about a potential clash with that legislation. I note that the Committee has said that depriving someone of assets to which he was not entitled does not constitute a punishment. I also note that the Human Rights Commission said that Parliament could expressly decide that it wanted to proceed in a way that was incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights. Even if Parliament did so proceed, a successful challenge could be mounted through the European Court of Human Rights.

I imagine that Parliament would not wish to proceed in such a manner, as that would be conceding the point. It would probably prefer to let the point emerge — if it were going to emerge — when someone took a case. There is a potential difficulty there, but I trust that, if it should reach that stage, the European Court would prove to be robust, although that again raises the issue of why Her Majesty's Government put Parliament in the position of being subject to a higher authority in Europe. It is quite extraordinary, and the consequences of that decision will have a greater and more frequent impact on us.

Mr Ervine: The Member may not be aware of it, but 43 countries are attempting to create — or have created — similar legislation. That adds to our capacity to control the problem, not only in our country but beyond our borders. In this instance, belonging to Europe will not be at all detrimental.

Mr Leslie: I was not aware of that fact; it is a source of some comfort. In its submission, the RUC said that it was vital that sufficient human resources be made available to allow CARA to operate effectively. A considerable amount of cash will be needed. If one plans to mount a series of High Court actions, one must be sure that there are sufficient resources to do so to the best of one's ability, employing the best legal counsel. A figure of £54 million for the UK for three years has been identified as the funding that would be made available to CARA. I am unable to judge whether that is a lot or a little. It sounds like a large amount, but it could diminish quickly. I endorse Mr Ervine's view that there must be sufficient assets to do the job. A regular review by Parliament of

the progress made under the Bill would help to highlight that issue, among others.

Is £54 million a net figure? If CARA is successful in recovering assets acquired through criminal activity, there will be proceeds. What will happen to those proceeds? Will they be absorbed into the funding of the agency? That might be a reasonable thing to do, and it would have the highly satisfactory effect that people found by the High Court to have acquired assets illegally would be financing their further prosecution. Were the agency to be so successful as to recover hundreds of millions of pounds, what would be done with that money? Again, I echo Mr Ervine's concerns; I would like to see the money being used to ensure that CARA is properly funded and returned to the part of society that lost it in the first place. Again, that would greatly add to the public's satisfaction with this legislation.

I note that there is to be a memorandum of understanding involving the director of CARA, the Chief Constable of the RUC and the Director of Public Prosecutions, and I wonder whether some sort of protocol should also be in place with the other agencies that have been mentioned. It would be most unfortunate if we were to find a turf war going on. There must be some risk that that might be the case, although I have noted the comments of my Colleague, Sir John Gorman, about the high degree of co-operation that seems to have been achieved in Dublin. It would be most unfortunate if, instead of the Inland Revenue's being an instrument of CARA, it were to appear that CARA had become an instrument of the Inland Revenue. That would work heavily against the effectiveness of the operation.

I suspect that it is better to keep the definition of criminal lifestyle rather woolly and to give the courts the discretion to interpret it, although you run the risk that the courts will start off with a narrow interpretation that will become a precedent. I hope that Parliament will address that matter in some detail and work out whether it would be better to try to define the term without running the risk of a narrow definition allowing a more imaginative criminal to work outside its scope.

It was noted in the report that the sorts of people with whom we are dealing are exceedingly entrepreneurial in their activities, and we must be aware that the nature of the crime can continue to develop. We should bear in mind an outstanding early example of proceeding tangentially — Al Capone was not put in prison for smuggling alcohol but for income tax evasion.

Finally, I note that the Bill proposes to limit the director of CARA's activities in a number of ways, one of which is to say that he will have a claim on actual criminal proceeds but not the respondent's other property. If the money has been efficiently laundered it would be very hard to identify what was what. The section on money laundering simply set out to make it

easier to establish the offence of money laundering. Parliament needs to be careful about the restrictions on the claims that can be made by the director, so as to ensure that a highly entrepreneurial manipulator of criminally-acquired assets does not manage to evade the rules that have been put in place.

In conclusion, the director of CARA will have a key and very responsible role, and I imagine that there might be a number of people from Northern Ireland recently retired from a career in law enforcement who might be very suitable candidates for that job for the whole of the United Kingdom.

Mr O'Connor: I welcome this report. I had the privilege of deputising for Mr Attwood at a Committee meeting in Dublin. It opened my eyes and gave me hope when I saw that these people can be taken down a peg or two. The people who are purveying death to the children of Northern Ireland can be brought down because you hit them where it really hurts — in their hip pockets.

1.15 pm

I believe that, as Mr Leslie said, we have to find a high-water mark and a low-water mark in order to know the bounds of what can and cannot be done. In the context of the European human rights legislation excerpted in Annex A of the report, this is not a punishment. It is a recovery of assets that they should not have had in the first place.

In protocol 1, article 1, paragraph 1 of the European Convention on Human Rights, the phrase “except in the public interest” is used. No one could deny that this is in the public interest. Article 8 of the Convention protects the right to respect for private and family life. Paragraph 2 of article 8 makes an exception “for the prevention of disorder or crime”. Paragraph 2 of article 1 of protocol 1 provides another exception “to secure the payment of taxes or other contributions or penalties”. These things are present in human rights legislation.

Human rights legislation protects the rights of human beings as a whole. It is not there to protect a guy sitting in a £200,000 house, with a BMW at his front door, his children riding about on new mountain bicycles, while he is going to claim his dole money every other Thursday. That is a total perversion of society. It is an insult to those people who are on the dole and who need that money to live.

Here we have people lording it over council estates, sending out the wrong message to the children of this country that if they become involved in crime, they do not need an education or a job, because they can live like these people by selling drugs to young people. That is not the message that I want to send to the children of this country. The message that I want sent out is that there will be no hiding place for the drug barons; there will be no hiding place for anyone involved in illegal

activities such as fake CDs, Playstation games, et cetera. Those are all things which are helping to create their financial empires.

Drugs is the lethal one. As Mr David Ervine said, people are dying in this country because of drugs. We have those people sitting in their £200,000 houses like the centre of an onion, with so many skins that you cannot get near them. We need to shift the burden of proof. Those people can intimidate witnesses. They can pervert the entire criminal justice system through their intimidation, because their tentacles are so long and so far-reaching. The burden of proof must be shifted, and that is what this Bill does. If you are legit, where did you get the money? No one should have any difficulty in explaining how they came by their house or car, if it were by honourable and decent means. This Bill is aimed at those who gain by dishonest means.

I do not accept that we would hit the wrong target. If the burden of proof were shifted, then the person would be given the opportunity to say that he has gained his possessions legitimately and to show his receipts, accounts and tax returns. This problem will not go away with emergency legislation: it will change and develop, and we have to adapt accordingly.

However, I do not think that emergency legislation is necessarily the way to go about it. We are trying to move into a normal society, and we want to move away from repressive emergency legislation.

We want a multi-elemented approach to this. Sir John Gorman mentioned that the Garda Síochána has a role to play. There are revenue inspectors who can trace money through financial transactions and tax it at 24% per annum for tax that has not been paid. There are the social welfare agencies that recover money paid out in unemployment and social welfare benefits that should not have been paid, and Customs and Excise, which can recover VAT and other such duties.

Mr Leslie talked about Al Capone's being taken down for tax evasion. Perhaps what we need now in this country is a team of “Untouchables”, and our very own Elliott Ness to lead them, but this is a welcome start. The only reservation I have is that there is no hearsay element to it. There are times when it may be necessary for the director of such an agency to apply before a High Court judge on the basis of intelligence in his possession to ensure that certain assets can be seized. It may be to protect certain people, or to protect operations that are ongoing against other criminals. I wanted to see that element included.

This cannot be measured in terms of money. We may be able to say that we can recover £10 million this year. However, the real benefit of this is that it sends out a message to the people of Northern Ireland that these persons are going to be taken down, that crime does not pay. Young people in particular should stay away from

that path, because they will be taken down and taken down hard.

Mr Hay: The Ad Hoc Committee has done an important piece of work. Right across Northern Ireland, there will be many law-abiding citizens who will welcome what has been brought forward to the Assembly. The Committee and the Chairperson should be congratulated. I am sure that we will all get another opportunity to discuss this further as it goes forward.

Across the community in Northern Ireland, and further afield, we have watched these people operate so well that some of them try to tell us that crime pays. There is a notion in Northern Ireland that crime pays. We see gangsters with their lavish houses, big cars and with three or four holidays a year. All of that has been done at the expense of the entire community. That is the tragedy. It is the community that pays for the crimes committed in Northern Ireland.

For this to work effectively, there has to be co-operation between agencies. There has to be co-operation across the border. There can be no one in this House who believes that criminals operating in Northern Ireland stop at the border. We all know that that is not the case. Many of these people are also operating in the South of Ireland, some of them very successfully. There is no doubt about that. I certainly welcome the co-operation of the Southern authorities in this matter, because that is very important.

There are criminals in Northern Ireland who believe that they can abscond to a different jurisdiction and still pick up the pieces and carry on their crime. There is also a belief among some criminals — a belief that will soon be gone — that if they do a few years in jail, they will always come out to their assets. Jail is not a deterrent to them, because when they get out they are free to carry on doing what they were doing before. Some of their activities go beyond anybody's idea of decency. They are into every shameful crime in Northern Ireland. They do not stop at drugs — there are even more sinister crimes across the country.

For years some people thought that they were above the law. Some of them — for instance, in my constituency of Foyle — boasted of their activities and their lifestyles and about still being able to sign on and receive benefits. They freely told people about operating in that way and wondered why everyone else seemed to work so hard for such a small living when they could live such lavish lifestyles. For many years — and some Members referred to this — it sent out all the wrong messages to young people, although not to all of them, since the vast majority of young people are decent.

A small number of young people have been lead into crime because they saw those lavish lives and how easy it was to get a few pounds. Those people never had any problem getting money. Many young people saw this and were lead into crime, and that is a tragedy.

There is no doubt that many people involved in crime were able to hide behind the 30 years of the troubles. Some of them used the troubles by, for example, saying to people that they were fighting for a cause, irrespective of which side they came from. Some of them were able to justify to their own people that what they were doing was for the cause. Now that the level of the troubles has lowered, some of these people are very exposed.

Ordinary decent people from both sides are now asking whether there ever was a cause. Where was their loyalty? Their loyalty was to themselves and to their activities. The tragedy is that they bled both communities for many years.

I hope that what the Chairperson of the Committee has said and this important piece of work will bring to an end these types of activities.

Some of those who are indirectly attached to the criminals, and who work on the sidelines, are well known. I hope, when the Assembly is debating the Proceeds of Crime Bill, that Members will ensure that the relevant agencies and authorities are given the teeth to deal with the problem — that is what it is about. Most Members feel that these criminals have operated for too long. I support the Committee's views on the Proceeds of Crime Bill.

1.30 pm

Mr A Maginness: I thank all the Members who contributed to the debate. It has been a very good debate with some interesting contributions. The general welcome for the report that was expressed throughout the debate is reflective of the Committee and the common approach that it took in dealing with the proceeds of crime and the draft legislation.

The Committee worked harmoniously and co-operatively. All parties participated in the drawing up of the report, and it is a credit to the Assembly that that amount of work was done so quickly and so well. May I take this opportunity, as Chairperson of the Committee, to thank the Committee members, the Committee Clerk and the research staff who helped us with legal matters and research.

Some Members talked about the joined-up approach that was characteristic of the Criminal Assets Bureau (CAB) in Dublin. I endorse that. The key to its success is that it has successfully integrated many different elements of Government into the CAB. That should be done with CARA; that is the key to success. I agree with Sir John Gorman and the other Members who emphasised that point.

In the Republic of Ireland, the CAB has contributed to a significant, substantial and noticeable decline in crime since 1996. The Republic's serious crime figures are at their lowest since the 1980s. That is directly referable to the CAB.

Mr McNamee and other Members raised the issue of human rights. The Committee was conscious of those rights, and its members carefully studied the submission

from the Human Rights Commission. The Human Rights Commission believes that innovative measures are being brought forward by the Government, and it welcomes those. The Commission, of course, gave a health warning to the Assembly about the legislation.

There is no doubt that the legislation will be challenged in the courts on the grounds that it violates human rights. However, there is no human right to enjoy the proceeds of crime, and that is the basis on which any challenge to the legislation will ultimately be defeated.

Mr Leslie mentioned the provision of resources for CARA. Those resources will be made available, particularly for Northern Ireland. I am fairly confident of that. Mr Straw has said that 50% of the proceeds of crime will be ploughed back into CARA when it is up and running.

The proper thing is to defeat crime by using assets that have been recovered from criminals, and there is poetic justice in that.

Serious problems affect society, but they are probably not as serious as in the rest of the UK or as they were in the Republic. Nonetheless, they are serious, and, as Mr Ervine and Mr O'Connor have emphasised, the public, and young people in particular, are scandalised by seeing known criminals enjoying the fruit of their ill-gotten gains. Through this draft legislation we can begin to end that scandal.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Report of the Ad Hoc Committee set up to consider the draft clauses of the Proceeds of Crime Bill, as set out in Command Paper 5066, be submitted to the Secretary of State as a Report of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The sitting was suspended at 1.36 pm.

On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

North/South Mobility Consultation Conference

1. **Mr Dallat** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to give an assessment of the North/South mobility consultation conferences and the mobility study. (AQO 1555/00)

The Deputy First Minister (Mr Mallon): I refer the Member to the written response we gave to Ms Lewsley on 30 April. Two public conferences have been organised, one in the North and one in the South. The purpose of these meetings is to give the public an opportunity to express its views on issues relating to cross-border mobility and to discuss possible solutions. The intention is that the consultants will take those views into account when preparing their final report, which will be completed next month. The steering group will report its findings to the next plenary meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council. The First Minister and I will report to the Assembly as soon as practicable thereafter.

The first of the two meetings was held in Carrickmacross on 16 May. A number of issues were discussed and views expressed, and these will now be considered by the consultants in the preparation of the final report. The second meeting will be held in Omagh.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Deputy First Minister for his comprehensive answer. Those consultation exercises are most welcome in this important study. Can the Minister outline how this exercise will benefit people living in border areas? Will it address the problems raised by the private sector, such as mobile phone roaming call charges and bank charges, as well as those raised by the public sector?

The Deputy First Minister: The consultation exercises provide an opportunity for the general public living in border areas, and for representative organisations, to contribute to the study by identifying obstacles to mobility and by proposing solutions. These contributions will be considered by the consultants in the preparation of their final report, which is due next month. I can confirm that issues such as mobile telephone roaming call charges and bank charges were discussed at the first of the two conferences and will be on the agenda again at the

conference held tonight in Omagh. The terms of reference for this mobility study are wide-ranging and detailed. I would be happy to send the Member a copy of the study, because it does affect every part of life for people living in border areas.

Mr Beggs: Does the Deputy First Minister see merit in examining mobility issues in the wider context of the British-Irish Council, looking at issues that cause difficulty in the movement of businesses between Northern Ireland and Great Britain, and between the Republic of Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom? Will the Deputy First Minister assure us that he will be examining restrictive practices that occur in public tendering procedures in the Republic of Ireland and also in teacher appointments, so that there will be true mobility within these islands?

The Deputy First Minister: There is scope for the British-Irish Council to examine mobility issues in the wider context. On one very specific aspect of mobility — transport issues — the Council has already agreed that the Northern Ireland Executive is in the lead. There are other important mobility issues that could in future be addressed by the British-Irish Council. One example that crops up occasionally — much too often, in my view — is the problems that the elderly face when having to go into residential homes, either here or in Britain. There is a great deal of bureaucracy, and that should not apply.

There are other, more practical issues for businesses and people on the island of Ireland, North and South. Many of those issues should be looked at. The Member raised the question of teacher employment; I would like to get to a situation where any teacher on the island of Ireland could be employed in any school throughout Ireland, without restriction.

Children's Forum

2. **Mrs E Bell** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to detail what conclusions were reached following the recent meeting of the Children's Forum; and to make a statement.

(AQO 1546/00)

Children's Issues

10. **Ms Lewsley** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to detail what progress has been made following the recent meeting of the non-governmental organisations forum on children's issues.

(AQO 1572/00)

The First Minister (Mr Trimble): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I shall answer questions 2 and 10 together. On 3 April 2001, junior Ministers Haughey and Nesbitt announced the establishment of a forum of non-governmental organisations to provide input to the development of proposals for a children's commissioner and the development of a children's strategy.

The forum met on 4 and 11 May 2001. Some positive and useful discussions took place, focusing in particular on the involvement of children and young people in the development of the proposals. The forum has agreed to advance specific recommendations on how this would best be achieved, and to provide practical help in taking this matter forward. The forum demonstrates the value of working in partnership with children's organisations, and it will continue to provide valuable input as we proceed with these proposals.

Mrs E Bell: When we asked a similar question in April, the First Minister said that he looked forward to working in partnership with children's organisations. That is useful. Does he agree, however, that a channel of information on this issue should also be set up with the Committee of the Centre, as we are compiling a report on the same issue?

The First Minister: I am aware of the inquiry that is currently being undertaken by the Committee of the Centre into this matter. We look forward to the Committee's report. At the same time we are consulting, through the forum, with various non-governmental organisations which have expertise in this area. By the time we have consulted with them we hope to have received the report from the Committee of the Centre. We can use that to evolve the proposals and strategy that we hope to bring to the Assembly.

Ms Lewsley: Can the First Minister tell us what consultation has taken place with the Irish Government, given that they are drafting a Bill to establish an ombudsman for children?

The First Minister: Our officials have met their counterparts from the National Children's Office and the Department of Health and Children. Mr Haughey and Mr Nesbitt intend to meet the Minister of State with responsibility for children, Ms Mary Hanafin, in the near future.

We understand that the Irish Government have approved the drafting of a Bill to create an ombudsman for children. It is proposed that the office will be independent, and the ombudsman will be appointed by the President and accountable to the Oireachtas. It is also proposed that the principal functions of the ombudsman will be to promote the welfare and rights of children; to respond to individual complaints; to establish mechanisms through which there will be regular consultation with children, and to fulfil an advisory role to Government.

Dr Adamson: Can the First Minister assure us that this forum will not become another so-called quango or permanent body? Can he tell us how many children or young people participate in the children's forum?

The First Minister: The forum is not a quango. It is an informal, temporary working group brought together at our request to provide input into the proposals for a

commissioner and a children's strategy. The forum is made up of representatives of various non-governmental organisations. It does not involve children, but it is devising a questionnaire that will be put to a representative group of children to get some indication of their views. That consultation exercise will give children a direct input into the proposals that will come to us.

Community Relations Funding

3. **Mr McGrady** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to outline what steps will be taken to ensure that there is an automatic programme for the allocation of community relations funding to district councils; and to make a statement. (AQO 1539/00)

The Deputy First Minister: The funding allocation to the district council community relations programme in the current financial year is £1.65 million. Under present arrangements, our Department provides a 75% grant towards agreed expenditure by district councils on projects aimed at promoting better community relations in their areas. That includes the salaries of community relations officers employed by the councils. The basis on which future community relations funding will be provided to district councils will be considered in the review of overall community relations strategy, which is due to commence shortly.

In the meantime, we have approved the extension of funding for the district council community relations programme for up to a further three years.

Mr McGrady: I thank the Deputy First Minister for his comprehensive reply on this important area. I am sure that he will agree that this has been very successful in bringing people together. I appreciate the amount of money that has been set aside this year and for a three-year period.

Can the Minister expand on the three-year cycle of funding, at the end of which a stop-start situation is created? Can a rolling programme be considered to enable people to have more confidence in the community development programmes, which can have a long gestation period?

The Deputy First Minister: The Member makes a valid point. I do not believe that there will be a stop-start element to this, in the sense that we all recognise the good work that is being done by district councils in community relations.

Whatever the arrangements after the review, I envisage a central role for district councils. However, the basis on which future community relations funding will be provided to district councils will be considered in the review of the overall strategy. It is not possible, therefore, to give a commitment about continuous funding prior to the findings of that review, but we have approved the extension for up to three years, as the Member said. That will allow for continuation of funding. The district councils will

still have a central role to play, because that is where the issue of community relations has the most immediate need.

Mr Armstrong: What safeguards exist to ensure that councils use community relations funding specifically for district community relations projects, rather than merely siphoning off funding to subsidise community service? There is a requirement to provide officers with an annual detailed return of the dispersal of such funds.

The Deputy First Minister: The Member is right to draw attention to that. We are vigilant in ensuring that the funding goes where we have determined that it will go.

District councils submit community relations programmes for approval at the beginning of each financial year. The Community Relations Council's district council support and liaison officer regularly visits all district council community relations officers to review those programmes, and claims for payment are carefully scrutinised to ensure that they relate to the approved projects. A certificate is also obtained for each financial year from the local government auditor, certifying that the expenditure has been properly distributed.

Mr Speaker: I do not see Dr McDonnell in his place. I call Mr Poots.

Community Relations Council

5. **Mr Poots** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister how many members of the Community Relations Council represent church organisations other than the four main churches.

(AQO 1542/00)

The Deputy First Minister: Although individual members of the council may also be members of church organisations, none of those serving on the Community Relations Council has been appointed as a representative of such a body. Of the 16 current members, one is a clergyman from one of the main churches.

Applications to fill vacancies on the Community Relations Council are invited through public advertisement in accordance with the procedures promulgated by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. Any member of the community can apply for, and be given, membership of the council.

The articles of association of the council state that it should endeavour to achieve and maintain a membership that, at all times, is generally capable of commanding respect and approval across the entire community.

Mr Poots: Now is an opportune time to look at this, as I understand that there are eight new appointees to the Community Relations Council. There is a perception in the community that only liberals are appointed to the Community Relations Council. When will we have people who represent the diversity of opinion in Northern Ireland,

rather than a group of middle-class liberals pontificating about what is good for us?

2.45 pm

The Deputy First Minister: I note the question with interest. I am sure that the Member is not suggesting that those who sit on the Community Relations Council should be illiberal. I believe that the mix is right. I take the point that sometimes the whole question of community relations can appear rather precious and that it sometimes seems to be the preserve of the coffee-morning set in Northern Ireland. That may be at the heart of the Member's question.

The First Minister and I want to see people who are close to the problems of Northern Ireland sitting on the council. If they are close to the problems, they will also be close to the solutions. In that sense, I agree with the Member. I hope that we get that type of robustness into the organisation.

Hate Crimes

6. **Mr O'Connor** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to make a statement on hate crimes. (AQO 1571/00)

The First Minister: I am sure that the Assembly will join the Deputy First Minister and me in expressing sympathy to the Member and his family in respect of the recent deplorable attacks that they have suffered.

Criminal justice is a reserved matter. Ministers Nesbitt and Haughey met the Minister of State at the Northern Ireland Office on 14 May 2001 to discuss the scope for strengthening the legislation. The Northern Ireland Office intends to carry out public consultation in the near future. We will consider the options set out in that exercise, and we will advise the Northern Ireland Office of the views of the Executive on the best way forward.

Mr O'Connor: I welcome the fact that the two junior Ministers have had a meeting with the Northern Ireland Office. Does the First Minister agree that crimes against individuals or their property because of their religion, their political viewpoint, their race or their colour must be treated more seriously? Will he continue to pursue the matter with the Northern Ireland Office to ensure that we get the legislation in place as soon as possible to protect people from further attacks?

The First Minister: I understand the Member's point entirely. The issue was addressed in Great Britain by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. One of the disadvantages that we face is that criminal justice matters are not devolved, so we are unable to address such issues. As has been the case many times in the past, useful legislation put on the statute book across the water has not been extended to Northern Ireland. We hope to deal with that in the long term. We are in discussion with the Northern

Ireland Office to see how we can bring into operation in Northern Ireland legislation with provisions similar to those contained in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. The Northern Ireland Office will consult us in the near future, and I hope that we can make progress.

The Member's basic point is sound. Attacks that are made wholly on the basis of a person's race or creed are an alarming phenomenon for anybody, and we hope that they will be brought to an end. In many respects, the response is a matter for the police. It is important that the police be supported by all parts of the community, so that the attacks can be ended and the persons responsible made amenable.

North/South Ministerial Council (Implementation Bodies)

7. **Mr Bradley** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to make a statement on the location of permanent accommodation for North/South Ministerial Council implementation bodies.

(AQO 1563/00)

The Deputy First Minister: I refer the Member to the written answer to Mr Fee on 14 May 2001. Five of the six bodies have identified most of the permanent accommodation that they will use. The Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission has permanent offices in Derry and in Carlingford.

The language body has two agencies — the Ulster-Scots Agency and the Irish Language Agency. The Ulster-Scots Agency, Tha Boord o Ulster-Scotch, has an office in Belfast and there are plans to open an office in Donegal. The Irish Language Agency, Foras na Gaeilge, has two offices in Dublin and it plans to open one in Belfast. The Special EU Programmes Body has regional offices in Omagh and Monaghan and plans to move to a new Belfast office at the gasworks site this summer. The Food Safety Promotion Board currently occupies temporary accommodation in Dublin but this month will move to its permanent offices in Cork. InterTradeIreland is temporarily housed in the old gasworks business park in Newry but plans to move this summer to permanent accommodation on the same site. Waterways Ireland has temporary headquarters in Enniskillen and is currently issuing a developer's brief for permanent headquarters, also in Enniskillen. It is also seeking planning permission to establish offices in County Clare, and will later acquire permanent offices in Dublin and Carrick-on-Shannon.

Mr Bradley: I welcome the Minister's lengthy and detailed reply. Can he be more specific about the numbers to be accommodated, especially outside Belfast and Dublin? Can he state, for instance, the plans for InterTradeIreland in Newry, and those for the Special EU Programmes Body in Omagh?

The Deputy First Minister: At the moment, the total number of staff in the implementation bodies is around 400, and around 90 of those posts are located in Belfast and Dublin. The balance is spread throughout areas outside the two capitals.

InterTradeIreland plans to provide 42 posts based in Newry. At present, the Special EU Programmes Body has three staff members in Omagh, who are carrying out important work in programme management, and five in Monaghan, who are working on the implementation of the INTERREG programme and other community initiatives. The remaining 21 employees are based in Belfast, and it is to be hoped that they too will soon be based in the regional areas. It is intended that the Omagh office will eventually have 15 staff members.

Between them, the implementation bodies have approximately 200 vacancies at present. Many bodies are currently recruiting staff. Most of the posts will be located outside Belfast and Dublin, and that is important.

North/South Ministerial Council (Accommodation)

8. **Mr Fee** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to make a statement on permanent accommodation for the North/South Ministerial Council in Armagh. (AQO 1562/00)

The First Minister: The Member will recall the written answer given to him on 14 May, which also touched on this issue. The joint North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) secretariat is currently assessing the accommodation requirements. An investment appraisal will be prepared in respect of permanent headquarters buildings for the NSMC secretariat. Although the possibility of using the former Armagh jail is likely to be one of the main options in the appraisal process, full consideration will also be given to other viable options, including new build. When a preferred option is identified, proposals will be submitted in the first instance to the two Administrations separately to identify whether funding is available. If so, the proposals will ultimately be submitted to NSMC for approval.

Mr Fee: I am delighted that Armagh jail is being considered as a location for the Ministerial Council. Can the Minister indicate how many staff are likely to be needed? How many are likely to come from each jurisdiction?

The First Minister: At present, around 29 staff members are being accommodated in Armagh. Of those, 15 are from Northern Ireland, 12 are from the Republic of Ireland, and there are two vacancies to be filled from the Republic. I appreciate the Member's comments with regard to the Armagh jail; the people in Armagh are to be congratulated on its renovation. We will look in an

entirely neutral and thorough fashion at whether it would be an appropriate place for the NSMC.

Mr Kennedy: North/South activity seems to have stopped over the last couple of months. Does the Minister share my concern that meetings of the British-Irish Council have also stopped and, indeed, that those meetings are lagging considerably behind North/South Ministerial Council activity? Will the Minister assure the Assembly that he will seek to redress the balance and ensure that British-Irish Council activity reaches parity with North/South Ministerial Council activity?

The First Minister: I am not sure that the Member is entirely accurate in saying that activity has stopped. There has certainly been a degree of slowdown in the activity of the North/South Ministerial Council. Indeed, if I dare to say so, Mr Speaker, judging by the large swathes of blue space that can be seen on the Benches, something else may be distracting Members from their attention to business here. I dare say that the same factor has had an effect on the Administration in general, although I would not want to say that the Administration has been deleteriously affected by other distractions.

The Member made a serious point about the British-Irish Council, where there has been a disappointing level of activity. There are possibly a number of reasons for that, but it would, perhaps, be inappropriate for me to go into them here. I am anxious that we look into the matter, because as an earlier question from the Member's Colleague indicated, many issues that are being looked at in the context of the North/South Ministerial Council are also highly relevant in a British-Irish Council context. As we move towards the full implementation of the agreement in June, the target that was clearly set, we are also anxious to see the full implementation of the British-Irish Council.

North/South Co-operation

9. **Mr O'Neill** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to outline developments on the North/South areas of co-operation. (AQO 1564/00)

The Deputy First Minister: Six areas of co-operation covering matters relating to agriculture, the environment, health, education, transport and tourism were agreed at the inaugural plenary sitting of the North/South Ministerial Council in December 1999. To date a total of 13 North/South Ministerial Council meetings have been held in these sectoral formats. Some of the main developments have taken place in tourism, with the creation of Tourism Ireland Limited, in agriculture, with the agreement of measures to control foot-and-mouth disease, in environmental issues, with the creation of a database of environmental research, in education, with the establishment of a North/South special education co-ordination committee, in health, with the development of a shared work prog-

ramme for cancer research, and in transport, with the preparation of work programmes for transport planning and road safety.

Ministers have reported to the Assembly after each North/South Ministerial Council sectoral meeting, and copies of the joint communiqués that were issued after each meeting are held in the Assembly Library.

Mr O'Neill: I thank the Minister for his reply. It is heartening to see such good, constructive, positive work taking place.

Does the Minister accept that the years of co-operation offer a reassuring framework to allow things to progress, and would he recommend that areas in which all-Ireland co-operation is already occurring, such as energy and further education, could also be brought within that framework?

The Deputy First Minister: In negotiating the Good Friday Agreement, one of the key principles underlying all aspects of North/South co-operation was that in these areas Ministers would be directly accountable to the Assembly in taking forward the all-important action and co-operation that is so necessary. On that basis, I see merit in broadening the framework to include other areas such as those that the Member mentioned where co-operation is actually proceeding. There will be further discussions about that, and I hope that it will be raised at the next suitable opportunity in the North/South Ministerial Council.

Mr Shannon: Is there any intention to increase the areas of co-operation on North/South issues? If not, is that an indication of the failure of co-operation in the present areas?

3.00 pm

The Deputy First Minister: Contrary to what the Member suggests, I see the situation as an indication that we have an intent to deal with all matters that affect people in Ireland, North and South. For example, energy is a crucially important issue for people living in the North and South of Ireland, and it makes sense that that would be given consideration. I pay tribute to the two Administrations for the way in which they have co-operated on that matter so far. There will be further discussions, and I have no doubt that more positive decisions will be made.

CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Literacy and Numeracy

1. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether he has any plans to utilise the creative arts to address problems in literacy and numeracy; and to make a statement. (AQO 1557/00)

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

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McGimpsey): My Department is leading the inter-departmental initiative to deliver the commitment in the Programme for Government to unlock the creative potential of our community. The consultation document, 'Unlocking Creativity', was published in November 2000, and the response, including that of the education sector, has been overwhelmingly positive. Since then, the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment has published 'Their Future in Our Hands', which recommends the inclusion of a creative component as one of the five core elements of the curriculum at Key Stage 4. My Department is drawing up a strategy in consultation with, amongst others, the Department of Education. A further announcement and a publication are planned for 27 June 2001.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Minister for a comprehensive and encouraging answer. Can he assure the House that a particular effort will be made to target social need? Will he liaise with other Departments, particularly the Department of Education, so that the question of literacy and numeracy emerges as a very important cross-cutting theme for the Assembly?

Mr McGimpsey: Targeting social need is a common thread that runs through all of the Departments and everything that we do as an Executive and a Government. I can give the Member that assurance on behalf of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, and I do not doubt that other Ministers can do the same on behalf of their Departments.

With regard to literacy and numeracy, I do not want to stray into the responsibility of another Department, but we are working with the Department of Education and with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment on the 'Unlocking Creativity' initiative. That involves looking at how to embed creativity in the curriculum and how to teach creativity in the classroom. We recognise that people are the prime resource in Northern Ireland and that the future prosperity of Northern Ireland will increasingly depend on the creativity and adaptability of its people. We are moving into a revolution in ongoing social and economic activity worldwide.

Sunday On-course Betting

2. **Mr Bradley** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to give his assessment of the impact, in sporting and leisure terms, of the delay in the introduction of Sunday on-course betting. (AQO 1549/00)

Mr McGimpsey: Betting laws are not the responsibility of my Department. Neither horse nor dog racing are recognised as sports by the Sports Council for Northern Ireland, which has responsibility for the development of sport in the Province. Therefore I have not undertaken such an assessment. Horse and dog racing are matters for the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. I

understand that betting at horse and dog tracks and in licensed bookmaking shops is prohibited in Northern Ireland on Sundays under the Betting, Gaming, Lotteries and Amusements (Northern Ireland) Order 1985. However, there has been no legislative impediment to racing on Sundays since 1996.

Mr Bradley: I am certain that if I had directed a similar question to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Minister of the Environment, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, or the Minister of Finance and Personnel, all would have expressed similar reservations but also concern at the delay in the introduction of Sunday on-course betting. Does the Minister agree that culture and leisure activities should not be restricted to six days a week, particularly if the agriculture and tourist economies are being denied much needed finance?

Mr McGimpsey: I can give a broad assent to the remark that culture and leisure activities should not be restricted to only six days a week.

Horse and dog racing have been legal on a Sunday since 1996, although I understand that racing interests do not consider them financially viable because it is illegal to have betting facilities on a Sunday. That is a matter for the Minister for Social Development and his Department.

When Mr Dodds was Minister he did not go ahead with the changes that had been announced by a previous Administration, on the basis that a comprehensive review of the gambling laws was being undertaken in Great Britain and that that might have had implications for Northern Ireland. That is a matter of record and information, and I cannot help Mr Bradley any further than that.

Mr Leslie: Does the Minister consider Sunday on-course betting to be sinful in the same way that some Members of this House regard line dancing as sinful? Does he agree that both activities are entirely reasonable among consenting adults and should be facilitated?

Mr McGimpsey: I broadly agree, and I have never had any difficulties with line dancing. It is a perfectly healthy activity. I have no doubt that some people would like to bet on a Sunday. That is their decision, not mine.

Mr McCarthy: I am disappointed at the Minister's response. We are supposed to be in an era of joined-up Government, and the Minister should put pressure on his Colleague in the Social Development Department to bring forward those proposals, especially as the industry has spent years discussing the situation. The Minister responsible for this issue before the Assembly was set up had said that he was going to legislate on the proposals. The Minister and his Executive Colleagues ought to put pressure on the Minister for Social Development to bring this to fruition, because we are losing millions of pounds on this.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before the Minister responds, I have to say that that question should have been directed

to the Minister responsible for the issue and not to this Minister.

Mr McCarthy: We are supposed to have joined-up Government. Let us go for it.

Mr McGimpsey: The Member may have a point about joined-up Government. However, it is a matter specifically for Mr Maurice Morrow, the current Minister for Social Development. I have no doubt that he currently feels that he is under a great deal of pressure in other areas. If Mr McCarthy and others on the Committee wish to bring pressure to bear on the issue they may be successful.

Gaelic Athletic Association

3. **Mr Poots** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether he intends to continue grant aiding the Gaelic Athletic Association while it retains rule 21.

(AQO 1543/00)

Mr McGimpsey: I deplore the retention of rule 21, and I have made this clear on many occasions in the Assembly. However, it is the responsibility of the GAA to change rule 21, and such a change can be made only on the basis of a vote taken at the association's annual congress.

It must be recognised that the GAA is one of the major sporting organisations in the Province, attracting many thousands of supporters, and, as such, it qualifies for support on the same basis as other sports. Funding for sport in Northern Ireland, both exchequer and lottery, is made available by the Sports Council for Northern Ireland, which has an obligation to address all sections of the sporting community involved in recognised sports.

Mr Poots: Is it not the case that there are thousands of young people participating in sports who are being discriminated against through lack of funding for their sports? The Taylor report's recommendations for safety in soccer stadiums, for example, have not been implemented in Northern Ireland, yet we have a sport being funded that excludes people. Other inclusive sports are being excluded. Surely there is something inherently wrong. If the GAA cannot get its act together and scrap rule 21, it should be told that it will not be given any more money until it includes everybody in its sport.

Mr McGimpsey: We would all like to see rule 21 go. It is outmoded and outdated, and it has no place in a modern society. It is not conducive to building an inclusive society, and I agree with the Member's sentiments. However, I am also aware that there is a strong lobby in the GAA to remove this contentious rule, and I hope that it is only a matter of time before the GAA's annual congress votes to remove it.

The Member referred to the Taylor report. It is important to note that the House voted to give approximately £5.3 million over three years to support the changes recom-

mended in the Taylor report. The money was not made available earlier because we suffered under direct rule.

No Minister in the Northern Ireland Office bothered to chase the very substantial funding that was available, which, at that stage, would not have had to come out of the Northern Ireland block grant.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr O'Neill): The Minister recognises the valuable contribution to the sporting life in Northern Ireland made by the GAA. Does he also recognise that this is an amateur, voluntary, community association, which has provided sport at a very high level for young people and others in Northern Ireland and throughout Ireland? This sport has one of the highest player participation rates in Northern Ireland and attracts the biggest crowds. Does the Minister not also agree — *[Interruption]*.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order please.

Mr O'Neill: Does the Minister not also agree that rule 21 has more to do with late nineteenth and early twentieth century Irish history than with the sectarianism that is sometimes used to label it? Would he try to make that clear? GAA applications for funds should be judged —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Is there a question here, Mr O'Neill?

Mr O'Neill: I am asking for it to be judged purely on the merit of the service provided, which is outstanding.

Mr McGimpsey: I am not clear that I discerned a precise question. The GAA introduced this rule in 1887 — a very long time ago. The ban remained in place until 1893 when it was lifted for 10 years. It has remained in place ever since, one of a number of ban rules that the GAA drew up at that time. I am certainly not one for decrying tradition, but if you fail to move with the times and consistently stick with tradition, you are liable to become mediocre, not just in sport but in many walks of life.

I have nothing to add other than to quote what I said to Mr Shannon on 20 March:

"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 rule 21 will be dealt with to the satisfaction of everybody in this House." [Official Report, Vol 10, No 2, p63].

Creative Writing

4. **Dr Adamson** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the steps he is taking from an international perspective to stimulate creative writing in Northern Ireland. (AQO 1550/00)

Mr McGimpsey: Responsibility for the development of the arts, including creative writing, rests with the Arts Council. Literature is an area of the arts in which Northern Ireland has excelled in world terms. It is the policy of the Arts Council to maintain this high standard

and, where possible, to extend that excellence by promoting creative writing at home and abroad.

This involves a balance between the showcasing of major international writing talent in Northern Ireland and promoting writers from here to a wider international audience. There is also support for tax exemption for artists across the United Kingdom, and my Department supports Northern Ireland's interest in this being registered with Her Majesty's Treasury.

Dr Adamson: Does the Minister believe that introducing legislation similar to section 35 of the Irish Republic's Finance Act 1987, now section 481 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, would be beneficial, and not only financially, to marketing creative writing throughout Northern Ireland?

Mr McGimpsey: I am not familiar with the tax law to which Dr Adamson has made reference, but it is true that there is incentive in the Irish Republic that exempts writers and artists from tax on income derived from their creative works. This has been enormously beneficial to the Republic, to its economy and, in particular, to its film industry, which has managed to benefit greatly. We have seen major developments there over the last 20 years, which have had a lot to do with tax concessions. They can offer better tax breaks to film producers than we can. This is one of the areas that we must look at and the reason for my having registered our interest with the Treasury.

3.15 pm

Ms Morrice: My question is very similar to the last one. Is the Minister aware that the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee has recommended that there be tax exemption for the creative industries? He spoke of the areas that must be pursued. Will he outline what he and his Department are actively doing to pursue that line?

Mr McGimpsey: As Ms Morrice is aware, that is a reserved matter, to be dealt with by Her Majesty's Treasury. However, our corresponding Department on the mainland — the Department for Culture, Media and Sport — is pursuing a similar agenda. We are pursuing that through, for example, the joint bodies that we operate under, and through creativity. All that I can do is to use my influence and arguments to support the need for a relaxation in that respect because of the economic benefits, among others, that will accrue to our economy.

Museums and Heritage Review

5. **Mr McGrady** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail when the report into the local museums and heritage review will be published for consultation; and to make a statement. (AQO 1538/00)

Mr McGimpsey: I have received the report of the local museums and heritage review steering group and have agreed with my ministerial Colleague, Mr Foster,

that it will be published before the end of June. We have asked our officials to prepare a draft response to the report, and we propose to consult widely on that response as quickly as possible. It is important that we settle on an effective long-term strategy for developing the full potential of the museum and heritage sectors. I hope, therefore, that people will take the opportunity that this consultation will afford to make their views known.

Mr McGrady: The review to which the Minister referred was initiated 12 months ago. He said, in response to me last December, that the review would be published early in the new year. At least we have a new date for publication, which is the end of June. I look forward to that because it is important that the proposed direction to be taken by the museum system be articulated. I have a particular interest in ensuring that Down County Museum is given regional status. We promise to give a very urgent response to the consultation. How long will it be before the final answers are given?

Mr McGimpsey: I regret that the review report document did not appear more quickly. We had hoped to bring it out early in the year, and it is now due in June. The report is finished and ready for publication. I hope that members of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee will take this opportunity to make their views known. That will help us to form our view and the joint response by my Department and the Department of the Environment, which is involved on account of its interest in environment and heritage. We expect that response to be ready by the end of August. I expect a widespread consultation period to happen thereafter — in perhaps six to eight weeks, but no longer. I am conscious of the delays that have occurred in the past, and we are anxious that we get to the point where we can produce an action plan for this sector.

Mrs Nelis: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Is the Minister aware that the heritage of the local townlands is being eroded on account of the insistence by the authorities on using postal codes? Does the report indicate how this valuable heritage will be preserved?

Mr McGimpsey: I am aware that the introduction of postal codes has had an effect on such features as townland names and local district areas. A generation ago, most people would have known around 100 district areas by name. Now they know perhaps only half a dozen. We have lost so much because of the Post Office's insistence on having streets with numbers on them. I am not clear on what my responsibility is or where my area of influence lies. I strongly support the efforts made in the past to retain our townland names. They are part of our heritage, and that is worthy. I am sorry that I cannot be any more specific at this time, but I will consider the matter and then write to Mrs Nelis in due course.

Mr Shannon: While I am glad that the report of the local museums and heritage review will be published for consultation, can the Minister say when and if the minutes

of the meetings of the local museums' governing bodies will be made public? I understand that they are not open to the public, and perhaps they should be.

Mr McGimpsey: I am not clear on the exact position of the minutes of local museums' governing bodies. It is a matter for their discretion. I will enquire about it and write to the Member in due course.

Darts

6. **Mr Close** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQO 399/00, to provide an update on moves by the Sports Council for Northern Ireland to recognise darts as a sport. (AQO 1547/00)

Mr McGimpsey: In my answer to AQO 399/00 in December 2000, I said that the recognition of darts was kept under constant review and was likely to be considered again in the spring. I can now say that the next meeting of the Sports Council for Northern Ireland's officers recognition panel is due to take place in June, when the matter will again be considered.

Mr Close: I thought that June was considered to be the summer, not the spring. Therefore there has been a little slippage.

Is the Minister aware of the number of sportsmen and women who participate in the sport of darts and who feel that they are discriminated against, financially and otherwise, by the irrational view that darts is not a sport? Can the Minister take the initiative on behalf of countless people in Northern Ireland and recognise darts as a sport? That would, I hope, put pressure on the Sports Council for Northern Ireland, and other bodies, to have darts recognised more widely.

Mr McGimpsey: The slippage was not within my control — the home country sports councils make those decisions. They are made on a UK-wide basis. This will be considered again in June. Mr Close will be aware that darts was not considered a sport in the past because there was insufficient physical activity involved. Large numbers of people in Northern Ireland play darts, and they regard it as a sport. Darts would have access to lottery and Exchequer funding if it were recognised as a sport, and benefits would accrue to those who play darts. However, it is a UK-wide matter and a matter for the home country sports councils, and I am awaiting their decision in June.

Public Libraries

7. **Mrs E Bell** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail his plans to develop public libraries. (AQO 1545/00)

Mr McGimpsey: The public library service is a vital element of the vision set out in our corporate strategy and also in delivering priorities identified in the Programme

for Government. Our aspiration is to create a library service that promotes and encourages an environment of creativity, a culture of reading and learning and electronic access to the wider world of information.

I have commissioned a review of library services to assess the extent to which the service is currently fulfilling its aims, and to create an agreed vision for the future. A steering group, chaired by my Department and comprising representatives of those organisations with statutory responsibility, has been established to provide overall strategic direction for the review. A working group, with representatives from the Department and the Library Service, has also been set up.

Mrs E Bell: The Minister has answered my supplementary question. I know his commitment to the provision of proper library services. I was going to ask whether there was a programme of takeover and transition between his Department and the education and library boards. There obviously is. I take it that that is what the Minister means.

Mr McGimpsey: We will conduct a review of the Library Service. That is an area of responsibility that we have inherited. It is important to scope and audit it, to look at where it stands now and where it is going in the future. The handover from the Department of Education is not going smoothly, particularly in terms of the resources that came with the libraries.

We are all aware how seriously under-resourced libraries are. Last year, I managed to secure only an additional £500,000 for library capital development, which, nonetheless, allowed me to announce new libraries for Strabane, Castlederg, and, last week, for Ballymena. In addition, we have purchased a site for the relocation of Irvinestown library. The need for funding will be considered in the review, because the transfer of responsibilities for libraries from the Department of Education did not bring with it the resources that were required to discharge those responsibilities.

Mr Armstrong: I note the Minister's response to the Member for North Down. Are there any plans for purpose-built library facilities in my constituency?

Mr McGimpsey: A new library is due to open in Magherafelt in October this year. The Southern Education and Library Board and East Tyrone College of Further and Higher Education are working in partnership to provide a new library and college facility at the Burn Road site in Cookstown. In addition to that, there are a further five branch libraries in Mid Ulster.

Ms Lewsley: In his reply to Mrs Bell, the Minister referred to electronic services. Can he give us an update on the electronic libraries project? I know that there have been some problems.

Mr McGimpsey: The electronic libraries project, as Ms Lewsley is aware, will allow for the connection of all libraries to the National Grid for Learning and,

through that, to the University for Industry. It will be an important tool for Northern Ireland, as we move to an international information-based economy.

We hope that a contract will be signed in October for the electronic libraries project, with an implementation period of about 18 months. It is an expensive project, but we cannot afford not to move forward with it. To do so would be to let down not just this generation, but future generations.

Mr Deputy Speaker: There are no further questions to this Minister.

The sitting was suspended at 3.28 pm.

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

3.30 pm

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Kilkeel Harbour: Redevelopment

1. **Mr McGrady** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail when funding will be made available for the redevelopment of the harbour at Kilkeel, County Down. (AQO 1540/00)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers): The estimated cost of redeveloping Kilkeel harbour is £30 million. This is a significant project and as such will need to be subject to a detailed economic appraisal. No formal request for funding has as yet been made by the harbour authority, and, when received, it will have to compete with other bids for support. It is too early to indicate now if and when funding will be made available.

Mr McGrady: The Minister will acknowledge that the fishermen, the Fish Producers' Organisation and the Northern Ireland Fishery Harbour Authority all concur that Kilkeel harbour urgently requires redevelopment to make it a safe entry and haven. An application for structural funds for a development plan has been made, and I am very surprised and disappointed to hear from the Minister that the Northern Ireland Fishery Harbour Authority has made no such formal bid.

Ms Rodgers: At this stage it is not possible to say if and when funding will be available for the redevelopment of Kilkeel harbour. My Department has recently had responses from the authority to questions raised on a study intended to clarify the scope and direction of a full investment appraisal. Until this full economic appraisal has been carried out and assessed, the authority will not be in a position to submit a bid for funding. I must repeat

that given the anticipated size of the project, any application will have to be judged against other competing bids.

I hope to announce details of funding from a fisheries measure under the EU structural funds to assist the authority with other infrastructure projects in the three harbours by the end of June.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease

2. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to give her assessment of compensation for farmers and rural businesses affected by foot-and-mouth disease. (AQO 1554/00)

Ms Rodgers: The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development pays compensation to owners of animals affected by the disease or for those which have been in contact with affected animals or been exposed to the infection. It can also pay for a limited range of other material such as carcasses, fodder or feeding stuffs, which have been directly implicated as a disease risk. The Department has so far paid out in excess of £2.4 million, and we estimate that as much again still has to be paid. All the straightforward claims should be paid in the next few weeks.

In relation to the wider economic impact of the foot-and-mouth crisis, the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister were able to announce last week a support package for those businesses worst affected by the crisis. This included measures such as the deferment of rates and the launch of a £1 million tourism recovery strategy by the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for her contribution over this terrible period, but many businesses continue to have real financial problems as a result of the foot-and-mouth crisis. Has the help for business scheme, which was set up recently, attracted many applications, and does the Minister agree that people other than the farmers who are affected — for example, those involved in tourism, open farms, horse racing and motorcycle racing — are looking for more than just rate relief in compensation?

Ms Rodgers: The Member's question is not a matter for me but one for the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, because it is about compensation outside the jurisdiction of my Department.

Peace II

3. **Mr A Doherty** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail how much money will be available for rural communities through the new Peace II programme. (AQO 1567/00)

Ms Rodgers: Under the Peace II programme, some 45 million euros have been allocated to agriculture and rural development. When that sum is supplemented by Government co-financing, it equates to over £40 million

for direct assistance to rural communities across Northern Ireland.

Mr A Doherty: Can the Minister say what form the assistance will take and where it will be targeted?

Ms Rodgers: Around £16 million will be provided for a natural resource rural tourism initiative. The aim of that is to create a quality tourism product in rural areas with tourism potential, thus increasing the contribution that tourism makes to the local economy.

A rural intermediary funding body is likely to administer measures valued at over £4 million, which relate to the diversification of agricultural activities, renovation and development of villages, encouraging tourism and craft activities. Around £20 million of funding will be allocated as part of measures designed to provide training for farmers, investment in agricultural holdings and diversification of agriculture activities. That will be implemented by the Department's agri-food development service.

The natural resource rural tourism target areas chosen will be disadvantaged locations which are designated as environmentally sensitive areas and/or areas of outstanding natural beauty. Likely target areas are the Antrim coast and glens, the Mourne, the Sperrins, Fermanagh and south Armagh.

The rural intermediary funding body will deliver a number of measures under Peace II: diversification of agriculture activities; renovation and development of villages; encouragement for tourism; and provision of basic services for the rural economy and population. The agri-food development service measures will be targeted at farmers and farm families through training, which will involve the creation of local farms as model units, and peer mentoring. There will also be assistance for groups of farmers working to improve farm produce quality, and for those who wish to diversify into non-farming activities by helping to develop the necessary skills to obtain off-farm employment.

Mr Armstrong: Members know how important it is to ensure that no money is squandered. Why, therefore, is £6 million being spent on the storage of meat-and-bone meal which is earmarked for incineration at temperatures of over 1,000°C? Would it be possible to have an incinerator in the Province that could be used for purposes other than getting rid of meat-and-bone meal — *[Interruption]*.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Armstrong, is that directly relevant to question 3? You know the procedures of the House. What you say must be relevant to the questions as shown, and that is not the case in this instance.

Mr Armstrong: Funding could come from Peace II.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That is not relevant.

Mr McHugh: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. In regard to the delivery and implementation

of Peace II, can the Minister assure us that the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development will work closely with local communities to ensure that all projects in the next round, or as many of those as possible, have a positive outcome? We do not want to have the same difficulties as we had in the past with area-based strategy action groups.

Ms Rodgers: The Department will go out of its way to ensure that there will be rationalisation. It has appointed a consultant to ensure that the regulations and access to the schemes will be clarified and made simpler for people. The Department is aware of the need to ensure that all groups — particularly farm families who did not avail sufficiently the last time around — will be enabled and encouraged to access the schemes that are available this time.

Professional Fees

4. **Mr Poots** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to confirm whether pig farmers, who were refused assistance under the pig outgoers scheme, will have their professional fees reimbursed. (AQO 1544/00)

Ms Rodgers: No. All potential applicants to the outgoers scheme had to provide a professional estimate of the losses they incurred by keeping out of pig production for 10 years. When issued with an application form, applicants were advised that no aid, be it compensation for loss or for valuation fees incurred, would be paid if the bid failed.

Mr Poots: I am very disappointed by that response. Around 80 farmers missed out on the pig outgoers scheme, and most of those had had to pay approximately £350 plus VAT to make those applications. That is a relatively small figure for the Department to find, yet it would help alleviate the losses incurred by those who did not gain support under the pig outgoers scheme.

I appeal to the Minister to reconsider the hard-pressed farming community, particularly the pig farmers, and show some compassion in this instance.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am not sure that there was a question in there.

Mr Poots: There very clearly was.

Mr Deputy Speaker: It appeared to be more of an appeal than a question.

Ms Rodgers: There was no question in there. However, I want to make it clear that in the second outgoers' scheme, a large number of those who applied were successful. There were 282 successful applicants the second time around. I am pleased to say that that represents a high percentage.

It is unfortunate that some outgoers suffered the loss of the professional fee. It would be great if we had the money to pay for all of that, but we made it clear at the time that if they did not succeed in the tendering process, then we would not be in a position to pay. As in all elements of life, there is a certain amount of risk. I

regret that we are not in a position to pay, but we made that clear in the beginning.

Out of the 517 original applicants, 87 were successful in the first tranche and 282 the second time. Therefore, only 148 out of the 517 did not make it.

Mr Byrne: When will the Department be able to pay those farmers who met the criteria in the second scheme?

Ms Rodgers: The payments to those who were successful in the first outgoers' scheme are about to be made and will be worth £0.85 million to the 87 successful applicants. The payments to the 323 who were successful in the second outgoers' scheme will be made as soon as possible.

Rural Tourism

6. **Mr Dallat:** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail what co-operation she has received from the Northern Ireland Tourist Board to develop rural tourism as a key element in rural regeneration; and to make a statement. (AQO 1556/00)

Ms Rodgers: My Department has been working closely with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, the Environment and Heritage Service and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure to bring forward a natural resource rural tourism initiative within the Peace II programme.

This initiative will form part of my Department's next rural development programme, which will run from 2001 to 2006. It will be administered by my Department in partnership with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, the Environment and Heritage Service and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. It is my intention to consult widely on this initiative shortly.

Mr Dallat: Does the Minister agree that the rural development branch of her Department has played a critical role in developing rural tourism as a key element in rural regeneration? Will she ensure that the setbacks arising out of the foot-and-mouth crisis are addressed, so that rural tourism in its various forms can be put back on track with the least possible delay? Perhaps the Minister would like to indicate the proposed target areas.

Ms Rodgers: I will ensure that whatever assistance is required to help the recovery plan from the foot-and-mouth crisis in relation to support for rural tourism will be made available.

In attempting to identify the criteria for selection of the proposed target areas, officials have taken the rationale of the natural resource rural tourism initiative as a starting point. The rationale argues that parts of rural Northern Ireland are disadvantaged but have the potential to develop and sustain a strong tourism product based on their natural resources. It is considered that the core of the criteria should be rural areas that are, first, disadvantaged and, secondly, have an official designation in respect of

their landscape or environmental qualities such as environmentally sensitive areas (ESAs) or areas of outstanding natural beauty (AONBs).

As these designations relate only to natural features, it is proposed that the boundaries of the proposed target areas should be based on disadvantaged wards that overlap with ESAs or AONBs. This should be adjusted to take account of issues such as geographic coherence, socio-economic coherence, critical mass, existing tourism strategies, border location, equality of opportunity and community relations.

3.45 pm

As the Member may know, the main AONBs are the Sperrins, the Glens of Antrim, the Mourne, the Ring of Gullion and Fermanagh.

Mr McFarland: Will the Minister comment on the rural regeneration side for which her Department is responsible? The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is responsible for tourism and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure is responsible for the Ulster American Folk Park and the Ulster History Park at Gortin. How is the development of those enterprises to be co-ordinated with tourism and rural regeneration? It seems that there may be a danger of falling between stools in that each Department may think that the other is involved in dealing with the matter.

Ms Rodgers: There has already been co-operation between all those Departments through their various agencies, and that will continue. We have our own Government now. Our own Ministers meet regularly in the Executive, and departmental officials work together — because of that, there will be a co-ordinated approach. We are already working with the Tourist Board and other agencies so as to co-ordinate our efforts to the best advantage of the area.

Mr Shannon: What meetings has the Minister had with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board about rural tourism, and what part will that play in helping to develop rural regeneration? The Minister mentioned areas of outstanding natural beauty, but she did not mention Strangford Lough. What place does Strangford Lough have in plans for rural regeneration?

Ms Rodgers: An interdepartmental committee exists to co-ordinate and deal with these issues on a cross-departmental basis. All areas, including Strangford Lough, will be able to avail of tourism opportunities if they propose good projects in conjunction with their local councils. The whole aim of the rural development plan as it stands is to be as flexible as possible and to allow good projects to be considered.

LEADER Programme

7. **Mrs Courtney** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail how much money will

be available through the new LEADER programme; and to make a statement. (AQO 1560/00)

Ms Rodgers: I am pleased to report that because of our successful bid for additional money from the Executive programme funds, it is now possible for my Department to undertake a £20 million LEADER+ programme. Of the £20 million available, 85%, or approximately £17 million, will be allocated to local action groups under Action 1 to support the economic development of Northern Ireland's rural areas. Approximately £2.2 million, or 11%, will be made available to local action groups under Action 2 to encourage effective co-operation between rural areas. Networking will receive 3%, and a further 1% will be allocated to the management, monitoring and evaluation of the programme.

As you are no doubt aware, my officials are working with the European Commission to obtain approval for the Northern Ireland programme. Negotiations are on-going, and it is hoped to secure Commission approval in the near future. The LEADER+ programme will be delivered by locally based partnerships known as local action groups (LAGs) which will be selected through a competitive selection procedure. I hope to commence the selection process by inviting applications in June 2001.

Mr Kennedy: Any old lags?

Ms Rodgers: Nags or LAGs?

I have had problems with nags as well lately.

Mrs Courtney: Will the LEADER+ programme apply to all rural areas?

Ms Rodgers: Yes. All rural areas of Northern Ireland will be eligible under LEADER+, which will be delivered by local action groups which must be selected through a competitive process. Therefore although all rural areas are eligible to apply, the selection process may not result in all areas being covered by a local action group. The programme defines the eligible area for LEADER+ as all parts of Northern Ireland, excluding the Belfast metropolitan area, the city of Derry/ Londonderry and towns with a population of more than 5,000. The programme will retain the flexibility to support projects located in urban settings in cases in which the projects will benefit rural areas and if it makes sense that they should be located in a town.

Mr Beggs: Does the Minister accept that the rural community network played an important role in assisting the rural community to apply for LEADER funding? Will all parts of Northern Ireland, including south and east Antrim, which have, to date, been excluded, be included in the rural community network?

Ms Rodgers: I presume that the rural community network will be involved in managing the next tranche of funding, although the intermediate body has not yet been set up. However, I can assure the Member that I am anxious that all parts of Northern Ireland should have

access to the funding that is available for rural development. In the previous tranche, some areas, through no fault of the Department, did not have access to the schemes that were available, and local departmental advisers are working to ensure that all areas have access to the funding.

Rural Development Programme

9. **Mr Fee** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail how much money has been paid out through the rural development programme over the past three years and to provide an assessment of the contribution that it has made to rural communities.

(AQO 1566/00)

Ms Rodgers: In the past three financial years, the rural development programme has paid out over £29 million and has been particularly successful in establishing networks and partnerships and in stimulating a high level of community involvement.

The programme has supported over 100 community-based projects, the nine area-based strategy groups have supported more than 1,300 projects, and the 15 LEADER II local allocation groups have supported over 2,000 projects. Around 450 new businesses and more than 1,000 jobs have been created, and another 900 jobs have been secured. For example, Slieve Gullion Courtyard received funding towards redevelopment costs to establish the courtyard as a quality tourism, residential, conference and hospitality venue. The rural development programme has made a significant contribution to improving economic and social life in rural communities.

Mr Fee: I compliment the Minister's officials on the briefing that they have provided on the Slieve Gullion Courtyard. I know that the Minister has visited it.

The rural development programme is absolutely essential to the development of rural parts of Northern Ireland, not just south Armagh, but throughout Fermanagh, Tyrone and the Glens of Antrim. What objectives will the Minister set for the programme, and what are its likely themes for the period from 2001 to 2007?

Ms Rodgers: I have visited the Slieve Gullion Courtyard; it is an impressive rural development project in a most beautiful setting.

The 2001 to 2007 programme of rural development support will constitute a series of partnership programmes with the European Commission, and I intend to bring forward a new six-year strategy before this autumn. The new phase of the rural development programme has been the subject of extensive consultation for almost three years. The level of interest in the programme that has been shown by the broad rural community is a measure of the Department's success in developing a genuine partnership with rural people. I am determined to build upon that through an expanded programme that will bring real opportunities to rural people — community

organisations, farmers and their families and rural businesses. Funding for the new rural development programme is expected to be around £75 million, which will trigger a spend of over £100 million in rural areas.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Neeson appears to be absent. I call Mr Kennedy.

Newry Flood Alleviation Scheme

11. **Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to confirm the ownership of the retaining wall erected as part of the Newry flood alleviation scheme at Kilmorey Street, Newry; and to make a statement. (AQO 1536/00)

Ms Rodgers: I am advised that by legal convention structures on land belong to the owner of the underlying land. The land at the location of the retaining wall was not owned or vested by my Department for the purposes of the scheme. Insofar as sections of the wall protrude into the Newry tidal river between the high-and low-water mark, I understand that the Crown estates have ownership, and Newry and Mourne District Council has ownership at other locations.

Mr Kennedy: Will the Minister join with me in condemning those who have illegally erected an offensive Republican wall plaque at that location? Will she undertake to make representations to the various bodies to have it removed urgently?

Ms Rodgers: I may or may not be correct that the Member is a councillor on Newry and Mourne District Council, which owns the wall.

A Member: Correct.

Ms Rodgers: As a member of the council, he probably has more influence than a Minister.

As far as my Department and I are concerned, the plaque is not impairing the integrity of the wall as a flood defence or affecting the drainage efficiency of the river in Newry. Therefore there are no operational reasons for me to intervene.

Mr Kennedy: Does the Minister condemn the plaque's existence?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I cannot allow Members to indulge in conversation. Mr Close appears to be absent. — *[Interruption]*.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I call Dr McDonnell.

Common Agricultural Policy

13. **Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to give her assessment of the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food's recent statement that the common agricultural policy would need

to be fundamentally reformed and that subsidies should be decoupled from production. (AQO 1559/00)

Ms Rodgers: There are many pressures for reform of the common agricultural policy (CAP) arising from issues such as further trade liberalisation in the context of World Trade Organisation (WTO) negotiations, enlargement of the EU and budgetary constraints. We simply cannot ignore those pressures, but we must face the need for some degree of reform.

However, any proposals for reform must be considered carefully and judged in relation to the long-term interests of the Northern Ireland economy, while also giving due regard to the impact on the agri-food industry, the environment, consumers, tax payers and society as a whole. My approach will be to fight for what is best for Northern Ireland.

Dr McDonnell: On the reform issue, would Northern Ireland's interests be better served by alignment with the Republic of Ireland, rather than with the UK?

Ms Rodgers: In relation to agriculture, there are many matters of common interest across the British Isles. There is significant scope for east/west as well as North/South dialogue and co-operation. On two occasions I have already discussed the topic of CAP reform and WTO negotiations with the Republic of Ireland's Minister for Agriculture, Mr Joe Walsh.

The topic is on the agenda for the next North/South Ministerial Council conference. Such contact is valuable in increasing our mutual understanding of the wider issues that we face.

Mr Byrne: I was to have asked question 14. As the Minister has given a substantial answer to question 4, at which stage I asked a supplementary question, I withdraw my question.

Rural Development Strategy

15. **Ms Lewsley** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail when she expects to announce the new rural development strategy and to outline her priorities. (AQO 1570/00)

Ms Rodgers: It is my intention that the rural development programme strategy for 2001 to 2007 will be announced this summer. The strategy is currently being considered by the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee. My priorities will be to continue, strengthen and expand on the work of the previous rural development programmes.

I aim to create a flexible programme that can identify the widest possible range of opportunity and need in rural areas, and either respond to or support it across the full range of community, sectoral, farming, agribusiness and associated activities.

4.00 pm

Ms Lewsley: I thank the Minister for her answer and for outlining her priorities. What will be the focus of the strategy?

Ms Rodgers: The focus of the rural development strategy will be to target sectors of the community that require assistance such as women, the long-term unemployed, youth and farming families. The focus of the strategy, therefore, will be to assist in creating off-farm work, allowing farmers to reskill and retrain, allowing them to diversify and also to build capacity for under-represented groups.

Adjourned at 4.01 pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Monday 18 June 2001

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

PERSONAL STATEMENT

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: On Tuesday 29 May Mr Dallat made a number of charges against me. I wish to respond by way of a personal statement.

Mr Dallat falsely claimed that at great inconvenience to him I had departed the Agriculture Committee on Friday 25 May to electioneer in Portadown.

That comment bears no resemblance to the truth. The Committee minutes show that I left the meeting at 11.27 and that, as arranged, my Deputy Chairperson continued in the Chair. I was involved in other business. The arrangements for the meeting had previously been discussed and agreed with members. The Committee rose at 2.54 that afternoon.

I did canvass in Upper Bann that afternoon but — importantly — the Agriculture Committee had risen for the day before I arrived.

Members who wish to study the minutes of the Agriculture Committee meeting on Friday 25 May will see that the Member who made the allegations against me joined and left the Committee on no fewer than seven occasions, causing disruption to business and at one point making the meeting inquorate.

My Committee has met consistently throughout the agriculture crisis, showing leadership and giving support to the industry and to those involved in the fight for its survival. I resent an attack which questions in any way my efforts as Chairperson in that battle.

I point out to the Member that he will face legal action if he repeats the allegations outside the privilege of the House. This is not the first time that the Member has made such allegations here.

I had to miss two other meetings of my Committee during the foot-and-mouth disease crisis — to attend a funeral service and to attend a memorial service for the late Joey Dunlop, who was one of my constituents. On each occasion I made appropriate arrangements with the Deputy Chairperson, and the Committee was kept fully informed and given notice of the arrangements. I have

every confidence in the Deputy Chairperson's ability to do his work.

I take my work as a parliamentarian seriously. It is to be regretted that a Member who was not appointed to the Committee from the beginning chooses to make political capital from this sequence of events. Members will note from the minutes of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development that my record for chairing its meetings — and taking into account the long hours that are involved — is second to none. However, the Deputy Chairperson also has a job to do and should be given the opportunity to do it.

Mr Speaker, I wanted to put that on the record.

Mr Speaker: As is customary, the Member referred to may say whether he wishes to accept the statement.

Mr Dallat: I am pleased that Dr Paisley felt the need to offer an explanation to the Assembly, given that we were in the middle of the foot-and-mouth disease crisis. Now that the elections are over, I have no doubt that there will be no need to raise the issue again.

SOCIAL SECURITY FRAUD BILL

First Stage

The Minister for Social Development (Mr Morrow): I beg leave to lay before the Assembly a Bill [NIA 16/00] to make provision, for the purposes of the law relating to social security, about the obtaining and disclosure of information; and to make provision for restricting the payment of social security benefits in the case of persons convicted of offences relating to such benefits and about the institution of proceedings for such offences; and for connected purposes.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

Mr Speaker: The Bill will be put on the list of pending business until a date for its Second Stage has been determined.

Mr B Hutchinson: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I asked the Clerk to put my name down to speak. My understanding was that we would hear from the Minister for Social Development about the Bill before any decision was made.

Mr Speaker: Perhaps I need to clarify the matter for the Member. This was the formal First Stage of the Bill. The Member is referring to another motion on the Order Paper on the matter of accelerated passage. We will come to that later in the normal fashion, and Members who wish to speak will be called then.

GAME PRESERVATION (AMENDMENT) BILL

Second Stage

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Foster): I beg to move

That the Second Stage of the Game Preservation (Amendment) Bill [NIA 15/00] be agreed.

The purpose of the Bill is to amend the Game Preservation Act (Northern Ireland) 1928 to extend the partridge shooting season by one month so that it commences on 1 September each year. That will bring the season here in line with that in the rest of the United Kingdom.

The amendment is in response to representations made by local enterprises to extend the partridge shooting season for commercial reasons. It is also supported by organisations that represent shooting interests in Northern Ireland. While the main areas of commercial interest are Rathlin Island and the Copeland Islands, I am also advised that several shoots would be prepared to release partridges if the season were extended.

In 1999 some 73 shoots released partridges in Northern Ireland. The majority are not run as businesses, but many sell a day's shooting to supplement the shoot income and defray costs for syndicate members.

I have been told that a further consequence of the Bill might be that some local sportsmen who currently travel elsewhere in September might stay in Northern Ireland. It is not possible to estimate the economic impact of the changes accurately, but the British Association for Shooting and Conservation argues that it would contribute to the local economy and help to maintain the rural community.

My Department carried out a full public consultation. In addition to the Environment Committee, 370 organisations were consulted. These included the Department's statutory advisory body on nature conservation, the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside, the relevant environmental bodies, district councils, organisations representing farmers and land owners, the British Association for Shooting and Conservation and local shooting clubs.

Sixty-six responses were received — the great majority favoured the amendment of the 1928 Act. Four objections were received. The first was to blood sports in principle; the second was to the maturity of the birds as quarry in September; the third was to the premature disturbance of other quarry species, such as pheasant, for which the season is later; and the fourth was based on the need to protect the native grey partridge.

A few respondents, although they supported the Bill, also raised the issue of a possible threat of disturbance to

other native wildlife. The Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside and the environmental bodies outside Government did not object to the proposal. The Environment Committee had no objection to the proposal but asked for more detail on the extra revenue that might be generated and the additional economic and other benefits that might arise through increased tourism.

The Department's research indicates considerable potential benefits for the commercial shoot organisers. They will attract overseas visitors and their families, and local providers of services such as accommodation, hospitality and transport will receive spin-off benefits. In the case of Rathlin Island, there is the potential for a syndicated revenue of up to £70,000 for the month. Additional benefits of up to £200 a head by way of costs incurred by shooters for travel, bed and breakfast and entertainment might also accrue. Most of this would benefit the local economy. In the case of the Copeland Islands syndicate, the estimates are for four extra shoots at £3,500 a day during September. These are likely to be taken up completely by visitors from the USA who would stay locally.

In bringing this legislation forward, I took full account of the concerns raised in the consultation. First, the question of blood sports falls outside the scope of the Bill. Secondly, with regard to the maturity of the birds, I have been advised that the eggs are usually laid in April or May to allow the birds time to mature and adapt to the wild. The birds would normally be mature in September. However, as all the birds are artificially reared, it would be the responsibility of the game managers and shoot organisers to ensure that they release only fully-grown birds and that these birds are released into conditions that are conducive to good sporting practices. It is not in their interests to release immature birds, which make easy prey and will bring the sport into disrepute.

The third issue of concern is that the changes would create a premature disturbance to other quarry birds. This matter cannot be addressed directly by my Department. It is the responsibility of game managers to ensure that, under the terms of the code of good shooting practice,

"shooting should not commence until all birds are mature and fully adapted to the wild".

However, I am advised that the possible upset to other quarry is minimal.

The last point concerns the native partridge. I have been advised that it is now accepted that there are no native grey partridges in the wild, and it is highly unlikely that they will be re-established in the foreseeable future. Sufficient suitable habitat no longer exists for them, and current farming practices militate against creating such habitats. I understand that there are only a few native partridges left in the island of Ireland as a whole and that those that are left can be found only in the Republic

of Ireland. The remaining population is not expected to survive.

With regard to the possible threat to native wildlife, several protective measures exist under wildlife legislation. In particular, some Members have raised concerns about the level of protection that is afforded to the Irish hare. I announced a species action plan for the Irish hare, to be implemented by a number of Departments including my own, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, and the Ulster Wildlife Trust. The plan includes a repeat survey of hares, which will be commissioned once the current foot-and-mouth disease restrictions have been lifted. Upon completion of the survey I will consider what further steps, if any, need to be taken.

This proposal could bring economic benefits without harmful conservation side effects.

12.15 pm

The Chairperson of the Environment Committee (Rev Dr William McCrea): I thank the Minister for introducing the Bill. Members are looking forward to the discussions that will follow at Committee Stage.

Last September the Committee considered a consultation document issued by the Department of the Environment on extending the partridge shooting season. While we generally welcomed that proposal we did have some questions on the extent of the financial benefits arising from it. We still await the Department's response to those questions.

The Committee has already received detailed representations on the Bill from the Countryside Alliance in Northern Ireland and the British Association for Shooting and Conservation. Both organisations expressed disappointment at the proposed changes to the shooting of rabbits and concern at the proposed legislative process by which the Minister may make future changes to the closed season. The Committee takes the concerns that have been expressed seriously and will take the necessary step to permit appropriate consultations with it.

Apart from these issues, the Committee wants to know why the original consultation document seen by the Committee made reference only to extending the partridge shooting season and yet the Bill proposes several other amendments to the 1928 Act. The Committee will be interested to learn what consultations there have been on these proposals. The Minister gave the number of consultations to the House today, but consultation with my Committee extended only to the partridge shooting season and not to the other measures which now appear in the Bill. The Minister can be assured, however, that the Committee will look diligently at the details in the Bill and will come back with any necessary amendments at Consideration Stage.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Environment Committee (Ms Hanna): As Deputy Chairperson of the Environment Committee and on behalf of the SDLP, I welcome the Minister's statement and concur with some of the points raised by Dr McCrea. I am concerned by the change effected by clause 1(3), which will allow the Minister to vary the closed season for all types of hare, grouse and other birds by ministerial Order rather than by legislation before the Assembly.

Clause 2 of the Bill deals with the shooting of rabbits on agricultural land. Many people regard rabbits as pests, and I have noted submissions from various lobbying groups that welcome the more permissive proposals that allow an extended time for shooting rabbits. However, I want to sound a note of caution: rabbits are pests to many people, but they are also part of God's creation. I have reservations about any measure that could bring about the extinction of a species and have an adverse effect on ecology, biodiversity and variety of fauna. Are we clear that the extinction of rabbits is not an issue?

On the grounds of maximum possible accountability, I am concerned about clause 3's making orders under the Act subject to negative resolution — perhaps the Minister will elaborate on that.

I will end on a light historical note. In the 51-year history of the Stormont parliament, the Unionist Government accepted only one amendment to a Bill from the Opposition, in the 1930s. It was an amendment proposed by a Nationalist MP to a measure for protecting wild birds, and it was unexpectedly accepted by the Unionist Minister. That caused some consternation at the time.

Mr Ford: I am not sure what I should say in response to the point that Ms Hanna has just made. Perhaps if Dr McCrea, Ms Hanna and I can all agree, the Minister will find it easier to accept any views that may come from the Committee.

I also welcome the Bill, but I concur with many of the concerns that my Colleagues from the Committee have just raised.

In particular, I find it somewhat unhelpful when the memorandum relating to a Bill says that departmental research foresees economic benefits, but gives absolutely no quantification whatsoever as to what those benefits might be. It is not acceptable for a memorandum accompanying a Bill to make such a general statement and give no specific reference to what the perceived benefits are. If we are going to have a memorandum, we really ought to ask all Departments — and it just happens to be the Department of the Environment on this occasion — to ensure that the memorandum spells out what they are talking about. Unfortunately, this one has come along with a lot of other loose, woolly phrases that the Committee has seen and which were included in the consultation. It really is time that these issues were tightened up rather better.

I welcome the fact that the Minister actually noted the hare as one of the game species. The fact that he is now recognising that may mean that the concerns that people such as Mr Poots, Mr Wells and I have over hare coursing may gradually start to be addressed in this Assembly. It is clear that this remains a problem. I disagree with Ms Hanna in that I believe that the rabbit is a pest — several rabbits are definitely pests and several hundred rabbits are huge pests. We need to regard the hare, which is a native animal, in a different light. The rabbit, however, is an import from the adjacent island, and I would therefore have assumed that the SDLP would not have wanted it.

On clause 2 and the reference to shooting rabbits, is the Minister entirely happy that he now has adequate definitions of words such as “agricultural land” and “occupier”? Given the difficulties experienced at Westminster, particularly under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, where there are huge problems in defining “agricultural land”, is he satisfied that the Department of the Environment here is rather better than the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food was over there? Similarly, given the differences in land tenure — conacre and so on — is he absolutely satisfied with what the term “occupier”, in relation to land, means?

These are some of the issues that we will need to look at in detail in the Committee. We can welcome the Bill in principle, but in practice, the Committee has a great deal to do on it.

Mr Leslie: I am glad to see that amendments to shooting seasons are something that we can contemplate in legislation. It is a long time since they were changed. While I have reservations about this particular change, I think it is important that this matter be always kept under review and that we be alert to it.

My particular interest in this is that I rear, shoot and eat partridges — the last of those activities is the most pleasant, but I enjoy all three. On the subject of these rather elusive economic benefits, in sympathy to the Minister they are very elusive indeed, and they are not relevant to the argument or the issue. I can assure you that there is no economic benefit to me in rearing partridges — quite the opposite.

I cast back to the 1928 debate here, and more particularly the debate down the Corridor when this Bill was introduced, to see what rationales were advanced at that time. It is interesting to note that then, too, there was concern about the decline in the numbers of the native grey partridge, which even then was a consequence of declining habitat. Despite considerable efforts by the shooting fraternity, this decline was probably complete by the end of the 1960s. Sadly, there do not seem to be any left here now. A few years ago the Department of Agriculture introduced a scheme to encourage and provide some assistance for people to reintroduce grey

partridges, but this has proved to be exceedingly hard work. However, I hope that initiatives to do that will continue. This Bill, by giving some cognisance to the interests of people rearing partridges, may provide some further encouragement.

I also believe that the countryside management scheme that has been introduced by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development will make a major contribution towards improving habitat. The debate about the future of the rural economy and farming is growing louder all the time. In that context, I trust that a move to more environmentally-friendly farming policies, along with the reclaiming for nature of a great deal of land that has been claimed for agriculture, will contribute to the kind of habitat in which it will be possible — if one takes a reasonably long-term view — to get partridges successfully breeding again in the wild.

However, if we continue to protect all predators, particularly raptors, it will prove to be as difficult for the partridge population as it is for the grouse population.

I hesitate in regard to the lengthening of the partridge season because while partridges in Hampshire may be fully grown by 1 September, it is much more difficult to achieve that in Northern Ireland, particularly during a wet year. I understand from people involved in rearing partridges in large numbers that eggs need to be imported from the continent in order that the birds can hatch and be fully grown by 1 September. However, the shooting fraternity self-regulates exceedingly well; therefore I hope that we can trust its judgement from year to year, depending on the rearing season. I welcome the Minister's comments about that.

The season for shooting pheasants starts on 1 October. Few pheasants are shot in Northern Ireland before the last week of October. The people involved in that activity know that they need a few more weeks here before pheasants are fully reared, though they might be shot in the early part of October in the south of England. I trust that the self-regulatory disciplines of the shooting community will work in that respect.

The Bill does not distinguish between native grey partridges and imported red partridges, though it is appropriate to have the undefined term. Along with other Members, I am concerned that in clause 1(3) the Minister reserves the right to amend shooting seasons by Order. Although it has not been the case in the past, it might be an excessive burden if legislation were passed frequently. Widespread consultation is important, and the House should be given the opportunity to deliberate fully on any future changes.

I concur with other Members that the definition of "agricultural land" in clause 2 is wrong — we need a broader term. The other rules that regulate where one can shoot will provide the necessary protection to persons and property. All of the matters that I have raised can be

addressed satisfactorily in Committee. I hope that there is some degree of consensus among Members, and I look forward to dealing with those matters during the Consideration Stage.

Mr Shannon: I welcome the Minister's statement and thank him for his time and effort. Approximately four years ago, many of the shooting organisations and conservation bodies approached elected representatives to push for a change in the legislation to bring forward the season for partridge shooting. I agree that there are benefits, though some Members may not. In my constituency, partridge shooting is a pastime, and these birds are used, together with pheasants, to try to increase the potential for many of the shoots. We should welcome that.

Strangford, the constituency I represent, enjoys sporting, tourism and economic benefits as a direct result of partridge shooting. The Copeland Islands, just outside my constituency, are used purely for partridge shooting, and this attracts tourists. Shoots on these islands are oversubscribed, and it is hoped that the existing potential for developing tourism can be increased. If permission were granted for an additional four days' shooting in September, it would be possible, as the Minister has stated, to make around £3,000 on each of those days.

12.30 pm

Rathlin Island, in Dr Paisley's constituency, is another area where partridge shooting could be promoted to enhance the area's potential for a growth in tourism. The shoot in Rathlin Island was recently featured in 'Shooting Times and Country Magazine', which is distributed throughout the UK and further afield. An advertisement listing the shooting dates for Rathlin Island which are available for booking was published in tandem with the feature.

A partridge shoot also takes place in Portaferry, in my constituency. If it were to begin in September the area would receive direct economic and tourism benefits. Partridge and pheasant shoots also take place in Rosemount in Greyabbey, and the extension of the shooting season by one month would provide extra potential. Dunleath estate in Ballywalter is a third example of such activity in my constituency. Ards Borough Council, of which I am a member, supported the legislation relating to this type of shooting.

Direct benefits are gained from visitors' staying overnight in the locality, with the result that bed-and-breakfast accommodation, hotels, restaurants and country sport shops all profit. Tangible gains are made as a result of this activity. Shooting can and does create benefits. The countryside needs the creation of this tourism potential and economic benefit more than ever, therefore we should support this Bill. I am glad that there seems to be a consensus on this matter.

The maturity of the birds was mentioned. There is no reason why appropriate management cannot ensure that birds mature on 1 September so that partridge shooting can take place. Sportsmen understand the issues involved, and if the birds had not matured to a suitable standard, they would not shoot at that time. I think that they will be mature, and management is in place to ensure that this is the case. There will be clear benefits for everyone by 1 September.

The Minister is probably already aware of section 7(a) of the Game Preservation Act (Northern Ireland) 1928, about which myself and other Members are concerned. The Minister will agree that all legislation must be clear and reasonable. This paragraph is neither entirely clear nor completely reasonable. It relates to the shooting of rabbits on agricultural land, and uses the wording

“Provided that this section shall not render unlawful the shooting of rabbits on any agricultural land”.

There seems to be a grey area, because some landowners in Northern Ireland do not own the shooting rights to their land and are not, therefore, in a position to authorise third parties. I am sure that the Minister would agree with this. The position in Northern Ireland is slightly different: while an occupier may have permission to harvest a crop off a piece of land, he may not have the authority to let people on to his land to shoot rabbits and control vermin. The wording of section 7(a) of the Game Preservation Act (Northern Ireland) 1928 should be changed to,

“Provided that this section shall not render unlawful the shooting of rabbits at any time by authorised persons”.

Such wording would ensure that the legislation is clear, reasonable and of benefit to landowners and those with the shooting rights of the land.

I welcome the legislation and the efforts that have been made to create it. We have waited four years for this, therefore it is good to know that on 1 September partridge shooting on Rathlin Island, Copeland Islands, Rosemount, Ballywalter, Portaferry and other estates can be taken advantage of and that tourism potential and economic benefit can be created in all the boroughs and constituencies involved.

Mrs Carson: I welcome the opportunity that the Game Preservation (Amendment) Bill gives us to redress parts of the Game Preservation Act (Northern Ireland) 1928. The amendment in clause 1(2) will extend the shooting season for partridges to commence on 1 September annually, and this will bring Northern Ireland into line with the rest of the United Kingdom, as partridge shoots commence in England, Scotland and Wales on that date.

Evidence so far suggests that with appropriate management, partridges can be fully mature on 1 September. As everyone knows, wild grey partridges are extinct here, so there should be no basis for any objections for sustainable conservation on that score.

The change to the close season will also create a positive incentive for conservation by encouraging more landowners to rear and release partridges in the wild, which enhances the commercial sustainability of shoots, making a much-needed contribution to our rural economy.

This legislation should end the confusion about the legal position on shooting rabbits at night-time and on Sundays, but it contains some unclear references. The reference to “agricultural land” that has been mentioned several times already should be removed. Land types are difficult to define in law, and, as we all know, rabbits do not confine themselves to just that. Any reference to a specific land type only compounds the lack of clarity the Bill is attempting to redress.

Present firearms legislation is strict and clearly governs where shooting may take place. The terminology used to describe people permitted to shoot rabbits should be “any authorised persons”. Many people have pointed out that some land occupiers do not own the shooting rights to the land, and they would not be in a position to give authority for third persons to shoot over it.

Clause 1(3) gives powers to the Minister to vary the close season in relation to any kind of game, and that causes me concern. I urge that a clause be included in the legislation to ensure that there is consultation with relevant bodies and organisations before any variation to a close season takes place. That would allow a wide range of expertise to contribute to discussions on any change to the close season so that the most sensible option is chosen.

I am also concerned about Orders made by the Minister being subject to negative resolution. That would curtail any debate in the Assembly. Negative resolution must be changed to affirmative resolution to ensure what we all want — open and transparent Government.

I hope that the Minister will consider these points when wording the final Bill.

Mr M Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. While supporting the Bill, I would like the Chairperson of the Environment Committee to reserve the matter until it reaches its Final Stage. I have difficulty with some of the terminology used.

Not all landowners own the shooting rights to their land and not all, therefore, are in a position to authorise a third party to shoot. There are particular means of letting land to a conacre, where the occupier has permission to take a crop, but in many instances he is not able to authorise just anyone to shoot on his land. The current wildlife legislation uses the term “authorised persons” to describe a broad spectrum of people who may shoot on certain lands. That is clearly defined in the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985. I strongly recommend that similar terminology be used in the Game Preservation

(Amendment) Bill. I will wait until the Final Stage to say anything more. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Foster: I thank Members for their comments, which have been very useful and have teased out many issues that we will look at. This is not a complex piece of legislation, and it has widespread support, particularly from people with an interest in game sport. We expect that it will bring some financial benefit locally, and it is widely accepted that it poses no threat to nature conservation. It also brings the partridge season here into line with the rest of the UK, and it should be seen as the Assembly's responding positively to modest representations for a change that reaps some benefit to the rural economy.

Rural economy issues are important at all times, but particularly so at present with the crisis in farming and tourism. Providing a sustainable basis for the rural economy is vitally important. Some very interesting points have been made, and I will try to address some of the questions raised by Members.

With regard to the Minister's being able to make future amendments to the close season for all types of game by Order, there was a view that the provisions of the Game Preservation (Northern Ireland) Act 1928 allowed for any changes to the close seasons to be affected by subordinate legislation, although this was not absolutely clear. Therefore, in order to clear up any such confusion, the proposed amendment to section 7(3) of the 1928 Act will allow me to make future amendments to the close season for all types of game by Order. The use of subordinate legislation procedures of course carries the requirement to consult publicly, and that includes the Environment Committee, which was Mrs Carson's point.

The benefit of this proposal is that I will be able to make minor changes such as the present extension proposal without recourse to the lengthy and costly primary legislation procedure, which is designed for more major and complicated issues. This was seen as a technical amendment and was not included in the consultation. I apologise if Members thought that this was inappropriate, and I will note it for the future.

Reference was made to the threat to the rabbit population. I have been advised that there is no perceived threat to rabbits, and, in fact, their numbers are possibly increasing slightly. If there were ever any evidence of rabbit extinction, I would take appropriate steps to protect them.

On the change to the description of persons who can lawfully shoot rabbits on agricultural land, the 1928 Act restricts the lawful shooting of rabbits on any agricultural land to the occupier or any person resident with or employed by him. This reflects the nature and culture of landowning at the time.

The proposed change is now to allow the shooting of rabbits by a person so authorised by the occupier or owner. This change brings the legislation into line with

the current practice where landowners or occupiers may give permission, or may ask a person who is expert in this field, to shoot pest rabbits. Since the change is of a minor and uncontentious nature, it was not included in the consultation process. I recognise the points that have been made about the definition of "agricultural land" and will take this issue on board.

Reference was also made to the financial aspects. The syndicate which has the shooting rights on Rathlin Island, in support of the argument in the change of the legislation, stated that it could mean up to an extra £70,000 as well as some spin-off for the local economy by way of travel, accommodation, meals and entertainment. As a result of subsequent enquiries, my officials estimated the possible potential revenue for Rathlin Island as being 10 days for 10 people at £350 a day per person, giving a figure of £35,000. There would also be additional revenue by way of accommodation, meals and entertainment and, while it is difficult to put a precise figure on it, this was estimated to be in the region of £150 to £200 per person, which would represent an additional £15,000 to £20,000.

In the case of the Copeland Islands syndicate, the market clients are largely from the USA and are normally accompanied by their families. This syndicate was planning an additional four days of shooting at £3,500 per party per day. There would be associated revenue by way of accommodation, meals, and so on, which could be broadly similar to that for Rathlin Island. Therefore there are additional benefits as far as those groups are concerned.

Some people referred to the immaturity of birds. The advice given to me, and to Members, is that no responsible manager would release birds if they were immature. My officials advise me that normally the birds are mature in September. The eggs are usually laid in April and May, which allows time for maturity and adaptation to the wild. The Bill has not been opposed by the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside, by my Department's statutory adviser on nature conservation matters or by the majority of other people consulted. In addition, the Bill has the support locally of the British Association for Shooting and Conservation and other shooting interests.

I am aware of some concerns in different places, and I am glad that those issues have been teased out. The Department of the Environment will take them into consideration. I hope that I have addressed some of the questions raised by Members. I am sorry if any questions or points have been overlooked, but departmental officials will scrutinise Hansard, and I will write to anyone whose question has not been fully answered.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Second Stage of the Game Preservation (Amendment) Bill (NIA Bill 15/00) be agreed.

12.45 pm

DEPARTMENT FOR LEARNING AND EMPLOYMENT BILL

Consideration Stage

Mr Speaker: Members should have a copy of the Marshalled List of Amendments detailing the order for consideration. The four amendments to clause one and the amendment to the long title — since they are all on the same subject — have been grouped together in the provisional grouping of amendments selected list. Therefore, when I call the Minister to propose the first amendment, I ask that he and other Members who wish to speak to any of the amendments speak then in any debate that may follow, and I will subsequently put the amendments in the usual way.

Clause 1 (Renaming of Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment)

The Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Dr Farren): I beg to move amendment 1. In page 1, line 4 leave out “Learning and Employment” and insert

“Employment and Learning”.

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 2 (clause 1): In page 1, line 9, leave out “Learning and Employment” and insert

“Employment and Learning”.

No 3 (clause 1): In page 1, line 13, leave out “Learning and Employment” and insert

“Employment and Learning”.

No 4 (clause 1): In page 1, line 15, leave out “Learning and Employment” and insert

“Employment and Learning”.

No 5 (long title): In the long title, leave out “Learning and Employment” and insert

“Employment and Learning”.

The Bill and the amendments to it propose a change in the name of the “Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment”. Members may recall that during the Second Stage of the Bill, in April, I set out reasons for changing the name. Its undue length causes practical problems and its acronym, DHFETE, is unfortunate.

After much deliberation I decided that the title ought to be “the Department for Learning and Employment”. Having discussed the title with the Committee for

Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment I have agreed that an alternative formulation would be more acceptable. Therefore I have tabled five amendments which alter the order of the words “Learning” and “Employment”. The amendments change the proposed new title to “the Department for Employment and Learning”.

I trust that Members will agree that the shorter title is easier to say and, more importantly, reflects the Department’s responsibilities for lifelong learning and preparing people for employment. The resulting acronym, DEL, is acceptable and more positive than DHFETE.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Dr Birnie): Although some people might think that the Bill has a kind of rose-by-any-other-name aspect to it, I am pleased to support the amendments. The Committee always supported the principle of the name change and has been assured that the cost implications will be contained to under £15,000. The Committee accepts the inadequacy of the existing, unwieldy title and its unfortunate associated acronym.

However, the Committee was not convinced by the option of “Department for Learning and Employment” contained in the original Bill. The amended title, “Department for Employment and Learning”, is better. It avoids any potential for the acronym DOLE. It also avoids the usage of the cumbersome “f” used by the Department for Education and Employment in London (DFEE), which has become a casualty of the latest restructuring of Government in Whitehall. The amendment leads to the acceptable and easily remembered shorthand of DEL.

The Committee recommended amendment number one. There was unanimous agreement on that. One Member recorded a preference that the word “training” be retained in the title.

The working together of the Committee and the Minister on the amendments demonstrates consensus politics in action. The Committee supports the amendments. We suggest that it would be advantageous if all stages of the Bill could be completed by the summer recess. That would allow the Department and the Committee, under the new names, to progress with the real work in hand.

I thank the Minister and his officials for their meaningful and helpful input to the Committee Stage of the Bill. I also thank the Deputy Chairman for progressing the Bill through the Committee Stage in my absence. I support the amendments.

Mr Hay: I support the Minister and the amendments. I also want to put on record the good work carried out by the Committee Chairperson and by the Deputy Chairperson, Mervyn Carrick. That was important in reaching an accommodation with the Minister before the

matter came to the Floor of the House. We all agree that the old title was clumsy. It was difficult for everyone in the Assembly and in the Department.

The Department is responsible for so many issues in such a varied portfolio that it was always going to be difficult to shorten the name. At various stages in the Committee some members thought that the training aspect should be reflected in the new title. It was difficult to shorten the name and still try to cover the Department's entire remit. The old title had five words, and now we are down to three.

The Committee and the Minister have managed to reach an accommodation on this matter. I welcome that.

Dr Farren: I thank the Members who have spoken and, in particular, I thank the Chairperson of the Committee and Assembly Member William Hay for their support.

Members will appreciate that the amendments before them have, in effect, the same purpose as the Bill itself. My officials and I deliberated at great length over what the new name of the Department should be. We identified a number of options, including "the Department of Learning and Employment". This was rejected because it resulted in the acronym DOLE, which the Chairperson of the Committee has already mentioned. "The Department of Advanced Learning and Employment" was another option. That highlighted our involvement with higher education but did not adequately reflect our training and basic skills provision. This process continued for a number of months with various options being identified and then rejected for one reason or another. The new title proposed by these amendments effectively and equitably represents each of the key areas of the Department.

The Department's staff are drawn from the Training and Employment Agency, which is an agency of the former Department of Economic Development, and the higher and further education divisions of the former Department of Education.

The new name portrays the image of a cohesive Department, as opposed to one made up of separate parts. It creates a shorter, more manageable title and, I trust Members will agree, a more marketable acronym.

On costs, I am happy to repeat the assurances that I gave during the Second Stage of the Bill. The main costs of the change are associated with stationery and signage. They are unlikely to exceed £15,000. The Department has purposely ordered only small stocks of stationery, and a large proportion of the Department still uses Training and Employment Agency stationery. The cost of changing the Department's seal is around £150, and the signage currently in the Department's headquarters costs around £200. I am aware of the Committee's concerns on this issue, which arise from

the costs of rebranding the jobcentres following the introduction of New Deal.

I want to assure Members that I have no plans, and there is no need, to rebrand jobcentres as a result of this change.

With regard to the amendments, I am happy that the Committee for Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment and I are in agreement, and I thank the members of the Committee for their time and effort during the Committee Stage of the Bill.

Question That amendment 1 be made *put and agreed to*.

Amendment No 2 made: Clause 1, page 1, line 9 leave out "Learning and Employment" and insert

"Employment and Learning" — [Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment]

Amendment No 3 made: Clause 1, page 1, line 13 leave out "Learning and Employment" and insert

"Employment and Learning" — [Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment]

Amendment No 4 made: Clause 1, page 1, line 15, leave out "Learning and Employment" and insert

"Employment and Learning"— [Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment]

Clause 1, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Amendment No 5 made: In the long title, leave out "Learning and Employment" and insert

"Employment and Learning". — [Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment]

Long title, as amended, agreed to.

Mr Speaker: That concludes the Consideration Stage. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

PRODUCT LIABILITY (AMENDMENT) BILL

Consideration Stage

The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development (Rev Dr Ian Paisley): When the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development met on 15 June I was asked to make a statement on its behalf. Following the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment's request for comments on the proposals in the Bill, we considered how these matters might affect agricultural producers and the fishing industry in particular. The Committee was most concerned about a number of aspects.

Everyone knows the dire straits that farmers and fishermen are in these days. Many are facing financial ruin because of BSE, foot-and-mouth disease and cod closures, among other things. Members do not need me to tell them that. It has been voiced over and over again at length in this Chamber and elsewhere. On top of all these problems comes a Bill implementing yet another EC Directive that will leave food producers, farmers and fishermen wide open to be sued by consumers who feel that they had been affected by food that was defective in some way. The ramifications of a successful claim against the producers do not bear thinking about. The potential cost of extra insurance and other measures to protect themselves is yet another straw to break the camel's back.

The Committee was most disappointed to see that those who will be directly affected by this Bill have not been consulted. I can imagine what their response would have been. It seems that when Brussels issues a decree, it must be implemented without question. Not only have those affected not been consulted, but they were not told about the Bill's provisions and the implications and potential consequences for them.

1.00 pm

The Committee sought and received an assurance from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development that everyone involved in agricultural production and the fishing industry would be made aware of possible repercussions and any additional costs that would arise. Therefore, I am pleased that in its report on the Bill, the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment has taken on board my Committee's concerns about the additional costs and ramifications of successful claims. The report comments on the lack of consultation and the need to inform those affected. I trust that the Minister in charge of this Bill will urge his Colleague to take appropriate action.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):

I appreciate and accept the concerns that the Member has raised on behalf of the Committee for Agriculture

and Rural Development. I thank members of that Committee for giving consideration to this issue. In particular, I thank the members of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment for their scrutiny of this short Bill.

We must recognise that the timing of this Bill is far from ideal, as it comes in the wake of the foot-and-mouth disease crisis and in the context of the various pressures on fisheries. However, as the Member will realise, we have no option but to implement the European Directive that is the subject of this Bill. The Executive has had no choice in policy on this matter. However, evidence from other countries that already have this provision in force reveals no significant increase in costs to farmers or other affected groups. Nor is there any evidence of an avalanche of claims resulting from increased liability.

Consultation revealed that the vast majority of farmers already carry adequate cover for product liability. Therefore, this extension should not cause many of them any onerous additional burden. I can assure Dr Paisley that, before the Bill was introduced, my officials wrote to many interested parties in Northern Ireland alerting them to the need for this legislation. One response was received, and it was positive. There is a realisation that measures such as these, which are designed to restore public confidence in food safety, are of long-term benefit to producers as well as consumers.

I can give the Assembly the assurance that Dr Paisley's Committee and the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment have sought. My Department, in conjunction with colleagues in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, will ensure that those who could be affected by this Directive are made aware of the consequences and advised to take out any additional insurance cover that may be necessary.

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 2 and 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Long title agreed to.

Mr Speaker: That concludes the Consideration Stage of the Product Liability (Amendment) Bill. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

TRUSTEE BILL

Further Consideration Stage

Mr Speaker: No amendments to the Bill have been tabled. I therefore propose, by leave of the House, to group the 46 clauses, followed by the four schedules and the long title. Hearing no objection, I put the questions to the House.

Clauses 1 to 46 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedules 1 to 4 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Long title agreed to.

Mr Speaker: That concludes the Further Consideration Stage of the Trustee Bill. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

SOCIAL SECURITY FRAUD BILL

Accelerated Passage

The Minister for Social Development (Mr Morrow): I beg to move

That in accordance with Standing Order 40(2), the Assembly grants accelerated passage to the Social Security Fraud Bill.

The Social Security Fraud Bill is an important piece of legislation that will make provision for Northern Ireland corresponding to provision made for Great Britain by the Social Security Fraud Act 2001. In Northern Ireland alone, an estimated £73 million per annum of public money is lost due to benefit fraud. By anybody's standards, that is a large amount of money.

First, the Bill will help to reduce that loss through prevention and earlier detection, using new powers to acquire and disclose information. Secondly, it will reduce loss through deterrence, through the powers to restrict payments to persistent benefit offenders and the swift, effective punishment of collusive employers.

Social security Bills are, by definition, exceptional. The unique position of social security, child support and pensions is specifically recognised in the very Act that set up the Assembly, and from which its legislative competence is drawn.

Under section 87 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I, as the Minister responsible for social security in Northern Ireland, am under a duty to consult with the Secretary of State with a view to maintaining single systems of social security, pensions and child support for the United Kingdom. That section recognises the long-established principle of parity in social security between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. People in Northern Ireland pay the same rates of income tax and National Insurance contributions as those in Great Britain. They are entitled to enjoy the same rights and benefits as people in Great Britain.

The cost of paying benefits in Northern Ireland is very heavily subsidised by Great Britain. For example, in 1998-99, the Northern Ireland insurance fund needed a transfer of £123 million from Great Britain just to meet its benefit obligations. In the same period, expenditure on non-contributory income-related benefits, which are demand-led and financed from taxation revenue, amounted to almost £2 billion.

This funding is predicated on the maintenance of parity, which I hope all parties in the House are aware of and fully understand. However, parity is a double-edged sword. Rights to benefits must be matched by obligations to society. If it is right that we should enjoy the same rights and benefits as people in Great Britain, it is equally right that we should play our part in tackling the problem of benefit fraud.

In line with section 87 of the 1998 Act, I have already consulted the Secretary of State and agreed that I should bring the necessary legislation before the Assembly. Parity covers not only the content of the legislation, but also the timing of its implementation. To ensure that certain proposals in the Bill are implemented at the same time as in Great Britain, the necessary powers must be available as soon as possible.

Ministers in Great Britain are eager to commence several provisions of the Social Security Fraud Act 2001 as a matter of urgency, particularly the section dealing with failure to notify changes of circumstances, which closes a loophole in the existing legislation. It is currently difficult to prosecute fraudulent claimants who have been paid by automated credit transfer (ACT) and who fail to declare a change of circumstances. That is because, unlike payment by giro or order book, such claimants need not sign a declaration that there has been no change of circumstances before receiving their benefit payment.

Clause 15 of the Bill would rectify this situation. The ability to prosecute fraud where the claimant is paid by ACT will be severely compromised until that provision is introduced. Ministers in Great Britain have delayed implementing their Act to allow the Assembly time to consider the Bill. Failure to grant accelerated passage will probably delay the Bill until the end of this year or the beginning of next. That will leave the loophole for ACT payees open. Ministers in Great Britain will probably be unable to delay implementation of their Act until then. This will lead to a break in parity, which is clearly unacceptable. It will lead to a situation where in certain circumstances fraudsters could be prosecuted in Great Britain but not in Northern Ireland.

It will also be difficult to expect the Great Britain National Insurance fund to continue to bail us out if we delay taking the necessary steps to close the loophole as a matter of urgency. Therefore I am seeking the leave of the Assembly to use the accelerated passage procedure set out in Standing Order 40(2) to bring Northern Ireland law on these matters into line with Great Britain with the minimum of delay.

The granting of leave for the accelerated passage procedure means that there will be no formal Committee Stage. I have already met with the Social Development Committee to outline the provisions of the Bill and to discuss some issues arising from it. I have taken on board the Committee's comments on the use of information powers, and I have arranged for a draft code of practice that will govern the use of powers to be made available to the Committee. I have also arranged for the draft code of practice to be made available for Members in the Library. The draft code will also be published for public consultation. Members will have the opportunity to make their views known at Second Stage and Consideration Stage.

As Members will appreciate, social security Bills are a regular feature of the Assembly's legislative programme. A decision on whether to seek leave to use the accelerated passage procedure will be taken on an individual Bill basis, bearing in mind the duty placed on me under section 87 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to seek to maintain single social security, child support and pensions systems. The fact that we are attempting to use the accelerated passage procedure today in no way prohibits Members present from raising issues with regard to the Bill. It simply means that the Bill will not have a Committee Stage.

Mr G Kelly: Go raibh maith agat a Cheann Comhairle. Sinn Féin is opposed to social security fraud. We are particularly opposed to the organised social security fraud that is costing £73 million. As the Minister said, £73 million is a massive amount of money to be dealing with. We could be using that money in other ways.

Members have the right to be able to scrutinise the Bill and to put forward effective amendments. The Minister has not given a good argument for accelerated passage, which is a bad method of putting any Bill through the Assembly. There are particular problems in the Bill, and every Member should have the opportunity to scrutinise it.

It could affect people's human rights and invade their privacy. Following investigation there is no comeback for innocent people to right the wrongs done to them. The Minister mentioned that there is an obligation from a parity perspective. However, there is no rush to bring this legislation forward. The Minister said that delay here would delay the implementation of the equivalent Act in Britain, and if that is the case then they will go ahead in Britain. He also said that there would be a code of practice. A code of practice is no substitute for good legislation, and we have seen that many times in the past. I oppose the use of the accelerated passage procedure, and I hope that others will do likewise.

1.15 pm

Mr B Hutchinson: I want to raise the issue of accelerated passage. I understand what the Minister has said, and I agree with him on what needs to be done. My difficulty with this Bill and Standing Order 40(2) is that I am not sure that parity is mentioned. Either we decide that parity means accelerated passage or we do not. Such decisions must be made in all matters.

My understanding is that if this Bill were to go through the Committee Stage, the House could be asked to carry it over to the next sitting in September in time for its commencement. I am informed by people at Westminster that the commencement date is not expected until spring 2002, yet the Minister told me that it is expected to start in autumn 2001. I accept that, but there seems to be a difference of opinion.

We are setting a very dangerous precedent. Not long ago Michelle Gildernew commented that she was against setting the precedent of accelerated passage in the Assembly. At the time I said nothing, because I felt that what had to be said had been said. I am, however, concerned that Ministers are being allowed to accelerate whatever they want through the House.

On this occasion I am not as concerned as my Colleague, Mr Kelly, about what is in the Bill. No matter what we do, because of parity, the Minister cannot change what has been set down at Westminster. But how we allow Ministers and Departments to conduct business is a point of principle.

I understand that Westminster had six months with the Bill and that the Department for Social Development was told about it in January 2001. It did not, however, come before the House. Long before the Easter recess I asked the Chairperson and the Clerk of the Committee for Social Development if any legislation was to be dealt with between Easter and now, and nothing was forthcoming. Other Committee members know that the question was asked. My concern is therefore about how the Executive deal with business. They must deal with it better than they have so far, and they need to get that message.

The question for me is parity. Do we agree that parity deserves accelerated passage? The Committee or whoever is responsible for deciding should make that decision. It will be difficult for the Minister — whether it be Maurice Morrow or some other member of the DUP — because in fairness that Department will have most to do with parity in dealing with social security.

This is not a question of the Minister's ability or about the content of the Bill. I accept all that he has said today. My argument is about our setting precedents which enable other Ministers to use acceleration for other reasons. We need to make very sure that this is not an abuse of power.

Mr Ford: We face the issue of liaison between the Department for Social Development and the Department of Social Security in London and, on a wider scale, between the Executive and the Cabinet. I have heard no argument from the Minister on why the Assembly should be forced into rushing an accelerated passage procedure on this Bill through because they failed to get their act together.

Billy Hutchinson said that the Department was aware of this Bill in January. The English Bill was going through its process in Parliament at Westminster in January and February. If that was so, I see no reason for producing a Bill on the Floor of the House today and saying that it must go through in the few weeks before the summer recess and that if it does not, that will be the fault of Members who wish to scrutinise legislation properly. Talk that a code of practice might somehow be the solution to bad legislation is so spurious as to be unacceptable. Perhaps the Minister could tell us whether he has a

Northern Ireland code of practice or if he has merely adapted the GB code of practice, as has happened with the Bill itself.

We seem to be rehashing the arguments that we had about the Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Bill. We have never discussed the fundamental principle of how far we are bound by every clause, comma and full stop of Westminster legislation if there is to be parity in social security provision. Whilst we may have parity in social security in the rates of benefits paid, it is quite clear that parity of taxation does not exist in the United Kingdom. There is no parity of effect in social security payments either; the costs that claimants incur vary widely, yet there is a blanket allocation of the payment in pounds sterling per week.

We must start to discuss some of these issues, and not merely when a Minister decides that accelerated passage is needed for a certain matter. It was presumed that if we were to have a single social security system for the United Kingdom, that would have been a reserved matter. However, it is not. I am not aware that anyone in the House has argued that it should be. If it is not to be a reserved matter, the Assembly should give proper scrutiny to every aspect of its legislative programme. By proper scrutiny I mean no accelerated passage, and detailed scrutiny of every piece of legislation. If that results in a Minister's having to try to negotiate with a Minister in London about the fine-tuning of a Bill as it goes through its Consideration Stage, so be it.

As long as we have the legislative duty here, we should use it. We should not merely run away saying "This is parity. Let's do nothing".

The Chairperson of the Social Development Committee (Mr Cobain): The Committee for Social Development had a long discussion about the Bill, and it did not have any objections. The Minister attended those meetings and answered specific questions. Therefore I want to make it absolutely clear that there is no dispute about the Bill. Accelerated passage is a different matter altogether.

We will face the issue of accelerated passage on a number of occasions because of the social security Bills and the relationship between this Assembly and Westminster. I am sure that the Minister will request accelerated passage on a number of important issues such as payments. I do not think that any Member will object to accelerated passage for payments, because people in Northern Ireland would be disadvantaged without it.

Let me highlight a number of issues relating to the Bill. Mr Kelly wanted to know how the Bill will be implemented. The Minister explained to the Committee that objections and concerns about the implementation of the Bill should be raised when the code of practice — which Members can study today — comes before the House.

The Committee has a number of concerns about the implementation of the Bill. Clearly there are human rights implications. The handover of power to the Department allows it to investigate a range of personal issues such as individual bank accounts. In some cases the Department will be able to delve into the personal arrangements of innocent people. That concerns me deeply. However, that debate will begin with consideration of the code of practice.

As far as possible, we should try to divorce these two issues. The Committee approves of the Bill. The issue of accelerated passage which has caused concern to a number of Members must be dealt with in a wider political forum. Parity is of enormous importance to claimants in the area of social security, and accelerated passage will not be stopped when it comes to paying claimants. The Minister responded as best he could to the Committee's questions, and the majority of the Committee is satisfied with the Bill as it stands.

Mr O'Neill: Accelerated passage is the most important issue today. By using this mechanism we would create a precedent that could cause damage in future circumstances.

I support what the Chairman of the Committee said with regard to how the Committee examined the legislation before it. He is right in saying that we did not register any objections, but we did ask some very serious questions, and those were tabled to the Minister. Those were dealt with and, in fairness to him, he did promise us the code of practice, which will be subject to further examination by the Committee and by this House in the fullness of time.

On the question of infringement of human rights, which is something that I am particularly interested in and asked a direct question or two on, I received answers that are, I suppose, protected by this code of practice. I took the step of consulting a human rights legal expert, who assured me that on a preliminary reading of the proposed legislation he could not see where there would be an infringement of human rights. While a more definitive view could be sought on that matter, and I may reserve judgement on it, I was quite satisfied because I recognised his authority in that area. While the legislation does appear to be strong in some respects, unfortunately it may be necessary when we are dealing with this loophole.

Two things have frustrated me for many years as a public representative fighting people's social security benefit cases. One is the amount of money that goes unclaimed each year and that should be given to those who are entitled to it. The second is the amount that is lost through fraud. I do not think that anybody could possibly stand over that and allow it to happen. I am afraid that the interpretation that might be put on our refusal to accept this request for accelerated passage might be that we were standing over a recognised

loophole and allowing it to continue. That concerns me, because it annoys me to think of the abuse as well as the unclaimed amounts.

The Committee did get a fair chance at that preliminary stage. We will have opportunities at the Second and further Stages to examine the matter even further. I hope that a more definitive legal opinion may be available to me by then. At the moment, I hope that Members will agree to accept the Minister's recommendation.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: The issue before this Assembly today is not one in regard to the content of this Bill. It is very important to keep that in mind. I myself am not a supporter of the acceleration procedures. There is a better way of doing business than that. On this issue we have to be absolutely honest, as was pointed out by Mr Cobain. He said that we will accelerate payments, but we are not prepared to accelerate legislation to stop fraud. Where do we stand in this Assembly?

Mr O'Neill talked about his frustration when he has been representing people. I have had the same frustration when I have looked at the vast amount of money that is lost to the system through fraud. We must have a proper scrutiny of this today, because there is the code of conduct to be looked at, and there is another debate coming. People outside this House expect us, as the guardians of public money, to want to do something that should be done. After all, if we did not have devolution — and I happen to be a devolutionist — this provision would already be in force.

1.30 pm

Let us take the pragmatic step of saying "Yes, we might not agree with putting business before the House in this way, but we need this procedure when it comes to making social benefit payments. We need it now to safeguard the public purse so that the money can be made available and more of it kept for the purpose for which it was raised". That is the issue before us. If there was something radically wrong with the Bill, people here would not accept it, but as there is nothing wrong with it, as the Committee procedure has shown, the time has come for us to speed up the process and to deal with this running sore.

Mr Morrow: I have listened carefully to all of the contributions. I would be bitterly disappointed if the Assembly were to decide that this is the time to take a stand on legislation and, in particular, parity legislation. It would be a tragedy if the Assembly, which was allegedly brought into being to speed legislation up and to bring Government nearer to the people, were to be the very instrument that held the process up. Several Members have voiced their concerns, and I in no way disparage those concerns. Some Members also recognised that we addressed all of the issues that were raised at the Committee as honestly and squarely as we could.

I want to deal with the issues that Members have raised today to see if I can further allay their fears and concerns. I hope that I can. Several Members mentioned the issue of human rights. The Bill does comply with human rights legislation. Mr O'Neill has gone the second mile; he was concerned about this aspect, and he double-checked the facts. He has been satisfied, from another source, that the Bill complies with human rights legislation. Some Members raised the matter of the code of practice. The Committee raised this issue and put much emphasis upon it. The Committee was satisfied that the code of practice that we were introducing would go a long way towards ensuring that everything was done fairly and that every step that could be taken was being taken.

Mr Billy Hutchinson, Rev Dr Ian Paisley and others had concerns about the accelerated passage. This is not an attempt to abuse procedure — this is purely an attempt to keep up with parity legislation. I can understand why Members would want to object to the use of accelerated passage for anything other than parity legislation. If I were sitting on the Back Benches I would feel the same way. This is not an attempt to ride roughshod over the elected representatives in the House — the aim is keep up with parity legislation. Mr Hutchinson also made the point that much of the legislation that comes from my Department is parity legislation. He is right. My Department, probably more than any of the other 10 Departments that are answerable to the Assembly, deals with parity legislation. It follows therefore that I will be on my feet more often to ask for accelerated passage, purely in an attempt to enable us to stay in step with Great Britain.

Mr Ford also raised the issue of the code of practice. I have dealt with that, and I hope I have satisfied him as I think we did the Social Development Committee by the assurance that the code of practice is not something that has been cobbled together. It is a code of practice that the Social Development Committee is totally satisfied will meet the requirements.

Mr Ford: Is the Minister speaking about a Northern Ireland code of practice and not an adapted Great Britain code of practice?

Mr Morrow: By and large, it is a code of practice for the rest of Great Britain. I assure the Member that it will also be unique to Northern Ireland.

The Chairperson of the Social Development Committee, Fred Cobain, has struck the right chord on all issues. He chaired the meetings that my officials and I attended, and he has made a very useful contribution. He has hit all the right buttons today, and he acknowledges the reason why we must opt for accelerated passage. I cannot gainsay or add to anything that he has said, and I thank him for his useful and positive contribution.

I have dealt as best I can with Mr O'Neill's concerns. The Bill is compliant with the Human Rights Act, and he has already satisfied himself on that point.

Mr Ford asked if it would not be possible to introduce this Bill before the Great Britain Bill receives Royal Assent. The answer is no. A more detailed answer is that, as with all social security Bills, amendments were tabled at every stage of its process through Parliament. Given the need for parity, it is better to introduce a Bill that reflects the Great Britain Act than to introduce a Bill at an early stage and ask the Assembly to work its way through corresponding amendments in order to achieve a corresponding Act. That would be an unnecessary use of the Assembly's valuable time.

Dr Paisley said that in principle he is not an enthusiastic supporter of accelerated passage. Nevertheless, having been a parliamentarian for many years, he recognises the need for social security legislation to be kept on a par with the rest of the UK. That is a very valid point.

He also made the point that we in the Assembly are custodians of the public purse. Every year we lose approximately £73 million through fraud. Something has to be done about that, and today we are making an attempt to close the loopholes that fraudsters are jumping through.

Dr Paisley and Éamonn O'Neill made the point that they have felt frustrated in their roles as representatives of their constituencies. When this legislation is passed, some of their frustrations will not exist any more. We will have gone a long way towards ensuring that legislation exists to trap those who abuse the system. We want to get funding and give social security benefits to those who deserve and need them. We also want to deprive those who are jumping in and out through the legislation loopholes and who are keeping money back from those entitled to it. I commend the Bill to the House.

Mr Speaker: I remind Members that Standing Order 40(2) requires the Member in charge of the Bill to seek leave of the Assembly to proceed with accelerated passage. The motion can be carried only if the house is unanimous.

Question put and (in the absence of unanimity) negatived.

The sitting was suspended at 1.40 pm.

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

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Unoccupied Property reserved for Job Creation

1. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail, by constituency, the rent paid to private landlords for property reserved for job creation but which remained unoccupied in each of the last five years. (AQO 1600/00)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Sir Reg Empey): Foyle is the only constituency in Northern Ireland where rent has been paid to private landlords for buildings reserved for IDB projects. IDB pays rent totalling £90,000 per annum for the two buildings at Campsie business park, which, despite all efforts to find tenants, to date remain unoccupied.

Mr Dallat: Can the Minister assure the House that every effort will be made to ensure that suitable tenants are found for those two premises at Campsie and that the £90,000 paid in rent is not wasted?

Sir Reg Empey: Estate agents have been appointed to market the sites — IDB came to the same conclusion as the Member. They have been attempting to find possible tenants and have also put the sites on the market. Negotiations are ongoing at present with a potential occupant. I cannot say anything further, save that I am very conscious of the point the Member makes. We are pursuing it as vigorously as we can to ensure that this liability is terminated.

Provision of Industrial Land (Newry and Mourne)

2. **Mr Fee** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline his plans to provide additional serviced industrial land in Newry and Armagh. (AQO 1597/00)

Sir Reg Empey: IDB currently has sufficient serviced industrial land in Newry and Armagh to meet short-term to medium-term needs. As development of the new area plan proceeds, IDB will work closely with the Planning

Service and district councils to identify suitable new land for industry in both Newry and Armagh.

Mr Fee: I thank the Minister for his response. He has pre-empted my supplementary. Will the Minister make every effort during the review of the district plans for Newry and Mourne and Armagh city and district to ensure that some sympathetic consideration is given to providing industrial land in rural parts — places like Crossmaglen, Keady, Middletown and Armagh city itself? Will he do whatever he can to ensure that we attract investors to those areas?

Sir Reg Empey: I was at Edenaveys industrial estate in Armagh some months ago, where the local economic development group had a sod-cutting ceremony. I am familiar with a number of the difficulties. The planning process for Newry is further advanced than that for Armagh city and district, as the Member will be aware. It has been the practice in recent years for IDB to focus its activities on main urban areas, whereas enterprise agencies, backed by LEDU and the International Fund for Ireland, focus more on the more outlying areas to which he refers. It is a question of balance, but I am satisfied at present that in that constituency there is adequate serviced land, although this will be continuously kept under review. I am also conscious that the Member has, on a number of occasions, pointed out to me his dissatisfaction with the degree of progress in Armagh city itself. IDB has taken these points on board.

Energy Costs

3. **Mr Armstrong** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail any measures he has for mitigating the continuing rise in energy costs; and to make a statement. (AQO 1588/00)

Sir Reg Empey: Principal measures include: the introduction of increased competition, consumer choice and liberalisation into the energy market and inter-connection with other competitive markets; an examination of a possible buyout of the long-term generator contracts; an electricity transmission and distribution price control review; and studies on the development of an all-island energy market.

Mr Armstrong: My supplementary has nearly been answered. Will the Minister offer his ongoing commitment to provide cheap, variable, alternative fuels as energy alternatives?

Sir Reg Empey: I am familiar with Members' frustration at the relatively slow progress in dealing with what is a matter that affects every consumer.

I cannot think of any other issue on which I have had more traffic from Members, whether in the form of delegations or questions. As the Member will know, the subject has been debated in the Chamber, and the

Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee is currently undertaking an energy inquiry. Next week I am hoping to meet electricity representatives to review the report on the industry's performance, particularly during the storms earlier this year.

However, there have been positive developments. A new gas-fired — and infinitely more efficient — power station is being built at Ballylumford. The Scottish interconnector will, I hope, come into operation at the turn of the year, and we have a proposal for another gas-fired power station, which will be located at Coolkeeragh near Londonderry. All of these things, combined with the regulator's review of transmission and distribution costs, should contribute to a reduction in costs and certainly greater efficiency in the energy system.

Making radical changes will mean dealing with the long-term contracts, and while we are actively pursuing the option of buying out those contracts, it is a very complicated and expensive process. I hope to be in a position to report to the House later in the year.

Mr Close: Does the Minister agree that Northern Ireland consumers have very little to look forward to in terms of reduced prices until the long-term contracts are dealt with? Can he give us any further details of the position of those negotiations? This is the fundamental issue as regards the high cost of energy in Northern Ireland. Until those uncompetitive contracts are dealt with, the consumer cannot look forward with any real hope to the downward pressure on prices that is required.

Sir Reg Empey: The Member is probably right, but there are a number of things to be considered. It is a matter of trying to open more of the market to competition. The contracts include a specific fuel cost section, and therefore there is a direct linkage between international fuel costs and the price the customer pays. The more efficient the plant, the smaller that component part of the price is, because 80% of what the consumer pays is in generation costs. With brand new plants at Ballylumford and, it is to be hoped, Coolkeeragh, we will have state-of-the-art equipment in place which will be able to generate more electricity per unit — or per therm of gas — than is currently the case. Additionally, we will have the interconnector.

The Member is correct in that a very bad deal was done in 1991, and we are paying the price for that. There is no point in trying to hide that from the House. I intend that all of these issues — the regulator's review of transmission and distribution costs; the gas pipelines; the way we treat the contracts and a range of other matters — will be dealt with in the current calendar year. I intend that we will then be in a position to report to the House with a comprehensive package of what it is possible to do. I cannot be more specific than that.

The Treasury will have a role in deciding whether we can deal with the buyouts. That will mean bonds. Bonds

have been used as a tool in some other utility buyouts in Great Britain. However, each case has to be dealt with on its merits. We are dealing with very large sums of money, and we have to be aware that we are taking major decisions. We will never get ourselves completely free from this until we deal with the contracts.

Penn Nyla (formerly Courtaulds)

4. **Dr O'Hagan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail any contact between his Department and Penn Nyla (formerly Courtaulds) in Lurgan in relation to impending job lay-offs in the factory; and to make a statement. (AQO 1574/00)

Sir Reg Empey: At the end of March the chief executive officer of Penn Nyla met with IDB officials to outline the steps being taken to sustain the weft knit business. Since then, IDB has been in regular contact with him to review progress, agree actions to help the company and provide practical assistance.

Dr O'Hagan: People who represent the constituency are concerned. The Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment has met trade union representatives from the factory and will meet the management. Can the Minister give details of the investment that the company received from the IDB? There are concerns that machinery in the factory has already been broken down and sold off. Has any public money been used to purchase that machinery, and, if so, will there be any clawback? What has been done with regard to jobs for people who have been laid off? It has been predicted that by the end of August all the employees will have lost their jobs and the factory will be closed. Go raibh maith agat.

Sir Reg Empey: I am familiar with the concerns that the Member raises. Those matters have raised their heads on previous occasions. However, the hon Member will be aware that the company had to be summoned to appear before the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Industry. Perhaps that gives an insight into some of the difficulties that we have in dealing with large corporations. They like to make decisions unfettered in any way, and the only reason that the summons could be issued was that the company had received public money. IDB, as it does in all cases, had to look at the letter of offer under which that public money was drawn down to see if its terms and conditions were implemented. I cannot be more precise. We are watching that type of thing closely.

I raise two other points. We wanted to achieve a successful outcome, and an alternative buyer has been sought, either a management buyout or another company. So far no offers have been received. However, under the circumstances, we are prepared to examine any proposals and treat them on their merits, irrespective of previously agreed arrangements with the existing owners and without the overhang from other offers. If we feel that the letter

of offer has not been implemented as was agreed, the potential for clawback exists. However, that is a legal matter, and I cannot go into too much detail here.

Mr Carrick: I have noted what the Minister has said. We welcome the fact that the meetings have taken place and that various proposals have been looked at. Nevertheless, how does the Minister propose to minimise the impact of the job losses in Lurgan, and can he say whether the recommendations of the textiles task force will be based on facts and focused on the textile industry rundown in Lurgan?

Sir Reg Empey: Significant progress has been made on the implementation of the Kurt Salmon report. One of the recommendations was that a company should be established among the industry, something we are facilitating at present. An interim chief executive has been identified, and many of the legal technicalities have been completed. I look forward to the early launch of that company, which will help to promote the textiles industry.

I want to make it clear that we facilitate the industry to help itself. We will have to give considerable thought to how we target the selective financial assistance offered to companies. We want to give it to companies that bring forward proposals in line with the Kurt Salmon recommendations. The procedures have been followed in the current situation in Lurgan. As soon as we detect a threat to jobs, the Department of Higher and Further Education is notified, and a team assesses the situation individually with each worker who will be directly affected.

2.45 pm

In some cases people decide to retire, but other people require retraining or another job. The Member will also be aware that in his constituency, we have, fortunately, had consistently lower than average levels of unemployment. The claimant count is currently running at 3.6%, which is in the bottom quartile for Northern Ireland. I am optimistic that if it is not possible to find an alternative buyer for the factory, then many of the people there will be able to be redeployed. There is a standard procedure for this, and my Colleague Dr Farren is directly involved in it. If the company cannot be replaced, I hope that as many people as possible will be relocated and retrained.

Tourism Ireland Limited

5. **Mr Ford** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail his plans in relation to the setting up of offices for Tourism Ireland Limited; and to make a statement. (AQO 1584/00)

Sir Reg Empey: The North/South Ministerial Council has decided that the company will have its headquarters in Dublin and a regional office in Coleraine. The board of the company is also currently developing its proposals for offices in key tourism markets. Progress will be

considered by the North/South Ministerial Council at the end of the month.

Mr Ford: I am a little upset that the Minister is unable to be more specific about where the key markets are. It seems that there is a huge need for urgent action on the part of Tourism Ireland Limited. It is obvious we cannot expect that a long-term development programme will deal with the crisis currently arising out of foot-and-mouth disease, but it appears that very little is being done to promote this region for tourism both internally and from GB over this summer. Surely as we can now hope that foot-and-mouth disease is being put behind us, it is incumbent upon Tourism Ireland Limited and the Minister's Department to do more to actively promote tourism, particularly rural tourism, whether that requires overnight stays or day trips in Northern Ireland.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Is there a question there?

Mr Ford: I thought that there was, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Can the Minister not give more hope, in the absence of compensation for the great majority of those affected, that his Department will be engaging in strong tourist promotion?

Sir Reg Empey: I do not accept that nothing is being done. Tourism Ireland Limited is not going to be effective in the marketplace until the tourism season in 2002. It has only just been established; it must get its staff together, and it must get agreed marketing material. McCann Erickson has been appointed to work on that. We have seen some preliminary sight of it, but it will not be effective in the marketplace until next year.

The Member will be aware that my Department has made £1 million available for a particular promotion in the short term to deal with the aftermath of foot-and-mouth disease. That is ongoing. It applies in all markets, both locally and internationally. Proportionately, that is two or three times more than is being spent in the rest of the United Kingdom. We will also have access to a small amount of national resource as a consequence of moneys that have been allocated by the Treasury to the British Tourist Authority — we will get a share of that. That share alone would not have been sufficient.

In addition, with my Colleague the Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure we have supported alternative locally based actions such as the North West Fest. If there are other applications coming forward we will look at those on their merits, but over the next few months we have a rolling programme of specific promotional events. I am sure that if the Member cares to look at the tourist web site, he will see that there is a very ambitious programme ongoing which we hope will contribute towards the minimisation of the losses in the industry over the coming season.

Mr Kane: Does the Minister accept that the difficulty with the concept of Tourism Ireland Limited is not so

much about offices as about the Republic of Ireland's ability to hog the tourists who visit attractions in Northern Ireland? What plans are afoot to tackle the problem of tourists who day-trip in Northern Ireland yet base their holidays in the Republic of Ireland and subsequently leave their currency there?

Sir Reg Empey: I am not surprised to see the Member on his feet about these issues, given his particular interest in north County Antrim. The Member has put his finger on the problem, which is that 70% of the people who visit Northern Ireland from overseas come onto the island via the Republic. In recent years there has been a pattern of day-tripping, but with the overnight stays taking place in the Republic. The Member is absolutely right.

He may recall that, in the setting up of Tourism Ireland Limited, it was written into the agreement and understanding of 18 December 1998 that the company has to pay particular attention to the special circumstances of Northern Ireland over the last 30 years. That is written into what might be regarded as the deeds of the company. Any marketing that it does, now or in the future, must therefore take that into account. That particular phraseology is there to prevent precisely what the Member was talking about.

It is not simply a matter of Northern Ireland versus the Republic. It also applies to the north-western part of the Republic itself. You will find great dissatisfaction in places north-west of Sligo and into Donegal. The people there feel that they have not been getting their share of the tourist traffic. It is a question therefore of moving many of the visitors further up the island, and of developing our ability to bring international visitors directly into Northern Ireland via our own airports. That means air links, and, as the Member will be well aware, we are poorly served at present by international destinations. We currently have only a Brussels route and an Amsterdam route. We have no route to Paris and no flight to North America. Negotiations are ongoing to resolve both of those matters, but until that infrastructure is there, we are always going to be fighting a rearguard action. We are acutely aware that that is the real problem, and therefore we have to take steps to counteract it.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Minister for his continuing interest in Tourism Ireland and his unquestioned efforts to make it a success. Does the Minister understand the frustration that there is locally that this key project appears to be taking an unacceptable length of time to get up and running? Will he assure the Assembly that he is making every effort to fast-track the project, given that it is a key element in our future tourism?

Sir Reg Empey: I appreciate the frustration, but we have asked some very high-calibre individuals to head this organisation. These are people who run chains of hotels and people who understand business.

For example, the deputy chairperson came from Microsoft. They are working as hard as they can. They

have had four or five meetings, and I hope to meet them at the end of the month in the Member's own district. It is my view that resources have been provided. They have had some difficulties with staffing and getting secondments from Bord Fáilte in the Republic, but that is an industrial relations issue. Through the Tourist Board we have supplied all the help that we can. They are working on the material for next year. That is the key thing, because you must have the marketing tool.

Andrew Coppel, who was born and bred in Belfast, is the chairperson, and he has a very clear understanding of the tourism issues. I am confident that when it starts to roll out for the next tourist season, the Member will feel satisfied that we have got matters right and that the market will grow in Northern Ireland.

Job Creation in the North-West

6. **Mrs Nelis** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail his targeting social need strategies to increase job creation in the north-west, specifically in the Foyle constituency. (AQO 1576/00)

Sir Reg Empey: The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment's actions aimed at reducing unemployment and increasing employment opportunities for the unemployed and long-term unemployed in deprived areas across Northern Ireland, including the north-west, are detailed in 'Making it Work', the New TSN action plan report which was published on 21 March. It is available in the Assembly Library.

Mrs Nelis: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

I thank the Minister for his reply, but I am not sure that we in the Foyle constituency can wait for this to be put into action, given that we have the highest long-term unemployment in the whole of the Six Counties. Fourteen of the most socially deprived wards are located in the Foyle constituency, and this is directly related to long-term unemployment. I ask the Minister to consider setting up a task force in the Foyle constituency to address this long-term unemployment. We talk about it, but no action is ever taken.

Sir Reg Empey: The Member needs to be reassured that I fully understand the situation in the Foyle constituency. As the Member will know, I have visited the area as frequently as I possibly can. I visit the city regularly. I know that my colleague Dr Farren, through his own Department, has been working very hard, and his Department and mine have been co-operating to devise the best measures that we can.

The Member will also be aware that the Programme for Government makes a series of major commitments. Long-term unemployment is still high in the Member's constituency, but I think it ought to be noted that if you

compare the situation today with that of five or ten years ago, there has been progress, albeit insufficient. Nobody can be complacent, but there has been progress.

Indeed, there have been a significant number of industrial developments in the Foyle constituency that we hope will provide the long-term foundations for a resolution of these issues. It is only possible when the opportunities are there. At the risk of taking some time on this answer, I will give the Member an example. When it was indicated that the Coolkeeragh power station might be rebuilt, we formed a group in the city, in conjunction with the Department of Finance and Personnel and others, to try to bring together businesses that could benefit from the £200 million that will be spent on the erection of the power station. We encouraged local businesses to be available to take advantage of the contracts when they came in.

That is the sort of measure that we are trying to take, as well as those that are published in the Programme for Government. I believe that given enough time to work through this Programme for Government, we will see inroads being made into long-term unemployment in that area.

Mrs Courtney: I note the Minister's response to the previous question, and his reference to Coolkeeragh. I suggest — and I think that he has already indicated this himself — that one significant way in which his Department could positively contribute to overcoming the high levels of deprivation and unemployment, as well as underpinning the policy of targeting social need and equality, would be to confirm when the investment in the new gas pipeline will take place, enabling Coolkeeragh to be built. When is the Minister likely to be in a position to make such a statement?

Sir Reg Empey: The Executive has discussed this matter, and we will be negotiating during the summer with Bord Gáis and Questar, its American partner. They have made an offer, which is currently on the table. We have set up a negotiating team with the Department of Finance and Personnel, the Economic Policy Unit and my own Department, and we will be entering into discussions with the Irish Department responsible for energy and negotiating the best deal that we can possibly get. We will be bringing back proposals in the autumn.

I am hopeful that this can be successfully dealt with, but it does involve a very complicated set of negotiations. I take heart from the fact that we actually have an offer on the table, and that we have something to negotiate about. There is a requirement for additional generating capacity by 2004-05 in Northern Ireland. At present, the only proposal on the table is from the Electricity Supply Board of Ireland (ESBI), and we are actively pursuing it to the best of our ability. The Executive will make a final decision in September.

Mr Hussey: The Minister will realise that the north-west area spreads well beyond the confines of the Foyle

constituency and includes a large part of west Tyrone. Does the Minister agree that while we welcome improving economic activity, we also realise that parts of west Tyrone continue to fall dramatically behind the Northern Ireland average?

3.00 pm

Can he give assurance that his TSN strategies will address this issue in the greater north-west area, including west Tyrone in general and Strabane District Council in particular?

Sir Reg Empey: There is no way that "Team West Tyrone" are going to let me forget that they are part of the north-west. I sympathise with the Member, because I suspect that behind his question is the fact that he does not anticipate the benefits of gas spreading to Omagh and the surrounding areas. I understand that, but the Member should take heart from the fact that one cannot be sure what route the pipeline coming from the gas field in the west of Ireland might take.

HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

Degree Courses

1. **Mr Fee** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to outline his plans to increase the number of institutes of further and higher education that offer degree courses. (AQO 1596/00)

The Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Dr Farren): I do not have any plans to increase the number of institutes of higher and further education that offer degree courses. Members should be aware that currently 12 of our 17 colleges deliver degree courses, three of them delivering degree courses on a full-time basis for different degrees in their entirety. Members may also be aware — due to several references having been made — of the development of foundation degrees from next September. These will be delivered in the institutes of further and higher education and will mark a significant and very welcome development as far as the involvement of these institutes and the provision of degree programmes is concerned.

Mr Fee: The experience with the university campus in Armagh has been excellent, and the more opportunity that the people across Northern Ireland have to access foundation degrees and further education, the better.

Can the Minister give any more details of how many additional foundation degree course places there might be in the near future, and at what institutes they will be provided?

Dr Farren: In the first phase, 100 full-time equivalent places will be made available, and I have commissioned

eight foundation degree pilot programmes. These are developed and delivered by university-led consortia involving further education colleges and employers. The following further education colleges are involved in developing, and will be therefore involved in delivering, the pilot programmes: Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education, Newry and Kilkeel Institute of Further and Higher Education, the North West Institute of Further and Higher Education, the East Antrim Institute of Further and Higher Education, the Upper Bann Institute of Further and Higher Education, the North East Institute of Further and Higher Education and the North Down and Ards Institute of Further and Higher Education, and Omagh College.

Mr Armstrong: Will the Minister concede that widening the provision of degree courses to the institutes of further and higher education would result in more accessible high level education?

Dr Farren: It is important to underline the fact that in the development of higher education courses in our institutes of further and higher education very strict criteria apply, and these include the appropriateness of buildings and equipment, the experience of staff and the viability as regards student numbers.

With regard to full-time higher education, the Department requires that colleges have a track record of delivering part-time education across at least four vocational areas, viable enrolments in each course and a reasonable total of higher education enrolments expressed as full-time equivalent students. Those criteria are in place in order to ensure that wherever higher education programmes are delivered they are delivered to the highest and most exacting standards.

Queen's University, Belfast and the University of Ulster (Part-Time Teaching Staff)

2. **Mr Ford** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail the number of teaching staff employed on a casual or part-time basis by Queen's University, Belfast and the University of Ulster. (AQO 1581/00)

Dr Farren: The latest available figures relate to the 1999-00 academic year. The Queen's University of Belfast employed 98 casual part-time academic staff, and the University of Ulster employed 85 such staff.

Mr Ford: Is it appropriate that such high numbers should be employed on a part-time basis? Is this an appropriate way of recruiting teaching staff to universities? Does the recruitment of so many people on a casual basis make it difficult to meet equality targets?

Dr Farren: The Member must appreciate that the numbers of part-time staff in both institutions are not excessively high and that staff are recruited on the basis

of rigorous criteria. Staff have to meet the desired qualification and experience requirements, where experience is relevant. I assure the Member that the colleges are required to observe those criteria. However, it is for colleges and universities to respond to their own recruitment needs.

In some disciplines, staff recruitment is not always easily achieved, particularly in fields where there is competition from the commercial sector. However, our universities ensure that they apply high standards. I do not agree that the figures indicate a worrying trend.

Mr McClarty: Does the Minister intend to convert many of the part-time posts into full-time positions?

Dr Farren: I am not responsible for such matters; it is for the universities to determine their own recruitment procedures. As Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment I am anxious that when recruiting staff the colleges and universities should meet the highest standards in every area. I am assured that they themselves will determine how to dispose of part-time staff in proportion to full-time staff. That will be judged by colleges and universities according to their needs and circumstances.

Limavady College of Further and Higher Education (Capital Expenditure)

3. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail his plans for capital expenditure at Limavady College of Further and Higher Education; and to make a statement.

(AQO 1590/00)

Dr Farren: The estate of Limavady College of Further and Higher Education is in relatively poor condition, and the college is carrying out an economic appraisal of its accommodation needs. I recently made a ministerial visit to the college and observed at first hand the condition of some parts of the estate. This is why the college is engaged with the Department in developing its plans for the future development of its accommodation needs. When the appraisal is clear, the needs will be considered in the light of available capital resources and other priorities in the sector.

Mr Dallat: Is the Minister aware that Limavady College of Further and Higher Education plays a key role in the delivery of further education, not only in the Roe valley but beyond that jurisdiction? Can he assure us that when the appraisals are complete every effort will be made to upgrade a college that was sadly neglected during direct rule?

Dr Farren: The House will be aware of my firm commitment to ensuring that everything possible is done to upgrade the accommodation and the facilities in the further education sector. I am aware of the considerable contribution by Limavady College of Further and

Higher Education and all other colleges to the educational needs of their areas, Northern Ireland and beyond. Since my recent visit to Limavady College of Further and Higher Education I have been more aware of that than ever.

We will move as expeditiously as resources allow, making good the considerable deficits in estate and facilities that colleges experience.

Ministerial Counterparts (Republic of Ireland)

4. **Mr O'Neill** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to outline any contact he has had with his ministerial counterparts in the Republic of Ireland in matters relating to his Department.
(AQO 1594/00)

Dr Farren: There are a number of issues that fall to my Department that are the subject of North/South co-operation requiring regular contact with colleagues in the South. The contacts and co-operation include issues such as higher education research, vocational education and training, the mutual recognition of vocational qualifications, tourism training, joint overseas recruitment and European funding issues.

I have had the opportunity to raise these matters in discussion with counterparts in the South, in particular the Minister for Education and Science, and the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment. I have also had the opportunity to raise some of these matters at meetings of the North/South Ministerial Council sector bodies on trade and development and tourism.

Mr O'Neill: Does the Minister agree that continued cross-border co-operation is important in further and higher education, particularly with regard to a better return on resources, the ability to maximise the range and quality of opportunity and access for our students? Can the Minister provide some details of his meetings with the Department of Education in Dublin?

Dr Farren: Since taking office I have had meetings with Minister Michael Woods and his predecessor Micheál Martin, in which we ranged across many of the issues that I referred to in my initial response to the Member.

Contacts have been developing between officials in our Departments since those meetings. There are long-standing contacts between officials dealing with educational matters at higher and further education level and well-established contacts between the officials within the Training and Employment Agency and its Southern counterpart, FÁS.

I come from the university sector, and I am well aware of the formal and informal contacts that have developed over the years. I have been quite surprised at the degree of contact, evident in student flows between North and South at the further education level.

During the course of the visit to Limavady I was surprised at the number of Southern students who are enrolled in some of the courses there. They travel quite a distance to avail of the high standard of the courses that we make available in our further and higher education institutions. Historically, there has been, and still is, a considerable flow of students from North to South. Staff exchanges at various levels also take place.

We are building on a healthy situation. We want to strengthen what has been taking place and to be innovative where development is required.

Dr Birnie: The Southern Irish universities do not have an equivalent to the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). Given that they do not get the benefit of such an external benchmarking of their research standards, would the Minister consider suggesting to his Dublin counterpart that something like the RAE be considered for the Republic of Ireland?

3.15 pm

Dr Farren: It is hardly my place to suggest to my counterpart in the South how he should benchmark the research initiatives that are funded there. It is evident from the considerable flow of funding into the universities and research institutes in the South that their performance is judged highly. They have their internal systems in the universities for benchmarking research, and I am satisfied that their initiatives ensure high standards. The existence of co-operation, albeit that it might be greater in a number of disciplines, between our institutions and those in the South is testimony to the high regard that academics and researchers here have for the standards down South.

Call Centre Employment: Training Provision

5. **Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to outline training provision for call centre employment.
(AQO 1587/00)

Dr Farren: My Department, through its institutes of further and higher education, provides a wide range of courses which are suitable for people wishing to pursue careers in call centres. The Training and Employment Agency, through existing programmes such as New Deal and Bridge to Employment, also contracts with a wide range of training providers to deliver training in customer care, which is the key skill for securing call centre employment.

Mr Kennedy: Will the Minister ensure that there will be adequate levels of pay for those employees and that his Department will also cover issues that affect health and personal safety?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am not clear as to whether that is an appropriate question to the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment.

Dr Farren: You are quite correct, Mr Deputy Speaker. In taking care of the responsibilities that fall to my Department and to the institutes and training providers with whom we are associated in the delivery of the training referred to in the Member's question, the highest standards apply.

Childcare Grant

6. **Ms Lewsley** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail the number of students likely to benefit from the new childcare grant announced as part of the student support package. (AQO 1592/00)

Dr Farren: My officials estimate that around 1,000 students will benefit from the new childcare grant announced as part of the student support package.

Ms Lewsley: I thank the Minister for his reply and welcome the fact that his student support package addresses childcare. Can he explain why there are inequalities in childcare provision between colleges of further education?

Dr Farren: Before I could give a detailed answer I would require information on the inequalities to which the Member seems to be pointing. I refer to my earlier comments with respect to the questions on Limavady College. My Department is investing considerable sums of money in further education to ensure that the highest standards are attained, whether the money goes directly to courses or to support services such as childcare facilities. We are concerned that these services are adequate to meet need and of the highest standard. If the Member has particular institutes in mind where she feels there are severe inadequacies and which may be in breach of requirements, I will be willing to receive such information and have the situation in those institutes examined.

Mr Shannon: In the light of the Minister's response and cases in my own constituency, will he actively seek out single parents and mature students who qualify for the childcare grant to ensure that they benefit from it? We have to seek out eligible people and make them aware of the grant rather than wait for them to come to us.

Dr Farren: When I announced a new package of financial and other support for students, I mentioned plans for initiatives in conjunction with the Educational Guidance Service for Adults, the National Union of Students and the Union of Students of Ireland to fully inform potential students — whether they be school-leavers or adults returning to education. This will include information on available courses and the necessary support and advice to help them succeed.

Mrs Nelis: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's statement that 1,000 students will benefit immediately from this grant. Will the grant awards be based on means testing, and will they be available to single parents in receipt of maintenance awarded through the courts? Will the grant apply equally to male and female student parents?

Dr Farren: The childcare grant is available to parents who care for children below school age, and that applies to male and female carers. Details of their means will be taken into account, individual cases will be judged and applicants will benefit accordingly.

Educational Guidance Service for Adults (East Antrim)

7. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment whether there are proposals to develop an Educational Guidance Service for Adults office and a learningdirect centre in the constituency of East Antrim. (AQO 1578/00)

Dr Farren: The Educational Guidance Service for Adults (EGSA) is seeking to expand its services throughout Northern Ireland, and it plans to open two offices in the Craigavon and Dungannon areas. In the short term, EGSA is collaborating with the East Antrim Institute of Further and Higher Education to provide a service to customers in this area. The provision of learndirect centres is a matter for the University for Industry and its Northern Ireland partners. East Antrim Institute, which has a learndirect centre on its Newtownabbey campus, will be invited to present proposals for the further development of learndirect services in the east Antrim area.

Mr Beggs: I thank the Minister for his answer, but the East Antrim Institute is not in my constituency. There is no further education college in the East Antrim constituency. Will the Minister acknowledge the need for a focal point for continuing education in East Antrim? In the past there has been an absence of education projects from such groups as EGSA. A centre would encourage continuing education and, perhaps, attract additional educational funding from other organisations such as Proteus, which have failed to invest in education in the East Antrim constituency.

Dr Farren: Mr Beggs has frequently asked about the provision in his constituency, and I have highlighted the redevelopment of provision for further education in Larne. It is actively under consideration, and on several occasions the Member has received details from my Department and myself on the investigation of the re-establishment of such provision in Larne. I do not accept that the situation in his constituency is being neglected. The remit of EGSA runs throughout Northern Ireland, and need will be met where it exists.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Byrne has advised me that he will be absent. Question 8 will receive a written answer. Mr Armstrong is not in the Chamber.

Careers Guidance

10. **Mrs Carson** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to co-operate and co-ordinate with relevant Departments to maximise careers guidance for students engaged in further and higher education. (AQO 1585/00)

Dr Farren: Careers guidance in further education is delivered through a partnership formalised by service level agreements between each institute and my Department's careers service. Each university has qualified careers staff. I will periodically review the effectiveness of those arrangements to ensure that students are helped to make informed career decisions.

Mrs Carson: The Minister is aware of a real need for students in further and higher education to have an understanding of potential career paths that will optimise their contribution to the employment sector. Will the Minister examine the current student career guidance system to ascertain its effectiveness?

Dr Farren: The question is essentially but not exclusively concerned with the universities' responsibilities for careers guidance. I am aware from my own experience that both of our universities have highly developed careers advisory services. Those services ensure that students throughout, and particularly towards the end, of their courses are made fully aware of career prospects ahead of them, and of the professional programmes that they need to pursue to enter the careers of their choice.

The provision of careers guidance in further education colleges has come under the remit of the careers review that we have undertaken in conjunction with the Department of Education. My Department is currently examining the report from that review, and it is hoped that decisions will soon be made in the light of its recommendations.

Mr Bradley: In his reply to Question 1, the Minister answered both my main question and my supplementary.

Mr Deputy Speaker: You are supposed to ask Question 11.

Mr Bradley: As my questions were both answered in the reply to Question 1, I will follow on.

The Minister stated that 100 foundation degree places are to be introduced across the area. What are the intended numbers for each specific college? I particularly want to know about the Newry and Mourne area.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I must advise you that it would have been normal to have asked Question 11, and then asked the supplementary.

Dr Farren: I cannot give a specific breakdown of numbers for each of the colleges that will be involved in the pilot scheme.

3.30 pm

In theory, 100 full-time equivalents could amount to almost 200 students. Given that most of the initial courses will be available on a full-time basis, however, it will probably be less. Numbers in the colleges will not be huge, as we have 100 full-time equivalents, but this is part of a pilot project which will begin its second year in September. There will then be a detailed ongoing review, which will evaluate the effects and benefits of the introduction of foundation degrees. That will help us to decide their future. We have to remember that foundation degrees are not the only form of higher education provided in institutes of further and higher education.

Association of University Teachers

12. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail the current status of pay negotiations with the Association of University Teachers. (AQO 1580/00)

Dr Farren: The current status of pay negotiations with the Association of University Teachers is a matter for the Universities and Colleges Employers Association as the representative body for higher education employers. It is its responsibility to advance pay negotiations with the Association of University Teachers.

Mr Kennedy: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. In respect of your handling of question 11 from Mr Bradley, I find it unsatisfactory that a Member can raise an entirely new question under the guise of question 11. It was the Minister's responsibility to link questions 1 and 11 had he seen the relevance of that link. It is unsatisfactory for any Member to be allowed to ask an entirely separate question under the guise of one which is advertised.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am inclined to agree with Mr Kennedy. Mr Bradley took me by surprise. Time is up.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Warm Homes Scheme

1. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the steps he is taking to publicise the Warm Homes scheme. (AQO 1582/00)

The Minister for Social Development (Mr Morrow): I announced the Warm Homes scheme at the National Energy Action conference on 27 March 2001. At the same time the Department for Social Development wrote to a wide range of interested persons to draw their attention

to the scheme. Future publicity is the responsibility of the Eaga Partnership, which has already contacted voluntary organisations to advise them of the scheme.

Mr McCarthy: The Warm Homes scheme should target senior citizens — though not exclusively — to prepare their homes for that extra heat which is necessary for winter. We often hear that senior citizens are not getting their full entitlements. Will officers from the Department for Social Development phone or visit all senior citizens to ensure that everyone benefits?

Mr Morrow: Research has shown the areas of greatest need. The scheme that we now have in place will address that need. It is the responsibility of the scheme manager, which is the Eaga Partnership, to advertise and to make this scheme as widely known as possible. I have no reason to believe that they will not be successful in doing that. On the contrary, I am quite satisfied that all those who are entitled to benefit under the scheme will know about it. We will continue to monitor that to ensure that the people who need the scheme most are aware of it.

Mr Armstrong: Further to his response to the Member for Strangford (Mr McCarthy), can the Minister indicate, in financial terms, the response to the home energy efficiency scheme from my constituency of Mid Ulster? Were there many successful applications?

Mr Morrow: I do not have figures relating to individual constituencies with me, but I will try to make that information available to the Member. The scheme starts on 1 July 2001 and in its first year will run for nine months. We have funding of £4.38 million for that period.

Mr Gibson: Can the Minister advise how many efficiency schemes will be processed on 1 July or in the first nine months of operation?

Mr Morrow: It is anticipated that approximately 4,000 households will be addressed in the first year. The target thereafter is 6,000 in a full year.

Housing Executive Tenants: Installation of Double Glazing

2. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail how many Housing Executive tenants in the constituency of East Antrim have refused the installation of double glazing. (AQO 1577/00)

Mr Morrow: I understand that one tenant has firmly refused to have double glazing installed. The Housing Executive is aware of some problems arising from a scheme in the Whitehead area, and a meeting involving the Housing Executive, a local councillor and a representative from the residents' association took place on 30 May 2001. The Housing Executive is addressing the issues raised by the Member.

Mr Beggs: I thank the Minister for his answer, but I was referring to Dunlusk — a completely different area. I will pass other names to the Department.

Does the Minister support the installation of double glazing where the contractors do not measure the window frames and subsequently resort to block cutting, which gives rise to unnecessary dust and disruption to the home? After installation the windows might remain unplastered for three to four weeks, which is not acceptable. Will the Minister review this current practice? All people would then be encouraged to upgrade their homes by installing double glazing.

Mr Morrow: It is imperative that any work carried out by the Housing Executive or its contractors is done to the highest standards. The executive generally does a very good job, but there are unacceptable exceptions. The competence of the work and the contractors on any scheme are closely monitored by the Housing Executive. As to the question of whether double glazing should be installed ad infinitum, it is difficult to say yes or no. Every case has to be treated on its merits, and that is the way forward.

Community Groups (Meetings)

3. **Dr O'Hagan** asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQO 1372/00, to detail (a) the four groups he met with; (b) the seven groups he declined to meet; (c) the criteria for meeting with the four groups selected; (d) the reasons for refusing to meet the other seven groups; and (e) the criteria on which he bases such decisions. (AQO 1573/00)

Mr Morrow: I will ensure that the Member receives the requested lists of groups. As to the reasons for meeting — or declining to meet — particular groups, I assure the Assembly that I meet a wide range of people and organisations from all sections of the Northern Ireland community. There are no formal criteria for decisions on requests for meetings. Each case is considered on its merits and in relation to the demands of my other responsibilities. If the Member had a list of all the groups I meet across the community, I have no doubt that she would be quite impressed.

Dr O'Hagan: I thank the Minister for his answer. My questions arose because some community groups that were concerned at being refused meetings had contacted me. I impress on the Minister the need for inclusiveness and the need to ensure that fair and equal treatment be given to all sections of the community. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Morrow: Whatever faults I may have, I do not think that not trying to reach out and meet groups from all sections of the community is one of them. I assure the House that I try to be as transparent as is humanly possible in all my ministerial duties. I have not, at any time, tried to sidestep or evade any group or organisation

that has come to me with real and genuine problems and concerns. I have reached out, and groups and organisations come to me from all sections of the community across the Province.

Mrs Carson: I was interested to hear the Minister's reply and to see how he is relating to Sinn Féin in answering its question. I find that rather surprising, given that he and his party were instrumental in Sinn Féin's gaining the Fermanagh and South Tyrone seat in the recent Westminster election. Would it not now be in keeping with the DUP's new image to meet with all deputations and groups?

Mr Morrow: I am disappointed that the Member took the opportunity to score a few cheap, snide political points. I, and I alone, offered to and did stand aside in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone constituency. I offered her party the opportunity to ensure that one candidate went forward. It was her —

Mr Deputy Speaker: I must advise the Minister that this is totally inappropriate.

Mr Morrow: Which was wrong, Mr Deputy Speaker: my answer or the question?

Benefits: Availability

4. **Mr Close** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the measures he has put in place to ensure that all those entitled to benefits are aware of their availability. (AQO 1583/00)

Mr Morrow: The Social Security Agency realises how important it is that everyone should claim and receive the proper benefit entitlement. The agency ensures that the public is aware of the range of benefits and other services that are available through a number of measures, including a comprehensive range of leaflets, promotion in the media and a benefits enquiry line for people with disabilities, and by working closely with a number of voluntary sector organisations.

Publicity campaigns to signal the arrival of new benefits and to increase awareness of existing ones are regularly undertaken. Some recent measures are: the launch of the agency's customer charter pack, which includes a guide to all benefits and details of agency locations; the minimum income guarantee campaign, which has given pensioners in Northern Ireland an extra £100,000 per week; the foot-and-mouth disease financial help leaflet, targeted at those most affected by the crisis; and the recently launched guide to public services for pensioners in Northern Ireland.

Mr Close: I thank the Minister for his reply. However, I understand that about £6 million went unclaimed in 2000. Therefore the various measures that the Minister listed are not working. Does the Minister agree that we really need better education for those people who meet the general public? They should be better educated in more than one benefit. They should change their mindset

to such a degree that claimants who come to benefit offices are not seen as a nuisance. Claimants should be given full help, education and assistance in filling in the plethora of forms, and pointed in the right direction. They must be recognised as being the most deprived and vulnerable in our society, rather than often being dismissed and told to go to the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Mr Morrow: In general, I agree with Mr Close. However, I will outline several things that my Department is either doing or has done. The qualifying conditions for social security benefit are contained in the leaflet 'Your Guide to Our Services'. That leaflet is incorporated in the Social Security Agency's customer charter pack. It is also available separately at all social security offices and at the benefit shop in Castle Street.

The leaflet is a signpost document that tells customers the following: who can get the benefit; how to claim; rates of benefit payable; what other help is available; and where more information can be obtained. Other leaflets and claim packs are available from social security offices.

3.45 pm

I accept that this information should be as widely available as possible. We have run publicity campaigns, which have had some success. The recent minimum income guarantee publicity campaign has resulted in just over 7,000 pensioners claiming the minimum income guarantee since the campaign was launched in March last year. Of these, just over 4,000 have been successful. That resulted in the average extra payment of £100,000 a week in the hands of pensioners in Northern Ireland. We are getting there, and these figures are sure signs of increased public awareness of what help is available.

Mr Kane: What evidence is there that the publicity campaigns have been successful?

Mr Morrow: The information that I have already given is evidence of the campaigns' success. Over 4,000 of the pensioners who applied were successful — that represents an extra payment of £23 a week each, which comes to a total of £100,000 extra a week for pensioners. With regard to long-term strategy, the Social Security Agency will be developing a strategy for maximising the uptake of all benefits as part of its targeting social need (TSN) initiative. That will follow on from the introduction of the family resources survey in Northern Ireland, the results of which will, I hope, be available by autumn 2003.

Ms Lewsley: I commend the Minister on the number of initiatives that he says he has taken on creating awareness. What training do the staff in the benefit offices receive to make them competent in relaying the information to the public? How do they protect claimants' privacy? Some old people feel that they are begging for something that they are not entitled to, and they often

have to speak to people in a reception area or hallway where there is no privacy.

Mr Morrow: Benefit forms are constantly being reviewed by the Social Security Agency. Work is under way to simplify several claim forms, such as the minimum income guarantee form. Over the next few years, the welfare reform and modernisation programme will see a much simpler and more streamlined application process introduced for all benefits.

Customers can contact their local social security office for help with completing forms. Pensioners and disabled customers can avail of a free telephone line that offers the facility to make a claim by telephone, or arrangements can be made to call at their home. Staff training is an ongoing process and is constantly reviewed to ensure that all staff are competent and capable of dealing with queries that come across the counter on a day-to-day basis.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Ms McWilliams does not seem to be in the Chamber, so I call Mr Mick Murphy.

Housing Benefit

6. **Mr M Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of housing benefit claims currently being processed; and to make a statement. (AQO 1575/00)

Mr Morrow: At the beginning of May 2001, a total of 130,935 tenants were receiving housing benefit. Of those, 90,677 were from the public sector and 40,258 were from the private sector. The average length of time taken to process a housing benefit claim is 13 days in the public sector and 23 days in the private sector. Those figures compare favourably with similarly sized local authorities that administer housing benefit in Great Britain. Housing benefit is an important part of the social security system, providing assistance with meeting accommodation charges for those on low incomes.

Mr M Murphy: I do not believe that the figures you quoted accurately reflect the time it takes to process applications for housing benefit. What is the cause of the delays? What steps does the Minister intend to take to ensure that the assessment of housing benefit claims is carried out more quickly and in a less complicated way so that delay and complexity will not remain a barrier to payment? Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

Mr Morrow: Since 1998 the total number of claims has decreased by some 10,000. During this period the percentage of private sector tenants has increased from 25% to 31% of the total caseload. The average length of time it takes to process a housing benefit claim from the date of receipt to the date of payment is 13 days in the public sector and 23 days in the private sector.

Mr Leslie: I listened to the Minister's reply with great interest. I wonder whether, if those waiting in the

benefits queue were to treat the Minister in the same way as the crowd he was part of treated the First Minister in Upper Bann last week, he would condone their behaviour?

Mr Morrow: I am not sure of the relevance of the question. Nevertheless, I am quite happy to answer it. If the Member is referring to my presence at the electoral count in Upper Bann, I was there. However, he should check with some of his own associates to find out my exact role at that event.

Mr Shannon: The Minister mentioned that housing benefit waiting times compared favourably with those across the water. How do current figures compare with those from three years ago? People want to know if there is a bigger drain on the resources than there was three years ago.

Mr Morrow: Housing Executive figures compare favourably with the larger-sized authorities. As I said, it takes the Housing Executive 13 days to process a claim in the public sector and 23 days in the private sector. In Manchester, it takes 88 days in the public sector and 100 days in the private sector. In Birmingham, it takes 57 days in the public sector and 73 days in the private sector. In Liverpool, it takes 51 days in the public sector and 38 days in the private sector. In Sheffield, it takes 105 days in the public sector and 78 days in the private sector. The Member will find that Housing Executive figures compare very favourably with others.

Northern Ireland Housing Council

7. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the cost of overseas trips undertaken in an official capacity by members of the Northern Ireland Housing Council in each of the last five years. (AQO 1591/00)

Mr Morrow: The cost of overseas trips outside the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland in each of the last five years is as follows: 1996-97: £3,714; 1997-98: £2,079; 1998-99: £7,179; 2000-01: £5,370. No overseas conferences were attended in 1999-2000.

Mr Dallat: Given that many tenants have waited years for basic repairs, does the Minister agree that the lifespan of the Northern Ireland Housing Council is at an end — particularly since we have a Social Development Committee in the Assembly — and that the money could be better spent on tenants?

Mr Morrow: The Housing Council has carried out a very useful function in years gone by. If the situation changes we will examine the matter. I have no plans to change the housing delivery and advice structures at the moment.

Mr Gibson: Has the Minister planned any conferences to pour some balm on the uncomfortable losers who are

displaying their ill temper and impetuosity in the form of questions this afternoon?

Mr Morrow: I would prefer to devote my energies to the job I am doing — looking after the housing programme. I do not get too worried about those who have stupid remarks to make in the Assembly. I would rather deal with those who want to — *[Interruption]*.

I note what the Members are saying, but they should sit on their swords and get on with the job, like the rest of us.

Income Support

8. **Mr Fee** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail any plans he has to increase help with housing costs for homeowners with a mortgage who make a fresh claim for income support. (AQO 1595/00)

Mr Morrow: Homeowners should, where possible, have a responsibility to provide for short-term contingencies themselves — for example, through mortgage payment-protection insurance policies. By securing appropriate insurance cover, homeowners can become more self-reliant and avoid situations such as short periods without work that are not covered by the benefit system.

The current income support rules on help with housing costs, which also apply to jobseeker's allowance claims, were introduced in October 1995. For the majority of people, help with mortgage interest is restricted until they have been on benefit for 39 weeks. Exceptions to this rule are people who took out a mortgage before 2 October 1995, certain vulnerable people who are subject to a shorter waiting period, and people aged 60 and over, whose interest is paid from the start of the claim. There are no plans to reduce the waiting period.

Mr Fee: I thank the Minister for his reply, although he rehearsed the facts rather than address the question. In the current climate we have regular and unpredictable job losses right across Northern Ireland. Property prices are higher than they have been for a long time, and the greatest fear, particularly for young, new homeowners, is that they will end up out of work very suddenly and lose their homes. Will the Minister not accept that his Department has the lead responsibility in ensuring that mortgage repossession is kept to a low, that home ownership is kept to a high, and we do not have people thrown out of their houses because of unexpected unemployment?

Mr Morrow: I have the greatest sympathy with people who get into difficulties with their mortgage repayments. I have spent some 27 years of my life helping people and have arranged many mortgages, so I do have some knowledge about that.

The majority of people making fresh benefit claims are people who have been working. It is reasonable to

expect that people in employment who take out a mortgage should make some provision against difficult times such as short periods of unemployment between jobs. Many will have savings or final payments from their employment that will help cover part, if not all, of the mortgage payments during this initial period. I want to re-emphasise that the fresh claims are coming mostly from people who have been working.

4.00 pm

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

SUPPLY RESOLUTION FOR 2001-02 MAIN ESTIMATES

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):

I beg to move

That this Assembly approves that a sum not exceeding £4,679,167,000, be granted out of the Consolidated Fund for or towards defraying the charges for Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, and the Office for the Regulation of Electricity and Gas for the year ending 31 March 2002 and that resources, not exceeding £5,021,262,000, be authorised for use by Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, and the Office for the Regulation of Electricity and Gas for the year ending 31 March 2002 as summarised for each Department or other public body in columns 3(a) and 3(b) of Table 1.3 in the volume of the Northern Ireland Estimates 2001-02 that was laid before the Assembly on 11 June 2001.

I propose the adoption of the resolution under section 63 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which provides for the Minister of Finance and Personnel to make to the Assembly proposals leading to cash appropriations from the Consolidated Fund. In doing so, I act on behalf of the Executive, and the spending allocations reflect the decisions of the Executive.

The main spending plans were approved by the Assembly during the Budget debate on 18 December 2000. There was, therefore, a period of scrutiny of the proposals between the presentation of the draft Budget on 17 October and the Budget debate on 18 December. Since then my Department and I have sought to provide all the briefing and analysis needed in regard to the proposals. We have also sought to develop procedures for the future, which will improve the scope and detail of the consultative process.

The Budget, as approved on 18 December, has been supplemented by further resources carried forward from 2000-01, and by the first allocations from the Executive programme funds, as I explained in my statements of 12 February and 2 April. The main purpose of today's motion is to seek the Assembly's approval of the use of resources by the Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, and the Office for the Regulation of Electricity and Gas, for the year ending 31 March 2002. This was summarised in the Estimates booklet that was laid before the Assembly on 11 June.

The resolution also seeks the Assembly's approval of the allocation of a cash sum from the Consolidated Fund for the 2001-02 financial year, as detailed in the Estimates booklet. To ensure that the Assembly, and especially the Committee for Finance and Personnel, had the best possible opportunity to consider the Estimates, drafts were provided a month ago, before the printing process was finalised. We also offered briefing on the significance of the change from cash-based estimates to resource-based estimates, which takes effect this year. That offer still stands, and officials from my Department will provide further briefing on those issues for Members in the autumn.

The amounts of cash and resources covered by today's resolution are additional to the Vote on Account approved by the Assembly in the Supply resolution debate on 19 February, which was followed by the passage of the Budget Bill. When the amounts quoted in today's Supply resolution are added to the Vote on Account, the total cash and resources contained in the 2001-02 Main Estimates will amount to some £8,486 million and £9,327 million respectively.

I remind the Assembly of the significance of the Supply resolution for which I seek support today. The resolution is the basis upon which the Assembly authorises the expenditure of Departments, the Assembly, the Northern Ireland Audit Office and other bodies in carrying out their functions. One of the Assembly's most fundamental responsibilities is to authorise expenditure while holding Departments accountable for the use of this money. This is one of our main means of ensuring that we deliver on the commitments set out in the Programme for Government.

The scope of the debate covers expenditure in 2001-02. The resolution is the means by which Estimates can be examined by the Assembly, thereby implementing the Budget agreed by the Executive and approved by the Assembly last December.

It will pave the way for us to consider the Budget (No 2) Bill, which, subject to the approval of the Assembly, will provide the legal authority for Departments to incur expenditure this year. As such, those steps represent the conclusion of the 2001-02 financial cycle. It is important that a clear distinction be drawn between those processes which are concerned with the current year and the preparatory steps that we are taking towards the development of a Budget for 2002-03, on which I will make a statement to the Assembly tomorrow.

Before I cover the details of the Estimates, I want to acknowledge the confirmation by the Finance and Personnel Committee that appropriate consultation on the spending plans is reflected in these resolutions. I welcome the Committee's keen and constructive interest in finance issues, and I look forward to further advice and assistance from Committee members throughout the key phases of our financial cycle.

As Members will be aware, 2001-02 is the first year in which Budget allocations and Estimates will be determined and managed on a resource, rather than a cash, basis. The technical side of that transition does not need to take up time today. However, it is important that I draw out some important aspects of the Estimates that differ from the position on the Budget. The Budget as approved in December 2000 concentrated on expenditure in the departmental expenditure limit (DEL). The Estimates include some annually managed expenditure (AME) as well as expenditure that falls within the DEL. The main items that fall into that category are social security benefits, some of which are subject to annual appropriation or authorisation, and others which are charged under legislation to the National Insurance fund. Hence they do not feature in the voting process. Expenditure under the common agricultural policy also falls into the same category, because it is fully funded by the European agricultural guarantee and guidance fund.

As well as those AME items, there are some aspects of expenditure which were nominally attached to the departmental expenditure limit but which are ring-fenced by the Treasury. As we have no discretion on the use of those resources, they have also not been included in the context of our monitoring rounds, even though they were shown in the Budget documents in October and December last year. Those include expenditure under the Peace I programme and the special addition that was provided some years ago to cover the costs of the Moyle electricity interconnector.

I have already mentioned that some expenditure on social security is handled outside the voting system, because there are standing authorisations in the form of specific legislation that allow money to be drawn from the Consolidated Fund or another fund to provide a service. A further example arises when a Department makes a loan under a statutory power. In most cases the issue of the loan will count towards the departmental expenditure limit. However, where there is a standing authorisation for the making of loans outside the vote, the loan would not need specific Assembly approval through the Estimates and Budget Bill system. Some important aspects of the Budget are funded in this way, as distinct from the supply procedure that we are considering today.

The total that determines what we can do is the departmental expenditure limit set by the Treasury. The Budget brings together all the expenditure and revenue that relate to what we can do within that limit to finance public services. The Estimates then set out what that means for the drawing of cash by Departments from the Consolidated Fund and their use of resources in relation to their objectives. I must also emphasise that the convention is that Estimates are not reduced as the year progresses, even if the Department concerned is clear that not all the spending will be required.

By their nature, the figures are estimates. The reason for the Supply resolution is that the Executive and the

Departments are seeking authorisation for spending up to the figures quoted in the Estimates. This point is important, because it helps to explain how the figures, which were set out in the Budget planning documents, are ultimately reflected in the amounts that need to be authorised for issue from the Consolidated Fund to cover the approved expenditure. This is complex, but essential, in order to meet the twin requirements that we keep expenditure within the departmental expenditure limit as set by the Treasury, and seek authorisation for no greater amount of cash expenditure than is set out in the Estimates.

The total net resource requirement for the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is £223 million. Approximately £172 million is sought in request for resources A. That sum provides for ongoing regional services and support measures, including £73 million for development of agriculture and agricultural products industries and for scientific and veterinary services. Approximately £57 million, including £2.4 million allocated under Executive programme funds, is sought for farm support, enhancement of the countryside, animal disease compensation, and processing and marketing grants, which are totally funded by the European Union. Twelve million pounds is for central administration, including information technology and specialist accommodation services, and £9 million is for the rural development programme.

Nine million pounds is in respect of the EU peace and reconciliation programme and structural funds, totally funded by the EU, and £12 million is for non-cash items such as notional interdepartmental charges, capital charges and depreciation costs. The various market support measures administered under the common agricultural policy, totalling £158 million, are also accounted for under request for resources A. These are fully funded by the receipt from the EU and, therefore, cancel within the Estimate.

Resources of £51 million are sought in request for resources B. This includes £25 million for the Rivers Agency, Forest Service and Fisheries Division, and £5 million in relation to central administration, the EU peace and reconciliation programme and the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission. The remaining £21 million is in respect of non-cash items, such as notional interdepartmental charges, capital charges, and depreciation costs.

When the resource requirement is adjusted to a cash basis and capital expenditure is taken into account, the Department is seeking £208 million to fund expenditure on the Estimate.

The total net resource requirement for the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure is £76 million, an increase of 3% on last year's final net provision. Those resources, which are contained in a single request for resources, include £24 million on expenditure by education and library boards on public libraries, of which £2.3 million

is for capital works and £0·3 million has been allocated under the Executive programme funds. In addition, £9·9 million has been provided for the National Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland. The sum of £8·8 million, including £0·7 million allocated under the Executive programme funds, has been allocated for the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and other miscellaneous support for the arts, and £1·5 million has been allocated for the Odyssey landmark project.

Approximately £4·8 million, of which £0·5 million has been allocated under the Executive programme funds, is for the Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland, and £2·2 million is for the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland.

4.15 pm

The sum of £3·4 million is sought for sports. The request for resources also provides £1·6 million for the Northern Ireland Events Company and £0·8 million for the Armagh Planetarium and Observatory. Provision of £3·5 million is needed for Northern Ireland's contribution to the North/South language body, and £2·6 million for Northern Ireland's contribution to the Waterways Ireland project is also included. When the resource requirement is adjusted to a cash basis and capital expenditure is taken into account, it can be seen that the Department is seeking cash of some £74 million to fund expenditure on the Estimate.

Moving to the Department of Education, resources of some £1,350 million are sought in request for resources. Schools require £1,023 million for recurrent expenditure by education and library boards and £38 million for boards' capital projects. The figure also provides for £59 million for capital projects in voluntary and grant-maintained, integrated schools, £148 million for recurrent expenditure in voluntary grammar schools and £34 million for recurrent expenditure in grant-maintained, integrated schools. Some £5 million is being made available under Executive programme funds and £7 million under the European Union's peace and reconciliation programme.

For resources to cover youth service and community relations programmes for young people, resources of £27 million are being sought. This includes some £18 million for recurrent and capital expenditure by education and library boards, £2 million under the Executive programme funds and £2 million under the European Union's peace and reconciliation programme. When the resource requirement is adjusted to a cash basis and departmental capital expenditure is taken into account, the Department is seeking cash of some £1,377 million to fund expenditure on the Estimate. In the Estimate for teachers' superannuation, resources of £80 million are being sought along with a corresponding cash requirement of the same amount.

In the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment the total net resource requirement is £322 million. The sum of £306 million is sought, first, to cover the Department's economic support and regeneration measures.

This includes £123 million to help the Industrial Development Board to attract and support industrial development in Northern Ireland and £28 million for local enterprise to assist in developing, strengthening and improving the competitiveness of the important small firms' sector. Also included in this request for resources are £23 million to support the tourist industry and £26 million to increase industrially relevant research and technology in industry.

In this request for resources, which covers the Department's regulatory services, the sum of £16 million is sought. When the resource requirement is adjusted to a cash basis, and capital expenditure taken into account, the Department is seeking £306 million to fund expenditure on the Estimate.

Turning now to the Department of the Environment, a total net requirement of some £112·8 million is being sought, together with £2·5 million for capital investment. This is a significant increase over the resources available last year, reflecting the need to resolve historical under-funding of the Department's functions. Around £9 million of the new funds will be used to help meet international environmental obligations, including the development of a new strategy for the disposal of waste.

The remainder of the increase, some £3 million, will be directed in a variety of ways, including assistance to district councils, the continuing effort to reduce road casualties and support for the planning process. When the resource requirement is adjusted to a cash basis and capital expenditure is taken into account, the Department is seeking almost £103 million to fund expenditure on the Estimate.

The Department for Regional Development's Estimate comprises two requests for resources with a total net requirement of £1,384 million, together with £173 million to meet direct departmental investment in capital projects. Requests for resources to cover the roads, transport and strategic planning functions of the Department with related central administration amount to just under £915 million, of which almost £692 million is attributable to non-cash costs such as depreciation and capital charges, substantially in respect of the road network.

Provision is also made for capital expenditure of some £63 million, mainly by the Roads Service, and this includes an initial allocation of approximately £2 million from Executive programme funds to enable four priority road schemes to progress.

On the transport side, the request for resources includes the additional £20 million approved in the Budget to fund capital expenditure by the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company to bring the railway network up to modern safety standards. This is included in the grants column on the resource side of the estimate. Almost £14 million is needed for other railway services and some

£20 million for road passenger services, including concessionary fares.

Requests for other resources relate to the provision of water and sewerage services, for which a total net amount of slightly over £469 million is required. This includes some £5.5 million made available in the Budget approved by the Assembly in December 2000 to meet the additional cost associated with the Kinnegar waste water treatment works and alternative means of sludge disposal. Depreciation and capital charges amounting to £367 million are also catered for.

The £110 million needed for capital investment in the water supply and sewage treatment and disposal infrastructure includes the extra £14.5 million allocated in the Budget and £1 million for flood prevention work allocated from the Executive programme funds. After accruals to cash adjustments are made, the Department for Regional Development's net cash requirement for the year is just over £509 million.

Turning to the Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment, the total net resource requirement is £604 million. Some £396 million is being sought, which includes over £147 million for colleges of further education, £167 million for universities and colleges of education, and net resources of £81 million and capital provision of £95 million for student support, including provision for new arrangements emerging from the recent review of student support.

Some £208 million is sought, which includes £42 million to provide 15,000 places in a range of employment and training measures, mainly within the New Deal initiative, for 18 to 24-year-olds and the long-term unemployed. This will also provide for the introduction of an enhanced New Deal for the over-25s from April. Over £66 million is to provide over 12,000 places under the Jobskills training programme, and a further £14 million will be spent on other training and temporary employment programmes providing some 3,000 places for long-term unemployed adults who are not eligible for the New Deal.

When the resource requirement is adjusted to a cash basis and departmental capital expenditure is taken into account, the Department is seeking £662 million cash to fund the expenditure in the Estimate.

Over £2,060 million is sought for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. That figure includes £1,968 million to be spent on delivering an effective, high-quality health and social care service to people in need, £57 million for fire services and £34 million for departmental administration. When adjusted for capital payments and non-cash items, the net cash requirement is just over £2,124 million. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety's Main Estimate identifies £48.6 million to meet the cost of the health and personal social services superannuation scheme. The net cash requirement for that estimate is also £48.6 million.

The Department for Social Development has sought £2,473 million for resources A, which covers the Department's social security and child support programme. That figure is made up of non-contributory and income-related benefit expenditure of £2,303 million, £145 million for administration and £25 million for non-cash items such as notional interdepartmental charges, capital charges and depreciation costs. Included in the administration cost is £18 million to enable the Department to take forward the welfare reform and modernisation programme.

The Department for Social Development is seeking £266 million for resources B, which covers the housing programme. That figure includes programme expenditure of £260 million, administration costs of £2 million and £4 million for non-cash items. When net borrowing and the Housing Executive's rent and capital receipts from house sales are taken into account, the gross resources available for housing will be over £600 million.

In its request for resources C, which covers the urban regeneration and community development programme, the Department for Social Development is seeking £73 million. That figure includes programme expenditure of £57 million, administration costs of £6 million and £10 million for non-cash items. In programme expenditure, £30 million will be provided to promote and implement a comprehensive approach to physical and social regeneration, and £8 million will be provided for grants to voluntary bodies. Under the European Union peace and reconciliation programme, £16 million will be made available, of which £12 million will be funded from European Union receipts. When the resource requirement is adjusted to a cash figure and capital expenditure is taken into account, the Department for Social Development is seeking £2,773 million to fund the expenditure in the Estimate.

The Department of Finance and Personnel has sought a total net resource of £133 million. For resources A, the Department has sought £23.4 million to maximise the benefit to Northern Ireland of public expenditure, including European Union funding. For resources B, the Department has sought £93.7 million to support public sector business performance. For resources C, the Department has sought £16.4 million to administer specialised public services including Ulster Savings Branch, General Register Office, maintenance of the valuation list for rating purposes, Rate Collection Agency, Office of Law Reform, Land Registry and Lands Tribunal for Northern Ireland. When adjusted for capital and non-cash items, the net cash requirement is £124.6 million.

4.30 pm

On superannuation, the Department of Finance and Personnel is seeking £18.5 million to cover the payment of pensions and lump sum benefits to those covered by the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme. The net cash requirement for this Estimate is £18.4 million.

For the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, total resources of some £32 million are sought. Some £13.1 million is to support the Executive in making and implementing well-informed and timely policy decisions and improving public services, while £18.7 million is to promote equality of opportunity, human rights and improved community relations and to meet the needs of victims. When adjusted for capital and non-cash items, the net cash requirement is £32 million.

The Northern Ireland Assembly is seeking £37.7 million to cover Members' salaries and expenses and the Assembly Secretariat. The net cash requirement for this Estimate is £38.8 million.

I remind the Assembly that the spending plans that we are debating today derive from the first Budget cycle for which the devolved institutions have been solely responsible. We have collectively risen to the challenge of looking afresh at what our priorities should be, and at the social and economic outcomes that we wish to achieve through public expenditure.

Through the Programme for Government we have established a number of important priorities upon which we will wish to build our policies and develop our thinking further. These include meeting our equality obligations and giving proper recognition to need through targeting social need and the priority areas and initiatives that will attract additional funding through the Executive programme funds.

In commending this Supply resolution to the Assembly, it is right that we should reflect on the importance of being able to make these decisions in a devolved Assembly for a complete financial year for the first time. It is also appropriate that we ensure proper levels of management and control over the use of these resources so that they give maximum effect and deliver the highest quality and the greatest range of services possible for the citizens of Northern Ireland. I beg to move.

The Chairperson of the Finance and Personnel Committee (Mr Molloy): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his detailed account of the Supply resolution and for the opportunity to contribute to this debate as Chairperson of the Finance and Personnel Committee.

Due to the suspension of the Assembly last year, the Committees had little time to consider the Main Estimates on the Supply resolution. This year there was disruption because of the Westminster and local government elections. There has, however, been limited time for the Committees to scrutinise their departmental spending plans.

The Finance and Personnel Committee questioned the Department's officials on three occasions on the Main Estimates, as proof copies became available. The Minister has today given a detailed account of the Supply resolution. The Committee welcomed the Minister's proposal that

the Committees should have the opportunity to scrutinise and focus on the Supply resolution to ensure that they were content that it reflects the needs of their respective Departments in the Programme for Government. The Committee advised the Minister of its preference to present the Executive funds as a separate functional line within the request for resources, as this is the case for expenditure such as the European Peace programme.

However, the Finance and Personnel Committee has expressed concern at the complete absence of prior consultation with the Assembly Committees regarding how to allocate the funds that become available through the monitoring rounds. These allocations are simply presented to the Assembly as a *fait accompli*, with no opportunity for the Statutory Committees to bring any influence to bear on how they are spent.

I suggest that the way in which in-year monitoring is handled should be re-examined. The procedures that were adopted during the direct rule era have continued on and carried across without serious consideration having been given as to whether they are appropriate in new circumstances. In the Committee's opinion these procedures are far from being appropriate. A revised arrangement is needed in which the Department of Finance and Personnel anticipates the likelihood of additional resources becoming available as a result of the in-year monitoring. The Assembly Committees could be given advance information about the scale of the funds and their availability for reallocation, and their views could be sought in relation to how these funds could be reallocated, before the Executive Committee takes its final decision.

I speak for all departmental Committees when I say that the Committees must be fully consulted on future spending plans, including related financial matters such as the spending review, the regional rate, and the European Union structural funds. This should be undertaken early in the year to ensure that the Committees can make an effective contribution.

The Committees can demand this within the existing structures. Each Committee has the right to question its Department on what bids it is making and how it proposes to spend the money. Additionally, there is a duty on each Department to ensure that its respective departmental Committee has the information it needs to perform its statutory role of scrutinising, considering and advising on the departmental Estimates.

I refer to one of the principal points raised in the Committee for Finance and Personnel's report with regard to the Budget proposals in November. The Committee suggested that steps needed to be taken to reassess the application of the Barnett formula with particular reference to its inability to address the present infrastructure deficit, the low population density across most of our region and, significantly, social need and deprivation. We suggested that the Minister look again at a joint

approach with our counterparts in Scotland and Wales. With the involvement of the Committees a co-ordinated approach could be made to the Treasury.

I would like to impress upon the Minister the over-riding need to agree procedures for the handling of the annual financial cycle. The Committee for Finance and Personnel is extremely concerned about the Minister's proposal for the handling of the early stages of the public service financial cycle.

It is clear in the Belfast Agreement and reiterated in the Northern Ireland Act 1998 that the Committees have a statutory duty to advise Ministers in the formulation of policy. The role of the Committees in relation to the preparation of budgets is a central theme in their work. However, in this area it appears that the Executive Committee and the Department of Finance and Personnel are paying lip service to the functions of the Committees. It is clear that the various Departments have been told not to discuss their bids and proposals for the 2002-03 financial year with Committees until tomorrow's announcement by the Minister of Finance and Personnel. This effectively prevents Committees from becoming involved with their Departments' crucial stage of development of financial policy. The involvement of Committees in early consultation is crucial in planning ahead.

In virtually all other areas my Committee Colleagues are content with the procedures proposed by the Minister of Finance and Personnel. We still question the issue of early consultation. The success of future procedures depends on the ability of Committees to become involved in the early formulation of financial policy by individual Departments. To my knowledge there has been no coherent argument put forward to justify the withdrawal of rights of Committees to obtain policy papers relating to the bidding process, to be consulted and to have their views taken into account.

This situation is unacceptable to me and to the Committee, as it is to other Committee Chairpersons and members. I ask the Minister to look at this again. With this proviso in mind, I am content to recommend the Minister's Supply resolution to the Assembly.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development (Rev Dr Ian Paisley): My Committee met on Friday 15 June and agreed that I should speak on its behalf in this debate. This Supply resolution allows consideration of the 2001-02 Main Estimates. Committee members received papers, including proof copies of these Estimates, in mid-May. At a meeting on 18 May Committee members agreed that their main interests in exercising their statutory powers regarding budgets lay in budget bids and allocations specifically related to the Department, rather than in the overall format and presentation of Estimates and general financial procedures. They therefore passed no comment on the proof copies of the Main Estimates. On Friday, however,

members compared the final estimates with the plans previously tabled in the Programme for Government and the announcements regarding Executive programme funds.

Members were reassured by the Department's explanation of the differences in the figures, due mainly to the change from cash to resource terms. The Committee noted the inclusion in the Estimates of £2.4 million for Executive programme funds in this year, and it was content that this reflected announcements made by the Minister of Finance and Personnel.

Through the Executive programme funds the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has secured important resources additional to those agreed in the original Budget. At that time the Committee supported the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's unsuccessful bids under farm waste management, nutrient management and organic farming.

The Committee, having considered the draft LEADER programme last October, also welcomed the additional funding for the LEADER+ programme. However, when considering the Department's Executive programme funds bids, the Committee noted that there had been no bid for funds to implement early retirement or new entrants schemes for farmers. These are imperative for the future of farming and for farming to remain the main job provider in Northern Ireland. It has long been the Committee's view that such schemes are needed urgently. The foot-and-mouth disease crisis has simply brought this home, and we will be looking for action on this front — not pleasant words or promises on the dark horizon, but real action for the farming community in this year's and next year's budgets.

Bad news for the fishing industry seems to be coming from Europe. Our fishing industry has already been decimated. There is an urgent need to deal with the decommissioning of boats in a realistic way. Why should fishermen, who have been given money to keep their boats in seaworthy condition to face bad weather conditions, be invited to pay back what they have received before they get any compensation whatsoever? That is an insult to the fishing industry.

While the Committee welcomes the increased funding for the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development for 2001-02, members agree that there should be no illusion in the Assembly, as quoted in the Ulster press, that the farmers are the big winners in this Budget. That is not a fact.

Farmers will need significant additional help, and, if we are realistic about keeping our farming industry, this year's resource allocation can be seen only as a beginning.

4.45 pm

The Chairperson of the Committee for Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Dr Birnie): I will start in my capacity as Chairperson, and then speak on behalf of my party.

I note that in the Estimates relating to the Department of Further and Higher Education, Training and Employment, the allocation for central administration appears to have increased considerably this year in comparison to the previous year, from £27 million to £37 million. The justification for that cannot simply be the cost of introducing the new Department, as such changes would have already fed through the system. I wonder whether this is the result of reallocations under different definitions, or if it is a real change in administrative costs. That might be a cause for legitimate concern, both for the Committee and others.

I want to make two other points on the estimates allocated to the Department of Further and Higher Education, Training and Employment. These remarks will be based on a report published last week by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The report, 'Education at a Glance', provided statistics for all OECD members — basically, the Western economies — and made two points that are relevant to the situation in Northern Ireland.

First, of all OECD members, the UK has the largest number of 21-year-olds graduating from university. Northern Ireland has a considerably higher so-called participation rate amongst its young people than the UK average. That is a cause for some satisfaction. However, the Minister will not be surprised that I will not say that everything is fine. There are some worrying issues that continue to require attention, and hence there are implications for the allocation of money to our universities and other parts of the Department.

There is a question mark over whether that high level of participation in Northern Ireland has been compatible with the maintenance of quality standards. Certainly, as in the rest of the UK, the cost per unit of output in higher education has been squeezed over the last 10 or 15 years, and there is a resultant strain — sometimes a considerable strain — on staff and students.

Moreover, although Northern Ireland has a considerable proportion of 18-to-21-year-olds in higher education, around one quarter cannot stay here because there are insufficient places. While there has been some improvement in that regard, the need for increased numbers of places will have funding implications for the future.

Secondly, I want to address the area of adult basic skills.

The OECD report also showed that while the United Kingdom has a very good record of producing a high number of university graduates relative to the younger population, it also has the infamous position of being near the bottom of the OECD league with respect to the proportion of the working-age population who do not have basic numeracy or literacy skills. In this regard, Northern Ireland is no different from the United Kingdom average.

On behalf of the Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment Committee I welcome the funds that

have been allocated to deal with this problem. I also welcome the Executive programme fund moneys, but I put down a marker to say that those funds are probably inadequate, given the scale of the ongoing problem. It is a major social and economic issue that must be tackled.

I will now make some more general remarks. The motion concerns the fate of up to £5 billion, which is a considerable sum of money. As the Minister said in his opening remarks, it is a demonstration that we have, thankfully, moved away from the direct rule system, wherein such moneys would have been dealt with in an entirely different manner.

No one of any sense ever argued that the introduction of devolution per se and the introduction of these new arrangements to deal with the authorisation and accountability of public money would immediately and necessarily lead to Northern Ireland's becoming a land flowing with milk and honey. However, what can be reasonably argued is that we now have a process where the quality of decision-making is improved relative to what happened under direct rule. That improvement, while subtle, will, in the long run, create an economic and, ultimately, financial benefit which will exceed the considerable costs of running this Administration.

From time to time, the Executive will make mistakes in the allocation of money, but the point in comparison to direct rule is not that mistakes are not made, it is that those mistakes will, I hope, be corrected more rapidly than was the case before 1999. Today we are considering £5 billion expenditure in the Northern Ireland block, but whatever happens to the Barnett formula it would be unwise to assume or bank on any big jump — much though we might like it — in the amount of public money provided per capita. That is not at all likely. The imperative is, and no doubt always will be, one of a careful stewardship of our resources. I support the motion.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr O'Neill): I thank the Minister for his in-depth examination of the Supply resolution. We were very glad of his grasp of the financial situation, because at times it seemed quite expansive to me. The Committee welcomes the additional allocations in the Budget this year in respect of libraries, health and safety in sports grounds, the languages body and improved access to, and participation in, the arts by young people and those who are most disadvantaged in the community. As we have pointed out already, the Department's total allocation is modest compared to its assessment of its need for this year.

The Committee hopes that the Department will fare better in 2002-03. We, like all other Committees, have aspirations in that regard, although we have not yet been informed of what those needs are.

We were also glad that the Executive programme funds provided much-needed resources — totalling £7

million over three years — in critical areas, including some that we have pushed very strongly for. One example is the £400,000 to be spent this year on beginning the process of buying out the commercial fishing nets around the Northern Ireland coastline. As I have said before in the House, the impact of this measure in arresting the decline in the North Atlantic salmon population in our rivers will be enormous.

There is also £300,000 additional expenditure to begin work on the vital and imaginative Northern Ireland electronic libraries project.

Our Committee has expressed its concern to the Department that following negotiations nothing was included for the safety improvements of existing motorcycle road racing facilities. Again, I take the opportunity on behalf of the Committee to remind the House and the Minister of Finance about this issue, which has been the subject of much debate in the Committee, the Department and the community. It is an issue requiring urgent attention, and it is one in which small amounts of funding could go a very long way.

The Committee is also concerned that the current year's funding for the arts is so low. The Minister referred to it as an improvement in expenditure. For a couple of months, we have been taking oral evidence in our inquiry into cultural tourism and the arts, and it is clear that this area is very poorly funded despite the tremendous potential and talent that exists in all aspects of the arts in Northern Ireland. I am amazed that there are so many enthusiastic and committed people in the arts. With a small nudge in the right direction, that potential could achieve a tremendous amount for the whole community and could help to create sustainability.

The closure of the Navan Centre has very seriously concerned the Committee, and it would be remiss of me not to mention it. The main reason given was resource problems. The Committee has asked for a meeting with the Minister to go through the detail of the situation, and I do not want to pre-empt that. However, this is as good an opportunity as any to make a point on behalf of the Committee. A pre-emptive move such as this closure, without a proper examination — at least, as far as we are aware there was no proper examination — of the circumstances that led to that decision seems to have been very hasty indeed. It came towards the end of the foot-and mouth disease crisis, when one might have hoped to see an upturn in visitor figures. Considering the importance of that facility for Northern Ireland, the whole island, and internationally, it is a very abrupt way of dealing with a situation.

As we all know, once something is closed it can be very difficult to get it up and running again. Is there any possibility that the Minister of Finance might have an idea of how to handle this type of crisis with support until such times as a proper publicly accountable exam-

ination can be carried out to ensure that such decisions are not too hasty?

5.00 pm

The Committee also shares the view of the Chairperson of the Finance and Personnel Committee and other Chairpersons that finding adequate time for consultation is problematic. I recognise that time laid aside for consultation can be freely interfered with by events such as elections. I applaud the Minister on his clear attempt to improve on last year's timescale. As we should also continue to look at ways in which we could make the timescale even better, I am glad that the Minister announced that intention earlier.

In general, the Committee welcomes and supports this stage of the Supply resolution.

Mr Shannon: I want to focus on the shortfall that will affect the road system and the education system in my constituency and on its periphery, despite the proposed increase that the Minister spoke of.

Many of us in the Ards borough and on the Ards Peninsula sat by while road improvements took place elsewhere. That must be proactively addressed. It is all very well for people to say that the Minister for Regional Development can do that. On the contrary, he can only do so if he is given the funding. Unfortunately, the Minister of Finance and Personnel's statement estimated that the increase for the Department for Regional Development should amount to 2.58%. Obviously that is of great concern to us, because that 2.58% could be used in the Strangford constituency alone.

Our roads have continued to deteriorate and are now in the worst condition seen for many decades. Last winter saw the Ards borough road network in especially bad straits. While some improvement work has been done, the number of serious potholes in the area has highlighted the need for more attention. It is clear to any regular car user that the deterioration of the roads is ever-increasing, to the extent that drivers may be unable to control their vehicles.

The Roads Service has a number of appointees whose duty it is to locate and mark parts of the roads which need to be repaired. A great deal of the deterioration appears to have been missed. The Department seems to be playing catch-up with the amount of repairs that are needed to the roads in my area. This must be addressed.

In addition, the Roads Service was allocated only about half the amount needed to maintain the road network. Divisional road managers in the service are currently preparing proposed road maintenance programmes for 2001–02. They will inform councils about that programme at the end of June. The Roads Service advised me that the focus will be on the structural maintenance of the road network through carriageway resurfacing and surface

dressings, along with the repair and augmentation of the road drainage system.

Will there be adequate funding for the Roads Service's proposals? My constituents and I are worried that we will again find that the roads in the Ards borough and the Strangford constituency fall far behind those in other parts of the Province. My Colleague Mr Gibson always tells us that the roads in west Tyrone are the worst, but if he comes to the Ards Peninsula he will see what bad roads are.

As a result of the inability to cope with repairs, the Department for Regional Development hears a litany of compensation claims. Over the past months, an increasing number of my constituents in Strangford have come to the advice centre in Frances Street with complaints about the state of the roads, the damage caused to vehicles by poor road conditions and the length of time they must wait to obtain compensation.

Some have been waiting for more than six months for compensation claims to be properly processed despite the fact that the average waiting time is five and a half months. There is something seriously wrong if the claims can not be processed on time. Changes need to be made as soon as possible to make the system more efficient so that the Department can give the public a satisfactory level of service.

Our roads are disintegrating as a result of gross underfunding, and the number of claims for compensation reflects the dire nature of the situation. In 1999-00, 1,702 compensation claims were submitted in the area that I represent. In 2000-01, 2,094 claims were submitted which is a rise of almost a quarter.

Mr McCoubrey of the Roads Service stated that

"Roads are the backbone of Northern Ireland's social and economic life".

In spite of this, his Department, because of its lack of funding, has been unable to grasp the nettle. We are desperately seeking to attract business and employment to the area, but I am sure that the poor condition of the roads has been a major factor in the failure by interested parties to secure investment. We need to ask why people who have come to our constituency with a view to developing factories or businesses there have not stayed.

I have lobbied the Department on several occasions, and I will continue to do so. However, Members, and Mr Durkan in particular, must add their voices to the list of concerned parties. Perhaps Mr Durkan can release the necessary funding. The situation is wholly unacceptable. After ten years of lobbying, the main route between Portavogie and Ballyhalbert has finally been upgraded. Such delay is unwarranted, and the state of disrepair is unparalleled. That message must be made very clear.

The situation is such that the Department's commitment to providing and maintaining a satisfactory road network

and its compensation procedures must be questioned. We must ask why there has been such underfunding of roads that their deterioration is increasing the number of compensation claims. The Minister for Regional Development has assured me that he will be pressing for further funding. However, beyond the 2.58% increase, what funding can the Minister allocate to our area?

I will highlight areas in my constituency where there is insufficient funding for education. The education budget has been increased by 9.7%, and this is to be welcomed, but will any of that money be spent on the people that I represent? In the mid-Down area, which includes part of the area Mr O'Neill represents, most people, especially those with children who are approaching secondary school age, are aware of the difficulty in obtaining school places. They are also aware of the public pressure for the reopening of Killyleagh High School.

The cases of pupils who were refused admission to Saintfield High School have been well documented by the media. As a result of the fundamental problem of insufficient places, weaknesses have filtered through all aspects of the transfer procedure. As a result the criteria used in the area, and especially in Saintfield, to allocate places have become inefficient and profoundly unfair. In other areas there are no such problems, and criteria can be used successfully without alienating or offending anyone. In Saintfield, however, the use of the same criteria over the past few years has resulted in prejudice against some local children.

Four years ago the annual intake to Saintfield High School was cut from 90 to just over 60. Given that the aim is to address the competition for school places, it would have been wiser to increase the percentage of local pupils who attend the local high school. Unfortunately, a situation has arisen whereby children who have family ties with the school travel from Belfast, Comber and Downpatrick, while some children from Saintfield are turned away.

Flexibility is needed to deal with the problems, and finance must be put in the right pockets to ensure that these issues are addressed. To date, the criteria have been applied so rigidly that pupils' education is being put in jeopardy. The heart of the problem lies with the closure of schools in the area, and until this is addressed a system is needed to accommodate local pupils, because they deserve better. Without such action the problems can only get worse.

If the people of Newtownards and district are not to be exposed to the same crisis in secondary education as we have witnessed in mid-Down, it is essential that Scrabo High School be retained. There is already competition for places at Movilla High School and Regent House Grammar School in the area, and it is clear that within the next five to ten years the problems concerning secondary education places in Newtownards will continue to grow. We witnessed the same short-sightedness

on the part of the board towards Killyleagh High School, when education standards were not maintained so that a few pennies could be saved.

The situation in mid-Down has now reached crisis point, with so few secondary places available that students are forced to travel to either Downpatrick or Comber to receive their education. At least we still have the option of reopening Killyleagh High School. To continue with the sale of Scrabo High School is utter lunacy. It may save a few pounds in the short term, but it will cause pain and anxiety for many local parents in the not-too-distant future.

In the same vein, special schools throughout Northern Ireland require increased funding if they are to meet their current demands. There are real shortfalls in special needs education for children in the Ards area. A wee bit more funding for Killard House Special School would be sufficient to bring in another class and ensure that the special educational needs of the children in the area are addressed. That can only happen if the funding is there. That 9.7% of the education budget must go where the need is. There is a need for secondary education in the Ards Borough Council area. There is a need in Strangford, and we should examine that.

The plight of the non-maintained sector has been directly precipitated by the openly prejudiced behaviour of the Minister in command of the Education Department in ignoring the needs and the requirements of the state sector, preferring instead to give priority to the maintained and integrated sectors. I fear that the crisis in education will continue until he is removed from office.

Ms Lewsley: It is very important that we are discussing and approving this Supply resolution today, because only a few years ago this scene would have been unimaginable. We are working together across all parties — and I stress all parties — on issues that unite rather than divide us.

We know that the resources we get from the Treasury are not sufficient to meet the needs of our society, and so does the wider public. We also know that the rates are one of the few sources of funds for health, education, roads and the other services so badly needed by our people. We all hate the rates but we should realise how much we actually need them, because this is real politics. What can we do when our only way of raising revenue is through the rates? We can pretend, score political points and ignore the reality, or we can accept that however unpalatable it may be, we need them.

We also need to develop other areas of funding and efficiency so that we can reduce our dependence on the rates. It is important that we approve the Supply resolution, but it is also immensely important that we support and approve the action of our Finance Minister. He does a difficult and complex job fairly and professionally. Even his sternest critics would commend his professionalism on these issues.

However, it is insufficient to merely congratulate from these Benches. All of us in this Assembly, in the Committees and in the Executive must work ceaselessly in pursuit of the goals of the community. We need to increase the resources available for allocation to meet the needs of our people. Therefore we should be watchful of expenditures that do not meet the priorities that we know exist. We must continually question the use of resources in every Department and ask whether such usage represents value for money. We must strive to find innovative ways of funding our services, not just through the private finance initiative or public-private partnership, but also through using not-for-profit organisations to deliver services in a way that ensures professionalism and, at the same time, derives other benefits in terms of secondary goals.

5.15 pm

We must ensure that our public procurement is used in ways that not only satisfy a need but also, where possible, liberate opportunity for the people and the economy. There are many ways in which we can wage war on need, utilising resources more efficiently and effectively, and thereby maximising the return to our people. We need to explore these, no matter how small. We can be rightly proud and happy with this Budget and the increases achieved, but we cannot be complacent or rest on this success. We must build and innovate, develop and continuously improve our activities. We need to get behind Mark Durkan, the Minister of Finance and Personnel, and support and encourage his efforts as he leads this Administration's effort to secure more resources, both from the Treasury and through actions internal to Government.

I support the Supply resolution and ask this House to do the same. To build the resource base for the future society needs this approach, and the people demand it.

Mr Deputy Speaker: One Member has withdrawn, leaving only three others to speak. Minister, how long will you require for winding up?

Mr Durkan: I do not know yet.

Mr Deputy Speaker: We can continue until 6 o'clock, but we must finish then and resume the debate tomorrow. However, we have 45 minutes remaining, and it is possible we might finish it now.

Mr Hussey: Mr Deputy Speaker, can I assure you, the Minister and the House that I will be extremely brief.

I have to agree with much of what Patricia Lewsley had to say. We cannot ignore reality. I doubt there is anybody in this House who does not enjoy the opportunity that the Assembly has afforded us to look at and control our own Budget. It is a great pity that we all know we are facing a threat to the continuation of this. I appeal to those who pose that main threat to this institution to do what is expected of them in the agreement — to start the

process of decommissioning of weapons and allow us to continue here with proper government for Northern Ireland.

I would like to say to Mr Shannon that I am in total agreement with his Colleague Mr Gibson. In the west Tyrone area we do have the worst roads in Northern Ireland.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I was under the impression that he has not spoken yet — perhaps I am wrong.

Mr Hussey: I am talking about previous addresses to the Assembly. We are totally together, and I believe we were called “Team West Tyrone” earlier in the Chamber.

There is a threat to the roads network throughout Northern Ireland. A danger may exist in the future strategy of concentrating on the main transportation corridors, and the rural network could suffer through that. Like Mr Shannon, I appeal for the Minister of Finance and Personnel to ensure that the regional development budget is sufficient to ensure that the total transport infrastructure is dealt with in a proper way. It should not be allowed to constantly go down, down and down to the point of becoming unreasonable.

I am seeking clarification from the Minister on the subject of European funds, which he mentioned with regard to one or two Departments. Indeed, in respect of his own Department he mentioned a sum of money that struck me as being laid aside as pump-priming. What additional funding does the Minister expect to come through that he will have to deal with? Also, can he assure Members and clarify to the House that the Assembly would be dealing with additional funding available to it from Europe, as opposed to the previous situation?

I said I would be brief, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Hussey, you are a man of your word.

Mr Hay: What the Minister of Finance and Personnel has announced today is fine detail. That is important and good for us all. Usually when the Minister announces a Budget, we get a run around west Tyrone roads.

One point concerns the maintenance of roads. There is no doubt that if we cannot maintain existing roads, we will find it more and more difficult to raise capital money for new schemes. The Department for Regional Development sees roads maintenance as a priority, because defects are increasing every year, and there is no money to repair them. How are we going to address that problem?

The Department has asked for additional funding of about £40 million to address this. We also have to raise the matter of the Roads Service’s capital budget with the Minister, because that concerns us deeply, not only in the west of the Province, but across Northern Ireland. That capital budget causes great concern. Officials tell those of us who managed to get re-elected to councils what they have to spend in our areas, whether for maintenance, capital schemes or whatever. Meetings

between officials and councillors in all the 26 district councils are usually fairly lively.

Councillors ask whether the situation has improved since the setting up of the Assembly, and the public assumes that, because we now have an Assembly here, we have more money to spend and it should not be a problem for Mr Durkan to get a few million pounds if he needs them. Members of the public do not understand why we do not have extra money. To get the necessary money to deal with priorities is as difficult for the Minister of Finance as it is for any Minister. Irrespective of how the Minister of Finance announces extra money, he is criticised, because some of us will say that it is still not enough, and no matter how much money we get from the block grant, it will never be enough to address some of the serious issues that concern us, whether they be health, education, or the Department for Regional Development.

We will never have enough money to address the needs that must be looked at. We must look at other ways of raising money. That is where the difficulty arises. However, there are other models and methods that have to be considered.

Some of us who sit on the Regional Development Committee know the serious situation that the Water Service is in. Some of the issues that it has raised with Committee members would make your hair stand on end. We have heard about our sewerage system and water treatment system, and we are trying to find out exactly how to move things forward. We were simply told that there must be massive investment in those two areas in the Department for Regional Development. It could take five years, 10 years, or even longer, to reach the point where we have a modern system — whether it is a roads system or a water system.

EU regulations are driving forward the issue of the water system. We are having to try to keep abreast of regulations that change year after year, and it is costing the Department a huge amount of money to do that. I want to know how the Minister plans to raise the extra money needed if we are going to resolve some of the Northern Ireland’s serious problems.

All Departments need money — each needs a large amount of money to address the serious issues that are concerning us in Northern Ireland. As I said earlier, each time the Minister announces the Budget, or extra resources, it is only a small drop into what is really needed by every Department. The public perceives that the Assembly can address some of these problems very quickly. We know that some of the issues could take many years to address across every Department.

It is important that we try to come up with new ideas on how we can raise the necessary finances to address our problems. The public will not wait five or 10 years for the problems in health and hospital waiting lists to be

dealt with. They will not wait much longer for problems in the transportation network to be addressed.

I heard Mr Hussey talking about transportation networks. There is no network in west Tyrone or throughout the west of the Province — an area starved of resources for many years. We could spend all day debating why that happened, but, as someone from the west, and who has represented the west of the Province for 20 years, I can say that the resources have not been there. They have not been there for a long time. The west of the Province comes from a lower base — it always has done.

When I see the road networks in other parts of the Province and come back to the west I ask myself “Where did it go wrong?” The problem has existed for about 30 years. I have no doubt about that. I remember when Roads Service officials came to council. There were occasions when we did not meet them at all. We did not even allow them to open the book, because we were so fed up with them continually telling us that there was no money for any capital schemes and that there would be no money for the next five to 10 years. I remember that we closed one council meeting after five minutes because there was no point in listening to them — they had nothing new to tell us since the previous year.

5.30 pm

That is how bad it was. Things are slightly better now, because they understand the concerns of the west of the Province, but we could be debating the same issue in two or three years’ time and still have no real resources to show for it.

Mr Bradley: I congratulate the Minister on the presentation of the Estimates, and I welcome the increase in the funding for the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. However, there would be something wrong if, as elected representatives, we did not seek a little more.

What percentage of the estimated £223 million will make its way directly to the farming community? I hope that that is not an unreasonable question. I would also like to say, following on from what the Chairperson of the Agriculture Committee said, that it is my party’s view that an early retirement scheme would be beneficial to the industry. Such a scheme, combined with a newcomer scheme, would have been welcome, but we may, regrettably, have to wait for at least another year. I hope that the Minister will take note for next year and put that near the top of his agenda. The Minister has earmarked £8.6 million for rural development. That amount will not create the desired vibrancy in rural areas. Therefore it is important that as much of that sum as possible reaches the people.

I acknowledge the efforts made by the Minister to help the agriculture industry, and I congratulate him on the Estimates. No doubt, he has burned the midnight oil in preparing the paper. Will he give an assurance that the spending of the £223 million will be closely monitored

to ensure that every available penny reaches the farming community?

Mr Gibson: I come at the Budget speech today from a somewhat different angle. I was hopeful about the Budget; it is our first real attempt to assess our needs.

I want to put the case for the west of the Province. We have suffered a serious battering from bomb and bullet that has torn our social infrastructure apart. The Orange halls that were once community centres for the rural Protestant population have been neglected because of intimidation and other forms of discrimination. The halls are in a state ranging from good to very basic, but they are still part of the social infrastructure. If that community is to re-emerge as an active part of the west Tyrone community, it must be helped to develop and renew its social infrastructure.

Removing the rates from Orange halls would involve little effort, but it would help. Parochial halls, church halls and community halls are not rated, but they serve the same purposes as small rural Orange halls. The Orange halls are social centres for the local Protestant community but must pay rates. The cost of one cross-border conference would cover it. The Minister should consider that only a minor change to the legislation would be needed and that only a small amount of money would be lost by removing the rates. That would be a start to rebuilding the Protestant community’s infrastructure and would encourage those people to recommence active social life.

I also suggest that in the whole budgetary allowance, greater consideration should be given to victims. I am not talking just about the Omagh bomb. I am talking about the 97 people who were murdered in my constituency before the Omagh bomb. These are the people who, over 30 years, have suffered deep-seated physical, psychological and mental disabilities. Homes have been decimated. I would have thought that we would have shown reconciliation in this Budget by demonstrating that there was going to be a willingness and a helpfulness to the community that has suffered so much.

I am appealing today to the Minister to take on board those very human aspects of healing and reconciling those in the west of the Province who have suffered because of their remoteness and their religious affiliation. Their social infrastructure has to be activated and redeveloped to bring it up to modern needs and requirements.

I agree with William Hay that it did not matter how much the Minister announced. I thoroughly congratulate the Minister on presenting this Budget, with the increases therein. But let me take you to seven of my constituents who are waiting for heart bypasses — those operations that cast gloom over a family. Take a farmer who has been told some weeks ago that his condition is such that they will not allow him out of hospital. Priorities come into play. Finance comes into play. The man is sent home,

and he is still at home, waiting for a call. It is to be hoped that he will get someone who has either dropped out of the queue, or who has died while still on the waiting list.

That is the reality of our provision at this time. I can think of seven others in my constituency about whom I have written to the Department of Health, asking that special consideration be given to them. They are the breadwinners of their families, with the whole family waiting in fear, trembling and desperation.

Budgetary consent is something that has to be examined. Where are our priorities? I think of those who are waiting for hip replacements and those who are struggling to get money to go into the private sector to be relieved of the serious agony of a hip joint replacement. I am told that there is a marketplace that ranges from £6,000 in the Royal Victoria Hospital to £2,000 in Letterkenny. There is something seriously wrong with our system when people are forced, despite having paid every required contribution to the Health Service, to go to their own private financial resources. This Budget does need examination.

I will move on to the area of rural proofing, which we were assured would take place. This Budget has not indicated how we are going to rural proof. How do you rural proof to give equality of opportunity to the people of my constituency as well as those who live in the more wealthy, opulent Strangford area? This Budget has to take consideration of Government policy statements. If the Government statements do not measure up — *[Interruption]*.

Mr Shannon: It was the voice from Strangford.

Mr Gibson: The voice from Strangford was just trying to compete with me.

The roads issue has already been very well dealt with, but I want to make another plea, because the Minister and the finance people have been good — *[Interruption]*.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I must insist that this does not happen again.

Mr Gibson: I also insist that it be switched off, because I am speaking.

We have £20 million for the A5, but we have the worse problem of getting to the A5 on class B roads. Our roads are outworn. I am sure that the Minister is fed up hearing this from west Tyrone and the west of the Province, but the roads are rugged and outworn.

Yesterday evening I went to look at Oldcastle Road outside Newtownstewart. The last time I was on it, it was like a road into a quarry. The best they could do was darn the road, but the road has often been darned. I could take Members through Omagh and along the Hospital Road and the Derry Road, two arterial routes through the largest town in the west of the Province — but they are like test tracks for a Sherman tank. The surface has been rutted, relaid and re-piped — everything has been done to it. Driving on it now is like spending an hour on the bumper cars at Bundoran.

Serious consideration needs to be given to us. We do not have railways or airports; we have only one infrastructure — a roads system, and it is a terrible one. The question has been asked “Is it worn beyond repair?”. It is now becoming an argument about value for money. A little repair over many years would have prevented the massive capital input that is now needed to bring the roads up to standard. Even if the Minister were to pour in millions of pounds per year, the contractors would probably be working and charging double the price because they could not keep up with the amount of work that needs to be done.

We have a desperate problem and, as my Colleague William Hay has suggested, alternative forms of financing our infrastructure must be sought and found, because we cannot go on living in a state of desperation. There is supposed to be a normal standard, but our roads are abnormal.

Finally — and I know that our time is nearly up — I want to deal with education and rural proofing. Rural schools are still a central part of our community, and there is always a push for rationalisation and great concern about viable numbers. However, other countries like Belgium and Holland have proved that you do not need to have such equations of numbers. They deliver a very good education system — in fact, one that is suspected to be better than ours at primary level — yet they can retain a rural school infrastructure. By clustering the resources and combining a number of other qualities of the provision of teaching staff, rural schools can be retained. However, no research has been done on that, and there is no indication in the Estimates that any research money is going to be put into that area.

If the Assembly is serious about the Budget proposals, there are areas of concern that need to be given priority. I appeal to the Minister to prioritise in order to solve some of the desperate rural problems.

5.45 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: The sitting must finish at 6.00 pm. Does that give the Minister sufficient time to give the House a sketchy version of his winding-up speech? If not, the House will adjourn until tomorrow.

Mr Tierney: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Standing Orders state that the sitting can carry on until 6.00 pm. If the Minister is not finished his winding-up speech by then, he can do so tomorrow.

Mr Durkan: I will endeavour to respond to the debate, and I hope that I will not need much time tomorrow. When I opened the debate I was looking forward to a responsible discussion of the Supply resolution, and that has been achieved. The contributions have ranged widely, although not as widely as some previous contributions have, and Members' points have been made clearly and forcefully. I have noted each of the points, and if I am

not able to address them all, I will follow them up and reflect further.

The motion before the House is the basis upon which the legislature, in the form of the Assembly, authorises the spending of Departments, the Assembly, the Northern Ireland Audit Office and other bodies to enable them to carry out their functions. That is one of the Assembly's most fundamental responsibilities. It involves the authorisation of expenditure and, importantly, it holds Departments to account as they seek to deliver on their Programme for Government priorities. I accept that time is limited, so if I leave out some significant challenges that have been made to me, it will have been conveniently so.

Mr Molloy, Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel, raised some questions about the Budget consultation — and I appreciate that Mr Molloy had to leave the House to attend a council annual general meeting at 7.00 pm. The Executive are committed to providing Committees with a constructive role in the development of the Budget for 2002-03. That is reflected in the proposals that have been set out for the Budget timetable, which I presented in a previous statement.

The Department has tried to deliver on the main aim as set out by the Committee for Finance and Personnel last year. It had concerns about the time available to consider the Budget, and we were keen to ensure that we would be able to take the Budget as soon as possible after the summer recess. To facilitate that, the Department of Finance and Personnel has today made the position reports available to the Committee Chairpersons, through the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. Those reports will not only inform the Chairpersons of the Executive's consideration of the work in relation to the Programme for Government but also of the work relating to the draft Budget.

I assure the House, and particularly the Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel, that those position reports were only made available to Ministers in the middle of last week. Therefore, there has been no question of trying to pre-cook things separately through the Executive in ways that deny Committees anything.

The position reports that were made available to Committees today reflect the same information that went to the Ministers last week — bids for next year, for instance. Therefore information is not being withheld from Members in the way that has been suggested. Members will be able to discuss further issues relating to the future process when I make a pre-Budget statement tomorrow, after which they will be free to ask questions about next year's Budget, and also as the Department takes forward the work with the Committee for Finance and Personnel.

Many of the points raised have involved people seeking increases in various budget lines and emphasising the needs of particular sectors or particular localities. Many of those issues will be more pertinent to the consideration

of next year's Budget, and the possible adjustments to the Programme for Government, than to the Supply resolution or the Budget Bill per se.

I remind Members that we are dealing with the second instalment — the major and final instalment — of the Budget for this year. The figures that are being referred to today, and the Estimates that were laid in the Assembly on 11 June, are figures that derive from the Budget. I have explained why some of the figures are not in exact accord with the Budget because of the nature of the Estimates in changing over to resource accounting and budgeting. Dr Paisley reflected on that in a point that arose in exchanges between his Committee and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Members have raised a number of questions. Mr Shannon, Mr Hay, Mr Hussey and Mr Gibson all raised issues about the roads budget. Some of the questions were about roads in particular localities, such as the Ards Peninsula, west Tyrone and the western area in general. I want to emphasise that the Budget that we adopted did commit new resources to roads. It also committed new resources to other significant areas of the Department for Regional Development's programme.

We are conscious of the historic underfunding that there has been in relation to infrastructure. The moneys that we made available in the Budget were further supplemented by allocations from the Executive programme funds and infrastructure fund.

In some areas, people are pressing for further attention to be given to maintenance and capital investment in roads. Those will be relevant issues for people to pursue and take up in the context of the preparatory work for next year's Budget and the Programme for Government. If Members have particular concerns about the relative priorities within the existing roads budget, those can be taken up with the Minister and the Department for Regional Development, as prioritisation within the budget falls to that Department.

I would like to make a similar point in relation to some of the questions that were raised about education. Members have emphasised the importance of ensuring adequate resources for schools. The Executive, the Minister of Education and I have made it clear that we want to make sure that we improve our school stock and the performance of our schools. We want to do that with proper investment, both in the education programme and in the schools capital programme. We have shown that in the previous Budget, again supplemented by the allocations from the Executive programme funds.

I stress to Members that I have noted the insinuation that there is some discrimination being practised either by the Executive or by the Minister of Education in relation to the schools' budget. I reject any such insinuation. If Members believe that any measure being pursued on behalf of this Assembly by any Department raises issues

in relation to equality considerations, there are procedures that can be invoked on that. No one has ever invoked any of those procedures. People have traded on all sorts of insinuations. I stated in the House previously, when this question arose in the context of the Executive programme funds, that allocations are made on the basis of educational need.

The readiness of projects can also be relevant when it comes to spending money. It would not make sense to allocate money to projects not ready to make use of it. The information shows that the allocations are being made fairly and properly.

The question was asked as to what proportion of the agriculture spend will go to farmers. A significant proportion of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's Estimate will benefit farmers directly. In "Resources, Grants", £170 million is for subsidy payments direct to farmers under the common agriculture policy. Additionally, there is an allocation of £14 million for agrienvironment schemes. In "Resources, Other Current", there is an allocation of £12 million for animal disease compensation. A substantial proportion of the "Resources, Administration" total of £117 million reflects the cost of departmental staff carrying out essential work for the operation of the industry. This includes statutory and regulatory inspections and testing, the reduction of animal disease levels, ensuring access to EU funds and high-quality education and advice.

Dr Birnie raised a number of concerns within the context of a broad welcome for our ability to conduct our Budget business in this way. I reassure Dr Birnie that the Executive do appreciate the significance that many Members — particularly the members of his Committee — attach to improving our performance in relation to basic adult skills, especially numeracy and literacy. We have been able to make some moves in that direction, not least in the context of the Executive programme funds. As regards further improvements, I refer Dr Birnie to the preparatory work in the context of next year's Budget and Programme for Government.

Ms Lewsley stressed the need for us to look at efficiency, not just at the money that is becoming available for the Budget. Committees in particular — and the Assembly in general — need to make sure that we are not just watching the bids but overseeing the spending in a sound and proper way. Ms Lewsley referred to the fact that we have to try to find additional means to supplement our expenditure and ways of improving delivery in order to release other resources. The same point was made by Mr Hay when he emphasised the need to add to the scope that we have for improving the levels of money available for public services and for important capital programmes. Mr Hay and Mr Gibson welcomed the increases available in this Budget. I also welcome

those increases, and that is why I have always voted for this Budget. However, some people who have welcomed the increases that are reflected in today's motion have not always voted for the Budget the whole way down the line.

When looking at areas of additional resources there is no simple solution. We cannot take an "over the rainbow" approach to the question of the Barnett formula. Dr Birnie's cautious words were correct in that we face difficult issues in relation to the Barnett formula. We do have some hard questions to put to the Treasury, but hard questions will also be put to us, and not just by the Treasury but by a range of other regional and national interests.

We must not believe that there is a magic bullet out there as far as the Barnett formula or finding additional moneys are concerned. Some of the ideas being suggested as magic bullets, such as the setting up of some type of bond, would not be easy to implement, because Treasury rules would count those as spending, and they would be scored against the departmental expenditure limits. It would not give us any additional public spending.

The time has beaten me. I hope that I have responded to most of the issues raised by Members. Any individual points not addressed in my general response will be followed up directly or will be brought to the attention of the Minister concerned.

6.00 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: I have looked up the Standing Order, and as long as I am on my feet, calling for a Division, we can go on for a few minutes after 6.00 pm. I must remind everyone that the Supply resolution motion is subject to section 63 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. This means that it has to be agreed on a cross-community basis. When I put the question, both sides of the Chamber should reply.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That this Assembly approves that a sum not exceeding £4,679,167,000 be granted out of the Consolidated Fund for or towards defraying the charges for Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, and the Office for the Regulation of Electricity and Gas for the year ending 31 March 2002 and that resources, not exceeding £5,021,262,000, be authorised for use by Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, and the Office for the Regulation of Electricity and Gas for the year ending 31 March 2002 as summarised for each Department or other public body in columns 3(a) and 3(b) of Table 1.3 in the volume of the Northern Ireland Estimates 2001–02 that was laid before the Assembly on 11 June 2001.

Adjourned at 6.01 pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 19 June 2001

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

PRE-BUDGET STATEMENT

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of Finance and Personnel that he wishes to make a statement on issues affecting budgetary planning and preparation for the financial year 2002-03.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):

The First Minister and the Deputy First Minister have already outlined the considerations that affect our approach to the preparation of Programme for Government proposals for 2002-03 in their letter to the Chairpersons of the Assembly Committees. The position report attached to their letter is the joint responsibility of the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister and the Department of Finance and Personnel. I shall complement what they say by covering the financial considerations in some more detail and emphasising some of the main points that will affect our public expenditure planning for the next year.

In the letter from the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, especially the attached position report, and in this statement, the Executive seek to provide a basis for the Assembly's consideration of the Programme for Government and the Budget for 2002-03. I particularly want to emphasise that our scrutiny needs to cover the full range of policy areas and actions in the public service. We must look at what is provided from the expenditure for which we are responsible. That means that our focus cannot be solely, or even mainly, on the bids that Departments have lodged for additional resources. We must look at the outputs that are being obtained to be sure that they are the best way to fulfil the Department's objectives.

We need indicators of how Departments' plans are progressing. We need a public service planning process, not an exercise in tallying up bids for more.

I emphasise that the development of priorities and actions in the Programme for Government must be the guide to our work on financial allocations. We need to avoid being drawn to focus mainly on financial pressures. We can ensure that we make a difference if we focus on

our policy objectives and priorities. Those are set out in the Programme for Government section of the position report. I encourage all Committees and Members to take the opportunity to respond to the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister on that aspect of the work. The Programme for Government must guide the Budget, and shape our programmes and actions to emphasise the devolution difference.

Our approach this year to financial issues reflects the fact that this cycle is transitional between two Treasury spending reviews. Spending review 2000 gave us substantial increased expenditure as a consequence of the major increases announced by the Chancellor last July. Next year, the spending review 2002 will see the completion of the transition to resource accounting and budgeting with, for the first time, a need to take direct account of non-cash items in the spending plans. That will have profound and important consequences for us well above the level of technical financial analysis. In the longer term it could affect our spending power quite significantly.

At this stage of the cycle the total resources available to the Executive are fixed. Following last year's spending review, and after the addition of £18 million a year in the Chancellor's March Budget, we have a departmental expenditure limit (DEL) for 2002-03 of £6,091 million. That is an increase of 5.8% over the current year. The statement and the position report concentrate mainly on the expenditure in the DEL. However, the Budget will also include coverage of the main aspects of spending, which are treated as annually managed expenditure (AME).

We have not yet allocated the £18 million that was added to our DEL in March 2001. That represents a small amount of unallocated resource. Therefore we are in a very different context by comparison with the situation during last year's spending review. Last year's addition to our provision for 2002-03 through the Barnett formula was £580 million. A large proportion of that was required to fund ongoing services. We also held some of it back to create the Executive programme funds, which are now progressing well. However, we did not keep a general contingency reserve.

As Members are aware, there is a pattern of changes in departmental estimating. Therefore, resources tend to become available for reallocation through our monitoring system. In that context, holding unallocated provision has not been necessary and may have been unhelpful.

I emphasise that there is fast growth in our spending trends at present. As a consequence of the decisions announced by the Chancellor last year, the growth rate of spending here is as rapid, in real terms, as at any time in recent years, and it is in considerable contrast to the pattern for most of the 1990s. In that respect the context is favourable. Although we dislike the fact that the Barnett formula does not give us as high a rate of growth as that

available for comparable services in England, we have still gained substantial increases in real spending power.

This is not an appropriate time for substantial discussion or analysis of the Barnett formula. However, I shall comment briefly on that important subject. We can establish that Barnett causes us difficulties on major services such as health and education, where the growth of spending has been rapid and where our needs are significant.

I have said before that we must not underestimate the great difficulty of making progress on improving the Barnett formula. We have to face the fact that our spending is high. On some services, as a result of historic patterns and past priorities, it is very high compared with that in England, Scotland and Wales. There are also profound differences in the amounts that are raised locally through the rates and in the funding of water and sewerage services. From an English point of view, we are regarded as very well funded. While we have a case to make, especially over capital assets and the future treatment of the Barnett formula under resource accounting and budgeting, we have to face the fact that making that case on Barnett will be difficult. It certainly will not lead to rapid change, and for the foreseeable future we shall have to work within the totals fixed by the current approach.

Against that background, the position report sent to Members highlights issues to be addressed as we develop the Programme for Government and the Budget for 2002-03. The Executive are determined to make a difference through the services and policies for which we are responsible. We want to take the opportunities to break away from approaches that are no longer effective and relevant to the Northern Ireland's best interests.

Spending pressures are, not surprisingly, intensified, despite the relatively favourable conditions presented by a rising trend in real spending terms, and there are significant backlogs of investment and great demands on some programmes. For that reason, we have emphasised in the position report the need to consider seriously and extensively the scope for reprioritising spending. We must focus more carefully and effectively on the Administration's top priorities, the region's most strategic requirements and the community's most pressing needs.

Efficiency must be improved. Section 2 of the position report highlights a range of activities that could ensure better use of resources. We must decide how to deal with public-sector pay, which is a major driver of our spending, and explore how private-sector finance and expertise can contribute to the delivery of services.

Some spending issues highlighted by Departments must be thought about very carefully in preparation for the Executive's Budget deliberations in September. It is important to focus on issues and not only on bids. The value of programmes should be considered rather than additional money simply being sought. We must ask "Why?" until we are satisfied or see what alternatives

could be adopted. Resource accounting and budgeting should help to break old patterns and promote our priorities.

I emphasise again, however, that we work within a fixed total. There are many substantial demands on future spending power, and resources could be put to a host of useful and desirable purposes. The plain fact is that the majority of pressures will have to be absorbed through prioritisation in individual Departments' budgets. The indicative figures set for 2002-03 in last year's Budget can be changed at departmental level if the Executive can agree a new pattern. However, the process is about total public expenditure plans — how best to use the money we have to fulfil the Programme for Government — and not only the bids.

It is profoundly important that, as we go through the process, we remember that what is vital is what we can produce and deliver for the services for which we are responsible. All services, to one degree or another, benefit everyone, and that should influence our judgements.

10.45 am

All of us, whether we are Ministers, Committee Chairpersons or other Members, need to seek a combination of spending plans that can best fulfil the new institutions' responsibilities. That means that we must look carefully at the contribution that each Department, North/South body and service can make to the wider objectives. The needs of big programmes can easily consume substantial resources. We also need to bear in mind the opportunities for benefit through other activities, while finding the balance between that consideration and the need to ensure that the resources are well spent.

We shall need to reflect that the indicative figures, as set out in December 2000's Budget, assumed a level of revenue from the regional rate that depended on the increases that were planned at that time. Lower increases will constrain spending provision; indeed, the lower increases that were approved earlier this year for 2001-02 will have a knock-on effect. That point is drawn out in the position report, and it would be helpful if the Assembly and its Committees could address it carefully.

This is serious and difficult business. It is at the heart of the nature of our role and responsibilities as a devolved Administration. With spending rising substantially in last year's cycle, it was possible to give relatively generous and substantial allocations to many spending programmes. The key point this year is that those allocations have continued in large measure across many programmes, as is shown in the indicative allocations for 2002-03 that were published in last year's Budget.

This is a profound time for agriculture and rural development. The foot-and-mouth disease crisis has made it all the more important that the vision group's work on the future of the industry addresses structural and

strategic issues. Our per capita spending is high compared with that in England. That is to be expected, given the much greater significance of the agriculture sector to our economy. Much of that is driven by EU obligations on member states on matters such as animal health. We must think carefully about how the agriculture budget can best be deployed and about what changes may be necessary and appropriate.

There are new opportunities to make a difference and benefit the public through the creative application of ideas in the culture, arts and leisure sector. There are also significant spending pressures, not least from the issue of librarians' pay.

The education sector is greatly significant for all concerned. The indicative figures do not show a sufficient uplift to cover some basic costs when compared to 2001-02. Therefore it is obvious that the indicative figures must be re-examined. Moreover, we must think carefully about the longer-term implications of the review of post-primary education. As the review body's recommendations are not yet available, we cannot at present gauge the extent to which that issue will affect our spending plans for 2002-03. However, it must be borne in mind as we move forward.

We also want to ensure that the development of a common local management of schools (LMS) formula for all schools, which is important in the interests of equality and equity of treatment, is addressed. The education sector, like several others, faces major infrastructure issues. The Minister of Education has announced a balanced programme of conventional capital procurement and exploration of a public-private partnership approach for several important projects. Those and other issues identified in the position report must be considered seriously as we proceed.

The major developments in the enterprise, trade and investment sector that flow from strategic thinking about the future of the Northern Ireland economy are mainly for consideration in the context of the Executive programme funds. We are carefully considering the issues of infrastructure development for energy and telecommunications. We also want to look carefully at the effectiveness of spending on industrial support and industrial derating to ensure that spending on that sector is as effective as possible. That is one of our needs and effectiveness evaluations.

The main spending issues for my Department concern Government office accommodation and ensuring that the services that the Department of Finance and Personnel provides to Ministers, the Executive, the Assembly and the public are based on the best possible analysis and evidence. Alongside the Economic Policy Unit, it is important that we lead the way in improving the effectiveness of spending. Some investment in that is likely to yield worthwhile returns by improving the way spending is used. We also

want to ensure that the procurement review produces results that are fully effective in pursuit of our economic and social objectives.

The 2000 Budget has provided significant resources for new student support measures to cater for the high demand for participation in post-16 and higher education. The needs and effectiveness evaluation, which is currently considering training and vocational education needs, will provide a better analysis of relative spending levels on those services.

The Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment has identified several spending issues. In the area of training and employment, the uptake for the preparation for work programmes and community projects has been greater than expected. In higher and further education, pressures are expected because of the need to meet higher-than-planned pay settlements for further education lecturers and non-industrial staff, and to adapt buildings to comply with disability legislation. Savings are expected, however, in the Springvale project.

The demands and pressures on the Health Service remain significant. Extensive work is being undertaken at present by nine different working groups to analyse the need for and effectiveness of health and social care spending here. We want to be able to make the best possible analytical comparisons with other countries and regions. Those will make a major contribution to the debate that we need to have on the application of the Barnett formula.

In the meantime, there are genuine pressures on the Health Service because of unmet need and rising demand, as well as the regular introduction of new and higher clinical standards. As is the case throughout the world, expectations of health services are rising significantly. The health sector is, by a considerable margin, our largest spending programme, and it is therefore all the more important that the resources available are used as effectively as possible.

Some hard choices have already been made, and we must be realistic about what efficiency gains are achievable. However, it is vital that we make use of that spending in the best possible way. I expect that the Assembly will sometimes set aside purely local considerations in order to ensure that resources are used in the best way from the point of view of the entire region. I stress that that includes equity of treatment for all parts of the region, and that calls for careful analysis of the relevant indicators so that those decisions can be taken objectively. We simply cannot afford not to do that.

The Department of the Environment received significant increased spending power in 2001-02 to make up for past underinvestment in the pursuit of environmental obligations under European Directives. That programme must continue, although again we need to ensure that available resources are used as effectively and carefully

as possible. Demands have been made for grants for historic buildings, which have recently been the subject of moratoria. However, it will be as important to analyse needs and effectiveness in that sector as it is in any other as the Executive move towards public spending decisions.

The Department for Regional Development faces a range of difficult infrastructure issues. Last year, we took the first step in responding to the issues of rail safety that were highlighted in the A D Little Report following the report of the railways task force. The Executive programme fund allocations included some important new road schemes. We have confirmed the growth in spending on investment in the water and sewerage infrastructure. We have that spending rolled forward into future years so that means we cannot use that money for other spending programmes.

In England, the consumer pays directly for the investment programmes for the water and sewerage service providers. Therefore, funds cannot be read across through the Barnett formula for that sector.

We must consider what steps might be required in public transport beyond the rail safety expenditure that has already been approved. The scale of the bids received from the Department for Regional Development is described as very high; it is beyond what can be afforded through available resources for 2002-03. However, it is important that we think about those profound issues so that they can be addressed in the long term.

The Department for Social Development has registered some important issues about fuel poverty and housing that must be considered carefully. The Executive are analysing the need for and effectiveness of current spending in five areas, while giving due regard to considerations of New TSN and equality of opportunity. Housing is one of those areas.

Another key area for the Department for Social Development is the development of a new regeneration strategy for Belfast. The Department is consulting with relevant organisations and groups in the public, community, voluntary and private sectors in that regard. Among the Department's other priorities is the welfare modernisation programme, for which significant provision was made in the last year's Budget. The programme will secure major improvements to the social security system with the key aim of providing work for those who can work, and support for those who cannot.

The Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister has important responsibilities for the modernisation programme of the Executive's Departments as a whole, and for that of a range of central co-ordination and secretariat functions that are vital to the operation of the new institutions. Our spending plans must reflect recognition of that, as we cannot advance the development of the agreement and the servicing of the devolved

Administration without also willing the means in OFMDFM and other Departments.

Those are only a few of the issues that we must address in the forthcoming Budget round. The situation is covered much more fully in the position report. Some of the work that we shall carry out from now until December will be relevant, not just to 2002-03 but to the years ahead.

From early next year, we shall be engaged in a full-scale spending review with the Treasury, and we shall try to resolve how the Barnett formula will be applied to resource accounting and budgeting. There has been concern about the timetable for that process. In my statement of 29 May, I emphasised that there is scope for considerable discussion despite inevitable constraints on the timetables. We have asked for preliminary views to be brought to us quickly, but that is because the Assembly has asked for the Budget to be presented earlier than it was last year. We could provide longer for the initial stage of comment if the Assembly could wait until later in the autumn to have the Executive's Budget proposals. However, that would not be the best way to proceed.

I accept that there is room for more improvement by way of pre-Budget input from Committees, but I would also like to point out that Committees are free to query their Department's existing spending priorities or propose new ones. Neither my Department nor I wish to inhibit our Committees' scrutiny of their respective Department's spending, or the exercise of their policy development role.

We must also bear in mind the Executive's key responsibilities and the need to ensure that the Programme for Government drives the Budget as it should. Together with all Departments and Committees, and in time for next year's cycle, we need to establish arrangements that ensure full dialogue on the spending plans for all programmes and how they relate to the Programme for Government. Committees can and should be able to influence the approach that their Department is taking to the Programme for Government and Budget work.

11.00 am

I hope that all Committees and Members will now be able to play an important role during this cycle and as the process progresses. This is a preparatory stage, but the more important stage will begin after the Executive make specific proposals for the 2002-03 Budget in September. I hope that, as a result of the position report, and the deliberations of the weeks and months to come, everyone concerned will be well prepared by that stage and there can be constructive and positive engagement.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Mr Leslie): I thank the Minister for his detailed statement, which contained some interesting

observations. I note, in particular, his comments on public sector pay, which is a major driver of our spending. Will he also be examining the overall size of the public sector — a matter about which I have tackled him before — to check whether there is capacity to reduce the overall size of this bill?

He laid considerable emphasis on the importance of finding other means of paying the bills. In particular, the Minister made it clear that there are insufficient existing resources to address the infrastructure deficit faced by the Department for Regional Development. Has he considered pursuing other means of raising revenue, such as tolling, congestion charging or water rates, to address the deficit in a timely manner? Does he agree that the tough decision-making and the potential for short-term unpopularity that such responsibility entails are not characteristics normally associated with the party responsible for that Department?

Mr Durkan: The scale and scope of the public sector are relevant considerations in the overall review of public administration. They are also relevant to our financial planning, because we want to ensure that we are not spending money on Government activities that do not benefit our citizens. We are therefore happy to carry out the work constructively and based on policy.

We want to ensure that the Assembly and the public have a realistic understanding of the resources that we have available to fund services. Under the Barnett formula we get no money for water and sewerage, because there is no public expenditure on such infrastructure across the water. Therefore we can not be given a Barnett consequential. We must find the public expenditure needed to fund water and sewerage, and the Executive recognise that there has been historic underinvestment that needs to be remedied.

We must find the resources needed to fund this infrastructure out of funds that are essentially intended to provide other services. Our only means of supplementing the Barnett formula moneys is through the rates. The Assembly has already indicated that there are sensitivities about seeking increases in rate revenue to support our expenditure in several areas. In the context of the rating review, we have to look at alternatives while recasting the rating policy itself. We must find other ways to raise funds to support much-needed investment in services. It will be for the Department responsible for each service, rather than the Minister of Finance and Personnel, to explore the possibility of imposing charges or taxes to fund that provision.

Mr Leslie is correct to acknowledge that we must be realistic and recognise that those issues must be dealt with.

If we are not prepared to ask ourselves those questions, we shall find in any attempt to review the Barnett formula that the Treasury will be asking us those questions, perhaps in more uncomfortable terms.

Ms Lewsley: I add to Mr Leslie's welcome of the Minister's statement. It is important that the Budget flows from the Programme for Government. Can the Minister give details as to when the needs and effectiveness reviews will be complete? If they are not ready in time for the work on this year's Budget, will Ministers be encouraged to rigorously interrogate their Departments to ensure that wasteful bureaucracy is removed, and that the structures and quangos developed under direct rule are tested to see whether they meet the needs of Northern Ireland?

Mr Durkan: The needs and effectiveness reviews to which Patricia Lewsley referred are an important tool to help to identify all our requirements and to ascertain the degree to which we are using our resources to best effect. The initial five reviews are under way, and we expect to see some preliminary results on relative needs soon. The work on effectiveness will necessarily take longer, but I hope that useable results will emerge to inform the Budget exercise.

The Executive expect each Department to conduct its business with the greatest possible efficiency, and the review of public administration to which we are committed will look thoroughly at opportunities for improving the delivery of public services. I emphasise that each Minister should be a value-for-money Minister. I also remind Committees, in the context of the position reports going to the Committees, that each Committee should be a value-for-money Committee. Patricia Lewsley mentioned the role of Ministers; Committees should also interrogate Departments on their spending.

Mr Kane: Will the Minister take on board concerns and allocate significant additional funding to the Health Service, the morale and staffing levels of which seem to be at an all-time low? Moreover, will finance be made available to revitalise the rural economy following the foot-and-mouth disease crisis?

Mr Durkan: I cannot pre-empt the decisions that the Executive will take on the Budget. The fact that we are making a pre-Budget statement and making available the position report, which covers the pressures facing all Departments, means that the Assembly and its Committees have a chance to address issues such as those that Gardiner Kane has mentioned.

I accept, as I said in my statement, that there are serious pressures on the Health Service. However, there have also been significant increases in expenditure. The Executive made more money available for Health Service expenditure from the additional resources that we got from the Chancellor's spending review than would have been the Barnett consequential for health. We therefore do recognise the priority attaching to the Health Service. We also recognise that even those significant allocations that we could make will not always enable us to keep pace with all the pressures that arise. There are technological costs

and implications for services, some structural changes and the service pressures through patient and client demand.

On the rural economy, the Executive are committed to rural proofing right across their programme. In relation to support for the rural economy, we should be thinking of more than just one or two particular budget lines. We should be trying to make sure that all Departments bend and lend their programmes to ensure that the rural community is supported in every possible way. It is not a matter of getting a single turn out of a single budget.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I too thank the Minister for his comprehensive statement. The Minister reiterated that this is not the time to further analyse the entire Barnett formula.

I want to make the point again that I would be more content if I were assured of the Executive's commitment to securing the necessary changes to the Barnett formula to take into account the gross underfunding that a large number of our services have endured for many years.

Secondly, the Minister will be aware that it is important to build on the relationships between himself, the Department and the Committee. The Minister will know that Members have varying degrees of satisfaction, and perhaps even dissatisfaction, with the degree of timely consultation with, and scrutiny by, the Finance and Personnel Committee of financial matters in the Assembly.

Finally, the Minister has dealt with the need for such proper scrutiny in his speech. However, Departments must retain responsibility but that does not absolve the Committees. That is right, and I thank the Minister for pointing that out. There is a significant onus on the Department to ensure that there is proper sequencing of the deliveries throughout the financial year. The Department can and should lead the way. As I said, that does not remove responsibility from the Committees to do their job of scrutinising or coming forward with their own proposals, but the Minister and his Department are central to the Executive's financial operation.

Mr Durkan: I want to reply to several of Mr Maskey's points. I welcome his continued interest in the need for us to try to challenge and change the Barnett formula. We must raise issues that relate to the Barnett formula, not only because of the implications that the ongoing taper on our expenditure increases have for some of our key service programmes, but because of the implications of resource accounting and budgeting.

We must also deal with issues to do with our capital assets in the public sector such as water, sewerage and roads. Across the water, local authorities usually deal with those issues, so they do not count, therefore, in the departmental expenditure limit (DEL), unlike here. That not only concerns the amounts made available to us through the Barnett formula, but what capital charges are counted in the ambit of the DEL. The Executive are

committed to trying to pursue those questions, and the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister are especially committed to playing a strong striker role as they represent the Administration and the region.

I acknowledge that there have been frustrations and criticisms from members of the Finance and Personnel Committee and others about the flow, cycle and availability of information at different times. With this exercise, the statement that I made on 29 May that set out an approach to timetable, the pre-Budget statement now, and the position reports sent by the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to all Committee Chairpersons, we are trying to ensure that all Committees have an early input. I remind Members that the position reports that Committee Chairpersons received yesterday were received by Ministers only in the middle of last week. There has been no Executive consideration as such of those position reports, and no bids have been weeded or screened out. From the point of view of the Executive planning process, the Committees and their Chairpersons were furnished with information almost as soon as Executive members.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Dr Birnie): I thank the Minister for his statement. It is good to talk about those more strategic aspects of spending plans as early in the financial cycle as possible.

Will the Minister elaborate on two points that I found to be tantalising disclosures? The first concerned the needs and effectiveness evaluation relating to training and vocational education. This is the first occasion on which my Committee has been aware of that. I would be grateful for any further information, in particular on who will conduct that evaluation. External evaluation can achieve a more objective proofing of the standards of service delivery.

11.15 am

Secondly, can the Minister elaborate on

"the need to meet higher-than-planned pay settlements for further education lecturers"?

That could be good news for further education lecturers, who feel that their pay levels have decreased in comparison with pay levels for secondary teachers. What sort of pay settlement is envisaged for those staff?

Mr Durkan: I am surprised that the Committee for Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment was not aware of the needs and effectiveness evaluations, and I cannot understand how that has happened.

The Executive instituted an exercise that involved five needs and effectiveness evaluations, as mentioned in my statement, and that is one of them. It has been mentioned in various communications and also in the Chamber. In future, we must ensure that any such decisions are communicated to those people who have a direct interest.

The needs and effectiveness evaluations are being done for our own purposes. This is a significant programme with a large amount of expenditure involved. It is an important area as far as the Executive's priorities in the Programme for Government are concerned. We are also conscious that we might want to challenge — and be challenged — on some of those issues on any approach we make in relation to the Barnett formula. Like the other needs and effectiveness evaluations, it is there to assist the Executive and the region in ensuring that we have optimum public spending patterns and levels.

I want to be careful about singling out any one group on the subject of pay pressures. As well as the reference to further education lecturers, elsewhere in the statement I referred to public sector pay's being a significant driver of our spending. I do not want to speak out of turn and imply that any one group of staff in any service is a problem, or that its pay award may lead to pressures. I hope that all Committees will note that we face significant pressures on public sector pay; the uplifts on public sector pay consume considerable amounts of our available additional resources. That means that people who need increases in services are often not getting as much as they would like.

Mrs Courtney: I welcome the Minister's statement and recognise that his area of work is complex and important. The Assembly understands that our needs are many and varied, and that the resources received from the Treasury are insufficient to meet them. Consequently, can the Minister advise the Assembly what action he has initiated to identify alternative sources of funding to augment the Barnett-based allocations, and what actions will his fellow Ministers take to help to get a greater return from the resources that we have?

Mr Durkan: I agree with the Member that public finances can be complex, but we must never lose focus on the essentials, which are to obtain an appropriate share of the resources available and to use them effectively to meet our needs.

The Executive have made no secret of the fact that we believe that a better needs-based mechanism to replace the Barnett formula is required. We are pursuing that goal, as I have already indicated.

The Executive are also determined to make maximum use of the existing funding opportunities. We have set up several needs and effectiveness studies in key areas in order to better inform policy-making. We have also announced a high-powered working group that will look at the scope for using public-private partnerships to help deliver public services. My Executive Colleagues have pledged their full support for those initiatives.

Mr Poots: I note the Minister's comments that the Minister of Education has announced a balanced programme of conventional capital procurement and exploration of public-private partnerships. I assume that

Mr Durkan's view of a balanced programme relates to public-private partnerships as opposed to spending from the public purse, and that it does not include the two-to-one ratio of spending that the Minister of Education announced for maintained and controlled schools, which discriminated against the controlled sector.

There was some confusion last year as to whether Northern Ireland would benefit from the "Prescott package". Can the Minister confirm that we are entitled to our element under the Barnett formula, given the case of the London Underground and other circumstances that prevailed in the UK? If that will be the case, can the Minister assure us that the money will stay in the public transport sector?

Mr Durkan: I addressed Mr Poots's point about the balanced programme for education yesterday. The spending on schools' capital is properly needs-based, whether it is announced by the Minister of Education with respect to his Department's Budget allocation or by me on behalf of the Executive programme funds. Information on the working lists of projects awaiting investment has been furnished to Members who wished to see it. Decisions were properly needs-based.

If people are saying that we should only give equal amounts to school sectors regardless of the needs of particular schools, that could be discriminatory. We would be saying that we could not fund certain schools because they were in a particular sector, but that we would fund schools in another sector that had less need, or whose building project was less ready for funding.

I want to assure the House that there is no discrimination in those areas of spending. There are means available for Members to pursue issues for which they believe that equality implications arise. Members are not using those means but are continually reciting this criticism or allegation every time I make a statement on spending.

We received a Barnett share from the money announced in the "Prescott package". Large additions were made to road and rail in 2001-02 in the past year and in the Executive programme fund allocations. Although the money that we get through the Barnett formula derives from expenditure decisions across a range of programmes in England, we, as a devolved region, have discretion on how we should spend that money.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development (Mr Savage): I too welcome the Minister's comments. He mentioned that the agriculture sector is of much greater significance to our country than it is in England and that we need to think very carefully about how our Budget can best be deployed.

Does the Minister agree that following the foot-and-mouth disease crisis, which came hard on the heels of the BSE crisis and, effectively, a decade of

collapse in agriculture, that the time is right to restructure the agriculture sector? Everybody says that that needs to be done, and I moved a motion to that effect last December. Does the Minister agree that we should take this opportunity to try to restructure the agriculture sector, including fishing?

We have come through a crisis through which no other industry has come. My Colleague mentioned the pay rises to lecturers in further education colleges. We are not talking about a pay rise; we are talking about a survival package. Something has to be done. I hope that the Minister will take that on board. Those of us on the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee pride ourselves on the fact that agriculture is, as he said earlier, a value-for-money sector.

Mr R Hutchinson: The Member is making a speech.

Mr Savage: I hope that I work in the department of value for money, but this has to work two ways, and we need help.

I shall ask my question and shall come to my point. I do not need any help. — *[Interruption]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Durkan: Mr Savage has asked a number of questions and made some salient points about the pressures and difficulties facing agriculture — and not just the pressures from the immediate fallout and impact of foot-and-mouth disease, but some of the longer-term structural challenges.

This is an area in which I want to be careful. After all, we are at preparatory stage for the Budget, and I look forward, on the basis of Mr Savage's remarks, to the views and insights that will come from the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee on those matters. The Committee will help the Executive think through how best to support the sort of changes and developments that are needed for the long-term good of agriculture.

I want to be careful about taking up his invitation to make a specific call for restructuring, wholesale restructuring or whatever. Many people in agriculture might make a benign response to a call from him phrased in those terms, but they might not make such a benign response to a similar call from the Minister of Finance and Personnel. People tend to look negatively at any strategic analysis that we offer as a threat rather than as an encouragement.

I have shared this with you before, Mr Speaker: as Minister of Finance and Personnel, I do not suffer from depression, but I am a carrier, so I will be more than happy, as will the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and Executive Colleagues, to reflect on the sort of thinking that Mr Savage is sharing with us on behalf of the Committee.

Mr Bradley: I too welcome the Minister's statement and endorse the other comments made. Can the Minister confirm that more professional procurement can play an important role in generating value for money and helping to achieve the wider social and economic goals that will meet society's needs?

Mr Durkan: The procurement review implementation team, which was established in February 2001, is reviewing procurement policy and procedures with very much the purpose that Mr Bradley has referred to in mind. The findings of the initial review, which was conducted before devolution, indicated that, if we were to set similar targets to those set for Departments in Great Britain, we could achieve procurement savings of £30 million.

Such significant savings for a devolved Administration to administer and direct towards some of our spending priorities would be useful. The more efficient our procurement procedures are, the more value for money can be achieved, and, in turn, the more money can be allocated to other public service needs.

11.30 am

The review team has also been asked to identify the scope for using procurement to achieve local social and economic objectives. That is a fairly complex legal area, and I look forward to receiving the report from the review team.

Mr R Hutchinson: I thank the Minister for his — *[Interruption]*

I suppose that one has to take as much as one gives. I welcome the Minister's statement and the moneys set aside for the redevelopment of Belfast city. It is important that that should happen. However, does the Minister agree that there are several important provincial towns that also need investment? Some of those towns have been allowed to fall into a terrible state because of sectarian trouble, population movement or out-of-town shopping. Will the Minister assure the House that some consideration will be given to that?

Mr Durkan: Members have an exercise that allows them the opportunity in the Chamber — and particularly in the Committees — to raise and explore issues such as that which Roger Hutchinson mentioned. Today we are allowing for pre-Budget reflection and input from the Assembly and Committees.

The position report is reflecting issues concerning the Departments, issues that they have brought to the attention of the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister and the Department of Finance and Personnel relating to Programme for Government planning and Budget planning.

The references made to Belfast in the context of the Department for Social Development budget are clear. If Members wish to make further representations to the

Department for Social Development to apply similar attention in other towns, they are free to do so. It is not for me in any context — and certainly not in this preliminary pre-Budget context — to give definitive commitments of the nature that Mr Hutchinson has sought.

Mr McHugh: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I agree with much of the Minister's statement. However, my problem with previous statements was that they were vague in stating what might be spent in the next round in areas that we consider priorities, and with how we might approach that.

In Britain, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) has been removed. Will that impact upon the Assembly's views on how to prioritise spending for agriculture in our Budget? Will this perceived movement away from agriculture by the British Government impact on how the Executive might view priority spending for agriculture in the next round?

Mr Durkan: The Executive are alert to the importance of the agriculture sector in our economy and its importance to the whole region. The implications of the changes in departmental designations in Whitehall will not make any material difference to how we set our priorities.

It is for the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to determine what Departments we have and to designate their structures and titles. The move to a dedicated Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is supported by the Assembly. It is a Department that is working hard to serve the needs of its sector and one that is co-operating with the Committee.

The Executive will be as supportive and as responsive as possible to the needs and services that are represented in the work of all Departments, including the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. Changes in departmental designations will not materially affect the priority that we want to see accorded to agriculture, and the type of support and intervention that we want to undertake in agriculture.

It might make some difference at representational level. It might affect how well our needs are reflected at UK level when it comes to some EU considerations. There may be some change at representational level and in the European policy-influencing area, but not in our own priorities.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development (Mr Cobain): I want to raise a number of issues on behalf of the Social Development Committee. First, it is important to target social need. Housing is central to that. This year we shall spend less on housing than we did last year. Next year we shall spend less again. The Housing Executive has targeted north Belfast, citing it as having the worst housing conditions in western Europe and highlighting the need for £157 million over

the next eight years to tackle that. To date, the Executive have allocated £5 million, and if we continue at that rate, it will take 20 or 30 years to address that issue in north Belfast.

Secondly, there is the matter of rents. Last year's budget was based on an increase of twice the rate of inflation for rents. I benchmark that against targeting social need (TSN). People who live in the poorest sections of society, such as Housing Executive tenants on housing benefits, had their bathroom and kitchen replacement schemes cancelled. That is another first for targeting social need.

Fuel poverty issues that were agreed by the Executive affect a small portion of society. People who are over 60 and have a small income-related pension are not entitled to the fuel poverty entitlements. Similarly, most people who are under 60 and who have severe physical disabilities and those who are under 60 and have a small family are not entitled to the fuel poverty entitlements.

Roger Hutchinson raised an issue about the regeneration of towns and cities. We are spending less this year than we did last year, and according to the Budget we shall spend less next year than we did this year.

I ask the Minister to take on board the concerns of the Social Development Committee. Unless the Executive take those issues on board and allocates sufficient funds that will tackle some of those needs, we are in for a lively Budget debate in November.

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr Cobain for his warning and the points that he made. Our spending on housing was not reduced last year. We reversed a pattern and saw an increase in housing expenditure last year. The Executive, when budgeting for services for which charges are made, such as rents, will allocate moneys based on certain assumptions.

Those are the working assumptions on which the Executive allocates the money. I indicated at the draft Budget stage and at other points of consideration that, in relation to the Housing Executive budget, the Executive were working on the assumption of rent increases of GDP plus 2%. The Housing Executive was funded on that basis. However, it fell to the Minister and the Department to decide whether that would be the case in practice. The option to go for a lower rate increase of GDP plus 0.5% was taken, and that in turn meant that there would be less rental income and less money to spend on the housing programme. That was not the Executive's choice; it was the choice of the Department and the Minister concerned, and was made within their budget. The Committee for Social Development is free to engage the Minister on that issue in relation to further Budget planning.

Members referred to what was or was not in the statement, and I ask them to look at the overall position report. Mr Cobain stressed that the Executive will have

to take account of the needs that he referred to under the responsibilities of the Department for Social Development. I hope that all Committees will take account of the wider realities and pressures that the Executive face and the service issues that the Budget must meet. We cannot go on automatically increasing every single Budget line year on year. If we are serious about making a difference and about reprioritisation as a devolved Assembly, we must spend less on some Budget lines, either because success has been registered in meeting particular needs and overcoming problems or because there are other new needs that take greater priority. We cannot sustain increases in every single Budget line — we do not have the additional money to do that. We hope that all Committees will be realistic about that matter, as well as being assertive in the context of the services that they want to see bettered and protected.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development (Mr A Maginness): I welcome the Minister's statement. It has been both interesting and provocative. I note that he said that

"The scale of the bids received from the Department for Regional Development is described as very high; it is beyond what can be afforded through available resources for 2002-03."

As Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development I accept that. However, I re-emphasise that there has been a historic underfunding of the roads infrastructure, which has led to a serious deterioration in the standard of roads throughout Northern Ireland. There has also been a historic underfunding of water and sewerage, and underinvestment in public transport, and that has led to a serious situation. All three areas must be addressed, and, unfortunately, they must be addressed simultaneously. The high bids are not inflated artificially but reflect the growing need in our society for better roads, better water and better public transportation.

The Minister has rightly stated that there are profound questions on future funding for the Department for Regional Development. I ask the Minister to consider whether there are alternative sources of funding that he or his Department can envisage in the near future that would effectively address the needs mentioned and of which he is aware.

Mr Speaker: I ask all Members and the Minister to be as concise as possible. I have a substantial list of Members who wish to ask questions, but there are only 15 minutes left for them to do so.

11.45 am

Mr Durkan: I assure Mr Maginness that my reference to the scale of bids from the Department for Regional Development was not meant to imply that there were inflated bids. I reflected on the historical underfunding that exists there. We have consultations at Committee and Executive level, and it is important to hear the results of deliberations such as those from the Committee for

Regional Development on issues that are, as Mr Maginness acknowledges, profound.

If there has been historical underfunding, there is also current underfunding in the Northern Ireland budget at large, and we have to work with that reality. We need to look at issues that must be addressed to get more resources for certain services. That comes back to the issue about charges that was raised by Mr Leslie, in particular, for services for which we get no money from the Barnett formula. We get no money for water and sewerage from the Barnett formula, and we must fund those services out of whatever resources we have. We need to think about the degrees of priority that we accord to the needs that are registered. We shall try to take account of particular priorities and pressures that exist across all Departments, and we shall take the Committees' views into account. We ask the Committees to look not only at what needs more money, but at how to get more money.

My Department does not have a "magic bullet". Some people think that there are easy options, that it is just a matter of establishing a new super bond. Unfortunately, that would not help us under existing Treasury rules. We are governed by a departmental expenditure limit. As my officials point out, the departmental expenditure limit does exactly what it says: it limits the amount of money that Departments have to spend. Therefore, if we were to get resources by other means, we would still come up against that spending limit. That is one of the reasons for having a high-powered working group to look at ways of supplementing our public spending through other means, including private funding.

Mr Gibson: I thank the Minister for his pre-Budget statement and for yesterday's draft. An unfortunate phrase has entered our political vocabulary — "rural proofing". I do not regard the rural community as something to be equated to vandal proofing, child proofing or theft proofing. The rural community is an important part of society. However, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development introduced that phrase. The Programme for Government talks about social inclusion and New TSN, but there is no mention of rural proofing.

As a result of the crisis in the rural community, we expect some form of positive discrimination so that we can get an equality of results. I am grateful that the Minister has allocated £10 million to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development for a vision for the future of agriculture. However, nowhere in today's statement or yesterday's draft was there any indication of how rural proofing would be carried out, whose responsibility it is, which Department is in charge or how it will be financed. How will rural proofing be carried out to support the rural community?

Mr Durkan: I hope that Members do not expect the concept of rural proofing to be translated into a Budget line of that name. The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development has championed and emphasised the concept. Although that Department will, obviously, have a particular responsibility for, and interest in, ensuring that the needs of the rural community are properly met, a similar responsibility will fall to all Departments that provide services across the region, including those services to people in rural communities. The issue can also be usefully taken up through the channels available to the various departmental Committees, which can question how well rural proofing is done by the corresponding Departments as far as their particular spending programmes are concerned.

In a draft or revised Budget, I present the spending decisions made, in broad terms, at Executive level. It is then the responsibility of individual Departments and Ministers to translate those into specific spending decisions that support services across the region. I reiterate that Committees are free to explore and interrogate those detailed spending issues. Questions on those issues should not be asked in a setting such as this, but should be taken up with the various Departments.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mr Neeson): In the past, the “economy budget” has been an easy option for extracting funding at a time of crisis. Can the Minister assure me that the Budget will not be tampered with, bearing in mind that major projects, such as the Northern Ireland science park, have not been outlined as part of the Budget itself?

The Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment is currently investigating energy provision in Northern Ireland. Will the necessary funding, especially for the expansion of the natural gas pipeline, be made available from the Executive programme funds?

Mr Durkan: I assure Mr Neeson that we are not identifying any departmental budget as an easy option. I hope that Members recognise that if we do not allow ourselves to reprioritise, or to refuse to increase one Budget line so as to make more money available for significant increases elsewhere, we shall only continue the patterns set under direct rule. Either we want to make a difference or we do not.

The Executive will decide the broad Budget allocations in respect of different programmes. In the Programme for Government, the Executive have defined a competitive economic situation as a high priority. Infrastructural commitments are of similar importance. We have made clear that money could be available from the Executive programme fund for infrastructure for projects like the gas pipeline. That obviously depends on the value and economic strength of the given proposals. It would be wrong to promise more than that or to pre-empt negotiations or Executive decisions about either the Executive programme funds or to the wider Budget.

The Chairperson of the Audit Committee (Mr Dallat): As an eternal optimist, I welcome the Minister’s statement. If I were in the Gallery, would I be right to

assume that the statement triggers a process that, if properly used, will enable us to break away from the pattern of direct rule expenditure?

Am I correct to assume that we can now prioritise expenditure against our agreed Programme for Government, thereby meeting people’s needs in a more appropriate way?

Mr Durkan: I would like to think that the eternal optimist Mr Dallat would be correct in making that assumption if he were sitting in the Gallery. We have challenges before us. We must match the limited public expenditure available to us to the right priorities, and they must be our priorities. We have taken some strides in that direction through the creation of the Programme for Government, the agreed Budget and the establishment of the Executive programme funds. We want to continue to break away from direct rule patterns of expenditure. We shall be able to do that only if we do not insist, as an Assembly or as an Executive, on being handcuffed to previous Budget patterns and commitments. We need to be ready to reprioritise. We can reprioritise as effectively as our decisiveness will allow.

Mr Armstrong: I welcome the Minister’s statement. It is very fitting that we have a devolved Government in Northern Ireland. Today we are looking to the future of Northern Ireland, and especially to next year’s Budget. Since the Belfast Agreement in May 1998, we have been looking forward to a brighter future for all the people of Northern Ireland. We all hoped for a time when we could make decisions in Northern Ireland for the people of Northern Ireland. However, today the future of Northern Ireland is still in the hands of Sinn Féin and the IRA. For the past 30 years, the country has been put in debt following the destruction of people and property.

Mr Speaker: Order. This is an opportunity for the Member to ask questions on the pre-Budget statement, not on the Budget or anything else.

Mr Armstrong: The agriculture industry is a shambles, and most of the budget is spent on administration. Is the budget too small, or is the Department not efficient enough? That question must be addressed by the Executive. Agriculture must be restructured so that farmers in Northern Ireland can have a fair day’s pay for producing a superior product. Farmers are living on the knife-edge of bankruptcy. We cannot sell the goose that lays the golden eggs.

Mr Durkan: I note Mr Armstrong’s point, but I shall not borrow the phrase that he used, because the wrong connotation would be put on it. The Member asked whether the budget for agriculture is inadequate, or whether the Department, or the plans that are in place, are efficient enough. It may be either or both. However, this exercise, with the pre-Budget reflections and the consideration when it comes to the draft Budget, allows departmental Committees to explore those issues with

their Departments and Ministers. Our total Budget is not adequate to meet all our needs and service demands. We also must ask whether our existing spending plans and patterns are as efficient or as effective as they could be.

Mr Byrne: I welcome the Minister's statement. I particularly welcome its tone and tenor regarding the introduction of resource accounting and development priorities in the Programme for Government. How will that impact on our future spending powers? Does the Minister envisage discussion with the Treasury leading to an improvement of the Barnett allocation to Northern Ireland, given the limiting factors that we currently have?

Mr Durkan: I have already touched on some of the points that Mr Byrne raises. The Executive are trying to address with the Treasury the difficulties that the Barnett formula gives us. I have said that it is not just the amount, which is the usual issue with which everyone readily identifies, but some of the implications of resource accounting and budgeting. That is a complex issue, but we must note that the move to resource accounting does not, in itself, have implications for our spending power. However, a fundamental principle of resource accounting is that budgets have to bear a cost in respect of assets held. That will have implications, because, as I have already said, we have a much larger asset base than England.

The Executive — while trying to address those allocation and ambit issues of the Barnett formula with the Treasury — are establishing a high-powered working group to look at other means of supplementing and supporting our public expenditure needs.

12.00

Dr McDonnell: I welcome the statement. Will the Minister confirm that the process initiated today offers a real opportunity for the Assembly and the Committees to play a full part in ensuring that the broad needs of our society are met and that we are not just exploring and raising issues? Will our views be taken seriously?

Mr Speaker: I am afraid that the time for questions is up. The Member will not be able to complete his question or, I regret, receive an answer from the Minister, except perhaps in writing if the Minister feels able to do so.

I regret the fact that some Members who wished to ask the Minister questions were not able to do so in the maximum time available under Standing Orders. Several Members asked questions that were almost identical to some that had already been asked. In some cases, Members had an excuse as they were not in the Chamber when the questions were asked. However, some Members were in the Chamber when questions were asked, and they asked exactly the same questions again, which is perhaps less excusable. I am sure that the Environment Committee will be happy about the recycling nature of this, but for the rest of the Assembly it is not particularly the best way to use the very limited time available for such a broad issue.

BUDGET (NO. 2) BILL

First Stage

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):

I beg leave to lay before the Assembly a Bill [NIA17/00] to authorise the issue out of the Consolidated Fund of certain sums for the service of the year ending 31 March 2002; to appropriate those sums for specified purposes; to authorise the Department of Finance and Personnel to borrow on the credit of the appropriated sums; to authorise the use for the public service of certain resources (including accruing resources) for the year ending 31 March 2002; and to repeal certain spent enactments.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

Mr Speaker: The Bill will be put on a list of future pending business until a date for its Second Stage has been determined.

FAMILY LAW BILL

Final Stage

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):
I beg to move

That the Family Law Bill (NIA 4/00) do now pass.

Taking account of your earlier observations, Mr Speaker, I shall not repeat the comments that I made at Second Stage.

This is a short but significant reforming Bill that will best serve the interests of children, their unmarried fathers and step-parents. Generally, it will support strong, healthy family relationships. Equally, the parentage of a child will be more easily established when that is in dispute, and certain presumptions of paternity will be set down in statute.

I sponsored the Bill, as law reform falls within my departmental responsibility. At the Second Stage, it became apparent that the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee had an obvious interest in the subject matter. The Finance and Personnel Committee was obliging in allowing another Committee to conduct the scrutiny stage of the Bill. As a direct result of the deliberations of the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee, five amendments were tabled in my name at Consideration Stage. I thank those Committee members.

Although only one of the five amendments was substantive in nature, it significantly improved the Bill in the way in which it amends the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. The amended provision directs courts to look to the best interests of the child when considering an application to make a parental responsibility order in favour of an unmarried father or a step-parent.

As I said in an earlier debate, our legislation on the interests of the child is more advanced than that in other jurisdictions on these islands. Another innovation that others are following is the conferral of joint parental responsibility on those who jointly register the birth of their child. We all agree that that is a common sense measure that most people already assume to be the law.

Members are interested to know when the reforms will come into operation — should the Bill be passed. I cannot give a precise commencement date, but it is likely that the Bill's substantive provisions will come into force in the autumn. The reason for the delay is that, although the Bill is short, there are a considerable number of court Rules and other Regulations that must be made so that the reforms can operate as intended.

For the most part, those Rules are the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Court Service, and they are subject to scrutiny and endorsement by the Lord Chancellor. A complicating factor is the interaction between this Bill

and certain provisions in Part IV of the recent Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Bill at Westminster.

My officials will use the time to develop an effective publicity and information campaign to raise the public's awareness of the effect of the changes. Members who spoke earlier referred to that point.

Mr Speaker, I commend this short Bill to the Assembly.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Family Law Bill [NIA 4/00] do now pass.

12.15 pm

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Assembly Standing Orders

The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Mr C Murphy): I beg to move

That, in Standing Order 47(7), after “five” insert:

“and such quorum shall be deemed to be present where Members are linked by a video conferencing facility.”

The motion to amend Standing Order 47(7), a Cheann Comhairle, is required after advice from the Assembly Commission that it is actively exploring proposals to provide several of off-site locations to facilitate Committee meetings. The aim is to allow local people to have greater access to Assembly Committees and, equally, to allow Committees to interface with local communities. I am aware that several Committees have already undertaken oral evidence sessions outside Parliament Buildings. It is likely that that practice will increase.

One of the key issues raised by Committee Chairpersons in the Commission’s consultations about off-site meetings was the feasibility of using video conferencing. That raised the issue of whether a Committee meeting would be in quorum should video conferencing be used with, for example, three members in Parliament Buildings and two members in Omagh. The Assembly’s legal adviser has stated that, although the existing Standing Order 47 could be interpreted as permitting a quorum when members are linked by video, it would be better if the Standing Order made it absolutely clear that a quorum can be achieved in such instances. The Committee on Procedures accepts that advice and proposes the amendment to Standing Orders.

Mr Leslie: I listened carefully to Mr Murphy, and, although for the most part this seems to be a sensible measure, it occurred to me that there might be one problem with it. The circumstances to which the Member referred were essentially in the context of a public Committee hearing, and I do not see any difficulty there. However, if for some reason a Committee does part of its business in private, how can it be certain that those persons who are participating in the meeting by video link are equally conducting their business in private? Although I regret to say that I did not think of that in time to table down an amendment, I wonder whether the Chairperson of the Committee might like to reflect on that matter for future reference.

Mr C Murphy: I thank Mr Leslie for his observation. Of course, Standing Orders provide that it is up to the Committees to set their own procedures on many of the issues. I am sure that that advice could be relayed to

Committee Chairpersons who are intent on setting up an outside meeting with a video conference link. If some of the business must be done in private, they obviously need to reflect on that and set their own procedures in that regard.

I imagine that only certain types of meeting would be held outside of Committee rooms. To date, the only meetings of that nature have been to hear oral evidence. Those are the sorts of meetings — rather than private, in-house meetings about sensitive issues — that people would want to hold in the community. Once the motion to amend has been passed, the Members’ Committee can pass on observations and advice to the Committee Chairpersons through the Chairpersons’ liaison group.

Question put.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 49; Noes 16

AYES

Nationalist:

Alex Attwood, P J Bradley, Joe Byrne, Annie Courtney, John Dallat, Bairbre de Brún, Mark Durkan, John Fee, Tommy Gallagher, Joe Hendron, Patricia Lewsley, Alban Maginness, Alex Maskey, Alasdair McDonnell, Gerry McHugh, Mitchel McLaughlin, Eugene McMenamin, Pat McNamee, Conor Murphy, Mick Murphy, Mary Nelis, Dara O’Hagan, Eamonn O’Neill, Sue Ramsey, John Tierney.

Unionist:

Ian Adamson, Pauline Armitage, Billy Armstrong, Billy Bell, Esmond Birnie, Joan Carson, Fred Cobain, Ivan Davis, Sam Foster, John Gorman, Derek Hussey, James Leslie, David McClarty, Alan McFarland, Ken Robinson, George Savage, David Trimble, Peter Weir, Jim Wilson.

Other:

Eileen Bell, Seamus Close, David Ford, Jane Morrice, Sean Neeson.

NOES

Unionist:

Paul Berry, Gregory Campbell, Mervyn Carrick, Wilson Clyde, Boyd Douglas, Oliver Gibson, William Hay, Roger Hutchinson, Gardiner Kane, Maurice Morrow, Ian Paisley Jnr, Ian R K Paisley, Edwin Poots, Peter Robinson, Denis Watson, Jim Wells.

<i>Total Votes</i>	<i>65</i>	<i>Total Ayes</i>	<i>49 (75.4%)</i>
<i>Nationalist Votes</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>Nationalist Ayes</i>	<i>25 (100.0%)</i>
<i>Unionist Votes</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>Unionist Ayes</i>	<i>19 (54.3%)</i>

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That, in Standing Order 47(7), after “five” insert:

“and such quorum shall be deemed to be present where Members are linked by a video conferencing facility.”

Mr C Murphy: I beg to move

That, in Standing Order 72, delete all and insert:

“Subject to the requirements of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, a Member may move a motion for the suspension of one or more Standing Orders in whole or in part. A motion under this Standing Order shall require cross-community support within the meaning of Section 4(5) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.”

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I am somewhat at a loss as to why we were forced through the Lobbies on the previous motion. I was aware that the DUP was opposed to progress. I did not realise that that also extended to technological progress.

This motion to amend is part of the Standing Orders —

Mr Speaker: Order. Is this a point of order, Dr Paisley?

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: Yes. Surely it is entirely out of order for the Member to comment on the previous vote. His job is to move this motion now, but he has no right to start to comment on the previous vote.

Mr Speaker: If I were to interpret the rules of the House so strictly in that matter, we should certainly shorten all the debates by a substantial amount. I have listened to a number of questions to Ministers from all sides of the House, including the Member's side, in the past hour and a half that were well wide of the mark. The Chairman of the Committee on Procedures should continue.

Mr C Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I continue to move forward. This motion to amend Standing Orders is part of the Committee on Procedures' ongoing work to clarify, where necessary, the existing Standing Orders. In this instance, the motion has been moved to clarify the meaning of Standing Order 72, which allows for the suspension of Standing Orders to facilitate the Assembly's plenary business in unusual circumstances or because of an unforeseen event.

Experience has shown that it has been used on several occasions, and that sometimes only part of a Standing Order has had to be suspended. The current wording of Standing Order 72 makes reference to “one or more Standing Orders”, and my legal advice is that the reference to one may be interpreted to include part of a Standing Order. The Committee has been advised that the wording of that Standing Order should be tightened to make it clear that part of a Standing Order can also be suspended.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That, in Standing Order 72, delete all and insert:

“Subject to the requirements of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, a Member may move a motion for the suspension of one or more Standing Orders in whole or in part. A motion under this Standing Order shall require cross-community support within the meaning of Section 4(5) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.”

The sitting was suspended at 12.28 pm.

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

ASSEMBLY BUSINESS

2.30 pm

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: On a point of order, I gave notice to the Speaker —

Madam Deputy Speaker: I remind the Member that points of order are taken at the end of Question Time. Your point of order may be taken at the end of the first half-hour session.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: This is nothing to do with today's Question Time. It is an important point of order about which I have already spoken to the Speaker, and I want to put it on the record. It is a simple reference to what took place in the Assembly yesterday and is recorded in Hansard. Questions that were entirely out of order were put to Mr Morrow by Mr Leslie and Mrs Carson. I have referred the matter to the Speaker, and I told the Speaker that at the opening of this session I would put it on the record.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the Member for his point of order. The matter has been raised with the Speaker and is being examined by him.

Oral Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Children's Fund

2. **Mr B Hutchinson** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to outline the current position on the development of the children's fund and, in particular, the proposed timescale for consultation and further allocation of funds. (AQO 1601/00)

The Deputy First Minister (Mr Mallon): The first allocations from the children's fund were announced on 2 April. It will provide £10.5 million over the next three years to 12 projects, which are to be developed by different Departments. Those are designed to assist children in need and young people at risk. The remaining £18.5 million will be distributed in future bidding rounds. We are committed to ensuring that the voluntary and community sectors are fully involved in that process.

The Executive will shortly consider proposals on the criteria that might be used to select future projects, and the structures that could be put in place to manage the allocation process and ensure that appropriate accountability mechanisms exist. Those are being developed taking account of initial views from the voluntary sector and will be subject to full consultation covering any associated equality implications over the summer and early autumn. When the consultation exercise is complete and the arrangements are finalised, we will move quickly to invite bids for support from the children's fund and assess those in line with our final criteria. We hope that the timescale will ensure that the final arrangements reflect fully the views of the voluntary sector.

Mr B Hutchinson: How will the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister use the criteria of the children's fund to ensure that the Chancellor's targets on reduction of children's poverty are met in Northern Ireland?

The Deputy First Minister: It may be worth looking at the allocations to date, of which there have been several. Those include allocations for disabled children; £1.3 million for specialist residential units; £1.6 million for the Families for Life regional adopting service; £1.2 million for counselling support for pupils in schools, and contributions to the school age mothers programme. Those are the sort of areas to which the money has been allocated.

The criteria will be governed by their obligation to implement TSN requirements, which will be strictly applied. As elected representatives, we know the nature of the problem. We must try to ensure that every penny spent goes to children in need and at risk. We will

welcome any advice from the voluntary sector and elected representatives that will help us do that.

Ms Lewsley: In his reply to the first question, the Deputy First Minister spoke about the views of the voluntary and community sector. Can the Deputy First Minister tell us how those views will be fully represented in the development of the children's fund? What steps will be taken to ensure that the operation of the children's fund fits with the developing children's strategy?

The Deputy First Minister: We are very pleased that the voluntary sector has been involved in helping officials to develop proposals for the management of the children's fund and hope to build on that productive relationship as we take the children's fund forward.

Some time ago the First Minister and I had a valuable meeting with a large range of organisations connected with children. That type of dialogue has continued with officials, and it will develop. We recognise the sector's key role in supporting children in need and young people at risk and the importance of ensuring that it is involved in distributing funding in future bidding rounds. After the Executive have had an opportunity to consider proposals for future allocations from the children's fund, we are planning full consultation with the sector and other interested parties. Those proposals envisage the sector's being actively involved in a number of aspects of that fund.

In addition we are committed to putting in place a comprehensive strategy on children's rights and needs. The strategy will set out the Executive's vision, values, strategic goals and specific objectives for children. It will also include a strong focus on children in need and young people at risk. The development of that strategy is being informed by experience gained through the operation of the children's fund. It will be important to have consistency between the goals in the strategy and the long-term aims of the children's fund, and we are committed to making sure that that will happen.

Mrs E Bell: I am heartened by the Deputy First Minister's comments. To allay earlier concerns, how will he ensure that funding allocated to Departments or statutory bodies will not be used directly, or indirectly, for other things or to enable funds to be diverted from mainstream projects?

The Deputy First Minister: The first and obvious reply is vigilance to ensure that if money is channelled towards children in need or at risk that is where it goes. Funding from the Executive programme funds is ring-fenced within the respective Department baselines, thereby ensuring that it can only be used for the specific purpose for which it was made available. That will also ensure that any allocated funding no longer required must be returned for reallocation. I repeat: it must be returned for reallocation, and funds will be allocated to other bodies,

whether in the statutory, voluntary or community sectors, on the same basis.

Officials are developing arrangements to ensure that all Executive programme fund allocations can be effectively monitored and accounted for. There will be no hiding place for those who try to divert money for children in need or at risk into other purposes; there will be no hiding place in the Administration, in the voluntary sector, in the community sector or in any other sector.

Strategic Plan

3. **Mr Byrne** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to outline what plans there are to provide a strategic plan for the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. (AQO 1628/00)

The First Minister (Mr Trimble): The first corporate and business plan of the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister will be available on Thursday, and copies will be placed in the Assembly Library.

Through the plan the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister as a Department seeks to promote good government and has several strategic aims. The first aim is to promote corporate thinking and collectivity in all institutions of the Government and to ensure that the Administration's key policies are agreed and delivered. Other aims include ensuring the effective operation of all institutions; developing relations internationally and within these islands; communicating the policies and activities of Ministers and institutions of Government; building a Programme for Government and modernising the Government's programme; and promoting better community relations in a culture of equality and human rights.

As Members will know, considerable progress has been made in realising those strategic aims, not least through the development of a programme for Government, including, for the first time, public service agreements, and also through the introduction of the concept of a single equality Bill and the implementation of evaluation of New TSN.

Mr Byrne: I thank the First Minister for his answer, and I welcome the fact that an announcement will be made on Thursday. Will the effectiveness of any plan be open to external evaluation and subject to ongoing monitoring and review?

The First Minister: Regular monitoring of what the Administration does is crucial. That is the primary function of the Assembly and its Committees. I expect that the Committee of the Centre will be particularly anxious to do that. Of course, many of the aims and objectives of the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister are directed towards co-ordinating the work of the Administration as a whole. In effect, our

success should be measured in relation to the success of all the Departments collectively.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: Is this plan not now in jeopardy, given that the First Minister has written a letter to the Speaker of the House telling him that he intends to resign from his office? That being so, does the First Minister not think that he has a responsibility to this House and to the country to tell people the exact terms of that letter? Is he going to resign if there is no announcement made by IRA/Sinn Féin? Is he going to resign if some arms are put away?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: Is he going to resign if all arms are put away?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The question refers to the strategic plan, and I will ask the First Minister to —

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: I am speaking to the plan. How can you have a plan when the First Minister has already said that he is resigning? It has taken him nearly 18 months to get to this plan.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

The First Minister: When the corporate plan is produced, Members will be able to assess its quality and see that considerable work has gone into producing it. I must say that I was very interested to listen to the question as it was originally framed, because Dr Paisley was clearly expressing his concern about the future of this institution, and he was clearly indicating his desire to see it continue. That, of course, is entirely in accordance with the manifesto of that party, which shows that it is slowly creeping towards full acceptance of the agreement.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mrs Carson: Will the First Minister assure the House that the corporate and business plan for his own Department targets issues such as training and staff development, which could contribute to equal opportunities for all the staff?

The First Minister: As in the Civil Service as a whole, we are committed to providing equality of opportunity. It is our policy that all eligible persons should have equal opportunity for appointment and advancement on the basis of their ability, qualifications and aptitude for the work. That is an issue that is carefully monitored to ensure that equality of opportunity is, in fact, provided.

The corporate and business plan also includes a commitment to ensure that staff have the necessary skills to meet the business needs of the Department and to fulfil statutory obligations. The implementation of that commitment includes an undertaking to produce a training and development needs analysis by September of this year and a training and development plan by March 2002. Given the unique nature of the work of the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First

Minister, one of the skills that we most need to acquire and develop is the skill to advise on policy formation.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Mr McGrady is absent and will receive a written answer.

2.45 pm

Disability Rights Task Force

5. **Dr Hendron** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to make a statement on the implementation of the report of the disability rights task force. (AQO 1630/00)

The First Minister: The Executive's response to the recommendations in the disability rights task force's report entitled 'From Exclusion to Inclusion' is being prepared. We plan to issue the response for consultation during the summer. The disability rights task force has set us a challenging agenda for ensuring comprehensive and enforceable rights for disabled people, and we believe that its impressive report will play an important role in achieving equality of opportunity for disabled people in Northern Ireland.

Dr Hendron: I thank the First Minister for his reply. A major defect of the Disability Discrimination Act is the fact that it does not apply to education. The disability rights task force recognises that. What is being done to give rights in education to disabled children?

The First Minister: The Member is quite right to say that the disability rights task force recognised that gap in the Disability Discrimination Act, and he will also know that the Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill, which takes forward the recommendations in Great Britain with regard to that aspect of education, received Royal Assent on 11 May.

Responsibility for taking those educational recommendations forward here rests with the Department of Education and with the Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment — while it is still called that. Both Ministers have indicated their commitment to introducing legislation on those issues, and I hope that we will see it on the statute book as soon as possible.

Mr Beggs: Will the First Minister clarify the role of the Equality Commission in relation to the Disability Discrimination Act as it applies to Northern Ireland and in ensuring that issues in this report are implemented?

The First Minister: In relation to the Disability Discrimination Act, the Equality Commission has a role similar to that of the Disability Rights Commission in Great Britain. The Equality Commission has specific duties in relation to disability. Those include: to work towards the elimination of discrimination and promote the equalisation of opportunities for disabled people; to keep the legislation under review; to undertake formal investigations; to prepare statutory codes of practice

giving practical guidance on how to comply with the law; and to provide information advice to employers and service providers.

In Great Britain, the Government have referred a number of the task force's recommendations to the Disability Rights Commission as part of its role to monitor and review the operation of the Disability Discrimination Act. As the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland has a similar role to perform in relation to the Act as it applies in Northern Ireland, we have already asked the Equality Commission to work in tandem with the Disability Rights Commission on those particular task force recommendations.

Freedom of Information Bill

6. **Mr Ford** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to give an update on the introduction of a freedom of information Bill. (AQO 1612/00)

The Deputy First Minister: No decision has yet been taken on separate additional legislation for Northern Ireland. The situation will be reviewed in the light of our experience with the operation of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The Westminster Freedom of Information Act at present extends to Northern Ireland. That Act must come into force within five years, and the Lord Chancellor has the responsibility for appointing dates for the different provisions to take effect.

Mr Ford: The Minister's response is extremely disappointing. I am sure that both he and his Colleague are aware of the fact that freedom of information was made a priority by the incoming Scottish Executive. As a result, the system of government in Scotland is considerably more open than in the UK as a whole.

If we are going to show the way forward in this Assembly, we should be seeking to do rather better than the very tardy progress in Westminster, which it appears the Ministers are satisfied with.

The Deputy First Minister: The Member is wrong on two counts. First, the Executive decided in February 2000 that the Freedom of Information Bill, which was passing through Parliament, should apply to Northern Ireland, because in the time available it would not have been possible to have had a freedom of information Bill on the statute book in this Assembly.

Hence we would have been without any freedom of information Bill. A decision has to be taken by the Executive either to continue with that or to draw up a freedom of information Bill for Northern Ireland. That is what many Members favour.

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 does not cover the devolved Administration in Scotland. The Scottish Executive recently published a consultation document on draft freedom of information legislation. The

proposals follow closely, but not exactly, the structure of the United Kingdom Act, and they are broadly similar in their provisions. As in the United Kingdom Act they propose to confer rights to information rather than access to documents and that there will be a roughly equivalent enforcement regime. A similar period of five years is proposed for the implementation following the enactment of the legislation.

Therefore there is no statutory regime in Scotland. There is no freedom of information legislation applying to Scotland. It is at the consultation period. I suggest to the Member that there was more wisdom in the decision taken by the Executive here to at least have a freedom of information Bill until such time as we could produce a better one, unlike Scotland which left itself without any and finds itself consulting.

Mr Dodds: In considering the freedom of information Bill or part of its provision — or even in advance of its introduction and in the interests of openness and transparency — will the Deputy First Minister use his influence with the First Minister, who takes his advice on many things and who regularly consults with him on every decision that he makes, and ask him to include details of his current resignation letter which has been kept hidden, his original resignation letter and the letter relating to policing that Mr John D Taylor received from the Prime Minister? Perhaps he could even throw in the opinion polls that he had done secretly and which told him that he was going to win the election when he lost it.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

The Deputy First Minister: I thank the Member for the question. He sets me a difficult task. There will be discussions in the Executive about the important issue of freedom of information. I hope that the hon Member will be present.

Mr Dodds: I am not in the Executive.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

The Deputy First Minister: The party represented by the hon Member has got revolving-door Ministries. I was guilty of thinking that the hon Member was still a Minister, but it is not his turn this week or next week. However, now that the election is out of the way we will maybe see the musical chairs operating again.

The First Minister and I do not consult each other; we make decisions jointly. The strength of this Administration is that it has the representatives of both sections of the community jointly making decisions. Come and join us and see that it works.

Mr Dallat: Assuming that democracy will survive, will the Minister tell the House what the likely steps will be to introduce the Freedom of Information Act?

The Deputy First Minister: Democracy will survive. It will survive in the Chamber and in the Administration.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

The Deputy First Minister: It will survive because there have been those on both sides who have been at pains to show the alternative to democracy.

An independent working group of senior officials has been established to oversee the implementation of the Act across all Departments. Contact will be maintained with the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Information Commissioner's Office to establish best practice, promote awareness of obligations under the Act and ensure compliance with all aspects of the new legislation.

We are currently considering the most appropriate date to implement the Freedom of Information Act 2000 in the devolved Administration. That depends on several factors, which include the time needed for the Information Commissioner to set up her office. The Executive Committee will be considering that matter shortly with a view to the First Minister and I reaching agreement with the Lord Chancellor on the implementation date to be applied here.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease

7. **Mr Armstrong** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, following the initial relief package provided by the Executive for industries affected by foot-and-mouth disease, if any further relief measures are being considered; and to make a statement.

(AQO 1616/00)

The First Minister: There has been a positive response from businesses to the financial relief package we announced on 21 May. There have been over 400 calls to the helpline to register interest in the help for business scheme as well as contact through the web site. Applications will be processed as quickly as possible by the new unit established to administer the scheme.

While we welcome the good news on regionalisation, which will lead to a reopening of export markets, we are aware that some businesses are still suffering due to the impact of foot-and-mouth disease, and we are keeping the situation under continual review. The interdepartmental task force led by the Economic Policy Unit continues to monitor the impact of foot-and-mouth disease on the Northern Ireland economy and provides regular reports to the Executive.

Mr Armstrong: Can the Minister assure me that assistance measures available in Northern Ireland remain on a par with those in the rest of the UK, bearing in mind that foot-and-mouth disease was first diagnosed in GB and not here?

The First Minister: It is our aim that the assistance available here should be no less beneficial than that available in similar circumstances in Great Britain. Where there are legislative and other constraints, as in

the case of rate relief, alternative ways of achieving the objective are being developed. Officials from our Department continue to attend the Whitehall rural task force to keep abreast of developments and wider economic issues in Great Britain, and I am sure that Northern Ireland benefits from any national schemes.

As the Member knows, the measures available in Northern Ireland include the following: the help for business scheme; the small firms loan guarantee scheme; the deferral of tax, VAT and National Insurance payments; business advice from LEDU and the IDB; marketing Northern Ireland and attracting promoters through the tourism recovery strategy; advice on alternative training and employment opportunities; advice on benefits and advice to farmers on farm business. The information leaflet published by the Executive entitled 'Coping with Foot-and-Mouth Disease — Help for Businesses' provides further details including contact numbers, and those can also be obtained from the web site.

As a way of showing that the assistance is as beneficial here as it is in Great Britain I would like to cite the marketing tourism scheme. We invested £1 million in the scheme — on a per capita basis adjusted for the size of Northern Ireland compared with GB — which is higher than the equivalent figures for across the water.

Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister (Identity)

8. **Mrs Courtney** asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to outline what plans there are to provide a clearer identity for the Office and the Executive. (AQO 1624/00)

The Deputy First Minister: It is important that the public can easily recognise and identify with the work of the Administration that serves it. With this in mind a corporate identity for the Executive and its Departments is currently being developed. It will provide a clear branding of all aspects of the work of the Administration and will feature on correspondence, publications, advertisements, buildings and vehicles. There will be an overarching branding framework for the Executive, but each Department will have its own clear identity within that structure in relation to its functions.

A strong corporate identity is important for the promotion of Northern Ireland's interests in Europe, the United States and everywhere abroad. We want to provide a clear image for the devolved Administration that can be recognised everywhere.

3.00 pm

Mrs Courtney: I thank the Deputy First Minister for his response. Will he assure us that the Executive identity will be coherent and that all Departments, including the semi-detached Departments with DUP Ministers will be fully integrated and signed up to the programme?

The Deputy First Minister: The Member is pointing up the failure of two Ministers to participate properly in the workings of government. That is a major issue and one that brings no credit to those who are adopting that position. The corporate identity aims to make it easy for the public to recognise government and the relevant Departments within government. Even at this late stage, I appeal to the two Ministers who do not take part in the proper workings of this Administration to think again and probe sufficiently to see if they have any conscience left in calling themselves Ministers and not assuming responsibility.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Time is up.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Madam Deputy Speaker: Mr McGrady is absent —[*Interruption*]. Order. The House is entitled to hear the proceedings. Question 1 in the name of Mr McGrady will receive a written answer. Question 2 in the name of Ms Armitage has been transferred to the Department of the Environment and will receive a written answer.

Rural Road Network

3. **Dr O'Hagan** asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he has any plans to increase investment in the rural road network. (AQO 1604/00)

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Campbell): I indicated in my replies to recent similar questions that I am conscious that existing levels of funding to maintain and improve the road network fall short of the requirements. I will be considering the scale of the infrastructure investment required on roads, including rural roads, as part of the work underway to develop a 10-year regional transportation strategy for Northern Ireland.

The regional transportation strategy will consider ways of increasing investment in transport infrastructure and how any additional money might best be spent. I hope to be in a position to present my draft regional transportation strategy to the Committee for Regional Development this autumn. Until the strategy is in place I will continue to press for additional funds for the road network at every opportunity. In the meantime I assure the House that my Department will continue to make the best use of the resources currently available to develop and maintain the rural road network.

Dr O'Hagan: I thank the Minister for his answer. I have written to him in relation to roads in Derrytrasna and Aghagallon in the Upper Bann constituency. One issue that was brought to my attention, along with every Member in the House who has been canvassing recently, was the state of rural roads. I am pleased with the Minister's answer. The rural network away from the main roads is

particularly bad, and there are a lot of potholes. People in rural areas pay the same taxes as everyone else, and they are entitled to equal services. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Campbell: I am concerned about the maintenance and improvement of the rural roads network. We will spend approximately £44 million in the current financial year on structural maintenance of all roads. Some of that will be on rural roads.

That figure compares favourably with last year's initial allocation of £39 million. The Roads Service and I have to constantly reappraise the need to improve the infrastructure of rural roads. The restrictive allocation of funding is a continual problem, which I know applies to other Departments as well. We will continue to keep that matter under review.

Mr McFarland: In the light of the imminent appearance of the results of the Hayes review of acute hospitals, has the Minister had discussions with the review group? Will he undertake to improve the rural trunk road network, particularly in Tyrone and Fermanagh, so that ambulances can have rapid transit in those areas?

Mr Campbell: I have not had direct correspondence with the Hayes review group, but I will endeavour to establish what level of communication took place between departmental officials and the group. I will inform the Member of the outcome.

The Member referred to roads in the west of the Province, particularly those in Tyrone and Fermanagh, and the accessibility of hospitals and essential services, something I am acutely aware of. Unfortunately, in the absence of additional funding, I will only be able to carry out works that have already been committed to in the present year. However, as a result of the hon Member's question, I will look at the issues arising in Tyrone and Fermanagh.

Mr R Hutchinson: First, I congratulate the Minister for Regional Development on his outstanding victory in East Londonderry and wish him well for his time in Westminster.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The Member is out of order. Will he please address the question?

Mr R Hutchinson: I would be delighted to. A Northern Ireland Audit Office report has confirmed that expenditure in Northern Ireland on structural matters has consistently been inadequate. Has the Minister made bids to all possible funding sources to rectify that situation? In particular, was a bid made to the Executive programme funds?

Mr Campbell: I thank the Member for his comments as well as for his question. As I said, my Department is constantly revising and analysing that issue to see where possible additional moneys can be accessed. I can respond positively. For example, I recently told the Assembly that I had put in a bid for additional funding maintenance in excess of £48 million for roads capital and for roads

structural maintenance. I am pleased to report that bids for capital works worth £27 million were successful. Unfortunately, other bids, particularly for structural maintenance, were unsuccessful. I repeat that we will continue to work on that until we get sufficient resources for what the public and every Member of this House wants — the improvement of the infrastructure of our rural and urban roads.

Ballyclare Sewage Treatment Works

4. **Mr J Wilson** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail when the commencement of works will begin to enhance the treatment of waste water at Ballyclare sewage treatment works. (AQO 1621/00)

Mr Campbell: Several options have been identified for the provision of enhanced waste water treatment for the Ballyclare area. A detailed technical and economic appraisal of those options is nearing completion.

I propose to consult in the near future with local public representatives about those options. I then hope to be able to announce the way ahead in the next two to three months. Work is expected to commence in October 2002. It will take 18 months to complete and will cost around £5 million. The starting date is subject to the completion of all the various stages, including planning approval. Improvements costing £500,000 will be made to the sewerage system in Ballyclare at the same time.

Mr J Wilson: That is very welcome news. In November 1996, Malcolm Moss advised a concerned resident that no future development in Ballyclare should proceed until the sewerage system had been enhanced. Bearing that in mind, will the Minister assure me that three extensive housing developments, one on the Doagh Road by Clauglin Developments, the Ballyclare village project and a development at Ballyeaston Road in Ballyclare, amounting to hundreds of houses, will not proceed? Will he advise the Planning Service not to continue until the Ballyclare sewage treatment works have been substantially enhanced?

Mr Campbell: I hope that, given the timescale, any minor difficulties will be ironed out in the short term. I will need to look at the issue raised by the hon Member. I will, in consultation with the Planning Service and my Colleague Mr Foster, confer with the Member on the proposed developments that he mentioned to ensure that speedy completion of the works that I have mentioned does not stand in the way of development. However, the developments should not be held up interminably because of any problems that may be encountered because of my announcement.

Northern Ireland Railways

5. **Mr Ford** asked the Minister for Regional Development to give an assessment as to whether the new Northern

Ireland Railways timetable provides appropriate levels of service. (AQO 1611/00)

Mr Campbell: I consider that the new Northern Ireland Railways (NIR) timetable provides appropriate levels of service, bearing in mind the limited rolling stock currently available. Because of the reopening on 10 June of the direct rail link between Antrim and Belfast, the new timetable provides journey time reductions of over 30 minutes for travel between Belfast and Antrim and all stations north and west of Antrim.

Those reductions have also enabled Translink to use its available rolling stock to provide a better service on the Londonderry to Belfast line. For example, there are now nine scheduled services each way on weekdays, compared to seven northbound and six southbound prior to the reopening of the line.

Mr Ford: There are clearly benefits in the new timetable for the northern part of the region and for those travelling from the Waterside to Antrim and on to Belfast. How can the Minister assess the value of the Knockmore line, as he plans to do over the next year, when the only morning train from Antrim to Belfast via Lisburn is timed to suit school students who must be in Lisburn before 7.30 and workers who must be in Belfast before 8.00? Is it realistic to base any assessment on such a timetable?

Mr Campbell: As the Member knows, I am acutely aware of the problem. I received a number of deputations about the Antrim to Knockmore line and spoke to a number of people in the area before the decision to preserve the line for a further year was taken. I also spoke to people who were still lobbying when the announcement was made.

3.15 pm

So, if there is a section of rail line in Northern Ireland that I am aware of, it is the Antrim to Knockmore section. My difficulty is that Northern Ireland Railways told me that it was in the unenviable position of having to open a new line. It cost approximately £17 million to provide an efficient, effective service and increase and improve the level of service for the thousands of people who use that line. The line is now open. Unfortunately, the corollary of that was that the Antrim to Knockmore line could not be supplemented and built up to the same degree.

I was not prepared to contemplate the closure of the Antrim to Knockmore line, and I am still not prepared to contemplate it. I understand and accept the Member's point that the current reduced service is not the best way of measuring the effectiveness of any service beyond the 12-month extension. Unfortunately, it is the only method that we have. I hope that we will be able to look again at the Antrim to Knockmore line in the regional transportation strategy, and I view its continued usage with sympathy and support. I hope that we will be able to preserve it, but I cannot say more than that.

Mr Poots: When the new rolling stock is brought in for other lines, does the Minister intend to use the existing rolling stock for the Antrim to Knockmore line? Will the rolling stock be used at more appropriate hours so that peak-period public transport could be provided for people who wish to use the line?

Mr Campbell: I put forward similar propositions recently. Unfortunately, it will take approximately two years to acquire the new rolling stock. However, it is not as straightforward or as simple as preserving the line until new rolling stock becomes available and then transferring some of it to the Antrim to Knockmore line. We must also remember that there is a significant and substantial cost implication for preserving the line on safety grounds in the next three years or so. It will cost millions of pounds. The Member has raised the issue and I, as Minister, have already raised the issue in the Department. If it provides a possible source of preserving the line, I am open to looking at that.

Asbestos Water Mains

6. **Mr Carrick** asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQO 1204/00, to state the length of asbestos cement water mains by county area. (AQO 1606/00)

Mr Campbell: There are approximately 1,250 miles of asbestos cement water mains located throughout Northern Ireland. That represents less than 10% of the total length of water mains. There are 210 miles of asbestos cement water mains in Antrim; 50 miles in Armagh; 140 miles in Down; 130 miles in Fermanagh; 370 miles in Londonderry, and 350 miles in Tyrone.

Mr Carrick: Undoubtedly the Minister will be aware of the degree of concern among environmentalists and the public regarding the health risk that asbestos cement water mains pose. Does he accept that during the repair of those mains there is a risk of water contamination by particles of asbestos falling into the water supply during the removal of the deficient sections? What safeguards have been implemented for the consumer, bearing in mind that engineers, recognising the health risk, are kitted out in special protective clothing when carrying out repairs?

Mr Campbell: I am aware of concerns about asbestos in water mains. As a result, I have tried to obtain an assessment of the situation from the health professionals. In 1996, the World Health Organisation advised that since "there is no consistent evidence that ingested asbestos is hazardous to health"

the position remains unchanged since a review in 1998.

I understand the Member's concern about the removal. The UK Water Research Centre carried out a review on the use of asbestos in the major European countries, the United States of America, Australia and Japan. It was found that most of those countries surveyed had stopped using asbestos cement pipes and that they

had no plans to replace existing asbestos cement pipes, as these were not considered to present a health risk.

I am not in possession of information that indicates that there would be a substantial risk with the removal or replacement of those pipes. If I were, however, the position would be revised. The ongoing replacement of asbestos pipes will take some time to complete. At the moment, fewer than 10% of water mains are made of asbestos.

Sewage Treatment Works (Mid Ulster)

7. **Mr Armstrong** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (a) how many sewage treatment works within the constituency of Mid Ulster are at full or excess capacity at this date and (b) his plans for resolving problem sites. (AQO 1614/00)

Mr Campbell: There are 27 waste water treatment works in the Mid Ulster constituency which serve population equivalents greater than 250. Four of these works, at Cookstown, Stewartstown, Sandholes and Magherafelt, operate in excess of their respective design capacities. A further seven works at Killeen, Coagh, Moneymore, Pomeroy, Clunto (Richardson), Creagh and Clady are approaching their respective design capacities. Work is already under way to upgrade the Killeen works, and that is due to be completed this autumn at a cost of approximately £600,000.

The Water Service plans to invest some £10 million in upgrading treatment facilities at eight works over the next five years, and investigations are being carried out into the options for upgrading the facilities at Pomeroy and Creagh. The largest project is the construction of a new treatment works at Cookstown. It is planned that that will commence in June 2002, take 18 months to complete and cost £5 million.

Mr Armstrong: Does the Minister agree that the health of the people is most important and that a situation in which the sewerage provision is inadequate should not have arisen?

Mr Campbell: I am aware of the problems with waste water treatment works across Northern Ireland as well as with those in Mid Ulster, which I outlined in some detail. My concern is reflected in my bids to try to upgrade the entire network, but again the difficulty is with the lack of resources. Two months ago I outlined possible ways of getting substantially increased capital funding diverted towards Water Service capital works schemes, and I am currently examining them.

I will continue to do that, and I will report to the House if and when we successfully obtain the funds.

Provision of Footpaths (Rural Areas)

8. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the criteria applied in rural areas when considering the provision of footpaths. (AQO 1629/00)

Mr Campbell: Schemes to provide new and improved footways are considered by Roads Service for inclusion in minor roadworks programmes. Footways and other minor works proposals must compete for priority, given the limited funding that is available. In assessing the priority of footway schemes, consideration is given to a number of factors, including: pedestrian counts; traffic volumes; the potential for pedestrian and traffic growth; accident histories; environmental factors, such as the presence of schools, churches, et cetera; the practicality of constructing the schemes and the cost of the schemes and the availability of funds.

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

Mr Dallat: Does the Minister agree that children at rural schools are at particular risk when there is a high volume of through traffic? Will he undertake to identify the high-risk areas, with a view to providing footpaths where the risk is clearly too high? The Portglenone to Randalstown road is one place where I see school-children running the gauntlet of the traffic as I travel to and from this House.

Mr Campbell: I am aware of the safety problems faced by rural schools in particular — probably more acutely in the winter, but also throughout the year. I will undertake to examine the specific instance that the Member has come across between his constituency and Parliament Buildings. I will respond in writing about that.

Mr Savage: Does the Minister agree that in determining the criteria for the provision of footpaths in rural areas, consideration should also be given to cycle lanes in order to enhance the amenity value of the countryside? That would enhance the potential for rural tourism as part of the diversification of the rural economy.

Mr Campbell: The short answer is “Yes”, but the Member will expect a more substantial answer than that.

The charitable organisation Sustrans has been in constant communication with Roads Service in trying to establish suitable areas, most but not all of them rural, where cycle lanes could be provided. A number of cycle lanes have been established in recent days; I have opened two in the past six months. However, I look forward to any increased funding, whether from bids that I make or from Sustrans or any other source, that would enable me to respond favourably to the Member and to ensure that increased numbers of cycle paths are included where it is possible to construct footways.

Flying of Paramilitary Flags (Policy)

9. **Mrs E Bell** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail what steps have been taken to co-ordinate policy between his Department, the RUC and NIHE to prevent the flying of paramilitary flags, the defacing of tombstones and the painting of offensive murals; and to make a statement. (AQO 1626/00)

Mr Campbell: Problems associated with the flying of flags and emblems and with the painting of graffiti and murals are widespread across Northern Ireland. While my Department's property is often used for such purposes, many other properties are also affected, for example, properties belonging to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, district councils, Northern Ireland Electricity and British Telecom, as well as those of many private individuals.

On receipt of complaints about the flying of flags on Roads Service property, my Department will try to gauge community reaction to determine the likely success of any efforts that might be taken to remove flags. That is generally done through consultation with the RUC and/or local councillors or other public representatives in the area.

Mrs E Bell: It is a difficult situation, and I know that the Minister is trying to deal with it as much as possible.

Given the increase in the number of flags, does the Minister agree that his Department should take the lead so that people in affected areas can be freed from fear and possible intimidation? The Minister said that his Department deals with complaints about flags and that they are in consultation with the affected communities. However, those communities often live in fear and are scared to get involved. This morning, in broad daylight, flags were being erected on the main road to Tullycarnet — the issue must be dealt with as soon as possible.

3.30 pm

Mr Campbell: The Member knows the Department's policy on graffiti and the flying of flags on departmental property. It has been said many times that the Department will try to remove from its property any illegal flags and graffiti that are a danger to road users. In other instances, where there is no danger, in spite of there being no legislative requirement to do so, the Roads Service will seek to remove such material on the advice of the RUC and where there is strong local support. The problem is that often the removal of flags leads to the erection of more flags than there were before. That is why the Roads Service places great importance on local community support for the removal of flags. There is concern about the flying of flags in communities during a few weeks in the summer, but also about those areas where flags fly all year. Those flags are equally unacceptable.

ENVIRONMENT

Third-Party Planning Appeals

1. **Mr Close** asked the Minister of the Environment if he has any plans to introduce third-party planning appeals.
(AQO 1617/00)

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Foster): I have no plans to introduce third-party planning appeals. I

have examined the case for introducing such appeals before, but there are well-established procedures in the planning process that allow third parties to submit representations and objections. The introduction of third-party rights of appeal would add delay, cost and uncertainty to the planning process. I recognise, however, that that is an evolving area, and I have asked my officials to keep procedures and policy under review.

Mr Close: I am grateful that the Minister is keeping the matter under review, however, I would like to be more specific. Consider a situation where a council is unanimous in its objection to or support for a development. Does the Minister agree that a council, made up of elected representatives, that unanimously objects to a departmental proposal should have a right to appeal rather than being dismissed out of hand as is currently the case?

Mr Foster: I take the Member's important point on board. As I said, this is an evolving matter which we will continue to keep an eye on. The Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 provides applicants with a right to appeal against a refusal of planning permission. There is no right of appeal for third parties, but they can make representations on planning applications. As I have said, such appeals would cause delays and uncertainty and add costs to the planning process. A third-party appeal system could also be vulnerable to abuse.

Mr McClarty: Will the Minister outline the possible impact of a third-party right of appeal on the planning process?

Mr Foster: My Department has estimated that the introduction of a third-party right of appeal could result in an additional 700 appeals a year, which is quite a number compared to approximately 350 appeals a year at present. That would cost upwards of £1 million a year. I am not sure that the system would be able to take such an increase at this time without more resources. It is a difficult issue.

Mr Poots: I am very disappointed with the Minister's response on this occasion. He must get real on this issue. People are not satisfied with what is currently on offer. He mentions the planning problems experienced by people in business. What about the problems of the individuals whose human rights are being damaged by many large businesses that have trampled and abused the planning system for years? When are those peoples' rights going to be recognised?

Mr Foster: Everyone is equal as far as we are concerned, whether their business is large or small. There is no discrimination — each planning application is taken on its own merits. I recognise that the Human Rights Act places increased emphasis on the protection of individual rights. The rights of third parties are well protected under the current planning system. However, as I said, this is an evolving area, and my Department is continuing to keep policy and procedures under very close review.

Coastal Forum

3. **Mr Ford** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the cost of establishing a coastal forum.

(AQO 1610/00)

Mr B Hutchinson: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. You have omitted question no 2.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I shall not take points of order during ministerial Question Time.

Mr Foster: I regret that I have only recently been able to write to the Member to provide the information that he sought in the supplementary question some time ago.

My officials have estimated that the direct staff costs of establishing and providing support for a coastal forum could well exceed £100,000 per annum. However, that figure takes no account of the senior staff time that my Department would have to devote to supporting the work of a coastal forum. Nor does it take account of the input that would be needed from other Departments, or of other probable costs such as expenditure on research, travel, and so forth. Therefore the true cost of establishing and supporting the work of a coastal forum is likely to be much higher.

As I made clear in responses to earlier questions, the additional resources made available in the Budget last year were not sufficient to enable my Department to establish and support a forum. I have said that I see some merit in the proposal. However, meeting my Department's commitments in the Programme for Government and the public service agreement must have first claim on resources.

Mr Ford: I thank the Minister for the responses that I received last week to my questions of some months ago.

I accept his point that there is a cost attached to setting up a coastal forum. However, does he not agree that, in the absence of a coastal forum, senior staff time is likely to be taken up with dealing with those issues anyway? Given the importance of the issues that a coastal forum would deal with, and the cross- departmental themes involving the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Department for Regional Development, is it not time that the Department submitted a bid under the Executive programme funds to ensure that the small amount of money that could be produced for overall benefits is committed in future spending rounds?

Mr Foster: As I said, the additional resources made available in the Budget last year were not sufficient to enable my Department to establish and support a forum. I am very much aware of the concern that exists and will take that into consideration. I will continue to seek the necessary resources in the forthcoming spending round.

Moreover, in view of the potential cross-cutting nature of the role of such a body, any decision to establish a forum would also require agreement on the scope of its remit.

Therefore I have written to Minister Rodgers and Minister Campbell, whose Departments would have the most direct interest in such a body, to seek their views on the merits of the proposal — subject to resources of course.

Mrs Carson: Can the Minister assure us that he and his Department are really considering the establishment of a coastal forum?

Mr Foster: I can assure Mrs Carson and the House that we are not taking this lightly, but we do not have the resources. I will continue to seek the necessary resources in the forthcoming spending round, but other priorities have taken precedence at this time. I can assure Members that it is not being taken lightly.

Biodiversity Strategy

4. **Mr Neeson** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail progress made with proposals for a biodiversity strategy since their launch last October, and to outline the timetable for the adoption of the strategy.

(AQO 1618/00)

Mr Foster: In line with the commitment in the Programme for Government, I intend to publish a Northern Ireland biodiversity strategy by the end of October 2001. In preparing the strategy, careful account will be taken of the 76 recommendations for action that I received last autumn from the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Group. The group's recommendations have implications not only for Departments but also for other sectors and, indeed, for wider society in Northern Ireland. Many of them also call for action that would need to be sustained over the long term.

My officials have been discussing the recommendations with other relevant Departments. I expect to receive a first draft of the strategy in the next few weeks. In the meantime, my Department is drawing up plans for allocating the additional resources for biodiversity secured in the Budget last year.

Mr Neeson: Can the Minister assure me that the proposals of the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Group will not merely be taken into account, as he has recently been quoted as saying, but will in fact form the backbone — a very strong backbone — of that strategy? I would be concerned if attempts were made to water down their proposals.

Mr Foster: I can assure the Member that there is no attempt at all to water down any proposals, and we will look at them specifically. I expect that the strategy being prepared will set out the broad approach to be followed in conserving biodiversity, and that more detailed implementation plans will subsequently be drawn up. I am grateful to the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Group for the sterling work it undertook, work which has done so much to advance preparation of an agreed biodiversity strategy. I am not yet in a position to say precisely how

the group's recommendations will be reflected in the strategy. However, as I have already said, careful account is being taken of the group's report.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mrs Eileen Bell has notified me that she will be absent and will receive a written answer to question 5.

Telecommunication Antennae

6. **Mr Carrick** asked the Minister of the Environment if he has any plans to amend the planning regulations in respect of the attachment of telecommunication antennae to existing structures. (AQO 1605/00)

Mr Foster: My Department issued a consultation paper on 10 November 2000 seeking views on possible changes to planning legislation for the control of development by licensed telecommunications code system operators. The deadline of 16 January 2001 for replies was extended in order to allow more time for the Environment Committee to provide a response. Its comments were received on 5 April 2001.

Following a discussion on the outcome of the consultation paper on 14 June 2001, the Executive Committee decided that the best way forward was for full planning procedures to be applied to telecommunication masts. I have asked my officials to consider what legislation is necessary to implement the Executive Committee's decision, and I expect to be able to introduce that legislation in the autumn. The attachment of telecommunication antennae to existing structures will be taken into consideration in that process.

Mr Carrick: I note the positive nature of the Minister's response. I know that he has been inundated with matters concerning telecommunication masts, but I will just add to his burden. In the light of the clustering of antennae and the sharing arrangements for telecommunication masts and equipment, does the Minister accept that new planning legislation is required? Does the Minister have any proposals to specifically include clustering and sharing arrangements in the new proposed legislation?

Mr Foster: Telecommunication masts are a big problem. However, in the course of the legislative process the Department will consider and take note of Mr Carrick's comments.

3.45 pm

Mr Kennedy: Does the Minister accept that the lack of neighbourhood notification about those masts has created many problems, and can he say how he intends to legislate on the matter? Can he also update me on the controversial case of the masts near Newry and Jerretspass? I am grateful for his assistance in the matter.

Mr Foster: All aspects will be taken into consideration. The Jerretspass situation was difficult. My officials have had discussions with Crown Castle, the developer's

agents in this case, and they have indicated their intention to remove the mast as soon as the operator can identify an alternative means of providing a service, but I do not expect any undue delay. I am grateful to One 2 One and Crown Castle for their co-operation in that matter.

Mr Douglas: Does the Minister agree that many of the microwave dishes and antennae that are attached to two masts under permitted development are now illegal, since most of them have been extended in the meantime?

Mr Foster: It will take some time to prepare the necessary legislation. As we can only apply the current legislation, masts erected under permitted development will remain.

High-Density Developments

7. **Ms Armitage** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline his plans to reverse the current trend of high-density developments that have radically affected the social and demographic character of many of our coastal towns. (AQO 1603/00)

Mr Foster: I have discussed those concerns with the Member in the past. My Department's planning policy statement 7, 'Quality Residential Environments', is to be published in its final form soon, and it will require developers to provide high-quality proposals that are sympathetic to the character of an existing area. It will also provide for development plans to identify local design requirements for new residential development which could include, for example, dwelling numbers, mix and types.

My Department will also issue draft supplementary planning guidance in the summer for consultation. It will take the form of a development control advice note, providing specific guidance on proposals for small unit housing within existing urban areas. Although it will not set policy, it will give guidance to developers on the physical form of housing development, including apartments, and the relationship to surrounding properties.

The development plan process will continue to provide communities with an opportunity to comment on and influence the future development of their areas. That opportunity will be enhanced by the recently introduced issues paper approach to the early stages of the process. In addition, the Department for Regional Development is preparing a regional planning policy statement on 'Housing in Settlements', which will provide strategic guidance on a range of social and sustainable housing policies.

Ms Armitage: I was reasonably happy with the Minister until he informed me that his new advice note will be for guidance only. We have had guidance before, and guidance for developers is unsatisfactory. Does the Minister feel that mere guidance is good enough, as this is a major problem in many coastal areas? People can

either take guidance or ignore it, and I ask the Minister if he has something more secure to eradicate this problem.

Mr Foster: We all need guidance of some kind in every aspect of life, and guidance is important in policies. The objective of planning policy must be to accommodate the growing demand for affordable housing, which is driven by demographic changes and the rising number of households.

The regional development strategy will set a target for growth in the number of new dwellings to be provided in existing urban areas. The Planning Service has been engaged in the quality initiative. The purpose of that initiative has been to promote a design-led approach in order to achieve quality housing schemes in existing urban areas. The 'Creating Places' layout guide published in May 2000 is assisting that process.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr McGrady has advised me that he will be absent. Question No 8 in the name of Mr McGrady will therefore receive a written answer.

Zebra Mussels

9. **Mr Carson** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail what research has been carried out to identify possible controls for zebra mussels infesting Lough Erne; and to make a statement. (AQO 1620/00)

Mr Foster: My Department, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure and the Department for Regional Development have established an interdepartmental group to co-ordinate action on this problem. Waterways Ireland and Queen's University are also represented. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has initiated a three-year study of the ecological impacts of the mussels on Lough Erne. That study is investigating changes in algae, water clarity, nutrient levels and the impact on native swan mussel beds. It has found that zebra mussels have consumed much of the algae in the lake and that water clarity is at the highest level ever recorded.

The majority of the native swan mussel beds have been colonised, and there is a threat of local extinction of those mussels. Further research, funded by my Department, is now being undertaken to predict the impacts and to assess the effectiveness of control measures for other lakes in Northern Ireland. However, it is impossible to control the zebra mussel infestation in Lough Erne. They have become densely established on all available hard surfaces throughout both the upper and lower loughs. I am disappointed about that, as I come from that part of the world myself. It is a difficult situation.

Mr Carson: I echo the Minister's concern. His reply has been useful, but I am particularly concerned about the cost to Northern Ireland. Can we recoup some of the costs from the Republic, where the infestation came from? I am concerned that we have lost algae and some

of the pondweeds and the plankton that the fish eat. How will the Minister and his Department ensure that the fish stocks in both loughs will not be endangered?

Mr Foster: As I have said, zebra mussels are now very abundant in Upper and Lower Lough Erne but have not spread elsewhere in Northern Ireland. The most obvious effect has been an increase in the clarity of the water in shallow areas. This is mostly because zebra mussels feed by filtering the water and extracting the microscopic aquatic life.

The effect of zebra mussels on fish stocks is very worrying. The effect will be indirect, and it will take some time to become fully apparent. It is expected that changes to water quality, bottom sediments and ultimately the fish food chain will affect fish populations to some extent. Ongoing work by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development on fish stocks in Lough Erne will indicate future changes.

It could be very difficult to get money from the Republic of Ireland, but zebra mussels did come through from the Shannon into Lough Erne. That is rather sad. I would advise people to closely monitor their boats to ensure that no more of them come in. Take ultimate precautions, hose down well, scrub and be very watchful and careful. Once they are in, they are difficult to control.

Speed Limiting Measures

10. **Mr Armstrong** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail what research has been carried out into the feasibility of applying innovative speed limiting measures to vehicles. (AQO 1615/00)

Mr Foster: The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions completed a research project last year on intelligent speed adaptation systems. Those can automatically restrict the maximum speed of vehicles to the relevant speed limit. The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions has recently begun a further research project examining how intelligent speed adaptation might affect driving behaviour. That work is complementary to work being carried out in other European countries, particularly Sweden and the Netherlands. Initial results suggest that those systems offer the prospect of significantly reducing the number and severity of speed-related collisions. However, vehicle construction standards are governed by EU Regulations, and any requirement for the compulsory fitting of intelligent speed limiters would therefore need to be agreed at European level.

Discussions at European level are under way, although those are still at an early stage. My Department will continue to monitor developments in this area through its contacts with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

Mr Armstrong: Has the Minister any plans for using new technology such as computerising vehicles?

Mr Foster: There are currently no plans to require the introduction of external vehicle speed control, otherwise known as intelligent speed adaptation. Consideration of any wider application of speed limitation devices is still at an exploratory stage and would require widespread public consultation. It is not, therefore, a feasible option in the short term, but given sufficient public support, intelligent speed limiters could in future make a contribution to preventing collisions or reducing their severity.

Mr McHugh: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.. Many people would consider that most of the speed measures are another means of collecting money from the public who use the roads. Are there statistics that show the impact of slow drivers? Sometimes they are farmers. Slow driving can have an impact on road accidents. Is the Minister doing anything to educate people about how slow driving, as well as speed, is a major cause of road accidents?

Mr Foster: Excessive speed remains the most common cause of collisions, but there is no doubt that slow drivers also create problems. Drivers lose their patience with slow drivers and try to overtake.

Excessive speed accounted for almost a fifth of all collisions that resulted in fatalities or serious casualties between 1994 and 1998. The 'Northern Ireland Road Safety Strategy 2001-2010' consultation document invites comments on proposed new initiatives to improve driver ability and significantly change the public's attitude to excessive speed. New initiatives aim to persuade drivers that neither experience nor advanced car technology makes it safe or acceptable to drive at excessive speed. Responses to the consultation document can be made before 27 July. If the Member or any other Members have a useful response to make, we would be receptive to it.

Disability Awareness Training (PSV Drivers)

11. **Ms Lewsley** asked the Minister of the Environment if he has any plans to provide disability awareness training for PSV drivers. (AQO 1619/00)

Mr Foster: My Department has no powers to provide disability awareness training for PSV drivers. I have, however, asked my officials to liaise with Disability Action with a view to preparing a fact sheet on disability awareness training. That could be made available to operators involved in the passenger road transport sector. Translink, which operates the majority of road passenger transport services, already engages the services of a disability awareness officer and provides training on disability awareness for staff. I encourage other PSV operators to include disability awareness as part of their customer care training.

Ms Lewsley: Unfortunately, when people are asked to volunteer, it does not always happen. Is it possible that the Minister's Department will take an initiative similar to the one that the Department of Education has taken on training all escorts and drivers who deal with young children with disabilities? Will the Minister consider making such training compulsory before a PSV driver can get a licence?

Mr Foster: I cannot give an assurance that we will take that on, but we will see what we can come up with. This is very important, and we could pursue it with other Departments. We will think about what the Member has said without giving any commitment to taking it on.

4.00 pm

Landfill Site, Movilla Road, Newtownards

12. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of the Environment whether the landfill site at Movilla Road, Newtownards is currently operating within planning guidelines. (AQO 1613/00)

Mr Foster: A planning approval to carry out infill operations at the site, together with the provision of facilities to allow for the recycling and recovery of materials, was granted on 22 November 1999. The approval limited the categories of waste to be deposited on the site and the permitted levels of infilling. It also included a requirement that the site should be restored when approved levels are reached, or if infilling ceased for a period of six months. The planning permission also included the erection of a storage building.

A recent site inspection by my officials revealed that while the materials being used as infill are as permitted, the level of infilling appears to be slightly higher than approved. However, it is the experience of the Planning Service that those levels will decrease naturally as the material consolidates. My officials will continue to monitor the situation to ensure that infilling is maintained within the approved levels. Enforcement action will be taken if necessary.

The inspection also revealed that the storage building which formed part of the application has been erected 80 metres from the approved location and is also significantly larger in scale than that indicated on the approved plan. The operator has been warned that that development is unauthorised and that enforcement action may be pursued if it cannot be regularised with a planning permission. In line with normal enforcement policy, he has been asked to submit a planning application for that development. It will be considered on its merits, and if refused, appropriate enforcement action will then be taken.

Mr McCarthy: I am sure that the Minister's response will be gratefully received by the local residents

who have been complaining about the matter for many years. Will the Minister ask his Department to keep a close watch on the activities on that site? If the person operating the site does not comply, will the Minister and his departmental officials take action to ensure that the planning authority rules are not breached?

Mr Foster: Yes, we will certainly monitor the situation. If enforcement action is necessary, it will be taken.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Our time is up.

Mr Kennedy: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I draw your attention to the fact that question 2 on the Order Paper, posed by Mrs Courtney, who is no longer in her place, appears to have been ignored. May I ask for an explanation?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I neglected to say that the question in the name of Mrs Courtney had been transferred to the Department for Regional Development and will receive a written answer.

Adjourned at 4.03 pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

BUDGET (NO 2) BILL

Second Stage

Monday 25 June 2001

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT BILL

First Stage

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Sir Reg Empey): I beg leave to lay before the Assembly a Bill [NIA 18/00] to establish Invest Northern Ireland to exercise certain existing functions in relation to industrial development; to dissolve the Industrial Development Board for Northern Ireland, the Local Enterprise Development Unit and the Industrial Research and Technology Unit; to abolish certain functions of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board; to amend the Industrial Development (Northern Ireland) Order 1982; and for related purposes.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

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

Mr Speaker: I confirm to the House that, in accordance with Standing Order 40(2), I have been notified by the Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel that the Committee is satisfied that there has been appropriate consultation with it on the public expenditure proposals contained in the Budget (No 2) Bill. The Bill may therefore proceed under the accelerated passage procedure without a vote.

I remind the House that the Second Stage of this Bill, as with that of any other Bill, is an opportunity to debate the broad principles of the Bill and not an occasion for detailed debate on other sundry matters.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):
I beg to move

That the Second Stage of the Budget (No 2) Bill (NIA 17/00) be agreed.

The debate follows on from the Bill's First Stage last Tuesday and the Supply resolution for the 2001-02 Main Estimates that was considered on Monday 18 June. The purpose of the Budget (No 2) Bill is to give legislative effect to the resource Estimates that were approved through the Supply resolution that was passed last Monday.

Given the wide-ranging and valuable debate then, I do not intend to detain the House with unnecessary repetition of the detail implicit in the spending authorisation contained in the Bill. I gave much of that detail last week. However, I will summarise the main features of the Bill in accordance with the nature of the Second Stage debate as envisaged under Standing Order 30.

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

The principle of the Bill is to authorise the use of resources totalling £5,021,262,000 by Departments and the issue of £4,679,167,000 from the Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund in respect of the Main Estimates for 2001-02. Members received copies of the detailed Main Estimates booklet on Monday 11 June.

I am grateful to the Committee for Finance and Personnel for the attention that it has given, and continues to give, to matters of public expenditure and related procedural issues. I am also grateful for the confirmation from Mr Molloy, Chairperson of the Committee, that there has been appropriate consultation on the public expenditure proposals contained in the Bill, as set out in his letter to the Speaker dated 18 June.

This is the first full year in which Budget allocations will be determined and managed on a resource basis. Aside from the technical dimension of that, the transition involves the introduction of several new terms. Most of those were covered in the Vote on Account process in the Budget

Bill in February. However, the Budget (No 2) Bill introduces an additional new term — “accruing resources” — which represents the Departments’ receipts or income. It was known as “appropriations in aid” in the old cash regime. I hope that clarifies matters for Members.

As the Speaker has acknowledged, the Budget (No 2) Bill represents the endgame regarding the 2001-02 Budget — a process that started last year and ran from the Budget vote in December 2000 to the Supply resolution debate last Monday. The spending plans reflected in the Bill have been approved and endorsed by the Assembly, but I will be happy to deal with any points of principle that may arise.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Mr Molloy): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister of Finance and Personnel presented the draft Budget for 2001-02 on 17 October 2000. That was followed by a substantive Budget debate on 14 November and by the final Budget debate on 18 December. A sequence of events was involved. It really comes down to the question of whether the Assembly was given sufficient opportunity to properly consider the Bill’s implications and, if not, whether there is sufficient justification for proceeding in the absence of such consideration.

The Committee for Finance and Personnel is concerned that, due to the Westminster and local government elections, there has been limited time for Assembly Committees to have had appropriate opportunity to analyse the Estimates and to discuss them with their respective Ministers. In more normal circumstances it is the duty of the Committee for Finance and Personnel to ensure that all the Committees’ views on the financial provision proposed for the various Departments are co-ordinated and brought before the Assembly.

Clearly it is not possible to have such a properly informed debate on the Estimates for the current year. However, the Minister of Finance and Personnel kept the Committee fully informed and the Assembly updated on a regular basis on the preparation of the final version of the Estimates for 2001-02. The Finance and Personnel Committee is content that the requirements of Standing Order 40 for appropriate consultation have been fully met and that it is in order for the Budget (No 2) Bill to proceed. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr McGrady: The Budget debate in any legislature is an important event. The Budget dictates how we will govern ourselves. It has a tremendous effect on the lives of our constituents, the economy and social well-being.

At this stage of the Bill it is possible to deal only with very general terms. Notwithstanding that, it is evident that the total amount of money we can spend is determined by our income and not by our expenditure. It is almost a self-evident truth that our income in this case is capped by the grant-in-aid received from the Exchequer.

We know from previous Assembly debates that we have cross-party agreement that the amount of grant-in-aid is inadequate. Its inadequacy has been exposed more and more in our experiences over the past two years. Each time we look at a departmental budget we see deficiencies, not in the work that is being carried out, but in the inability to have the money to do further things.

On previous occasions the Minister has indicated to the Assembly the urgent work he is doing with the other Ministers and with the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister regarding the famous — or now infamous — Barnett formula, which dictates in many ways how we govern in Northern Ireland.

I would like the Minister’s assurance that those negotiations, which we all hope will go to a higher level, are now well progressed. Perhaps he could give us some indication as to whether there is a willingness on the part of central Government to redress the inadequacies of the Barnett formula and also to take on board the problems we are having by the revelations that each Department makes to the Assembly.

We have only to look at the Department of the Environment and its Committee to see huge deficits in water and sewerage provision, roads provision, hospital provision and adequate medical and surgical training.

Those deficits have come about as a result of inadequate expenditure in previous years. It is estimated that there has been underspending on our infrastructure and on our primary resources of health and education for almost the entire period of direct rule. That being the case, it is surely a sound and valid argument that that deficit should be restored from a top-up; not from current restricted financing. A top-up would enable us to recover and address that inadequacy in these major issues.

Infrastructure is not a word that excites the ordinary man and woman in the street, but if you do not have infrastructure you cannot progress as a society, you cannot sustain industrial development, and you cannot attract inward investment. All those things impinge directly on the educational prospects — and the healthcare, moreover — of every man, woman, and child in our community.

12.15 pm

We have had a series of almost catastrophic events that were never envisaged in the Barnett formula. Some of those were in agriculture — the BSE crisis, the foot-and-mouth disease outbreak and the threat of the run-down of our fishing industry. Those three major crisis areas in agriculture were not provided for by the formula used to give us our financing.

Looking at the other Departments, £60 million is required for sewerage and £100 million for infrastructure. Those are major issues that need consideration. I doubt that the current Budget can properly address our

ongoing plans. However, those will have to be addressed now or in the immediate future. I am talking about matters such as the recent Hayes Report which, if it is accepted, predicates a huge investment in hospital infrastructure and medical services. We do not have adequate resources to meet that need.

The only alternative to the capped Barnett formula spending is to use direct taxation, which is a dirty word because it always means increasing taxes. The Scottish Parliament has a direct taxation revenue-raising power of up to three pence in the pound. We do not have that power, and I am not arguing that we should have that facility. However, because of the strictness of our current grant-in-aid controls we will have to review the existing arrangements or look at alternatives. There is a great reluctance — understandably and sometimes justifiably — among all Assembly parties to increase direct or indirect taxation, even in the form of licences. In the next two days that issue may crop up. All parties bitterly oppose minuscule increases in licensing fees, and that indicates that, even if we had direct taxation, we would not be able to use it. In the meantime, we must tailor our Budget and our commitment to economic and social development to the resources available.

Another huge area coming up is the recovery of the agriculture industry and its knock-on effect in tourism, which has faced horrendous problems in many areas of Northern Ireland. South Down has suffered a triple whammy as regards tourism, agriculture and fishing, with no apparent real moneys being directed to those problems. I hope that special extra funding will be directed from the Executive to address those issues.

In the area of fishing alone, the Irish Government have made an additional £20 million available for the improvement of their fishing fleet while we are decreasing the capacity of our fishing fleet. I do not want to labour that issue.

We have the question of building new maternity hospitals, which was debated on the radio this morning. Where is the money coming from for such projects? These are real issues that any debate needs to address, because unless we can make a change in our economic and social well-being — a change in the fabric of our society — then our efforts in relation to our devolved responsibilities are brought to nought by lack of finance.

The Minister, in his opening remarks, said that I would fully understand the meaning of the term “accruing resources”, because it is a substitution for “appropriation in aid”. I do not know what “appropriation in aid” is, so perhaps he would explain that phrase also.

Ms Morrice: We are very grateful for the opportunity to consult at this important stage of the Budget. As well as talking about the overall principles, I would like to look in some detail at certain areas we would like to see underlined in the Budget.

I begin with one of the Assembly’s most important considerations — the future of our children. We hope to see plans for a children’s commissioner coming on-stream in the next year. Can the Minister tell us what plans have been made for additional expenditure for that purpose? Which Department — or Departments, as we are talking about joined-up government — will have responsibility for the office, and how will that be reflected in future Budgets?

There is recognition of the importance of research and statistics as a firm foundation on which to base future policy analyses. Through the many parliamentary questions that we have asked this year, we have ascertained that there are no available statistics on some topics, such as, for example, the number of children living in poverty. It is unfortunate that such statistics do not exist. In order to fine-tune policies, as the Executive suggested in their position report to the Assembly for the Programme for Government, we need high-quality, relevant and accurate information.

We are disappointed that, apart from specific funding for the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, only the Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment has allowed for departmental research and development. Although the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has the Industrial Research and Technology Unit, other Departments, such as those responsible for the social development and health budgets, should be explicitly prioritising research moneys. Will the Minister look into the level of each Department’s research budget and tell us what the budget accommodation is?

The Bill does not show the amount of money to be spent on private finance initiatives (PFIs) and how they deliver public services. As we have asked before, does the Executive accept that if they continue to pursue expenditure by private means, they are mortgaging our children’s future? Spending money on private firms now means that we have to pay it back later and, it is accepted, with a great deal of interest. What percentage of money does the Bill allocate to private companies, and what will the repayment be? We would appreciate a response to these questions. We do not believe that private finance represents value for money for our people today or tomorrow.

I also want to talk about economic issues. What is the Minister doing to accommodate the recommendations made by the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment on the ‘Strategy 2010’ report concerning tax? A number of our recommendations favour helping the economy to grow and become stronger through initiatives, tax breaks or other imaginative ways. Are those recommendations being accommodated? If so, what is being done through the Budget to implement proposals such as tax breaks for the creative industries, greater

support for the social economy or the needs of small business?

The euro is one of my own areas of interest. As we all know, the euro will be in place and in the pockets of people south of the border. What moneys will be set aside to help Northern Ireland's small businesses manage the position they will find themselves in? Will there be a proposal to help small businesses give their prices in euros as well as pounds? What initiatives are there?

I want to raise a point that was brought to me by trade unions about the minimum wage. The Assembly supported the £5 minimum wage, and it is hoped that legislation will be introduced in the near future to accommodate the pressure from the Assembly on that. What is the Minister doing in the Budget to prepare for that legislation?

Childcare is of great interest to the Women's Coalition. What provision is in the Budget for subsidies for childcare places and for accommodating the parental leave measures that will come in through legislation in Brussels and London?

Mr Deputy Speaker: This is the Second Stage of the debate on the Budget (No 2) Bill — it is not an opportunity to rerun the supply debate of last week. In a Second Stage debate we discuss the principles and philosophy of a Bill, not its specific terms. Members had the opportunity to raise such points in the supply debate. Please bear that in mind.

Ms Morrice: I take the point. I will conclude my remarks without going into too much detail, but I thought it important to raise those points for the Minister to consider.

My final point concerns peace building, which also concerns the future of our children. How can individual Departments, and the Executive as a whole, lead on issues such as challenging sectarianism? Although we are emerging from conflict, we still live in a deeply divided society. There should be an extensive programme to combat sectarianism in schools, community centres and at all levels of society.

Political leaders can lead from the front by example. However, those leaders should look to the examples of women's groups and trade unions that have done so much work and have such expertise in that area. Will the Executive consider, and respond to, the money that has been set aside for developing a strategy on community relations, anti-sectarianism and questions that we have on race and ethnicity?

Mr Dodds: This is a Second Stage debate, and we on this side want to come back to some of the issues at Consideration Stage and perhaps thereafter.

The Budget (No 2) Bill carries on from the previous Budget Bill and earlier Supply resolutions. As this is the Second Stage, we do not intend to divide the House today. We will consider the detail of the various appropriations

contained in the draft legislation. We have no difficulty whatsoever with many of them, many of which are, necessarily and rightly, in general form. However, there are issues that concern us and should concern us, especially Members on this side of the House.

For example, the Minister and other Members will not be surprised that we will not forget or run away from expenditure under the Department of Finance and Personnel on, for instance, the North/South Ministerial Council, the various all-Ireland bodies and other areas, such as the Civic Forum. Our party will return to those issues later.

12.30 pm

I want to put on record that our position in the House today does not in any way diminish our opposition to those areas of expenditure where we believe that the allocation of money does not represent good value for the people of Northern Ireland. The allocated money is being spent on a political project and not on delivering real and substantive benefits to the people on the ground on both sides. For instance, after a considerable period, many people still wonder exactly what the Civic Forum is supposed to be doing for its money.

We will return to those issues later. It would not be appropriate to go into them in detail at this stage, especially in the light of your earlier ruling, Mr Deputy Speaker, but I want to put the Minister on notice about them.

Mr Dallat: My contribution concerns a fairly small but important element of the Budget. I pay tribute to the Minister for his co-operation in ensuring that the requirements of the Government Resources and Accounts Act (Northern Ireland) 2001 have been taken fully into account. Resource accounting is a new concept that takes the presentation of accounts away from simple receipts and payments. It enables Members to have a much more comprehensive picture of the state of the various Departments, and it is to be hoped that it will allow Members to identify areas where better use of public money can be made, where savings are possible and where additional services are feasible.

I speak now as an individual — lest I get into trouble — but as Chairperson of the Audit Committee, I realise that for Departments to comply with the Act will involve additional work and additional pressure. Nevertheless, it is well worthwhile. The benefits are enormous, and they will further advance the Assembly's impact on how public money is spent.

I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the Public Accounts Committee and, in particular, to Mr Billy Bell, although he belongs to another party. That Committee has established itself as a very reliable watchdog to ensure that the bad practices of the past are eliminated. In the proposed Bill every penny spent must be accounted for, and civil servants at all levels now realise that.

We hope that the dark days of direct rule are behind us. Let us hope that we never return to a situation where elected representatives are not in place to ensure that Government services are provided on a basis of best value, keeping in mind the need to target social need and test for equality.

In the years ahead, the services for which we are responsible can be transformed, provided that there is proper public scrutiny. It would be remiss of me not to pay tribute to the Comptroller and Auditor General, who no longer works in isolation but, for the first time, reports to elected representatives. That exercise is working extremely well, and the public at large realise that.

In conclusion, all of this would not be possible if everyone were not pulling in the same direction. The Audit Committee, the Public Accounts Committee and the Finance and Personnel Committee are all co-operating in the common interests of everyone. At times that may seem strange, but it is a reality. The Minister of Finance willingly participates in a spirit of co-operation, and that is a good omen for the future. The Assembly needs to blow its own trumpet at times. It has every reason to be proud of the fundamental changes that have taken place and that will continue, provided that common sense prevails and the wreckers do not have their way.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Minister, you will have heard my earlier remarks that this is the Second Stage of the Budget (No 2) Bill and not an attempt to rerun previous debates. I know that you will be judicious in your response.

Mr Durkan: I noted your earlier remarks, Mr Deputy Speaker, with some appreciation. Members need to appreciate the nature of the Budget exercise. This is obviously not an occasion when the Assembly can range freely over all the expenditure items in the budgets of the various Departments. We are trying to complete, in a competent and proper manner, the necessary procedures following the budgetary decisions made last year and approved by the Assembly.

On the basis of those budgetary decisions we were able to authorise expenditure in the first period of this financial year through the Vote on Account and the Budget Act (Northern Ireland) 2001. In this Bill we are authorising the rest of the expenditure for this financial year. Members want to have regard to, and Committees should ask, whether the Estimates and the Bill properly reflect those previous decisions. The fact is that they do. I know that some Members have opposed some of the provisions, but in the Budget (No 2) Bill we are doing what we are required to do, which is to provide for the competent authorisation and allocation of expenditure as already approved.

Some points dealt with particular areas of expenditure. I will not go into those, because those areas are not germane to today's exercise. On the other hand, I do not want to sidestep everything, because many Members did not

address the particulars of the Bill as such, but raised wider budgetary issues.

As Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel, Mr Molloy registered the Committee's concern about procedures — particularly in the longer term — and also recorded its satisfaction that there had been sufficient consultation with it to allow accelerated passage given the time constraints. I appreciate the constructive role that the Committee for Finance and Personnel has played and continues to play. On behalf of my Executive Colleagues, I want to ensure that it can continue to play and develop that constructive role, not just in its own interest but as an aid to the good work of other Committees. The Committee for Finance and Personnel has a pivotal role in ensuring that the Assembly gets proper consideration in regard to budget planning and implementation.

The Barnett formula falls outside the remit of the Bill *per se*. However, I assure the House that the Executive are well seized on that issue. Next year, in the context of the 2002 spending review, we will need to refine and articulate a strong case for revisions of the Barnett formula. It will not be a case of just asking the Treasury if it knows who is asking. There will be difficult issues, and the Executive are prepared to address them. The Executive hope that Members and Committees will be realistic about the difficulties and challenges that they face. Just as there are strong points to make, there are also strong points and questions that must be answered.

The point about the Barnett formula raises the issue of the adequacy of our budget, and many Members have touched on this, both today and on other occasions. As an Assembly we have already registered those questions. The Assembly needs to look not only at the question of whether it needs more money, but at the question of whether it needs to plan more wisely for the money that it has. Do we need more targeting for that money?

Do we need more definitive strategies to underpin our spending plans? Do we need those strategies for the discrete spending decisions at departmental and ministerial level as well as for the Executive's Determinations? I am concerned when there are many calls in the Assembly for more money rather than attempts being made to ensure that better use is made of the budget. We must remember that the information in the Budget (No 2) Bill and in the Estimates should not be referred to only as we go through the process of passing the Bill. Departmental Committees should use the information, together with the details in the public service agreements and the commitments in the Programme for Government, as they scrutinise the work of Departments during the year.

Committees can scrutinise the work of Departments in many ways. There can be more monitoring of a Department's performance. If there are questions about the quality of Estimates the most telling way to pursue

the answers is not by considering the Budget or Budget (No 2) Bill; it is by looking at the scrutiny work that departmental Committees can undertake during the year. Committees can interest themselves in certain programmes and look at the related management, administrative and policy issues. In doing so, they can also examine the adequacy or accuracy of Estimates. The Executive have no problem with Committees taking such an interest. Committees should rightly interrogate spending plans at a departmental level, as well as in the wholesale context of Budget consideration at such times.

Ms Morrice raised many points that are well beyond the ambit of the Budget (No 2) Bill by nature of their detail. A Bill is coming forward concerning the children's commissioner, and it is not my place to imply or suggest that anything that the Assembly might legislate for is pre-empted or predetermined by the Budget (No 2) Bill — it is not.

Issues have been raised concerning the importance of statistics. I refer people with those concerns to my point that Committees should make sure that they impress their considerations on Departments to ensure better planning and targeting, which are necessary, because we need more robust statistics. The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency is trying to do that on several levels, and it responds to and takes on board the working requests of other Departments. We are trying to improve that situation, and if Committees can offer any insight into statistical gaps we will try to make good those gaps. We identified that problem in relation to the North/South statistical profile, which we published earlier this year.

Ms Morrice asked what is being done to accommodate the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee's views on 'Strategy 2010' and certain tax considerations. Mr McGrady asked about tax-raising powers and the sensitive issues involved in such considerations. The points made by Ms Morrice gave rise to questions about the fact that some people are seeking tax-raising and tax-reducing powers.

12.45 pm

If we are to consider more fiscal discretion or leverage for the Assembly, we must make sure that we join up our thinking on that. It will be very difficult for us to make a coherent case for any improvement in such capacity if we are saying continually that we will not levy any increases and that what we want, by way of intervening powers for ourselves in the fiscal regime, is simply the ability to offset or duck certain taxes. We must make sure that we not only do more as a joined-up Government but that we are ready to show that we are a grown-up Government.

The points about following through on 'Strategy 2010', which raise questions about the impact of aspects of the fiscal regime, will be reflected by the Executive in their consideration with the Treasury and other devolved

institutions of several matters in the fiscal regime — consideration that takes place at the Treasury's request.

In the past we have reflected on fuel duties, aggregates tax and so on, and we will do so again — that will include tax breaks for creative industries. Those points will be made on behalf of the Executive, not just by me as Minister of Finance and Personnel, but by the Ministers with relevant sectoral interests, such as the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Sir Reg Empey, or, in the case of creative industries, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Mr Michael McGimpsey. Those points will be pursued with the Treasury, not least by the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, because it falls to them to represent and prosecute certain cases.

Mr Dallat made useful points about the implications of resource accounting and budgeting. We must understand that we are dealing with a different system. We do not fully realise the implications of that. It will create some difficulties, but I am impressed by the way in which Departments, including my own, have managed the challenge of change to date.

We must recognise that this will change the nature of the control that the Assembly will have. It gives us greater planning opportunities and greater planning challenges, because the Assembly will have more of the picture than it had before, as Mr Dallat said. Not only will the Assembly control spending, it will control the stock of assets. People have not fully realised the implications of that.

Mr Dallat's remarks on the contribution of the Public Accounts Committee are well made, but it should not just be up to the Public Accounts Committee to examine post hoc whether expenditure was undertaken in the most proper, beneficial and effective manner. There is a considerable gap of activity, and that will enable departmental Committees to become involved. They will be able usefully to interrogate more of the operative spending practices of Departments than previously. That will not in any way detract from the work of the Public Accounts Committee. In many ways it will build upon much of the work and consolidate many of the pointers and useful principles that have been established by the Public Accounts Committee in relation to some programmes. However, we cannot cover them all, and I would like to see the various Committees taking up and amplifying some of the concerns that have been registered.

There was one question on accruing resources. It is difficult to understand what appropriations in aid are. Cash received by Departments, with the approval of the Assembly, is appropriated towards their gross expenditure plans. Appropriations in aid are receipts and income that come to Departments and are used in support of our wider Budget, and that is what we mean by accruing resources.

I will refer points on individual spending programmes to the relevant Minister or write directly to

Members on them. It would not be appropriate to go through all those points exhaustively because they are not necessarily appropriate to the Budget (No 2) Bill. I appreciate that some people missed the Supply motion last week because they had expected it to run into Tuesday, and I accept that some points have been saved from then and are being carried over now.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That the Second Stage of the Budget (No. 2) Bill (NIA Bill 17/00) be agreed.

LANDS TRIBUNAL (SALARIES) ORDER (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2001

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):
I beg to move

That the Lands Tribunal (Salaries) Order (Northern Ireland) 2001 be approved.

Article 3 of the Order provides for increases in the annual salaries payable to the president and members of the Lands Tribunal for Northern Ireland, with retrospective effect from 1 April 2000 and 1 April 2001, following recommendations made in the reports of the Senior Salaries Review Body.

While the provisions are straightforward, the procedures involved in their making have been anomalous. Before devolution such an Order was subject to negative resolution at Westminster and laid before Parliament under paragraph 3(3) of schedule 1 to the Northern Ireland Act 1974. Following devolution that Act was repealed, and such Orders became subject to affirmative resolution in the Assembly. Therefore the Department of Finance and Personnel has been required to draft the Order for the Secretary of State's signature. The draft Order does not include a commencement date, but that should be taken as the day after signature by the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State has agreed that I should take the Order forward on his behalf.

I commend the Order to the Assembly.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Lands Tribunal (Salaries) Order (Northern Ireland) 2001 be approved.

DEPARTMENTS (TRANSFER OF FUNCTIONS) ORDER (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2001

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

That the Departments (Transfer of Functions) Order (Northern Ireland) 2001 be approved.

The Order arises because the Planning Appeals Commission and the Water Appeals Commission are being transferred from the Department of the Environment to the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister.

The Planning Appeals Commission deals with appeals against decisions of the Department of the Environment's Planning Service. Under the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 and the Water and Sewerage Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1973, the Department of the Environment has responsibilities relating to, for example, the remuneration allowance of the commissioners of the Planning Appeals Commission and the Water Appeals Commission.

The Water Appeals Commission comprises the four most senior members of the Planning Appeals Commission. It deals with appeals in regard to the work and responsibilities of the Department of the Environment, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure and the Department for Regional Development.

The Department of the Environment has been considering the appropriateness of its role in regard to those appellate bodies for some time. However, since the introduction of the Human Rights Act 1998 in Northern Ireland it has been examining its functions more closely to ensure its compliance with the 1998 Act and the European Convention on Human Rights. The Department was satisfied that the Planning Appeals Commission and the Water Appeals Commission are entirely independent and impartial. However, it recognised — as did we — that the current statutory arrangements could create a perception that the commissioners are not fully independent. For that reason, and with Mr Foster's agreement, the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister proposes to acquire the sponsorship functions of the Department of the Environment.

The proposed transfer will provide these appellate bodies with more robust and transparent levels of independence and impartiality. The transfers would be effected under article 4(3) of the Departments (Transfer of Functions) Order (Northern Ireland) 2001. The functions under the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 that would be transferred from the Department of the Environment to the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister would include powers to appoint commissioners

to the Planning Appeals Commission and to determine their remuneration and allowances. The Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister would also be granted powers to appoint staff to assist the commission in performing its functions, to determine their remuneration and allowances, and to determine remuneration allowances for any assessor appointed by the chief commissioner to assist at hearings. It would also acquire powers to make rules for regulating the procedure for proceedings before the commission and to prescribe fees in respect of commission applications.

It is proposed to transfer the functions contained in the Water and Sewerage Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1973 that provide for the appointment of the chief commissioner and other commissioners of the Water Appeals Commission, the payment of commissioners and those appointed to assist the commission. The four most senior members of the Planning Appeals Commission act jointly as commissioners of the Water Appeals Commission.

A consultation role in the appointment by the chief commissioner of an assessor to sit with the member of the commission at an appeal or hearing would also be transferred to the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. There would also be provision to approve the payment by the commission of fees and allowances to an assessor and to make rules to regulate commission procedure.

Some of those functions currently fall to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Department for Regional Development and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, where these Departments have an interest in a water appeals hearing. Mrs Rodgers, Mr Campbell and Mr McGimpsey have agreed to the transfer of those functions to the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, as outlined in articles 8, 9 and 10 of the Order.

The transfers of several other functions are set out in the Order. In February 1999, the Assembly approved an earlier report by the First Minister Designate and the Deputy First Minister Designate setting out details about certain functions of the 11 Departments in the Northern Ireland Administration.

The principal Departments (Transfer and Assignment of Functions) Order (Northern Ireland) 1999, which implemented the agreed structures, was enacted in December 1999. Since its enactment, Departments have identified several statutory functions that must be transferred to other Departments to create consistency with the agreed allocation of functions at that time. The opportunity is now being taken to enact those transfers.

1.00 pm

First, article 3 of the Departments (Transfer of Functions) Order (Northern Ireland) 2001 will transfer functions

relating to the payment of expenses of the North/South Ministerial Council, the British-Irish Council and the Civic Forum from the Department of Finance and Personnel to the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. While the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister supports the operation of the North/South Ministerial Council, the British-Irish Council and the Civic Forum, the Northern Ireland Act 1998 provides that expenses in respect of these functions are defrayed as Department of Finance and Personnel expenses. That will be addressed and corrected by article 3. When the Northern Ireland Act 1998 was drafted, the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister did not exist. The Order before the Assembly would regularise that position.

Secondly, the functions being transferred from the Department of the Environment to the Department of Finance and Personnel come under article 4(1) of the Departments (Transfer of Functions) Order (Northern Ireland) 2001. These transfers are necessary because of the distribution of functions under the principal 1999 Order. They relate to functions conferred on the Department of the Environment under social security legislation that deals with rate fraud in housing benefit claims.

Thirdly, the opportunity has been taken in article 4(2) to transfer several provisions from the Department of the Environment to the Department for Regional Development. Those provisions properly fall in the remit of the Department for Regional Development; they relate mainly to its responsibility for public transport and its obligations as a public roads authority for Northern Ireland.

Fourthly, article 5 of the Order transfers functions from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to the Department of Finance and Personnel. This relates to the appointment of a committee to advise Departments on the exercise of functions under the Statistics of Trade and Employment (Northern Ireland) Order 1988. That committee is currently appointed by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, and the focus of its work is predominantly economic and business statistics. This degree of specialism is reflected in the membership of the committee. While current legislation makes provision for Departments other than the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to consult the committee on matters related to the collection and quality of general statistical information, this facility has not been widely used.

A committee appointed by the Department of Finance and Personnel will retain the statutory functions as currently detailed in the legislation relating to business statistics, and it will act in an independent advisory capacity to the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency — an agency of the Department of Finance and Personnel. Given the agency's position as the host body for all Northern Ireland Civil Service statisticians and its role in quality-assuring their work, it is appropriate for the new committee to develop its role beyond pure

statistics or business statistics. Therefore, its remit will span the statistical material of all Departments, as well as covering more fundamental issues such as quality assurance, a statistics code of practice and national statistics.

Fifthly, article 6 of the Order transfers certain functions under the Pension Schemes (Northern Ireland) Act 1993 from the Department for Social Development to the Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment. This relates to the payment of contributions when an employer becomes insolvent. As those payments are infrequent, it has only recently come to light that in consequence of earlier legislation on the consolidation of pensions, the function is more appropriate to — and should have been transferred to — the Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment.

My sixth point deals with article 7 of the Order, which carries some minor transfer from the Department of Education to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. This relates to library and recreational matters consistent with the transfer of library services, recreation and cultural activity functions from the Department of Education to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure in the principal 1999 Order.

Finally, article 11 of the Order makes legislative changes consequential upon the transfers. The Order has been scrutinised by the Committee of the Centre and the Examiner of Statutory Rules. All Ministers concerned in these transfers have been consulted and are content. I hope that Members will support these measures.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee of the Centre (Mr Gibson): The Committee of the Centre considered this Statutory Rule at Consultation Stage and Statutory Rule Stage. The junior Minister has outlined in detail the various transfers of functions from one Department to another. The Order was presented to us as a tidying-up exercise following the creation of the 11 new Departments and the establishment of devolution.

As outlined earlier by the junior Minister, the area of greatest concern to the Committee was the transfer of the Planning Appeals Commission and the Water Appeals Commission to the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. We were told that this was to allow for greater independence. Currently the Department of the Environment has statutory responsibility for the Planning Appeals Commission, and the four most senior planning appeals commissioners comprise the Water Appeals Commission. Therefore, the appellate bodies were examining the decisions of the Department that had the statutory responsibility for them. While we were assured that they acted independently in that arrangement, this transfer creates a more open and accountable form of impartiality.

The Committee questioned whether these important appeal bodies would have been better set up outside the

central Government structure to provide them with even more independence and impartiality. However, the Government had already announced a review of public administration, and the Committee decided that this matter should be taken on board in that review. All forms of appeals in our administrative system should be seen not only as apparently independent, but as very obviously independent.

The junior Minister dealt with the 11 transfer functions which relate to Departments other than the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. The Committee of the Centre consulted with the other relevant Assembly Committees and got assurances on the points of concern that were raised. The junior Ministers attended the Committee of the Centre and positively answered the questions that had caused concern. Therefore, the Committee of the Centre is fairly and reasonably satisfied that it can recommend that this Statutory Rule be accepted and affirmed.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I have received no further indication of Members who would like to speak.

Mr Nesbitt: I welcome Mr Gibson's comment that he is fairly and reasonably satisfied. If anyone says to anyone else here that he is fairly and reasonably satisfied, that can be taken as a commendation. Mr Gibson rightly said, as did I at the outset, that the main thrust of this transfer of functions is to deal with the Planning Appeals Commission and the Water Appeals Commission. There are others coming through as well.

While satisfied that both commissions are entirely independent and impartial, this provides a greater outward display of that impartiality. It remains for me to thank Mr Gibson on behalf of the Committee that he represents for his words of support. I ask that the motion to approve these provisions be supported.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Departments (Transfer of Functions) Order (Northern Ireland) (SR 229/2001) 2001 be approved.

The sitting was suspended at 1.11pm.

On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —

2.30 pm

Mr Speaker: During Question Time last week a Minister was asked questions about matters that were not his responsibility. They were occasioned less by their appropriateness as questions to that Minister than by the events of the recent elections. As the Deputy Speaker ruled at that time, such questions are out of order. They should not be put, and, if put, the Minister should not be required to respond.

The Speaker of the House of Commons of Canada, the hon Peter Milliken, and several of his parliamentary

Colleagues have visited us today, and some Members have had an opportunity to meet them. It is an honour for the Assembly not only to receive distinguished parliamentarians, but, for the first time since it decided to join the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), to be visited by parliamentarians from a CPA legislature. On the Assembly's behalf, I extend a hearty welcome to Speaker Milliken and his Colleagues.

The Minister is in his place, unlike some Members who have tabled questions. I will call Members, but if they are not in the Chamber they may not put their questions and, unfortunately, Members will not be able to ask supplementary questions. Mr John Kelly, Mr McHugh, Mrs Iris Robinson and Mr Conor Murphy are not in their places. However, Mr Gibson is present.

Mr Gibson: Ever ready, ever sure, Mr Speaker.

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION

Post-Primary Education Review

5. **Mr Gibson** asked the Minister of Education to detail the current timescale for completion of the post-primary education review. (AQO 1633/00)

All-inclusive Post-Primary Schools

9. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Education, in the light of favourable research into comprehensive schools in Great Britain, if he will provide an assurance to give the concept of all-inclusive, all-ability post-primary schools his full consideration. (AQO 1645/00)

The Minister of Education (Mr M McGuinness): With your permission, a Cheann Comhairle, I will answer questions 5 and 9 together.

The independent review body on post-primary education is due to report at the end of October. After its findings and recommendations have been consulted, I intend to make proposals for change at the earliest opportunity.

Mr Gibson: Will the Minister assure the Assembly that, irrespective of any structures for post-primary education proposed in the Burns Report, the primary importance of any review is to ensure an increasing standard in educational provision? What criteria have been given to the Burns team to ensure increasing academic success for every pupil in this age range?

Mr M McGuinness: The purpose of the Burns review body is to put in place a strengthened and enhanced education system. The review body's terms of reference were to consider research and other relevant information on the impact of selection on pupils, parents, teachers, the economy and society, and to undertake widespread consultation. The purpose of the consultation was to identify and consider key issues arising from the current selective system of post-primary education, and to assess the extent to which the current arrangements for post-primary education meet the needs and aspirations of children and their parents and the requirements of the economy and society.

The terms of reference also state that the review body should report its conclusions and recommendations on the future arrangements for post-primary education to the Minister of Education, and address specifically: the most appropriate structures for post-primary education, including the age or ages at which transfer should occur; the administrative arrangements for transfer; the implications for the curriculum at primary and post-primary levels; the implications for current school structures; the implications for further and higher education and training;

the anticipated impact of any proposed new arrangements on the economy; the cost of any revised arrangements; and the timing and phasing of any new proposed arrangements.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Given that research carried out after 1998 in Britain — Members will note that I say “Britain”, not “Great Britain” — at the University of York shows that some comprehensive schools do better than grammar schools and secondary moderns in progressing children from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4, and that research carried out in Cardiff shows similar success, will the Minister tell the House how extensive the review body's consultation has been?

Mr M McGuinness: This consultation has been the biggest by far on any education issue in recent years. The review body has held over 25 public meetings, two open days to receive oral evidence and meetings with representatives of business and commerce, and it has received over 1,000 written submissions. There has been huge public interest in the work of the review body, and there have been approximately 250,000 hits on the official web site. Barry McElduff is a member of the Education Committee, and it is important that that Committee submit its views as a matter of urgency so that they can also be considered.

Dr Birnie: Has the Minister noted the recent comments made by the former chief press secretary to the Prime Minister, Alastair Campbell, who said that the days of the bog-standard comprehensive school were over? Does the Minister agree that there is little point in copying an experiment in England that experts agreed failed between 1971 and 1999?

Mr M McGuinness: I noted those comments when they were made. The Department of Education has put in place a wide-ranging review. The Gallagher and Smith Report provided information on education in England, Scotland and some European countries. The review body and the panel of education advisors have substantial knowledge of these matters. The review body has undertaken study visits to the South, Scotland, the Netherlands and Austria to experience their systems at first hand.

It would be a serious mistake to pre-empt the outcome of the review body's deliberations. An extensive consultation is taking place, and, as a result of the information that I have received from the review body and its trips abroad, I am certain that it is taking a broad view of all this.

Mr Dallat: Does the Minister agree that when considering comprehensive education he would do well to examine the concept of community schools that exists in the Republic of Ireland? Not only are they comprehensive, but they are open to the whole community, thereby promoting lifelong learning.

Mr M McGuinness: The review body undoubtedly had extensive discussions with education authorities in Dublin during its recent visit there and became fully appraised of the community schools.

Members are trying to glean some indication as to how all this will turn out, but I do not know how it will turn out, because the review body is independent. It has been involved in in-depth discussions on many education systems, and I am as keenly interested as Mr Dallat in the outcome of its deliberations.

Common Funding Formula for Schools

6. **Mr Leslie** asked the Minister of Education to detail how the responses to the consultation on a common funding formula for schools will be weighted. (AQO 1640/00)

Mr M McGuinness: There will be no formal weighting allocated to any response. I will decide on the common formula in the light of my consideration on all the views expressed and after further consultation with Colleagues on the Executive and the Education Committee.

Mr Leslie: I do not regard the Minister's answer as satisfactory. Does he agree that the official responses given by the schools affected by these proposals are the most significant responses he will receive? They should be given greater consideration than responses from individuals, which can always be input in large numbers in order to distort the apparent balance of opinion on the matters being discussed. Therefore, can he assure us that he will be giving full and proper weight to the responses received from the schools affected by the proposals?

Mr M McGuinness: I am particularly interested to hear what representational bodies have to say about the proposals. However, this is a consultation; it is not a referendum. Decisions will have to be made taking into account the various views expressed, the policy context and, most importantly, what is judged as being best for schools. I understand the Member's point, but we need to remember that this is a consultation exercise. There is a particular interest in hearing what the representational bodies have to say.

Mr Speaker: Question 7, in the name of Ms Sue Ramsey, has been withdrawn.

Local Management of Schools

8. **Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister of Education to detail the representations he has received to extend the consultation period for the review of the local management of schools funding formula. (AQO 1649/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Representations to extend the consultation period have been received from the Assembly Education Committee, the general purposes and finance committee of the Belfast Education and Library Board, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, the Governing

Bodies Association of Voluntary Grammar Schools, the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education and a Member of the Assembly, Mr Duncan Shipley Dalton. In the light of the concerns expressed, I have reviewed the timetable for consultation and extended the closing date to 21 September 2001.

Mr Kennedy: I welcome the extension of the consultation period. Given the extension and the need for primary legislation if the proposals are implemented, will the Minister concede that, because of the representations made to him, the implementation date of April 2002 is no longer realistic?

Mr M McGuinness: There is some concern about that. In considering the extension of the deadline until later in the year, we were very conscious of the ongoing intention in the Department to put this in place as early as possible at the beginning of next year. Any delay would be highly detrimental, as we are dealing with the sense of unfairness and inequities perceived by many people in the education system.

I regard this as an urgent priority — an objective to be achieved as quickly as possible. This has put people under pressure. It has put many officials in my Department under pressure, and by extending the period of consultation I have made their lives much more difficult. We are determined to complete this process by early next year.

Pupil Admissions Criteria

10. **Mr Ford** asked the Minister of Education if he will introduce new guidelines for schools in respect of the criteria for pupil admission. (AQO 1644/00)

Post-Primary Schools' Admission Criteria

1. **Mr J Kelly** asked the Minister of Education if, following recent concerns by the Human Rights Commission relating to post-primary schools' admission criteria, he will ensure that the human rights of pupils and their families are guaranteed in the transfer to post-primary school. (AQO 1638/00)

Mr M McGuinness: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will take questions 10 and 1 together.

In publishing its recent report, the Human Rights Commission acknowledged that the report is the work of Laura Lundy, senior law lecturer at Queen's University. No specific human rights issues have been identified. Under my Department's New TSN action plan, a working group was established some time ago to consider the promotion of access to schools by disadvantaged groups, with particular reference to the operation of admissions criteria.

2.45 pm

Laura Lundy is a member of that group. Its report will issue from the Department to schools in late August

as specific advice for the review of admissions criteria. My Department will also be undertaking an equality impact assessment of the open enrolment policy in 2002-03 under its statutory equality scheme. The whole system of post-primary provision is currently under review.

My Department is aware of these important issues and is taking appropriate action. I should also stress that admissions criteria are statutorily matters for boards of governors, and their legality is a matter for the courts.

Mr Ford: I thank the Minister for his response, although I am surprised that he said that there were no specific human rights issues identified in the commission's report. Given that this matter is urgent and accepting that it is for boards of governors to implement, can the Minister say how quickly he expects to issue any revised guidance in the light of that report? Will he be taking any further action so that the admission of pupils who are neither Catholic nor Protestant to integrated schools is treated more fairly than at present?

Mr M McGuinness: As I said earlier, we intend to issue advice to the boards of governors in late August, and that will help to settle these matters. We should not exaggerate the extent of the problems we face. Generally, boards of governors take great care in drawing up and applying their criteria, and they exercise their responsibilities very conscientiously. We must ensure that any problems identified are resolved in the future, and that includes the problem with integrated schools. We are monitoring the situation carefully, but we must keep the problems in perspective and in context.

Mr J Kelly: Go raibh maith agat a Cheann Comhairle. I apologise to you, Mr Speaker, to the Minister and to the Assembly for not being present when my question was called.

Do I take it from the Minister's answer that he is concerned about the problems in the system?

Mr M McGuinness: I would be concerned if there were a perception that our approach or that of schools and boards of governors left something to be desired. These are important issues, and doubtless many Members receive communications from their constituents, particularly in the aftermath of the results of the 11-plus examinations. We have tried to deal with the problem by establishing the working party. That was a positive development, and we await the outcome of it. The advice will issue to schools in August, and I hope that we can overcome many of the difficulties as a result.

Bullying and Discipline in Schools

11. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Education when he intends to introduce legislation to address the problem of bullying and discipline in schools. (AQO 1648/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Every school is required to have a written discipline policy that must promote self-

discipline, good behaviour and respect for others among pupils. Bullying behaviour is unacceptable and should be addressed by schools as part of their existing discipline policies. On a voluntary basis, many schools have developed a separate anti-bullying policy. I intend to strengthen that position by taking the next legislative opportunity to make it mandatory for every school to have an anti-bullying policy in place and to implement it.

Mr Beggs: I thank the Minister for confirming that he is going to address bullying in schools. Will he also agree that it is unacceptable for others to bully a pupil's parents? When will he and the Republican community end their so-called punishment attacks and decommission their weapons —

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member knows that the question is out of order. I will not permit the Minister to respond.

New Schools

12. **Mr Hamilton** asked the Minister of Education to confirm that he will not approve the establishment of a new school in an area where there is already a surplus of places available in existing schools. (AQO 1647/00)

Mr M McGuinness: As the establishment of new schools involves substantial public expenditure, their eligibility for grant-aid must be assessed against a range of criteria to ensure that they are robust and educationally effective. The criteria include viability, availability of suitable alternative provision, impact on other schools, quality of current education provision and the level of objections to any grant-aid proposal.

Mr Hamilton: How does the Minister's answer sit with the Government's policy of open enrolment? Is it now policy to further curtail parental choice?

Mr M McGuinness: When I first came to the Department of Education, I stressed the importance of parental choice and of ensuring that we allow for the demand for education in relation to particular sections of the community, whether in the integrated, Irish-medium or any other sector. We said that we would do everything in our power, as long as people came forward with robust proposals. On the specific issue of applications for the establishment of new schools, we have been at pains to ensure that there has been no favouritism for anybody and that people's rights have been protected. At all times the Department has ensured that it adhered rigidly to its criteria for the establishment of new schools or the continuation of schools that were under threat.

Mr Speaker: As there are no further questions, we must leave questions to the Minister of Education at this point.

I am aware that Members' minds may, for various reasons, be on matters outside the Chamber, but it is a

matter of more than mere regret that many Members whose names were down to ask questions were not in the Chamber when their time came. In addition, any Members who may have wished to ask supplementary questions were denied the opportunity to do so. Although that may be a discourtesy and a disadvantage to the House, it is also a discourtesy to the Minister and his civil servants, who have taken substantial time to prepare responses to the questions. Frankly, that is not the way in which the House should be treating those who are servants of the House and of the Executive.

At this point, according to the agreement previously reached through the usual channels, the House will, by leave, suspend and resume at 3.00 pm with questions to the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

The sitting was suspended at 2.52 pm.

On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —

3.00 pm

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Health Service Staff (Mileage Allowances)

1. **Mr Hussey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to explain the differential in mileage allowance paid to social workers, health visitors and community nurses while engaged on Health Service business. (AQO 1631/00)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms de Brún): De réir téarmaí agus coinníollacha a bhfostaíochta, tá oibrithe sóisialta nasctha le rátaí an liúntais mhíleáiste a íoctar lena macasamhla de fhoireann i seirbhísí údarás áitiúil sa Bhreatain Mhór. Maidir le cuairteoirí sláinte agus altráí pobail, tá an nasc leis na rátaí a íoctar lena macasamhla sa tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Sláinte.

Under the terms and conditions of employment, social work staff are linked to the mileage allowance rates payable to similar staff employed in local authority services in Great Britain. The link for health visitors and community nurses is with the rates paid to similar staff in the NHS.

Mr Hussey: The Minister will be aware that the division in mileage allowance arose in England when departmental responsibilities for health and social services were separated. Does she not recognise that these workers are carrying out work in the Health Service? They are travelling the same miles, driving on the same roads, and as employees in the Health Service, they deserve to be paid the same mileage rate.

Ms de Brún: The health services agreement contained in the Finance Act 1971 requires that staff employed in health and personal social services receive the same

rates of pay and conditions of service as their counterparts in the NHS and local government respectively in England and Wales. The rates were agreed for staff in the NHS. Organisations that represent staff in health and personal social services in agreeing terms and conditions of service for here and GB were consulted and agreed to parity being maintained.

Guardian Ad Litem Service

2. **Mr Ford** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to give her assessment of the guardian ad litem service in Northern Ireland.

(AQO 1642/00)

Ms de Brún: A Cheann Comhairle. Tá mé sásta gur labhair Gníomhaireacht an Chaomhnóra ad Litem ó seoladh í i mí na Samhna 1996 go héifeachtach ar son páistí sa dlí poiblí agus in imeachtaí uchtaithe agus gur chuir sí seirbhís mheasúil ar fáil do na cuairteanna.

I am satisfied that the Guardian Ad Litem Agency, since its launch in November 1996, has provided an essential voice for the child in public law and adoption proceedings and a valued service for the courts.

Mr Ford: To clarify, I should explain that I have carried out the duties of guardian ad litem as an employee of a health and social services board, though it is not an interest to declare. It seems that with the setting up of the agency, there is now less consistency in the work of individual guardians, and they may take different attitudes in accordance with their professional judgement. I would not wish guardians to be in the same position as, perhaps, psychiatrists or doctors, by finding that they disagree with each other in court. To ensure consistency, is there not a case for considering greater regulation of the way the entire panel works?

Ms de Brún: Each case is unique and must be treated on its merits. It is ultimately for the court to determine the action to be taken, based on the evidence before it and its assessment of the Guardian Ad Litem Agency's recommendations. The Social Services Inspectorate is empowered to carry out inspections of the agency to ensure that its services adhere to acceptable standards and that it continues to satisfy legislative and departmental requirements. The Social Services Inspectorate will shortly plan its business programme for the next five years. Together with the Department's childcare unit, it will consider whether there is a need to include an inspection of the Guardian Ad Litem Agency during the planning cycle. I am informed that the courts value highly the work of the Guardian Ad Litem Agency; it is my assessment that they are satisfied with the agency's work.

Mr McFarland: Can the Minister comment on the likely interface between the Guardian Ad Litem Agency and any future commissioner for children?

Ms de Brún: I cannot speculate on that matter, because the proposed appointment of a commissioner for children is under consultation. However, when the commissioner's powers and remit become clearer, I will speak to the Member further.

Drug Therapies (Rheumatoid Arthritis)

3. **Ms Hanna** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the steps she is taking to ensure that the new anti-TNF drug therapies for the treatment of severe rheumatoid arthritis, Etanercept and Infliximab, are reaching those who most need them.

(AQO 1650/00)

Ms de Brún: Tigim leis an tuairim gur forbairt thábhachtach iad na drugaí seo do roinnt othar le airtríteas réamatóideach trom agus forchéimnitheach nach dteachaidh na teiripí drugaí atá ann faoi láthair chun sochair dóibh.

Tuigim gur dar le húsáideoirí seirbhísí a bhfuil airtríteas ainsealach orthu go bhféadfadh tairbhe nach beag a bheith sna drugaí nua seo. Ó tá tuilleadh staidéir de dhíth orthu lena n-éifeacht fhadtréimhseach a mheas, tá sé riachtanach go ndéanfaí stiúradh agus monatóireacht dhian ar a n-úsáid, go háirithe mar gheall ar na fo-iarsmaí tromchúiseacha dochracha a d'fhéadfadh a bheith ann.

I support the view that these new drugs are an important development for several patients with severe and progressive rheumatoid arthritis who have failed to respond to existing drug therapies. I appreciate that for service users with chronic arthritis, the potential benefit that these new drugs offer appears to be considerable. However, as further studies are required to ascertain the efficacy of these treatments in the longer term, it is essential that their use is strictly controlled and monitored — particularly in the light of possible serious and adverse side effects.

Boards have agreed to adopt a cautious approach to the introduction of these drugs by taking account of the increasing evidence of their effectiveness and of the resources available. I am awaiting further expert advice on the effectiveness of the drugs. However, in the event of any decision to move beyond their gradual introduction, I will not hesitate to seek the support of the Executive in securing the necessary resources.

Ms Hanna: Given that these drugs are widely used and widely recommended by the medical profession, will the Minister assure me that she will meet the patients, their families, their doctors and their nurses? Figures do not begin to convey either the pain and frustration that those patients feel, or the dramatic transformation that these drugs are having on those lucky enough to have been prescribed them.

Ms de Brún: The Member referred to the widespread use of these drugs. Usage here is in keeping with usage in the wider NHS; in fact, it compares favourably with

it. The Department continuously assesses the published evidence about these new drugs. It recently received evidence that was submitted jointly by rheumatologists and Arthritis Care. It is likely that that information will form part of the evidence that will be presented to the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE). In addition, my Department will soon meet with rheumatologists and boards. As I said, the drugs are the subject of an appraisal by NICE, which is expected to produce guidance on their use later this year.

Dr Adamson: Does the Minister agree that the use of new anti-TNF (tumour necrosis factor) drug therapies for other severe forms of arthritis such as ankylosing spondylitis would greatly alleviate the terrible suffering, indeed torture, of so many of her own constituents? Does that not far outweigh purely financial considerations?

Ms de Brún: The drugs are being introduced gradually in keeping with the British Society for Rheumatology's guidelines. I am waiting for further advice on the drugs' effectiveness. I fully appreciate that for some sufferers the potential benefits of the new drugs appear to be considerable. However, as further studies are required to ascertain their efficacy in the longer term, it is essential that they are introduced gradually and that use is strictly controlled and monitored. The drugs are not licensed for the use that the Member mentioned.

Mr J Kelly: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Can the Minister assure us that the approach to access to these drugs is consistent with the human rights agenda?

Ms de Brún: The decision to promote a gradual introduction of these drugs and to carefully monitor that introduction necessarily means that some patients will receive the drug and some will not. I am awaiting further expert advice on the drugs' effectiveness. My Department is satisfied that this approach is consistent with human rights standards and that it has taken full account of human rights issues in its consideration of the matter.

Mr Speaker: Question 4 has been withdrawn.

Review of Acute Services

5. **Mr Gibson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the anticipated timescale to complete the review of acute services. (AQO 1634/00)

Ms de Brún: Seoladh tuairisc an ghrúpa aithbhreithnithe ar ghéarospidéal go foirmiúil ar 20 Meitheamh. Is mian liom machnamh cúramach a dhéanamh uirthi anois le mo Chomhghleacaithe sa Choiste Feidhmiúcháin.

The acute hospitals review group's report was formally launched on 20 June. I now wish to give that careful consideration with my Colleagues in the Executive.

Mr Gibson: The Hayes Report has outraged most of the residents of County Tyrone. Most of the area covered by Cookstown, Dungannon, Omagh and Strabane district

councils has been marginalised. Accessibility and availability of services are not properly provided for in the Hayes Report because of the decline of Tyrone County Hospital. Will the Minister and her associates show serious concern during the consultation period for the residents' heartfelt outrage? It will not disappear until their demands are met.

Ms de Brún: The report is a frank assessment of the problems that face our hospital services, and it underlines the need for the problems to be confronted. Everyone who is affected by the report should take time to study it carefully, and everyone will have an opportunity to make his or her views known. It is important to stress that no decisions have been or will be taken prior to a period of consultation. Any changes that are proposed for the long-term future of our acute hospitals will be subject to an equality impact assessment. I agree that the question of access to acute hospital services is a matter of crucial interest, and I reiterate that everyone will have an opportunity to make their views known.

Mr Byrne: The Hayes Report on acute services has caused immense disquiet and anger in Omagh and west Tyrone. The recommendation flies in the face of all logical factors involved in medical care provision. What comfort and consideration can the Minister offer the staff and, in particular, the patients of the Tyrone County Hospital who have genuine fears about the future of acute services provision in west Tyrone?

3.15 pm

Finally, can the Minister assure my constituents in Omagh that nothing underhand has taken place to their detriment, and will she give a sincere pledge that her Department will listen to Omagh's case on this matter during the consultation stage in the next few months?

Ms de Brún: I commissioned an independent review to give me advice on all the complex issues involved and to make recommendations about the way forward. I have now received that report, and I wish to give it careful consideration with my Colleagues in the Executive.

The acute hospitals review group report makes direct reference to the provision of hospital services for Tyrone and Fermanagh. I will explore how best to ensure safe and effective services for people in those areas.

Mr P Doherty: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Can the Minister give some indication of the timescale of the consultation period, the mechanism for accessing that consultation process and the timescale for the decision-making that will result from it?

Ms de Brún: I hope to be able to give more details on the precise timing in the near future. I received the report only last week, and I want to consider it very carefully and discuss it with my Colleagues on the Executive.

By way of preparation, I hope to issue the report soon and to advise staff, medical professionals and the public

that they and the wider community can give their views on this. Any proposals for the long-term future of our acute hospitals will go first to the Executive, then through a consultation process and will also be subject to an equality impact assessment. That will take time.

The Programme for Government envisages an agreed way forward by the end of this year. However, when that was laid out, we expected the report to be available at an earlier stage. The Member should now have a general idea of the timescale and mechanisms, and I hope to be able to make further details known soon.

Rev Robert Coulter: How does the Minister intend to process the provision of the seamless robe of medical care through acute hospitals and primary care?

Ms de Brún: Allow me to reiterate: I have only just received the report. I believe that it makes a valuable contribution to progress. It will stimulate an important and necessary debate. However, I want to consider all of the issues carefully and discuss them with my Colleagues in the Executive.

Mr McGrady: In the light of the Hayes Report that has just been published, does the Minister agree that the proposals of the working party regarding the provision of services in Downe Hospital — the Stewart Report — should have been implemented? The Minister placed a moratorium on the building of the new hospital in Downpatrick approximately a year and a half ago. She suspended the architectural work and placed a moratorium on the procurement of equipment for the new hospital. Does she not agree that she should now lift those moratoria? The new hospital buildings will cater for whatever services will go into them. Two years have already been lost, and it is absolutely disgraceful that medical, surgical and nursing staff are expected to work in the archaic conditions that now exist in the Downe Hospital.

Ms de Brún: I want to resolve the uncertainty about the future of our hospital services as soon as possible. I intend to issue the report shortly to gauge the public and professional reaction to what it proposes. During that period my officials will be considering the issues with other relevant Departments. I will advance proposals for agreement by the Executive, with a view to issuing a consultation paper later in the year.

Members who have raised points about individual hospitals and services will be able to make their views known, first, when I issue the report to gauge public and professional reaction initially and, secondly, during the consultation period.

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Can the Minister tell us how the question of rural proofing will be taken into account with regard to the acute hospitals review?

Ms de Brún: The acute hospitals review group was asked to take account of local accessibility as one of the key considerations in its task. I will consider carefully the implications of the review's recommendations on disadvantaged rural areas. Of course, any subsequent decisions will be subject to an equality impact assessment.

Mr Hussey: Thank you for calling me, Mr Speaker. I know that you are indulging me, and I really appreciate that.

The Minister will realise from questions the concern that is being generated in west Tyrone. To date, she has failed to meet with people who wish to make representations. Will the Minister guarantee the Assembly that she will meet with people from west Tyrone who have concerns about the future implications of the acute services review, whether at council or chamber of commerce level?

Ms de Brún: The acute hospitals review group report contains many radical and far-reaching proposals that I will now want to consider and discuss with Executive Colleagues. At this point no decisions have been taken, nor will they be taken prior to a period of consultation.

I have already met members from the chamber of commerce during the period of suspension. I have not received a specific request to repeat that particular presentation. However, we do have a lengthy list of councils and others who have asked to meet me to discuss the matter. We made it clear to them that such meetings would be best undertaken after I received the report. My Department is now beginning to organise a series of meetings with those who have already written in, where correspondence is on file.

Mr Speaker: That concludes questions to the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. The Assembly will now, by leave, suspend, resuming at 3.30 pm with questions to the Minister of Finance and Personnel.

Mr Hussey: Mr Speaker, will you take a point of order at this stage?

Mr Speaker: I do not normally take points of order during Question Time. It is only interrupted by a suspension. Perhaps, during the suspension, the Member might like to draw the matter to my attention privately. I would be content to hear him then.

The sitting was suspended at 3.24 pm.

On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair)—

3.30 pm

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Public Finance Initiative/ Public-Private Partnership

1. **Ms Lewsley** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (a) the terms of reference of the public

finance initiative/public-private partnership working group; and (b) what progress has been made to date.

(AQO 1652/00)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):

Officials in my Department are concluding discussions with officials from the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister on the terms of reference for the PPP working group, which I announced on 15 March. I expect to make an announcement on the agreed terms of reference soon, and I will ensure that a copy is placed in the Assembly Library.

In response to part (b) of the question, administrative staff have already been assigned as a secretariat and are developing plans for the composition and operation of the working group.

Ms Lewsley: Can the Minister confirm that the use of PFI/PPP will be guided by need and will be used only after the more traditional approach of publicly-funded investment has been considered?

Mr Durkan: I am happy to confirm the thrust of that. As the Executive emphasised in the Programme for Government, resources available from taxpayers are finite and stretched by the need to provide services to meet levels of need that are greater than the UK average. The Executive have also had to deal with a legacy of historical underfunding in the infrastructure of our public services, which means that education, for example, has a backlog of capital investment needs of around £500 million. That simply cannot be funded in the traditional manner with the resources available.

It is therefore important that the Executive and the Departments explore new ways of financing public services such as PFI/PPP. Where this is employed, it is invariably because the traditional investment approach has been considered but has been judged to be unaffordable from available resources. PFI/PPP is used to address real needs, but only if deals with private-sector partners are affordable and demonstrably deliver value for money.

Mr Weir: Will the Minister assure us that it will be part of the remit of the new working group to consult with other Departments and particularly to look at other innovative schemes for funding the investment deficit such as bond schemes, which are being examined by at least one Department?

Mr Durkan: It is intended that the group will work with all relevant Departments and for all Departments. It will be trying to ensure that we can make better use of other financing opportunities to provide public services and maximise the amount of investment that takes place in the public interest. We must keep underscoring that we are trying to maximise the amount of investment in the public interest, and we are talking about the provision

of better public services for the longer term. That will involve working with all Departments. Some of the ideas are not going to be as straightforward as some of their sponsors necessarily believe, so the working group will have to address some of the issues that arise, for example, in the context of Treasury rules.

Procurement Review

2. **Mr A Doherty** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the timetable for completion of the procurement review. (AQO 1654/00)

Mr Durkan: The procurement review implementation team is aiming to complete its work and present its report to me by the end of this month.

Mr A Doherty: Will the Minister confirm that the use of effective procurement is important, not only in achieving value for money but in helping to achieve other social and economic goals?

Mr Durkan: I can confirm that. Public procurement is first and foremost the means by which the public sector buys in the goods and services that it needs to discharge its responsibilities to the citizens. Securing commercial value for money is an important consideration. With well over £1 billion a year being spent, not only might savings be possible but that activity has the potential to have a significant impact on the social and economic environment. For that reason, the review team has, as part of its terms of reference, the task of exploring the scope to use public procurement to further social, economic and environmental objectives in the context of current EC and international law relating to procurement. I look forward to its findings and recommendations.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease

3. **Mr Gibson** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in relation to foot-and-mouth disease, to detail (a) the estimated cost of reimbursing direct and consequential loss to the rural economy; and (b) the estimated financial package expected from Her Majesty's Government and the European Union to assist in this regard. (AQO 1635/00)

Mr Durkan: Until the beginning of June, the total cost to Departments of dealing with foot-and-mouth disease was £16.5 million. Included in that figure is £6.9 million spent on reimbursing the direct losses incurred.

Compensation is not payable for consequential losses connected with foot-and-mouth disease controls. However, Members will be aware that the Executive have approved the Help for Business scheme. The costs for the Help for Business scheme cannot yet be quantified, as applications are still being received. There are currently no final figures available for the financial package expected from Whitehall and the European

Union. Those figures are the subject of discussions between Treasury and Department of Finance and Personnel officials.

Mr Gibson: Will the Minister bear in mind that many businesses in west Tyrone have been adversely affected by foot-and-mouth disease? Many of those directly affected were tourist facilities, and others were suppliers connected with the tourist industry. What immediate relief can the Minister offer them by way of financial aid?

Mr Durkan: I again refer the Member to the Help for Business scheme that has been announced. That scheme is taking applications from businesses that can demonstrate that they have been directly affected and are suffering financial hardship as a direct result of the foot-and-mouth disease crisis. Businesses that fall into that category in west Tyrone should be availing of that scheme. The tests that have been introduced — including being able to show a 15% drop in turnover — are neither complicated nor exacting. I hope that as many Members as possible will encourage any business raising concerns with them to apply for that scheme.

Senior Civil Service Review

4. **Mrs Courtney** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail when the senior civil service review will report its findings. (AQO 1653/00)

Mr Durkan: The senior civil service review commenced at the beginning of March this year, and the review team is due to report its findings to me in September. When I have had the opportunity to study the findings of the review, I will bring the report, along with my recommendations, to the Executive for final decisions.

Mrs Courtney: Can the Minister confirm that the findings of the review team will be implemented as soon as is practicable and that all promotions and recruitment to that senior group will be influenced by these findings?

Mr Durkan: The point of embarking on such a significant review was to ensure that the review team's ideas would influence future appointments and promotions. However, I cannot prejudge the outcome of the review. When the review has been completed, I will bring the report to the Executive, along with my recommendations. It will be for the Executive to take the final decisions on the implementation of the review's findings.

Budget Timetable

5. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to confirm that the proposed Budget timetable will allow for proper input to be made by Assembly Committees. (AQO 1655/00)

Mr Durkan: The Executive are committed to giving Committees a constructive role in the development of

the Budget for 2002-03. The proposed Budget timetable provides for initial input from Committees — that process will start before the summer — before the Executive consider the draft Budget in September.

The early involvement of Committees, which was not possible last year, will be informed by the Executive's position report 'Developing the Programme for Government and the Budget for 2002-03', which was published this month. Compared to last year, Committees will have two extra weeks in the autumn to scrutinise the draft Budget. Thus, the Assembly will have a meaningful input throughout the Budget process.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Minister for his undertakings. Can he assure the House that there will be a wider community input into the Budget? Is the Minister confident that, after 30 years of direct rule, people will have a real influence on how the Budget is spent?

Mr Durkan: We are conscious that we must have consultation on the draft Budget with all the groups listed in the Department of Finance and Personnel equality scheme. There must be similar consultation on the Programme for Government with all the groups listed in the scheme administered by the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. In that context, the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister has already issued copies of the position report to over 1,200 groups and individuals listed in the equality schemes and invited them to comment. The same material that was made available to Committees has been distributed to a wide range of groups. It is also available on the Internet.

We are trying to ensure that the broadest possible range of social and economic partners can discuss the issues that the Executive lay before the Assembly and that their views are conveyed to the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, in respect of the Programme for Government, and to the Department of Finance and Personnel, in respect of the Budget. Committees will also benefit from those insights.

Rate Collection Agency

6. **Mr Bradley** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail his plans on the future status of the Rate Collection Agency. (AQO 1646/00)

7. **Mr Ford** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he intends to make changes in the status of the Rate Collection Agency. (AQO 1643/00)

Mr Durkan: I will take questions 6 and 7 together. The review of the Rate Collection Agency is coming towards the end of its first stage. The first stage of the quinquennial review examines the organisational options. If agency status is confirmed, the review will proceed to the second stage, which is a forward-looking consideration

of improvements in performance. I currently have no plans to change the status of the Rate Collection Agency.

Mr Bradley: There is some good news built in there. In early May, the team that was asked to consider the purchase of two new computer systems for the Rate Collection Agency was suspended. What was the reason for the suspension?

Mr Durkan: As part of the Rate Collection Agency's plan for the future, an outline business case for a project to deliver a new integrated computer service was developed and submitted to the Department on 27 April. However, the agency decided to suspend further work on the project until after the quinquennial review, to ensure that any future investment would be maximised.

3.45 pm

Pending the outcome of the quinquennial review, the agency is concentrating on securing appropriate business continuity arrangements to minimise the risks arising from the continued operation of its two existing computer systems.

Mr Ford: I thank the Minister for his response and specifically for his assurance that he has no plans to change the status of the agency. Can he confirm to the Assembly that the Rate Collection Agency is significantly more efficient than the vast majority of authorities in GB in its collection of rates — or in GB's case, council tax — and that any possible change in status would have to be based on a need to improve what is already an excellent service?

Mr Durkan: I am happy to confirm the performance efficiency of the Rate Collection Agency. I have made that point before in answer to questions from Mr Ford's Colleague, who seemed to be less impressed by the indications of the Rate Collection Agency's performance.

Stage one of the quinquennial is not yet complete. If agency status is confirmed, we will move into stage two. I have not yet received any report or recommendations arising out of stage one.

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. To follow on from the same question, can the Minister confirm that there is speculation that the Rate Collection Agency is going out to tender and that BT and NIE are bidding for the contract? There is also speculation that the review team favours the Rate Collection Agency's function being contracted out to the private sector.

Mr Durkan: No proposals or recommendations have yet come to me. The Rate Collection Agency's chief executive has written to all the staff to inform them of what favoured option was emerging in stage one. That letter was copied to me as Minister and I, in turn, copied it to the Finance and Personnel Committee. It is in the context of that information that the other rumours that Mr Molloy has referred to have been circulating.

Equine Establishments

8. **Mr Savage** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he has any plans to end the levying of business rates on dedicated equine establishments with a view to redressing the direct competition that they experience from farms operating subsidiary equine businesses, but which pay no rates. (AQO 1641/00)

Mr Durkan: I have no immediate plans to exempt equine businesses from rates liability, but the matter will be addressed in the rating policy review, which is under way. All equine businesses, wherever they are located, are treated in the same way for rating purposes.

Mr Savage: Does the Minister take the view that levelling rates is a primitive and crude method of raising revenue and that, as in certain states in the United States of America, local purchase taxes and income taxes, which reflect more accurately an individual's ability to pay, are a fairer way of raising revenue? Will he undertake to consider that?

Mr Durkan: In the context of the rating policy review, we are trying to make sure that we have a means of raising revenue that is efficient in giving a good yield but fair in the burdens it imposes on households and businesses. The Member referred to direct taxes, including some examples of states in the USA, but direct taxes of various kinds can be as unpopular and at times as crude and simplistic as he thinks that rating policy is.

PERSONAL STATEMENTS

Mr Gregory Campbell and Mr Maurice Morrow

Mr Speaker: I have received requests from Mr Campbell and Mr Morrow for leave to make personal statements.

Mr Campbell will make his statement, and Mr Morrow will formally identify himself with the content of that statement.

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Campbell): Mr Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to make a statement.

On Tuesday 6 May, four weeks before the general election and six weeks before the meeting of the Ulster Unionist Council, the First Minister announced his intention to resign from office on 1 July if decommissioning did not take place. Owing to the results of the general election and the local council elections and the success of anti-agreement candidates, it is clear that the First Minister has no option but to resign.

To make that gesture meaningful, all Unionist Ministers ought to resign with him. To do otherwise would be to reduce the actions of the First Minister to a stunt — *[Interruption]*.

Mr Speaker: Order. Members on all sides — at least those with any experience — ought to be aware that personal statements are heard in silence. I ask that this convention be observed. It has not always been observed in the Chamber, but Members should adhere to it.

Mr Campbell: To do otherwise would be to reduce the actions of the First Minister to a stunt, the result of which would be to see further concessions made to Republicans over the summer on policing, amnesties for on-the-run terrorists and demilitarisation. All Members must be acutely aware that that will be the inevitable consequence if the First Minister alone resigns.

My Colleague Maurice Morrow and I have therefore today tendered to the Speaker a letter of resignation effective on the resignation of all the First Minister's party Colleagues from the Executive.

Several Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Campbell: That action, together with the election results, will send out the clearest possible signal that the current system does not command the support of a majority of Unionists in Northern Ireland. The DUP is committed to finding an accommodation that can command such support and in pursuing that aim it will talk to any democratic party. However, it will not sit down or negotiate with those who are not committed to exclusively peaceful means. The DUP will not act in a way that will simply hand over Departments to those who support the Belfast Agreement; it will act in the best interests of all the people of Northern Ireland.

Today we challenge the First Minister to see if he is serious about decommissioning and give him the opportunity to take a decisive and meaningful step. The process has reached a moment of truth, and the First Minister can halt the concessions to Republicans that may be made over the summer months. I challenge him to act now. Let him heed the will of the Unionist electorate and prevent a further wave of capitulation and concessions.

It is time to unify Unionism behind a position that can command the support of the majority of Unionists. This is an opportunity that Unionism can ill afford to miss. Mr Morrow and I remain ready to divulge the precise terms of our letter as and when the First Minister does likewise. *[Interruption]*.

Mr Speaker: Order.

The Minister for Social Development (Mr Morrow): I wish to associate myself with the comments of my ministerial Colleague Mr Campbell. His remarks to the House today are my remarks also. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: As I advised the House on 8 May, the occasion of a previous personal statement, this statement will be made under the precedent of a statement made on 15 July 1999. When Ministers make statements about their personal position that affect public office, an opportunity may be given to other party leaders or their nominees to make comment or response to them.

Mr Trimble: I am astonished by some of the comments that have been made by Mr Campbell. He appears to be in some doubt as to what the letter I lodged with the Speaker says. If there is any problem I will publish the letter. It contains one sentence. It is absolutely clear in what it contains and what its effects will be.

Behind the fog of language that we heard from Mr Campbell two things stand out. First, he is incompetent; he has not read the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The letter he has lodged will have no effect. A letter of resignation — if he can read the Northern Ireland Act — should be sent to the Deputy First Minister and myself. Sending a resignation letter to the Speaker has no effect at all.

Secondly, he is a coward, he is a political coward. If he had any courage he would go now. What is he going to do? He says — *[Interruption]*.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Trimble: He says that after I resign he might think about it. In other words he is content to follow me, and by saying that, he is showing that he and his party regard me as the leader of Unionism.

Mr Speaker: Order. Normally it is the case that when there is disturbance it is in the Galleries, and they may be cleared. If the House will not settle there will be little point in continuing with this.

Mr Durkan: Mr Campbell described the First Minister's resignation letter and any implementation of it as a "stunt". Mr Campbell and Mr Morrow seem to be offering what might at best be described as a "shadow stunt". They "may" resign if other Ministers resign following Mr Trimble's resignation. It seems to me that they are suggesting that all the Unionist Ministers should take the same step and the same moves in a manner that I think is dangerously close to a political form of line dancing. I would have thought that on that basis the DUP Ministers might reconsider what they are offering.

For some time it has been clear to many of us outside Unionism that there are two groups of people on David Trimble's back: those within his party are there because they are trying to bring him down; and those from the DUP are there because they are quite happy to piggyback on David Trimble and on the success and the workings of the agreement.

Yet again, we have an indication from the DUP of their attempt to talk up their stance, and how they are out to break or undermine the agreement, while at the same time taking care to shelter themselves within the office of the agreement.

The non-statement from Mr Campbell and the very obvious non-statement by Mr Morrow, or "Mr Ditto", show that the DUP, in spite of its hype about its mandate, has no agenda now that the election is over.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: I was always convinced that what my two Colleagues were going to do was right, but having seen the tantrum thrown by the First Minister, to hear his ranting and raving, and to see his attitude — *[Interruption]*.

4.00 pm

That gentleman was not even elected. He is best described as what the scriptures call "a creeper".

Let me make it clear that Mr Durkan, who seems also to be enraged, remembers a day in the House when they were kissing him, congratulating him and patting him on the shoulder because he had been elected to office in the Assembly. Who was it who brought him down? It was not the gentlemen sitting on those Benches, who were hiding away in Glengall Street. It was I and this party behind me who brought the mighty man down. If anyone suggests that my party is interested in office rather than principle, that proves that it is not. If we had been interested in office we could have taken the best offices in the House. That is a fact of history that cannot be gainsaid.

What has happened today is this: the bluff of the First Minister and his fellow travellers who are trying to fool the public that they can stay in power when he goes has been called. We know that when he goes, they have to go. Why do they not do it decently and let every Unionist

worth his name and who has any interest in defeating Republicanism and the IRA resign? *[Interruption]*.

We are not prepared to put Republicans into office, as the party that is mumbling would be very glad to do. The moment of decision and of truth has come, and if these men were Unionists they would get out and stay out.

Mr McLaughlin: We do have to reflect on the message now coming from broad Unionism that after years of preaching about politics and democracy, it has surrendered. We used to hear the “No surrender” catchphrase of Unionism; now we hear surrender. The message from broad Nationalism and Republicanism is that yes, there are problems, but we can resolve them through dialogue, negotiation and commitment to politics. I direct that to all those on the opposite Benches. *[Interruption]*.

Mr Speaker: Order. There is a Member on the Back Benches who does not seem to have acquainted himself with the proceedings of the House. It would be better if he sat and observed. If he cannot abide by the rulings of the Speaker it would be better that he did not stay here for the rest of the day.

Mr McLaughlin: My point — and it is an important one — is that if we measure the progress of the last few years against our collective experience of political failure, there is only one option. That option is to continue on this path, take our courage in our hands and exercise the mandate we received to deliver peace and democracy through negotiation, agreement and mutual respect. We will then solve the outstanding problems of militarisation and policing in our society, the criminal justice review and, yes, the question of arms. We will resolve those problems by agreement and by applying ourselves in a diligent, sensible fashion. Those who set ultimatums and unrealistically expect that we can solve the problems of generations in a matter of months betray the expectations of those who voted for the Good Friday Agreement and those who voted for the setting up of these political institutions.

Let us abandon this silliness, this theatre of tit-for-tat: “If you resign, I’ll resign; if you surrender, I’ll surrender; if you jump, I’ll jump.”

Let us commit ourselves to exercising the mandate given to us by an overwhelming majority of those who live in the Six Counties and endorsed by an overwhelming majority of those who live on this island and in the international community. Let us make politics work and stay at it until we do.

Mr Neeson: I do not know what all the fuss is about. Gregory Campbell will continue to be Minister for Regional Development, Maurice Morrow will continue to be Minister for Social Development, and Dr Paisley will continue to be the Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development. Once again the DUP is trying to bluff the people into believing that they

are not going to make the Assembly work, when even the dogs in the street know that they are working the system.

People on the street know that devolution works, and they know that the Assembly works. The Assembly will continue to work despite today’s protest by the DUP.

Mr C Wilson: Is it not sad that those who signed up to the agreement have brought the whole democratic process in Northern Ireland into disrepute with what is taking place in the Chamber today? We are being treated to nothing more sophisticated than a political game of chicken played by the Ulster Unionist Party and the DUP. They have no mandate to remain in the House for one more minute, because they presented themselves to the electorate on the basis of “no guns, no Government” and total opposition to the Belfast Agreement and its institutions. They stated clearly that they would not have terrorists in Government. The only fact is Mr McGuinness’s statement — at the beginning of the negotiations in Castle Buildings that brought this whole sordid process into being — that there would be no guns before, during or after the negotiations.

Mr Trimble may issue post-dated resignations, and the DUP may mimic that move, but the only people who have stuck to their guns are those represented by Sinn Féin on the other side of the Chamber. Fifty-nine percent of the electorate cast their votes on the basis of Mr Trimble’s promise that he would resign, and on the DUP’s promise to smash the agreement. The electorate voted against terrorists in Government. However, they are sitting in the Chamber and will continue to sit in the Executive for as long as they wish to do so.

ALCOHOL BY-LAWS

Mrs Carson: I beg to move

That this Assembly believes that current levels of enforcement of alcohol by-laws are inadequate to address the problem of outdoor drinking; and that increased resources should be made available for the enforcement of the by-laws and for a Province-wide education programme to alert younger people to the dangers of under-age drinking.

Mr Speaker: Order. Members who wish to leave should do so quietly.

Mrs Carson: I am grateful that I am able to bring this important motion to the Assembly for debate in order to highlight the problem of alcohol consumption in public places, alcohol abuse by young people under the age of 18, and the problems of overindulgence. Many of my constituents in the small towns and villages of Fermanagh and South Tyrone — especially in Moy, County Tyrone — have seen these problems at first hand. They have endured weekend after weekend of alcohol-related disturbances with severe loss to their quality of life.

I do not condemn people for enjoying alcohol when they are responsible and aware of other people's rights. Each weekend, many people enjoy a drink responsibly and without impinging on the rights of others, either on their person or their property. Most are sensible enough to go home by taxi or with someone who has not imbibed alcohol. I commend groups that socialise together and organise rotas with a designated non-drinking driver.

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

In a tolerant society people should be aware that there are consequences for breaking the law. Laws are not made to restrict but to protect. I am concerned about young people who drink to excess, drink in public places, create a nuisance, drop litter or damage and destroy property.

I am also concerned about the high incidence of under-age drinking, which ensures a continuing culture of irresponsible use of alcohol. In 1999, the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and other Drugs (ESPAD) involving 15- to 18-year-old students showed that the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland shared the dubious distinction of being in the top four European nations of students who had been drunk 10 times or more during the 12 months preceding the survey, and of students who reported binge drinking three times or more during the 30 days previous to the survey. Binge drinking is defined as having five or more drinks at a time.

Surprisingly, the wine-drinking countries such as France, Italy and others in the Mediterranean area report the lowest incidences of such behaviour. It is important that parents encourage their children to have a responsible attitude towards the use of alcohol. Lessons in high schools and grammar schools on the effects of alcohol could help to combat the growing under-age drinking culture.

A recent UK-wide study by Dr Martin Plant of the Edinburgh-based Alcohol and Health Research Centre found that 75% of children aged between 15 and 16 admitted that they had been drunk. The study also shows that one in four deaths of young men are alcohol-related. The charity Alcohol Concern, in response to the study, called for tighter enforcement of under-age drinking laws, by saying:

“We just want to see the existing laws enforced properly when they have been broken by people selling alcohol to under-age drinkers.”

At the World Health Organisation conference in Stockholm in February this year, EU Commissioner David Byrne said:

“My key message on delivering change on alcohol and youth is the three Es: enforcement, enforcement and more enforcement.”

Law enforcement could be combined with a considered approach by the Government to address how the drinks industry aggressively markets alcoholic products.

The drinks industry is very experienced at focusing on particular target groups, and the introduction of alcopops shows that there can be only one conclusion as to what group the industry was targeting and appealing to. One drinks company even undertook market research on women's attitudes to discover how to make bottled beer more attractive to females. The end result was an easier-to-hold bottle and a thicker label for women to peel off. Needless to say, sales improved.

What can be done? Is more legislation necessary? Yes. An immediate start can be made with the enforcement of existing laws and by-laws. Even if the Assembly produced new legislation, any law is useless unless it is enforced. The abysmal failure of existing by-laws to control public and under-age drinking stems from the inability of either district councils or the RUC to enforce them.

District councils have powers to create by-laws under the Local Government Act 1972. Each of the 26 councils in Northern Ireland is responsible for its alcohol by-laws.

4.15 pm

There are 26 council areas and 26 different ways to apply alcohol by-laws. This inconsistency was highlighted by a review of the operation of alcohol by-laws in Northern Ireland that was presented to my local council — Dungannon and South Tyrone — by its director last year. As part of that study, responses were received from 21 councils. The findings showed that the enforcement of alcohol by-laws in Northern Ireland is at best patchy and at worst non-existent. It is a lengthy and costly process for a local council, under an existing by-law, to designate a street, a village or a town as an alcohol-free zone. Legislation is required to make it simpler for new areas to be added to a schedule attached to the existing by-laws. However, serious consideration should be given to the introduction of Northern Ireland-wide legislation

to create a consistent approach to tackling alcohol abuse in public areas.

There is an urgent need to clarify the relationship between the local authorities and the police. Responsibility for the by-laws and prosecution lies with the councils. Detection of the offence is the responsibility of the police. That division creates a weakness in tackling a serious issue. Local authorities are concerned that the police do not pursue rigorous detection of offences. Conversely, there are reduced detection rates by the police due to the lack of commitment by some councils to proceed with prosecutions.

The problem of the enforcement of alcohol by-laws is exacerbated when many inebriated persons are gathered together. There is also a high cost, with local policing resources tied up to control public disorder. For example, on a typical Friday or Saturday night the police in a small town with licensed premises would be on alert for three to five hours, with possibly half of a divisional mobile support unit having to be drafted in to cope with the numbers. The approximate cost, totalling man-hours, local resources and extra units, is £250,000 a year.

It must also be noted that 60% of alcohol-related disturbances happen in the vicinity of licensed premises and that 16- to 24-year-old males are the highest risk group for alcohol-related violent crime. There is currently no legislation to enable the police to seize alcohol which is being consumed in public, except from young persons under the age of 18.

There is ambiguity about the use of the word "consumption". Persons in possession of an open container of alcohol in a public place are not committing an offence. Prosecution can only take place if persons are observed consuming the liquid. The current legislation should be changed to allow a charge of possession with intent to consume alcohol. The police must be given the power to detect and prosecute those guilty of such an offence. That could take the form of fixed penalties and the power to confiscate alcohol. The police would then have the information on alcohol-related offences to maintain an up-to-date record and to provide continuing monitoring data. These records would merit inclusion in the police performance indicators for annual appraisal in each council area.

There is a real need to review the operation and application of alcohol by-laws in Northern Ireland. A single accountable body should be made responsible for enforcement and the prosecution of offenders. Logically, that body should be the police.

It is very difficult for the police to identify young persons who are under age and drinking alcohol. We all know that young persons now dress in as mature a manner as possible and look far older than they really are. An approved identity card scheme would go a long way to

preventing young people under the age of 18 from obtaining alcohol.

It could take the form of a card that could be produced before purchasing alcohol from licensed premises or before entering a licensed establishment. After the production of approved documentation giving proof of age, local authorities could provide young people with free identification cards. To reduce fraud, the cards could be bar-coded or marked with a hologram.

An accredited scheme for training bar staff, door staff and staff in licensed premises, as set out in the document on the strategy for reducing alcohol-related harm, would be welcomed and should be implemented as soon as possible. The scheme could be co-ordinated by councils, but with centralised direction to ensure consistent standards.

We must pursue a Northern Ireland-wide education programme to alert younger people to the dangers of under-age drinking. I welcome the inclusion of that proposal in the strategy document. To ensure a consistent delivery of the education programme, it should be provided under the direction of the joint action group on drugs and alcohol.

I refer again to the statistics for the United Kingdom in the ESPAD document. They show that young people — 15- to 16-year-olds — who use alcohol admitted to poor educational performance, to having accidents, to being injury prone, to having poor relationships with their parents, to becoming involved in scuffles and fights and to having unprotected sex after drinking. That last point is especially worrying: in Northern Ireland, there are many teenage pregnancies.

Alcohol-related disturbances, typically involving young men, are costing Northern Ireland dearly. The estimated total cost of alcohol-related harm for 1997-98 is £777 million. That is horrendous. Think of what could be done with that money; it could be much better used.

The strategy for reducing alcohol-related harm that was launched by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety is a positive attempt to tackle alcohol abuse. It will have an impact on the two areas that I have spoken about today. I welcome the announcement that there will be joint implementation of the alcohol and drugs strategies, although such joint implementation requires adequate resources. The work of the RUC is an integral part of the strategy, and that fact should be openly accepted. The police have to control public disturbances and deal with other offences resulting from alcohol misuse. There is an urgent need for a review of the alcohol by-laws in Northern Ireland. The required resources should be forthcoming.

Mrs Courtney: I congratulate the Member on bringing this matter to the attention of the Assembly. We are only too aware of the increase in alcohol-related crime, including not only attacks on individuals but attacks on property, cars and businesses. Doctors in accident and emergency

departments are constantly dealing with injuries resulting from domestic violence that is fuelled by drink or drugs.

Alcohol is the most abused drug but because it is socially acceptable it is seldom seen as such. Often, a blind eye is turned to alcohol abuse. Most major cities have by-laws that address the problem of outdoor drinking. The enforcement of those laws by local authorities is the difficult part. Council officers must go to court to prosecute. The police arrest individuals and gather evidence, but local councils must decide whether to prosecute.

One of the main problems in the area covered by my local authority — Derry City Council — is that it is often the habitual drinker — or wino — who is brought to court. The fine is derisory, but bringing the case to court is expensive, and it is time-consuming for council officers. Frequently, the offenders who should have been brought before the court are missed. If they are charged, the courts often show leniency, and the offences continue.

By-laws must apply to designated areas, and a blanket ban is unenforceable without adequate resources. Glasgow has such a policy, but in my area it was felt that this policy would not work. Support for such a policy must come not only from the community but from the police. If more resources were available to councils they could employ officers to enforce the policy and bring perpetrators of drink-related crime to court.

By-laws can be easily overcome by moving on-street drinkers to another area where they can laugh at those trying to enforce the policy — which often happens. The support of statutory agencies such as the education and library boards, health and social services boards and those involved in the treatment of young alcoholics is necessary if we are to raise the awareness of the public and get its support. That is why I support the motion and ask for the legislation to be amended and more resources to be made available. A Province-wide education programme is needed to address the problem once and for all, and we must make the by-laws and legislation adequate.

Mr Dodds: Mrs Carson, who moved the motion, and Mrs Courtney mentioned some of the deficiencies in the legislation and by-laws. I know from experience in North Belfast and as a city councillor that there are problems with enforcing the law. The issue comes up time and again for councils. People say that the by-laws are not effective, but the fact is that the legislation is inadequate.

Mrs Carson mentioned a couple of areas of concern. For example, if the police find someone with an open container of alcohol and know that that person has been drinking outside a designated drinking area, there is nothing they can do unless they catch the person in the act or he or she is an under-age drinker. That brings the law into total disrepute. Much money is spent by local authorities on putting up signs that say “No Drinking”, and to a great extent that is a token effort at tackling the problem. I once asked my local authority in Belfast about the

number of people who had been convicted of offences in relation to the by-laws, and the number was paltry.

Another area of concern is that although many streets and parks in any borough or council are designated as areas where people cannot drink, the by-laws cannot cover entire areas. That can lead to the problem simply being pushed from one area to another and people calling for their areas to be added to the list of designated areas. One school of thought says that a council should have the power to ensure that an entire area is covered by the by-laws.

The problem causes great concern, and it seems to be on the increase. People are entitled to consume alcohol if they wish, but we must draw the line at heavy drinking in public areas, because it can lead to antisocial behaviour and other problems. Current legislation is inadequate.

I support what the motion says about an education programme. Sometimes we talk about enforcement and neglect education — these two elements must go hand in hand. Neither enforcement nor education on its own will solve the problem. As with litter, there is no point in simply fining people for dropping it; people must be educated so that they do not drop it in the first place.

4.30 pm

I fully support the call for an education programme — or the enhancement of existing education programmes — and increased resources to deal with the problem.

Members have spoken about the need to have legislation amended. The problem is that the motion as currently worded does not call for legislation to be changed, although I think that that is the thrust behind it. The motion states that current levels of enforcement of the by-laws are inadequate, calls for increased resources and mentions a Province-wide education programme. However, I think that many Members — and the proposer of the motion, in her winding-up speech — will accept that the deficiency of legislation is a major issue. Perhaps some sort of amendment should be considered in relation to that. That may be what lies behind the thrust of the motion, although its wording is not explicit. I am happy to support the motion in so far as it goes, and I believe that the underlying message is that there is a need to examine the terms of the legislation itself.

Ms Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat. Members have mentioned the lack of resources available for education programmes. I agree. The issue is not just about people drinking in our streets; it is also about educating our young people — and those not so young — on the dangers of the misuse of alcohol.

Alcohol misuse creates massive social and family problems. Joan Carson rightly said that the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has relaunched a strategy which, as the Minister said in answer to a question in April, is aimed at reducing adult alcohol

problems. The strategy commits the Department to three objectives: encouraging a sensible approach to drinking, promoting effective treatment services and protecting individuals and communities from the damage caused by alcohol misuse.

The majority of on-street drinking is done by young people. They are likely to be under age and therefore cannot purchase alcohol legally. We need to ask where they get this drink. We are aware that some adults make money by purchasing alcohol from off-licences for these young people. That happens in towns and cities across the North. Some young people produce fake identification, and others get dolled up to the nines to appear older than they are.

I am not sure whether people are aware that in my own area, west Belfast, my party and several community groups and local drinking establishments were involved in setting up a community off-sales initiative. It was a pilot scheme to encourage the community and the off-licences to tackle the issue of under-age drinking and the associated problem of on-street drinking. We were encouraged by the response of the off-licences, the community groups involved and the wider community. The off-licences agreed to require identification and not to sell drink to people unless they were over 21 years of age. Those involved in off-sales say that they are losing some of their profit, but they do not mind because they are playing a part in helping the community to tackle the wider problem.

We must develop an approach to tackle alcohol abuse through peer education and through educational programmes in our schools. The role of the education system has been mentioned. We need to target and attack the culture of drinking. Drink is promoted in big neon lights. Adults set the tone. The behaviour of adults can encourage or discourage our young people. Young people need to learn about the dangers of alcohol misuse.

I know it has been touched on earlier, but, as an overall co-ordinated approach, we need to deal with people who sell alcohol and adults who make money by encouraging young people to drink. We need a co-ordinated approach to the advertising of alcohol. Alcohol creates damage in the family, and in the social and community sector. We need to say that it is not a glamour issue.

I support the comments of Joan Carson. I was alarmed by the statistics she and Annie Courtney referred to with regard to the money spent on hospital-related incidents around alcohol misuse. We also need to look at fixed-penalty fines. Annie Courtney did mention that the winos seem to be more likely to end up in court. We need to take on board whether these fixed-penalty fines work. Usually these people have little or no money anyway, so where do they go? Are we creating a vicious circle? We need a long-term, strategic, co-ordinated approach to

tackle the whole issue, not only of under-age drinking but also of alcohol misuse. Go raibh maith agat.

Mrs E Bell: I support the motion and the comments made by Mrs Carson in her comprehensive speech. It is an unfortunate fact of life that, unlike most other countries where pavement cafes are encouraged, the situation in Northern Ireland militates against this. It does not lend itself to the often delightful practice of open-air drinking, even in such organised legal establishments as cafe bars, and so on — certainly in my area. Our primary objective must be to strenuously oppose the many, often illegal, forms of largely under-age open-air drinking.

In my constituency of North Down, outdoor drinking occurs on a regular basis throughout the area — unchecked on most occasions. The RUC maintains that its problem is undermanning, resulting in an inability to enforce the law. Therefore, the reputation of the RUC is the first to suffer, and the problem gets worse. The situation on the streets of central Bangor at the weekends is such that many of the youth of the town head into Belfast and other places for their entertainment. Very few residents of any age would dare to venture onto the seafront or High Street areas after dark. This cannot be allowed to continue. Also, when some of the drinkers are moved away from the seafront into the suburbs, the elderly there live in fear of their houses being wrecked, or worse. It makes life very difficult, both for residents and tourists.

A more active enforcement role is required, and this may take many forms, including education, which has been mentioned by other Members. Also, much more concerted action by the RUC, with the support of other agencies and stronger legislation, is first and foremost on my and my constituents' list. It is really a case of having a good working partnership between councils, the RUC and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety with its different strategies, as Sue Ramsey mentioned. When this partnership works, it ensures that the dangers of drinking in public places, drink-driving, burglary, vandalism, and so on are recognised by all sections of the community as serious breaches of the law.

The continuing sale of alcohol to people under the legal age limit is also something that needs to be more rigorously investigated — again, a measure requiring the attention of the RUC — although, as Sue Ramsey pointed out, there are more community initiatives. That is very welcome. Those found selling alcohol to under-age persons should be put out of business immediately, if possible. We must strengthen and implement the legislation effectively so that the RUC and other agencies have the appropriate support. We have to cut down the supply of alcohol as much as possible. We need to arrest those who still insist on flouting the law and prosecute them with the full might of the law. We must ensure that the courts not only are able to sentence them effectively and severely but also are charged to do so to a much greater

degree than they tend to do at present with the few who are brought before them.

I agree with Nigel Dodds. The position is comparable to that of people who fail to buy dog licences, or to prevent their dogs from soiling the streets. When they are brought to court, the magistrates consider the matter to be too small and simply fine them. We must get out of that mindset. We can make major headway towards greatly reducing the blight on our society if the motion is passed and the attention of the relevant authorities is drawn to it. I support the motion.

Mr C Wilson: I support the motion and congratulate Mrs Carson on the excellent manner in which she proposed it. Not one constituency represented in the Assembly has been free from the blight brought about by the increasing problem of outdoor drinking. It is reaching epidemic proportions throughout Northern Ireland, and even in those areas where the local authorities have attempted to take some action, law enforcement is difficult. The problems are compounded by the fact that the already hard-pressed members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary do not have enough resources. They are struggling with major problems such as domestic crime and the increased terrorist threat, and unfortunately alcohol abuse is fairly low on their list of priorities. It is only when this kind of activity takes on the magnitude of some of the incidents that have occurred in the Queen's University area, where many people drink excessively, continue to do so on the streets and then start to fight, that it becomes a major problem for the security forces and the RUC.

Mrs Carson's motion proposes attempts to educate young people in order that we may in the future help to alleviate the problem or remove it from society. Probably most people, and particularly those with young families, are conscious of the fact that there is increased pressure on our young people through television, magazine and newspaper advertising. Alcohol has been glamorised and made fashionable, and it represents something desirable for young people.

There was good reason for the banning of tobacco advertising, and urgent attention and serious consideration should be given to the promotion of alcohol. As the father of a young girl, I am aware that children are taken up with advertising such as that for Budweiser and the vodka ads that are made to look glamorous or have catchphrases that even the youngest child starts to parrot and mimic. It shows the impact of unscrupulous people who have only financial gain in mind. These large companies that promote alcohol are not targeting older age groups, who have already determined the type or brand of alcohol they are going to use. They are carefully and clearly targeting the younger market that will be coming on stream in a few years' time. I particularly welcome the opportunity that may be created when someone is appointed as an ombudsman for children's affairs — a matter referred to in a previous

debate. This matter should be given top priority in our attempts to prevent our children being subjected to this type of abuse — it can be described as nothing else.

In closing, I congratulate Mrs Carson on tabling the motion, and I am delighted that we have an opportunity to support it.

4.45 pm

Mr Kennedy: I am sorry that more Members cannot be available for this important debate. I warmly commend and congratulate my Colleague Joan Carson on bringing the matter to the attention of the Assembly. It gives this issue necessary attention, which is very timely. As Members have already said, we have all been faced with problems in relation to illegal outdoor drinking in our districts. The problem of enforcement is a major task confronting everyone. Current legislation is clearly unsatisfactory. It necessitates someone being caught in the act of consuming alcohol. Apparently, it is not enough to catch someone with a glass or bottle in their hand; they must be partaking. That has been a major flaw in the current legislation.

I am interested to know — and Mrs Carson may be able to shed some light on this — who has overall responsibility for the matter. Is it the Minister of the Environment because of his responsibilities for local government, or is it the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety? In any education programme, it is important that there is joined-up government and that all bodies with input into helping resolve these matters give consideration to them.

Enforcement is a serious problem. It has already been said that it is not possible or practicable to expect the RUC to be at every street corner or town centre. However, the problems created by illegal drinking in open places now dog many town centres, which are not now being inhabited by the "right" kind of people, so to speak. Largely speaking, many of our larger towns have become ghost towns, particularly at night. The only people found in them are winos and people with serious alcohol- and other substance- related problems. We should remember that we have a responsibility for those people too — to give them proper care and attention, and to try to ensure that we lead them away from those activities and give them better opportunities in life.

In my constituency of Newry and Armagh, and indeed in the district council area of Newry and Mourne, there are local initiatives such as pubs with no beer. That might sound unusual to some Members, but experiments are being tried to alert young people to the dangers of alcohol. It is one thing to be in a party mood or quite sociable, but it can lead to serious addiction and to the most serious social problems.

I am bound to say that there is parental responsibility in this area. It is crucial that parents are aware of where

their children are and who they are with, and that they put parental influence at a premium.

I welcome the fact that the Government did not propose to introduce legislation in the Queen's Speech to extend the opening hours of public houses and make drink more readily available, as was advocated by some very misinformed people, on a 24-hour basis. More than enough alcohol can already be bought and consumed. Extending the licensing hours would only exacerbate many of our social problems. We should consider restricting the opening hours of places where alcohol is sold, particularly if it is being sold to people who are under age. There should be severe sanctions against the owners and proprietors of such establishments.

I welcome the motion. It is timely and should be brought to the attention of the relevant Ministers and their Committees, so that appropriate legislation can be framed and the Assembly can make a contribution to society. That will be a positive result that will help us to deal with this intractable problem.

Mrs Carson: I thank all those who remained for the debate after a hectic period earlier. It shows that they feel that the matter is important. If other Members take time to read Hansard, they will see that we have a big problem in all constituencies whose Members have spoken. We have a problem common to all: not a town, village, area or townland is free from under-age drinking and the accessibility of drink. Mrs Courtney said that the blanket ban was unenforceable, but it is something we must think about — either a ban or some other way of dealing with the problem throughout Northern Ireland. Mrs Courtney also brought up something that I had forgotten about — the pressure that is put on our hospital services at the weekend — and I welcome that.

Nigel Dodds said that the by-laws are not adequate, and I agree with him about signage. We have the country covered with no-drinking zones, yet nobody takes any heed. The legislation requires amendment.

I was interested in what Sue Ramsey said about her area of west Belfast and the pilot scheme. Some people are doing that in local areas, and it is very commendable. Danny Kennedy said much the same, and that is fine in particular areas, but we need an overall response on this.

Eileen Bell talked about the fear generated at weekends. In a local village in my country area there is an atmosphere of fear caused by drinking. Cedric Wilson talked about television advertisements and the pressures on young people. The banning of tobacco advertising was a good suggestion and something to be considered — perhaps not by the Assembly, but other places could ban television

advertisements. Those advertisements target young people, and once they have them hooked on alcopops and such things, they have customers for the rest of their days.

To tackle the problem sensibly, the present by-laws need to be amended to include powers to confiscate alcohol being consumed in public. A clearer definition is needed of what is meant by the possession of, or consumption of, alcohol in public. The power to prosecute offenders should be withdrawn from councils, but there should be a liaison role for them with the RUC.

Stricter control of the licensing of establishments that sell alcohol would be useful, as would an accredited Province-wide training scheme for staff of bars and off-licences. It might be considered mandatory for businesses to be included in this scheme as a condition to obtaining a licence or a licence renewal.

A Province-wide scheme to provide identity cards for those over 18 years of age might reduce the incidence of alcohol purchase by under-age customers. A valid identity card could be used as a proof of identity in situations other than the under-age purchase of alcohol. The co-ordinated approach suggested in the document on the strategy for reducing alcohol-related harm should include direct co-ordination and co-operation with the RUC. If the statistics on alcohol-related harm were combined, councils, the Assembly and the public could be made aware of the human and monetary costs involved.

I thank everyone who contributed to the debate. This is a complex subject, and the debate highlighted the problems we have to address. I ask that the points made today be noted and acted on by the Departments concerned.

Mr Kennedy has asked which Department has overall jurisdiction on this matter. I cannot answer that. The Department of Education, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Department of the Environment could all work together to develop appropriate legislation to address effectively the problems of drinking in public, under-age drinking, the resultant disturbances and social problems. I ask that the motion be supported.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly believes that current levels of enforcement of alcohol by-laws are inadequate to address the problem of outdoor drinking; and that increased resources should be made available for the enforcement of the by-laws and for a Province-wide education programme to alert younger people to the dangers of under-age drinking.

Adjourned at 4.57 pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 26 June 2001

The Assembly met at 10.30 am (Mr Deputy Speaker [Sir John Gorman] in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Yesterday in the House, the First Minister called my Colleague a "coward". I understand that that word is banned by Erskine May, and I would like you to refer it to the Speaker for his ruling.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Yes, I will certainly refer that to the Speaker.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: Thank you.

FOOT-AND-MOUTH DISEASE

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

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers): It is now several weeks since I last addressed the Assembly on the subject of foot-and-mouth disease. As Members will doubtless be aware, the position — in Northern Ireland at least — has continued to improve during that time. There have been no further outbreaks of the disease; there are no suspected cases at this time; and the serology testing we have been carrying out on sheep demonstrates that the virus is not, and has not been, generally present in sheep outside the flocks which we detected and dealt with.

In recognition of that, the European Union granted regional foot-and-mouth disease status to Northern Ireland on 5 June. That decision has allowed the immediate resumption of exports of live pigs and certain products from susceptible animals — excluding beef, because of BSE. Sheep will again be eligible for export with effect from 1 July.

I am continuing to look at the remaining controls on the agriculture sector with a view to dismantling, or at least relaxing, them as the disease situation permits. I have particular concerns about the plight of the livestock marts, which remain closed. My intention is to permit the marts to reopen on a phased basis and under a suitable disease control regime as soon as it is safe for them to do so. This process should be able to start in the next few weeks.

Looking beyond the farming sector, the improvement in Northern Ireland's foot-and-mouth disease situation is such that two weeks ago the Executive was able to issue revised guidelines allowing the reopening of land and property which had, until then, been closed.

It is hoped that we will be able to advance in the next few days by allowing some of the remaining controls and measures to be stepped down, while continuing to protect Northern Ireland against the threat of foot-and-mouth disease.

The disease situation in Northern Ireland stands in stark contrast to that in Great Britain, where foot-and-mouth disease continues to occur. This difference means that the controls that I imposed on the movement of livestock, products and people from Great Britain will have to remain in place until the picture there improves significantly. However, I have agreed that horses can again be imported from Great Britain; this is a change which I know the industry was keen to see.

As the risk decreases, I intend to scale down the effort that the Department has been devoting to control of the disease. I will redirect the resources released by this move to deal with other pressures.

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development was testing about 10,000 sheep blood samples a day at one stage in the serology testing programme that I referred to earlier. Over 300,000 sheep or 10% of the Northern Ireland sheep population have been tested under that programme. That is a huge effort by any standards. The serology testing was carried out in those areas that were judged by the Veterinary Service to pose the greatest risk. The work is labour-intensive, and, bearing in mind resource implications and competing priorities, I am now exploring what further testing may be required for epidemiological purposes.

The dedicated foot-and-mouth disease helpline that I set up at the start of the crisis was no longer fulfilling the purpose for which it was established, so I closed it with effect from Friday 22 June. However, the departmental helpline and the special arrangement that I made for handling queries from Members are still available.

There is no further need for me to make regular statements to the Assembly as I have done since the disease first hit Northern Ireland in February. Therefore this is the last such statement unless the disease situation dictates otherwise.

It is to be hoped that Northern Ireland is now coming towards the end of the foot-and-mouth disease crisis. It is therefore crucial that the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development refocus its energy on other important objectives. In the next six months, as the problems associated with foot-and-mouth disease recede, I will concentrate on a recovery plan for the agrifood sector, taking account of both national developments of

interest to Northern Ireland and the outcome of the work of the vision group. That group met again yesterday, and its work will continue over the summer. I expect to receive a report from the group in September which will take account of issues arising from foot-and-mouth disease.

Further work will be done during the final phase of foot-and-mouth disease, but the Department's handling of the outbreak will be scrutinised through external review. This will dovetail with any equivalent review in Great Britain, and the Department will wish to liaise with the authorities in Dublin to ensure that cross-border lessons are also taken into account. I will make a further announcement on that in due course.

I will also turn my attention to achieving low-incidence status for beef exports. The difficulties that Northern Ireland still faces on that front should not be underestimated. Confidence remains low in Europe, and much will depend on the outcome of the Department's testing regime as it moves again into top gear to reduce the number of tests undertaken for foot-and-mouth disease purposes.

Success in that endeavour will depend on farmers' cattle identification and herd records being in good order. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development will give whatever help it can, but ultimately Northern Ireland farmers must demonstrate that they have reliable herd records and cattle traceability. I urge farmers to turn their attention to that as soon as possible.

The Programme for Government introduced the concept of rural proofing in Northern Ireland. Over the coming months we need to flesh out that idea so as to appreciate how the concept will work.

My Department will presently roll out the rural development strategy and its proposals for the Peace II programme, which will include consultation. I look forward to seeing the proposals that will emerge from the community.

Together with the North/South Ministerial Council, the Department will be developing issues with a strong North/South dimension. In particular, animal health will be the focus of further work. We also need to work with the authorities in Dublin to agree the most productive approach to the reform of the common agricultural policy (CAP), so that I can integrate it in the development of the United Kingdom negotiating stance.

We have been giving much thought to our forestry policy in recent months. I hope to present our draft proposals to the Committee and the Assembly after the policy review.

I have attempted to set out my main strategic objectives for the months ahead. Additionally, a massive amount of work is daily being undertaken by the Department. As we move out of the foot-and-mouth disease crisis, staff will be returning to normal duties. We will pursue all the objectives in the Department's business plan with our

customary energy. In particular, we must step up our efforts in tuberculosis and brucellosis control, and we must tackle the substantial backlog of BSE testing in cattle.

I assure the House that as well as focusing on relevant agrifood sector matters, I will be paying considerable attention to the problems in the fishing industry. At present, those problems are considerable, and more work must be done before the crucial Fisheries Council meeting in December.

I would like to end on a cautionary note. The fact that we escaped the epidemic that occurred in GB was due to a great deal of hard work and sacrifice by everyone in the industry. It would be disastrous if, having gone through all this, we were to drop our collective guard prematurely and foot-and-mouth disease were to recur here. Although we are relaxing our controls in a proportionate way in response to the improvement in our situation, it is important that we continue to adopt the fortress mentality that has served us so well. The foot-and-mouth virus is still circulating just a few miles away, across the Irish Sea. The controls we have set up at ports, airports and farm gates will continue to be necessary for some time.

I will end by expressing my personal gratitude to the Assembly for its assistance and support during the foot-and-mouth disease crisis. I also want to express my gratitude to the industry and to the public for their co-operation and forbearance over the past four months. The fact that we managed to escape the worst of the outbreak was due to the co-operation of Government, industry and the public. It has been a difficult period for all of us, and the effects of foot-and-mouth disease will be with us for some time. It was gratifying that we were able to work together so effectively in the industry's best interests.

The Chairperson of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee (Rev Dr Ian Paisley): It is certainly gratifying that we do not have this disease to the same extent as they do in the rest of the UK. Does the Minister agree that, given the serious announcements and fresh outbreaks in various parts of the UK, we need to be even more careful in guarding our ports as the summer months approach? As we have been able to stop the disease from getting a grip on Northern Ireland, it would be terrible if, given the summer traffic, there were to be any let-up in the very successful way that the ports have been guarded. Perhaps the Minister would like to comment on that.

Can the Minister tell us how much money has been paid in compensation during this time, and how much remains to be paid? What were the findings as regards fraud in this matter? I understand that the permanent secretary made a report on this matter in which he cited a view among officials that a strong stand had not been taken on this issue.

I would like the Minister to comment on why officials thought that. If everything had been all right then there would have been no need for that statement to have been made. That issue needs to be clarified.

10.45 am

I welcome the fact that the Minister is going to move on the issues mentioned, especially on the fishing industry, which is in a great plight. I am glad that she is going to concentrate her efforts on that matter.

Ms Rodgers: I thank Dr Paisley for his remarks and questions. I agree with Dr Paisley that we need to maintain precautionary measures and vigilance at the ports, particularly as the holiday season approaches and more visitors come here. We will do that; we will make sure that every precaution is taken at the marinas as well.

We have paid out £7 million so far in direct compensation, and £0.5 million remains to be paid.

Fraud is being investigated in the same way as in other years. The first advance payments of the sheep annual premium (SAP) scheme are, as a rule, paid in early July. Farmers who have submitted subsidy claims which require clarification, further information or which are being queried, will receive letters from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to that effect in mid-July.

Dr Paisley may be aware that information on the culls in Northern Ireland, GB and the Republic has been sought by the European Union. The information will be supplied in the second half of July, when it is complete.

The report by the permanent secretary of the Department, was also mentioned. That report was issued to me on foot of an investigation carried out in response to an allegation made by a Member of the Assembly that a blind eye was being turned to fraud in south Armagh. The permanent secretary had an investigation carried out, and he then made a report to me. The summary at the end of that report states:

"In conclusion, therefore, this review bears out that there never was any question of a blind eye being turned to fraud and that normal procedures will apply in relation to subsidy claims."

That is the position.

Mr Armstrong: I thank the Minister for her statement and welcome her intention to permit the reopening of livestock markets in the next few weeks. In relation to the live export of sheep from 1 July, some buyers have expressed the concern to me that they will be unable to avail of the opportunity to get sheep away for export. In the light of that, we could do with buyers from the Irish Republic buying sheep at the collection points that we have already set up. Our farmers would therefore be able to avail of the higher price for sheep over 21 kilos. It would be a good idea for the buyers to purchase the sheep at the collection points rather than to go around

the various farms. Perhaps the Minister could give that her earliest consideration.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member please put his question?

Mr Armstrong: The question is that we want the Minister to consider the proposal that buyers should come to the collection points to buy sheep.

Ms Rodgers: As usual, Mr Armstrong is trying to push the door a little bit further in. I established collection points at marts to facilitate the farmers who had difficulty, for example, in bringing three or four lambs the whole way from County Down to Derry. Those collection points meant that farmers could bring their fat lambs there, which was convenient.

Mr Armstrong seems to be suggesting that farmers, from the South or elsewhere, should be able to come to these collection points and buy sheep. I received a letter from him on the subject this morning, but I have not had time to study it. I will consider that possibility, but it looks suspiciously like opening the marts for sheep sales. I must inform him that, although I am looking seriously at the question of reopening the marts — because I recognise the problems of the mart owners and farmers — the first step will be to open them for cattle sales. Sheep sales will happen later, because we are still somewhat nervous of the problems with the flock. I will be guided by advice from veterinary experts. I will examine Mr Armstrong's suggestion, but I am not holding out much hope that it will be possible to implement it.

Mr McGrady: I thank the Minister for her "state of the agricultural nation" statement. I am delighted that the threat of foot-and-mouth disease is receding. I welcome the announcement that the Department will focus its attention on other problems affecting the industry, not least in fishing and forestry, which are germane to my constituency.

I would like the Minister to explain some points in more detail. We welcome the opening of the livestock marts, but will she tell us which animals will be allowed to be processed through the marts, in what order and when?

In addition, is the Minister aware that there is a charitable fund, called the Addington Fund, which assists farmers in GB? Although it is a private charitable fund, it receives public and private donations. Can she ensure that Northern Ireland farmers have access to it to obtain funding from it?

Ms Rodgers: I hope to open the marts for cattle and pig sales in the next few weeks. The best guesstimate that I can make for this is mid-July. At that stage, they will not be open for sheep.

The Addington Fund is a private fund for the assistance of farmers. I understand that Northern Irish farmers have already received some assistance from it. Because it is a private fund, it is not a matter for Government.

However, I understand that it has been operating through the Ulster Farmers' Union and the Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers' Association (NIAPA). It is outside the remit of Government, but it has provided some help to farmers who were beleaguered and required financial assistance.

Mr McHugh: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's lengthy statement, which mentioned future plans and the vision group. The possibility of the marts reopening for cattle sales in mid-July will be welcomed in Fermanagh, which exports nearly all its cattle.

What is being done to ensure that we have learned the lessons of foot-and-mouth disease? What action has the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development taken to ensure that the British Government put in place measures to prevent future outbreaks which, as in this case, could be followed by the movement of the disease into Ireland?

What are the restrictions on animals bought in the South to be used for breeding in the North?

Ms Rodgers: I expect that the British Government will carry out their own review of the episode to find out how it happened and what lessons can be learned from it. There will be a ministerial meeting next Wednesday between the regional Ministers and the new Minister of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Margaret Beckett. I have no doubt that those issues will be discussed.

A subgroup of the vision group is looking at the lessons we can learn from foot-and-mouth disease and will report to me in September. I intend to establish a review of the crisis outside the Department.

Breeding animals that come in from the Republic must have veterinary certification. That matter must be discussed, and my officials are in discussions with officials in the Republic about all matters, including that one.

Mr Ford: I welcome the Minister's statement. It appears that if she will not be back here in the autumn answering questions on foot-and-mouth disease, she will be here to talk about animal health, forestry, fisheries and rural proofing. I look forward to hearing some detail on those points, which have been sadly neglected in recent months.

What is the full remit of the external review of the Department's handling of foot-and-mouth disease? Specifically, what is the earliest date that it will consider? Will it include, in particular, the work of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in inspecting the ports before the diagnosis of foot-and-mouth disease in GB in February? The issue is not just the handling of the disease when it arrived, but the failure to prevent its arrival.

The Minister mentioned the resources for the serology testing and hinted that it was to end soon. What is the present basis — not the historic pattern — on which the serology tests are being carried out? How are

farms selected for that testing? What is the level of testing? Has she plans to wind it down soon?

Ms Rodgers: I have just announced the external review, and I have not looked at it in detail. The details have yet to be decided, but I will obviously want it to take account of all aspects of foot-and-mouth disease. It would be a useless exercise if we looked at only some parts of it. We will look at all the aspects, including the precautions at the ports that Mr Ford mentioned.

We are now in the final stages of the serology testing and strategic targeting of other areas that we want to investigate. We have finished testing in the Sperrins, the Mourne and the Glens of Antrim, which were the areas of greatest concern. We are continuing to test in the lowland areas and will take a significant number of samples there. I cannot go into every detail as I am not a veterinary expert, but we test a significant number of samples. In the areas that I first referred to, we have sampled 10% of sheep. Considering there are three million sheep in Northern Ireland, that is a large number.

11.00 am

We will continue the testing for epidemiological information. I will let Mr Ford have further detail from the experts, should he require it, but that is our general position.

Mr Kane: I too welcome the Minister's statement and her response concerning the proposed reopening of our livestock marts. That will be a major step forward for the farming community and the agriculture industry.

Will the Minister undertake to remove the 20-day holding period? That has been an obstacle to the supply of livestock among farmers. Does she accept the impracticality of that period for exporting live cattle from the Province?

Ms Rodgers: I am aware that the 20-day holding period causes difficulties, but I must also remind the House that the free and frequent movement of sheep in the initial stages of the disease created a huge problem. It was virtually impossible for us to identify where the virus was present, and our reaction to it was delayed.

We will consult the industry and all stakeholders on how we deal with the problem of moving sheep. Sometimes I fear that when we are out of the woods and things begin to look better, people will forget how bad it was and how bad it could have been. We cannot ignore the fact that the very frequent movement of sheep made it difficult for us to establish where they were or where the infection was.

In answer to Mr Kane, I am aware of the problem, and we will look at what can be done. Whatever we do, we must ensure that we are not faced with such a problem again and that the industry is protected. A balance must be found between the need to enable the industry to operate

and the need to ensure that we are not threatened by another disease with such negative implications for agriculture.

Mr Leslie: I am pleased that the Minister feels able to move on from foot-and-mouth disease and return to achieving low-incidence BSE status. That seems to have assumed some of the characteristics of the quest for the Holy Grail.

I am sure the Minister is aware that the new and more rigorous European Union beef labelling regulations come into force in January 2002. I understand that the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development does not intend to introduce them into Northern Ireland legislation until at least the end of the first quarter of 2002.

Does the Minister agree that this new regime of labelling should eradicate the possibility of imported beef's being in any way labelled as Northern Ireland produce? That possibility could compromise the traceability scheme. Can the Minister give the House an undertaking that she will introduce the new and more rigorous regulations as soon as possible after 1 January 2002?

Ms Rodgers: I assure Mr Leslie that we will implement the beef labelling regime as soon as possible, and I take his point about its importance. However, it will be done in stages.

Mr Bradley: I welcome the Minister's statement and share her hope that this will be the last special statement on foot-and-mouth disease. The achievement of the Minister and her team — from Dundonald House through the offices of the veterinary officers to the field — is all the more praiseworthy when the outbreak is still rampant in GB. Announcements of 22 outbreaks in the last seven days say it all.

I welcome the broad content of the statement and look forward to returning the agriculture industry to profit.

How important does the Minister believe North/South co-operation was in tackling foot-and-mouth disease throughout the island?

Ms Rodgers: I thank Mr Bradley for his comments and his question. North/South co-operation was important during the foot-and-mouth disease epidemic. An example of it is that, after the success of the regionalisation bid, my officials will meet their counterparts next Wednesday to review any issues regarding the resumption of trade between Northern Ireland and the Republic. The Republic's co-operation during the epidemic was important, as was its support for our regionalisation bid.

Mr M Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's statement and recognise the part played by her and her Department in curtailing foot-and-mouth disease. Turning to cattle traceability and identification, the need for records to be in good order and the achievement of low-incidence BSE status, may I suggest that the Minister undertake to change the ear-tagging and identification scheme? The Minister

will be aware that Northern Irish beef is tagged as being UK sourced. I propose that when marketing Northern Irish beef in future, the UK tag should be changed to a Northern Irish tag. Does the Minister agree?

Ms Rodgers: I thank Mr Murphy for his question. We do not have any control over being part of the member state of the United Kingdom. We might wish it to be otherwise; I might wish it to be otherwise, and so might Mr Murphy, but the fact is that the member state is the United Kingdom, and European regulations dictate that ear tags must show that beef is sourced in the United Kingdom. Cattle can be classed as belonging to the Republic of Ireland or to the United Kingdom, and in our case, whether we like it or not — and some of us do not like it but we must accept it until there is consent for change — we are in the United Kingdom. Therefore the ear tags must show that. However, there is nothing to prevent the industry here, when marketing its beef and produce, from agreeing on a marketing label that would be different from the ear tags. The label could suggest something such as the food island initiative or Irish beef, because Irish beef — whether from North or South — is a marketable commodity. There is nothing to prevent private or commercial concerns from identifying beef with their own label for marketing purposes. However, under the EU regulations we do not have a choice about what is on the tags.

Mr Paisley Jnr: I welcome the Minister's staunch defence of the Union. The Minister might now be a Member of Parliament as well, had she picked a different constituency. With her popularity in the farming community, that would have gone down very well.

I congratulate the Minister and her Department. I also congratulate the farming community, which can now receive a more upbeat and positive statement from the Minister. The Minister has said that certain measures will remain in place. Can she then tell the House if she is giving the green light to a return to normality for sport and tourism in the Province? Is the Minister content that those measures are adequate to protect Northern Ireland at this time? Has she made any progress towards consequential compensation, and how often does she raise that matter with the Government?

With whom is she raising the matter, and what does she expect the response to be? What consequential compensation does she expect to secure for those who have been drastically affected by the ravages of foot-and-mouth disease?

Ms Rodgers: I thank Mr Paisley for his questions. First, I would like to make it clear that I was not defending the Union; I was reluctantly accepting the status quo because we recognised the principle of consent in the agreement that we signed. However much I will try to get consent for what I want, I accept the status quo for the moment. I hope that we can continue to work

together until we convince people like Mr Paisley that we might be better off in an all-Ireland state, a member state which we often look to with envy in our dealings with Europe.

With regard to a green light for a return to normality in sport, the Executive's guidelines should be amended shortly to give a qualified green light. We are not over the threat from GB, but we are over the threat in the North. Given that fact, in the next week we will issue further guidelines that will enable people to take a common-sense approach to angling and other sports. If a person has not been in contact with live animals, he will be able to go ahead with the sport. We will be issuing clear guidelines in the next few days.

Consequential compensation is being dealt with by the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister and the Department of Finance and Personnel. Discussions about that are ongoing with the British Government. We will be meeting the regional Ministers and Mrs Beckett next week. I will be anxious to hear what the position is, and I will be pressing for Northern Ireland to get a fair share of any consequential compensation being considered by the Treasury.

Mr J Wilson: I hope that the Minister will not mind my saying that we do not expect to hear from her again on this matter for a long time. I share other people's concerns about the marts. Will the Minister assure me that someone will see the process through to the end if the reopening of the marts is going to be phased and is not going to begin for some weeks? Some mart owners may not be back in business until the autumn. I hope that she shares my concern that the person at the end of the process will be able to reopen the marts, because they have all been closed for a long time.

The angling estate that is managed by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure is open, with the exception of one or two difficult locations. However, will the Minister have regard for the fact that our rivers are still inaccessible? Even if she announced today that the situation were about to change, there would still have to be lengthy consultation between angling clubs and farmers that might go on into the autumn. I hope that it rains during the summer, although others will have a different view, and they will probably get their way.

11.15 am

When the water levels are very low, the slightest import of pollutant can be catastrophic. Anglers are the best policemen of the rivers, and the sooner we get them back out on the rivers where they can watch out for pollutants, the better. I hope that the Minister will bear that in mind.

Ms Rodgers: I thank Mr Wilson for his comments and for telling me that he hopes not to be hearing from me for some time. I hope that he is right.

A phased process for reopening of the marts means that, by necessity, the introduction of sheep sales into the marts will be at the end of the queue rather than at the beginning. I said in response to Mr McGrady's question — and he is not here at the moment — that the reopening of the marts would take place by mid-July. That might have been a little optimistic. It will probably be closer to the end of July, although it is difficult to be precise. Cattle sales will be the first to be introduced, then pigs and, further down the line, sheep. Members will understand the reason for that.

In relation to rivers not being accessible to anglers, in the Executive's most recent guidelines I stated that angling could proceed again provided that anglers were not in contact with farm animals. That will clearly have to be discussed with the angling clubs and local farmers. It is a matter of applying common sense, and I will be issuing further guidelines.

In the Strule River area, for instance — which I have come to know fairly well in the last four or five weeks — there are many angling clubs. Only a very small portion of the river crosses farmland. For the most part, access to the river does not involve going through farmland or contact with farm animals. Common sense is required, and I take the point that anglers would be the first to become aware of pollution. It is very important that they can alert people to that.

Mr Dallat: I too wish to thank the Minister and all her staff for their outstanding performance, and that includes the district councils, amongst others, which co-operated with the Department during the crisis.

My question is closely related to the concerns of other Members. The Minister is only too aware that our fledging rural tourism industry has, in general, been devastated by foot-and-mouth disease. Can the Minister assure the House that she will be doing everything possible to ensure that rural development and rural tourism in particular get the support that they so badly need in the months ahead?

Ms Rodgers: I agree with Mr Dallat about the co-operation that we received from the local councils and other public bodies.

Under Peace II, my Department will have a rural tourism initiative. I am very anxious that people should plug into that and that local communities, councils and private enterprise come forward with projects that can boost, improve and exploit the natural resources that we have in Northern Ireland for the purposes of tourism.

Mr Dallat may be aware that the Northern Ireland rural cottage holiday initiative launch took place in County Down about two weeks ago. I was present at that. Again, I am very anxious to ensure that rural tourism is supported and that our assets are exploited, and I will do everything in my power to ensure that that happens.

Mr Douglas: I welcome the Minister's statement, especially the section on the opening of the livestock markets. She said that, in the short term, this will involve cattle only and that sheep will be at the end of the queue. What is the Department's position on the sale of rams, as the season for sales is approaching? It takes six to eight weeks for those planning the sales to organise catalogues, and several people have asked me about this. Can the issue be examined, and perhaps dealt with first, if the sale of sheep is to be pushed to the back of the queue?

Will sheep from which blood samples have been taken be able to be sold without further blood tests, or will pedigree sheep require further tests?

Ms Rodgers: My officials have met representatives of the pedigree clubs to assess protocols to facilitate sales of rams and pedigree sheep. Those protocols will involve a clear blood test of all pedigree flocks involved in a sale. I hope to announce a timetable for pedigree sheep sales shortly, based on the discussions we have had and the protocols that must be put in place. Mr Douglas will agree that it is important to continue to take the necessary precautions.

Mr Gibson: I welcome the encouraging news we have had this morning. I am reassured that we are still keeping up our guard against the external threat. Having reached this stage, it is very important that we do not now suddenly import the dreaded threat once again.

Tyrone and Fermanagh have less favoured areas in greater acreage and queues of livestock for grazing — and we are well into the grazing season. Under the phased reopening of the marts, I appeal for the marts of Enniskillen, Clogher and Omagh, which are modern marts able to cater for any necessary health regime, to be given first-phase priority.

My second point relates to the traceability, credibility and promotion of our meat. We are now looking at how we can market our product in the future, and one of the greatest lessons we have learnt is about our inability to trace sheep accurately — look at the case of the 60 missing sheep. We now have a regime that is traceability proof, as far as is humanly possible. Farmers should be encouraged to ensure 100% accuracy. By the same token, there should be a penalty on those who thwart accurate traceability. It is very important to encourage farmers to help themselves, but we are asking the Minister to help them with marketing so that we can restore confidence to an industry that has been debilitated for six years.

Ms Rodgers: The phased opening of the marts will relate to the type of mart, not to location.

In response to Mr Gibson's other point about effective tracing, I agree that that is important. One of the problems we have had in trying to stay ahead of the disease, particularly in the initial stages, and since, has been the absence of effective tracing mechanisms for sheep, and

we will have to establish them. In doing this we will take account of the views of the vision group and our external review and in consultation with the industry. I take the Member's point.

I also agree that finding effective ways of tracing sheep will be a matter for co-operation between the Department and the farming community. That is how I would like to see our moving ahead. The issue will be discussed, and there will be consultation with the farming unions and the industry. We will take on board the proposals from the vision group and the findings of our review. I agree that we need to look at effective tracing.

SOCIAL SECURITY FRAUD BILL

Second Stage

The Minister for Social Development (Mr Morrow): I beg to move

That the Second Stage of the Social Security Fraud Bill (NIA 16/00) be agreed.

The Social Security Fraud Bill is an important piece of legislation which will make provision for Northern Ireland corresponding to provision made for Great Britain by the Social Security Act 2001. There has always been parity between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and that is how it should be. People in Northern Ireland pay the same National Insurance contributions and taxes as those in Great Britain, and they should receive the same benefits.

Parity also enables us to use the same computer system in Northern Ireland and Great Britain for child support and social security, thus making it cost-effective.

However, parity is a two-edged sword. Rights to benefits must be matched by obligations to society. It is right that we should enjoy the same rights and benefits as people in Great Britain; however, it is equally right that we play our part in tackling the problem of benefit fraud.

Parity covers not only the content of the legislation but also the timing of its implementation. To ensure that the proposals are implemented at the same time as in Britain, the necessary powers must be available as soon as possible. The UK spends over £100 billion each year on social security. It is our duty to make sure that the system is secure from both fraud and error, so that the right money goes to the right people. That duty is reflected in the Department's objective to reduce losses from fraud and error in social security benefits by 5% per annum over the spending review period April 2001 to March 2004.

In the United Kingdom, social security fraud costs at least £2 billion a year. That is clearly unacceptable, and we are determined to play our part in stemming the flow. The vast majority of people who claim benefits are honest, and it is unfair to them and to the taxpayers who foot the bill that a minority is cheating the benefits system.

A wide variety of fraud is perpetrated against the system, ranging from the opportunist, such as the person who does not tell us that he has started to work, to the highly organised criminal gangs involved in counterfeiting or stealing instruments of payment and running false identity fraud.

The Grabiner Report on the informal economy contained recommendations to combat benefit fraud. This Bill seeks to combat benefit fraud by putting many of those recommendations into action.

Before turning to the details of the Bill's proposals, I will set them in context by illustrating the broad nature

of social security fraud. Fraud takes place when people lie about their circumstances to gain benefit. There are many types of fraud. One is working and not declaring earnings, including those of a partner. Commonly this happens when a person claims to be unemployed but is working. Another type involves undeclared capital, when a person either fails to inform the Department of his assets or misrepresents their true value.

A third involves undeclared income from other sources. An example of this is where a person has unearned income or income from a private pension scheme. There is fraud involving family circumstances, where a person does not declare a partner who is living with him. Then there is residency fraud, where a person claims to reside at one address, but, in fact, lives at another. Identity fraud involves the hijacking of a real identity, or the creation of a false one, although with tougher checks on claims, the latter is becoming much more difficult.

It is estimated that in Northern Ireland about £73 million per annum is lost from public money due to benefit fraud.

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

11.30 am

Fraud is not a small-time activity or a victimless crime, although it is often portrayed as such. Rather, it is more often a planned, calculated act, and it diverts a great deal of public money away from other objectives. The provisions of the Bill will help to reduce that loss, both through prevention and earlier detection, using the powers to acquire data from the private sector; and through deterrence, using the powers to remove benefit from persistent benefit offenders and the swift, effective punishment of collusive employers.

Turning now to the measures proposed by the Bill, one of the key recommendations in Lord Grabiner's report on the informal economy was a power to take benefits away from people who persistently abused the benefits system. Rights to benefits must be matched by obligations to society. If we are to restore the public's confidence in the social security system, we must deter hard-core benefit cheats by getting across a strong message that they cannot repeatedly commit fraud and still expect to be able to claim benefit again as if nothing had happened. For the vast majority of benefit cheats, their first conviction is their last, because the process of being interviewed under caution, appearing in court, being sentenced and finding themselves named in their local paper is an extremely salutary experience. However, there are hard-core cheats who simply refuse to learn their lesson and continue to offend. They must be made to realise that they cannot abuse the benefit system and steal from the rest of society with impunity.

This Bill provides that those convicted of benefit fraud will be warned that a further conviction within three

years would mean that they could lose benefits for a period of 13 weeks. This would happen when they defrauded virtually any social security benefit. These are known as disqualifying benefits. However, the sanction itself will apply to a smaller range: the sanctionable benefits. We will not apply the sanctions to benefits that are specifically for children (child benefit and guardian's allowance) or to those which meet the extra costs of disability (disability living allowance and attendance allowance). Nor will we sanction retirement pension, as research has shown this benefit to be virtually free of fraud.

The measures are intended to be tough, but, as with other sanctions in the social security system, they include fallback provisions to protect the most vulnerable — those people and their families who rely on income-related benefits. People on income-related jobseeker's allowance will be able to apply for help under a hardship scheme. If their other circumstances are not such as to protect them from hardship, they will be paid at a rate which reduces the offender's personal allowance by 40%, or 20% for cases of particular interest: for example, where a member of the household is seriously ill. Benefits for the rest of the household will be unaffected. For people on income support, access to such a scheme would be automatic. Housing benefit would remain in payment, as would access to other benefits such as milk tokens and free school meals.

The scheme closely mirrors the hardship scheme that already operates for labour market sanctions, a scheme which has been tried and tested. We believe that this scheme is fair in that it strikes the right balance between, on the one hand, a punishment which brings home the point that fraud will not be tolerated, and on the other, ensuring that offenders, and their families in particular, do not suffer unduly.

I should stress that the main aim of this measure is deterrence. We do not want to see it being applied to large numbers of people: indeed, quite the reverse. The fewer people who are subject to the sanction, the better, because that means it is having the intended deterrent effect.

A second key to cracking benefit fraud identified by the Grabiner Report is the need for access to independent information about a claimant's financial and other circumstances. Fraud is committed by people telling lies or concealing the facts about their circumstances. If we are to succeed in rooting fraud out of the system, we need to be able to check what people tell us with third parties. For example, if we suspect that a person is claiming benefit and is concealing his earnings from work, cross-checking the information that we hold with additional independent sources, for example banks, would help to establish the fraud.

The Bill includes measures to allow officers authorised by the Department or the Housing Executive to require information from specified private- or public-sector

organisations, including banks, building societies and credit reference agencies, where we have reasonable grounds for suspicion. I must stress that these powers do not provide carte blanche to pry into people's bank accounts. The Bill is clear on that, and it will also be made clear in a publicly available code of practice that will set out how the powers will be used.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

First, it is important to say that what constitutes reasonable grounds will vary from case to case, and for that reason it is not appropriate to put specific conditions into the legislation. There would be reasonable grounds for suspicion where there were reasons to believe that a person was receiving or claiming benefit fraudulently. Staff authorised to use these powers will need to analyse their records and note their suspicions. They will always consider whether there could be an innocent explanation for any circumstances. Examples of what would be taken into account are tip-offs from members of the public, suspicious behaviour on the part of a claimant or unsatisfactory identity documents.

Objective statistical evidence that a person was disproportionately likely to commit fraud would also provide reasonable grounds. For example, we know that people who have committed benefit fraud before are more likely to do so again. I stress that the evidence would need to be objective, and obviously these powers would not be used on grounds such as community background, race or sex.

The Bill also seeks to tackle the problem of housing benefit being paid on empty properties. In some cases, that is a calculated fraud, where the address is being used to support a claim for income support or jobseeker's allowance under a false identity — known in the trade as a "giro drop". In others, the fraud is committed by the landlord, who does not tell the Housing Executive that the tenant has moved out. In other instances, the tenant simply abandons the property without bothering to tell the landlord or the Housing Executive. To help to put a stop to this and other types of fraud, the Bill will enable us to obtain information from the utility companies about abnormal levels of consumption that may indicate benefit fraud.

I have already referred to the problem of people working and claiming benefit. We have looked beyond the problem itself to one of its major facilitators — employers who are more than happy to have the state subsidise their wage and National Insurance bills by colluding with their employees in committing this type of benefit fraud. They are taking advantage of their workforce by denying them proper terms of employment, and they gain unfair advantage in the market by paying low wages. That is unfair competition against honest employers.

The prosecution of employers who have colluded in benefit fraud can be lengthy and costly and may not

always be the most effective way of tackling this problem. Obviously, we will continue to prosecute the most serious cases. For the less serious cases, the Bill allows the application of a swift civil penalty that will bring home the message that operating in the informal economy carries a high price and will not be tolerated. That will strengthen the ability of the Department and the Housing Executive to bring to book employers who collude with their employees in social security fraud. The measures provide for an administrative penalty of between £1,000 and £5,000 to be paid by a colluding employer as an alternative to prosecution. The penalty would be subject to the same safeguards that apply to administrative penalties for claimants — the employer will have the option of having the court decide the case. If an employer accepts the penalty as an alternative to going to court, he has up to 28 days to change his mind.

It is estimated that up to 70% of fraud occurs not at the start of a claim, but during its currency, when changes of circumstances which affect benefit entitlement go unreported.

Current legislation fails to impose a watertight duty on claimants to report changes and is therefore inadequate for cases where payment is made directly to a bank account and where no signed declaration of unchanged circumstances is available. We are reforming those powers to ensure that they are effective and to give a clear message that such sins of omission are crimes nonetheless and will be punished.

Finally, the Bill contains tidying-up measures that will clarify the legislation that enables prosecution when claimants deliberately fail to report changes of circumstances. It will allow the Department and the Housing Executive to act together to offer administrative penalties in place of prosecution in cases involving housing benefit as well as Department for Social Development administered benefits. It will strengthen arrangements for the supply of information by the Housing Executive to the Department, or to the Secretary of State for Social Security, by specifying in directions rather than regulations what information is required.

The provisions of the Bill are a measured response to the problem. Considerable care has been taken to ensure that the Great Britain and Northern Ireland Bills are compatible with the European Convention on Human Rights.

In conclusion, the Bill contains important measures that will significantly reduce fraud in the benefit system and thereby restore the public's confidence in it. I commend the Bill to the Assembly.

Mr Paisley Jnr: Today's debate need not have taken place. It is only taking place because accelerated passage was denied to the Bill a few weeks ago. We are here to commence a gestated period of debate because of that denial. I had hoped that accelerated passage would have

been given to the Bill, because it is important that the Assembly offer an immediate response to an immediate and ongoing problem.

Millions of pounds are lost to the Social Security Agency every year because people defraud it. Of course, there are people who do not claim their benefit, but the fear of fraud and the concerns about it are a problem that must be dealt with. It is very disappointing that this Bill cannot go through the House quickly, so that we send out all the right messages to those who are trying to steal money from other people's pockets.

It is unfortunate that a certain party decided to oppose accelerated passage. However, given that the Assembly has chosen the normal course for passage of this Bill, I am amazed that that party is not even here today. They are not even here to give us their view. People will watch the gestated period of Committee proceedings and further readings carefully to see whether that party is interested in making a major contribution to change this Bill. The party's denial of accelerated passage was more to do with political opposition to the Minister and political opposition to catching the fraudster than a constructive approach to the Bill.

It is important that the Assembly send out all the right messages when tackling fraud — and that it sends out a clear signal on this matter. Some people may be reluctant, but it is absolutely necessary that we do that. The Minister said that the Bill is about protecting the vulnerable. That is a key issue. It is about protecting those who are having their rights taken from them. It is crucial that everything is done to ensure the delivery of benefit payments to the right people at the right time, all the time.

The Social Security Fraud Bill is one way to protect the vulnerable from losing their rights. I understand that £73 million has been lost because of social security fraud in Northern Ireland.

11.45 am

That is an amazing amount of money, and it could have been used for a far greater good than going to false claimants. It is unfair to honest claimants and to the public in general that a small minority of claimants can cheat the system and make big money.

The Assembly is aware of the problem of fraud; Mr Billy Bell highlighted some of those problems in a previous report. I am all the more amazed, therefore, that the Assembly should try to slow the passage of the Bill, after his investigation into fraud in the social security system. Just today, Members received a press release on the Northern Ireland Audit Office's report on the agency's management of social security debt collection and fraud. It highlights the need for active encouragement for work to tackle fraud in Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, any delay in the tackling of fraud

will cost Northern Ireland hundreds of thousands of pounds every month.

As the Minister said, parity is a two-edged sword. It is correct that we should enjoy the same rights and benefits as people in Great Britain, and it is equally right that we play our part in tackling benefit fraud. With the right to benefit comes the responsibility to tackle those who defraud the benefits system. I agree wholeheartedly with the Minister about that.

I also agree with the Minister that the Bill is not draconian, nor is it a great axe that he looks forward to wielding. It is a deterrent. It is important that people keep things in perspective. The Bill will help the Department to prosecute the more serious cases, and it will deter those who see other people cheating the system from thinking that they can get away with it too. The Minister made it clear that the Department hopes that the deterrent value will be such that it will not have to use those powers repeatedly. The ability to check information will itself be a significant deterrent to would-be fraudsters. The Bill allows for the checking of the information that a claimant must give; it does not ask for anything special.

I would like to refer to clauses 1 and 2. Fraud takes place when people knowingly lie about their circumstances in order to obtain benefit. They have not made a mistake; they deliberately try to mislead the Department. By definition, a person who engages in fraud will not volunteer the truth. People lie about whether they have a job. There should be a deterrent to stop people lying about that.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member may be under some misunderstanding about the passage of the Bill. He said earlier that, with accelerated passage, this debate need not have taken place. That is not correct. With accelerated passage, there would still be a Second Stage; it is only the Committee Stage that would not take place. The purpose of this Stage is for discussion of the general principles of the Bill, but the Member is now moving into a discussion of each clause. That is properly the function of the Committee Stage, which will now take place, according to procedure. This is a debate about the broad principles of the Bill.

Mr Paisley Jnr: I thank the Speaker for that direction. I will stick to the broad principles contained in clauses 1, 2 and 15.

Mr Speaker: Order. The debate is about the broad principles of the Bill, not the broad principles of clauses 1 and 2.

Mr Paisley Jnr: The Bill is an attempt to clamp down on people who lie about whether they have a job, whether they have savings, whether their partner works and about who they are and where they live. It is essential that the Department have the strength to investigate those matters to find out whether the information is correct and to ensure that the right money goes to the right people at the right time.

I also look forward to seeing the code of practice and the safeguards contained in it. It is essential that the Department attempt to ensure that social security money goes to the right people, not to those who try by mischief to defraud the Department.

If the powers to obtain information are not introduced in Northern Ireland at the same time and date as in the rest of the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland will lose a vast amount of money. I have read that that loss could be as much as £400,000 a month. It will be interesting to find out whether that loss is incurred if we do not put this instrument in place at the same time as in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Other important clauses in the Bill would make it an offence to fail to notify a change in circumstances. Will the Minister tell the House how many cases last year could have been affected by the absence of the Social Security Fraud Bill, particularly in regard to those matters outlined in clause 15?

I will finish with an apocryphal story — or perhaps it is not an apocryphal one. Some time ago, a certain politician, it is believed, used a car under the motability scheme when that person ought not to have done so. After a television documentary, it appeared that some people's concerns about motability fraud still had not changed. However, the prospect of a mayoral car was seen as a measure to prevent further motability fraud. That did not seem to do the trick, because yet another political party did not believe that that was the right strategy to tackle motability fraud.

Today, the House should send out a clear "No" to fraud and give the Department every encouragement and strength to tackle any attempt to prevent the right money going to the right people at the right time. Even though the legislation must go through a Committee Stage, I hope that the Minister can take encouragement that there are parties in the Assembly that are willing to back him in his fight to tackle fraud as it raises its head in the social security system.

Mr Morrow: I welcome Mr Paisley Jnr's comments. He has spoken in support of what the Department for Social Development is trying to achieve. I will not go through a long winding-up speech. Mr Paisley Jnr asked how many cases could have been affected by the absence of a provision similar to clause 15. He is entitled to the most accurate answer that I can give him. Last year, there were 228 fraud cases involving payment by automated credit transfer, with the potential — and I emphasise "potential" — to be prosecuted. However, the absence of the provision contained in clause 15 precluded such action in those cases. Therefore the Department for Social Development will be better armed and better equipped to deal directly in cases of fraud when the Social Security Fraud Bill becomes law.

The code of practice is now available and will be in the public domain shortly. When I went before the Committee for Social Development to explain the different parts of the Bill, Members expressed their concern about the availability of the code of practice.

I am happy to confirm that the code of practice is in place and will be made available. I welcome the comments made by Mr Paisley Jnr and his wholehearted support for what we are trying to achieve.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Second Stage of the Social Security Fraud Bill (NIA 16/00) be agreed.

DEPARTMENT FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING BILL

Further Consideration Stage

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Long title agreed to.

Mr Speaker: That concludes the Further Consideration Stage. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

PRODUCT LIABILITY (AMENDMENT) BILL

Further Consideration Stage

Mr Speaker: I have had some indication that Mr Wells wishes to speak. However, he is not in his place, and I propose by leave of the Assembly to proceed.

Clauses 1 to 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Long title agreed to.

Mr Speaker: That concludes the Further Consideration Stage. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

TRUSTEE BILL

Final Stage

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):

I beg to move

That the Trustee Bill (NIA 11/00) do now pass.

I will not rehearse the comments that I made during the Second Stage debate on the Trustee Bill. These proposals to reform the law on powers and duties of trustees have been widely welcomed by Members and users of trust law. The Bill will undoubtedly facilitate better administration of charitable and private trusts. It will help trustees and beneficiaries alike. In some respects, the changes are overdue as professional advisors drafting trust deeds almost invariably choose to include clauses along these lines.

The Bill has had an uneventful passage through the Assembly. No amendments have been tabled; however, there has been proper scrutiny. I would like to acknowledge the contribution made by members of the Finance and Personnel Committee in their consideration of these proposals at the early consultation stage and during the passage of the Bill.

If the Bill is passed, its provisions will come into operation on a day appointed by my Department. I am unable to give an exact date at present but I see no reason to expect a delay. I commend the Trustee Bill to the Assembly.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Trustee Bill (NIA 11/00) do now pass.

Mr Speaker: There is time to move ahead; however, the understanding from the usual channels was that the debate on the Report of the Committee of the Centre: Commissioner for Children would take place this afternoon. It would be unfair to bring the matter forward at this time as the relevant Members are not present. That being the case —

12.00

Mr Tierney: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I spoke to the other parties, and I think that the Chairman — *[Interruption]* — perhaps not. He was here two minutes ago.

Mr Paisley Jnr: Mr Speaker, it was indicated to me very briefly by my Assembly Colleague that this matter could be brought forward, and we were asked to find some of the relevant people. However, that has been impossible, and there was no firm or fast agreement that the matter would be brought forward.

Mr Speaker: The speed and efficiency of the House this morning has been such that it has not been possible to sort the matter out and bring the business forward. The House will now, by leave, suspend, resuming at 2.30 pm with the debate on the Committee of the Centre's report on a commissioner for children.

The sitting was suspended at 12.01 pm.

On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —

2.30 pm

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE CENTRE – COMMISSIONER FOR CHILDREN

The Chairperson of the Committee of the Centre (Mr Poots): I beg to move

That this Assembly approves the Report of the Committee of the Centre on its inquiry into the proposal for a commissioner for children for Northern Ireland (2/00R) and calls on the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to take full account of the recommendations.

Why do we need a children's commissioner in Northern Ireland? Children are one of the largest and yet most vulnerable groups in our society. One of the organisations giving evidence to the Committee said that too often children have no mechanism through which their voice can be heard. Unlike adults, they do not have a vote, a union or a complaints system to access. They are wholly dependent on adults to raise and deal with their concerns.

There are almost 500,000 children in Northern Ireland, and they represent 30% of the population. Although the vast majority of our children have a healthy, happy and secure childhood, we are all too familiar with the horror stories of neglect, abuse or exploitation of our children and young people. All too often, we read in the press about the tragic consequences of failures by systems to protect children. In many cases, the failure is as a result of a lack of co-operation and co-ordination between organisations.

Just a couple of weeks ago, the local newspapers screamed headlines of "Agencies Blasted Over Boy's Death"; and "Tragic Teenager Failed By Systems". These headlines reported the tragic death of a 14-year-old Belfast boy who should have been in secure care accommodation. The magistrate in the case is quoted as having said:

"This court and the general public will want to know why Government agencies failed to protect this vulnerable young man and many other boys and girls".

The announcement in the House on 29 January by the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister of their intention to appoint a children's commissioner for Northern Ireland was given a widespread welcome. It was welcomed as a step towards ensuring that our children can grow up in a society, safe from exploitation and abuse, where their rights are protected and where their needs are met.

After that announcement, the Committee of the Centre embarked on an inquiry to examine the proposal and consider the role and remit of a children's commissioner.

Over a six-week period the Committee listened to more than 13 hours of oral evidence and questioned 51 individuals from 27 organisations, including statutory and voluntary bodies. We also listened to the views of a group of 11 young people and what they thought of the proposal. We invited representatives from Wales and Norway to hear at first hand about their experience of a children's commissioner. There were many diverse interests among those organisations, but they all had one thing in common — they all argued passionately in favour of having a children's commissioner.

During the evidence sessions the Committee heard shocking and dramatic statistics about some of the most vulnerable groups of children in our society. These included children born in Northern Ireland who were described as being "destined to fail" and who needed support right from birth to help them to break that cycle.

We heard about the intolerable levels of physical and sexual abuse in our society, and we heard that in Northern Ireland three children are raped every week, and another 12 are indecently assaulted. The Committee heard about the number of children in the juvenile justice system. Last year, over 340 children between the ages of 10 and 17 were locked up in Northern Ireland. We heard that at any given time about 30 children are locked up in our two juvenile justice centres, and over 600 are subject to statutory supervision orders in the community. Why is that happening? Can we not do better?

In 1999, there were 2,324 children in public care in Northern Ireland. Sixty-five per cent of them are in foster care in people's homes throughout Northern Ireland. I hold in highest regard those people who open their homes to children who have not had a good start in life to try to give them a chance. Many of the children will have experienced difficulties in their lives. They have the right to feel safe and protected from abuse and neglect.

We learned that approximately 11% of children in public care are in residential care. We also heard a very alarming statistic: one in five girls aged 16 to 18 will become pregnant within six months of leaving care.

We heard about children whose lives are affected by the criminal justice system because they or their parents have been involved in court proceedings. The children of prisoners seem to have received little attention in the past. Recent research in England and Wales shows that 63% of boys whose fathers have a criminal conviction will be involved in court proceedings by the age of 15. The figure rises to a dramatic 93% in cases where both parents have had criminal convictions.

We learned that 71% of young offenders and young men under the age of 21 given community sentences will have fathered one child. Forty-two per cent of them will have fathered two or more children. This is further compounded by the fact that 62% of those young men,

by the age of 23, will have no further contact with their children.

The Committee heard about the problems faced by children in ethnic minority groups. This is particularly evident in the travelling community. For example, 18% of travellers are under five years of age, compared with 8% in the settled community. Fifty-three per cent of travellers are under 17 years of age. Infant mortality and physical disability rates are three times higher among travellers than among the settled community. They also suffer from higher levels of chronic illness.

It is estimated that there are 14,000 children with a disability in Northern Ireland. The term “children with a disability” refers to a large and varied group, often with different and complex needs. It was pointed out to the Committee that regardless of this statistic, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 does not apply to children under 16 years of age. The Disability Discrimination Act is being reviewed, and this group was cited as an example of where a children’s commissioner could make a difference. The commissioner could ensure that the needs of children with disabilities are taken into account.

There are 76,000 one-parent families in Northern Ireland, with approximately 145,000 children — almost one third of the children in our Province live in one-parent families. In 7% of those families the parent is under 20 years of age; they are little more than children themselves.

The Human Rights Commission argued for a commissioner to act as a watchdog for the rights of children. The Commission called for someone with status and respect to monitor the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and to cover every aspect of children’s lives. The Commission called for the children’s commissioner to have strong investigative powers.

The Equality Commission reminded us that children are not a homogenous group; there is a vast array of children, and they have multiple identities. As part of its approval of equality schemes, the Equality Commission identified a gap in the carrying out of direct consultation with children and young people. This was particularly evident for young people with learning disabilities. The Equality Commission argued strongly that there was no substitute for children being their own advocates as part of a direct consultation process.

Many organisations in the voluntary care sector came together under the banner of Putting Children First. This was co-ordinated by Child Care NI. This group has been campaigning for some time for a children’s commissioner in Northern Ireland and put a strong and convincing case to the Committee. Thanks to the co-ordination of Child Care NI, and Mrs Mary Cunningham in particular, the Committee was able to hear the views of 15 organisations during two days of evidence. They argued

that children are our most valuable and, sometimes, our most vulnerable citizens.

They called for a children’s commissioner who would work not only with those in difficulties, such as those living in poverty, those who are abused, those who are in the care system or those in the juvenile justice system, but who would work with and for all children.

The organisations called for the commissioner to have strong powers to investigate all forms of abuse and gave examples of how he could take action on sexual abuse in children’s homes, bullying in schools or on behalf of children detained under mental health legislation. They highlighted the need for a holistic approach to strike a balance between parents’ rights and children’s rights and argued that he would need to consult parents and guardians on promoting children’s rights.

Several groups that work directly with children in care or in the juvenile justice system reported young people’s views on a children’s commissioner. They clearly want someone who will listen to what they say and do something about it.

The Committee met a group of young people, mainly in the 14 to 17 age range, at Magee College in Londonderry. The group from the north-west was brought together by the Western Young People’s Steering Committee, which is organised by the Western Health and Social Services Board. The young people were very forthright and wanted assurance that a commissioner would be someone with whom they could identify and communicate. Although the number of young people who gave direct evidence to the inquiry was limited, it highlighted to the Committee the absolute need, if there was ever any doubt, to involve young people in drawing up the proposals for a children’s commissioner.

While at Magee College the Committee also heard from the Derry Children’s Commission, an organisation made up of statutory organisations, including the council and health services board and voluntary and community groups that are working for children’s rights in the area. The group had very strong views on the role of a children’s commissioner.

The Northern Ireland branch of the British Association of Social Workers argued strongly for a children’s strategy here and for the children’s commissioner to be responsible for its implementation. The association saw the primary value of a commissioner as someone who could see the big picture and draw attention to the positive and negative aspects of practice.

The Guardian Ad Litem Agency and the Law Society of Northern Ireland joined forces to give evidence. They strongly welcomed the proposals for a children’s commissioner and highlighted some issues in their field that might be addressed by him.

One example related to article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Under that article, children capable of forming views have a right to be heard in any judicial or administrative proceedings affecting them, and although that obligation is fully met in public law proceedings, it is not met in private law cases, such as contested custody hearings. They argued that a children's commissioner could ensure that such areas were addressed and resolved.

The Assembly Ombudsman gave evidence to the Committee about the potential overlap between his office and that of the proposed children's commissioner. He argued that acting as a champion for children should be the core role of a children's commissioner, as it encompasses advocacy, research, monitoring and assistance with enforcement.

The Chairperson of the Health and Social Services Committee of the National Assembly for Wales told us of her experience. The Commissioner for Children in Wales has only recently been appointed, and it is too early to see results. However, there are valuable lessons for the Committee in how the consultation and appointment were carried out.

The innovative way in which young people in Wales were involved in the appointment of the Commissioner for Children particularly impressed the Committee. A group of 15 young people were directly involved in agreeing the assessment process and took part in the selection of candidates. After comprehensive training and guidance, those young people were invited to meet and interview all the shortlisted candidates. Two were then delegated to sit in on the formal selection panel.

It was most appropriate that the final evidence session was from the Ombudsman for Children in Norway, the first country to make such an appointment. Up to then, the Committee had listened to well-reasoned arguments and people's hopes and aspirations for a children's commissioner here. For the first time we were given an insight into how it worked in practice.

The Committee heard at first hand from someone who is tackling the problems that had been highlighted by others. One of the most interesting things about the session was that before it arguments had concentrated on the need to co-ordinate, monitor and enforce statutory services for children. In Norway, the Ombudsman also deals with those issues, but children set his agenda to a large extent. Many of the issues are more general cases of principle.

2.45 pm

He highlighted recent concerns there about infections resulting from body-piercing, which is not regulated in Norway. Another example was the campaign to ban cosmetic surgery for 16- to 18-year-olds. The Ombudsman

illustrated the type of issues he tackles with private companies:

"In Norway we do not have school uniforms as you have here. This means that we have one of the most expensive school uniforms in the world. You have to wear the right jacket, have the Nokia 3310, and wear the right shoes. Companies identify the most popular children in the school yard, who then receive free clothes for a few months. Advertising is not allowed in schools, but the children are used as indirect commercials."

As a result of that investigation the Ombudsman is about to publish a report on the commercial pressure on children. Censure by the Ombudsman is taken very seriously in Norway and can achieve very positive results.

The Ombudsman also examined the age of consent. Adults in Norway had been considering lowering it, but young people did not want that, and the Ombudsman drove forward their point of view.

Having listened to all the detailed arguments, the Committee strongly and unanimously supports the proposals for a children's commissioner for Northern Ireland. It also supports the development of a comprehensive strategy for Northern Ireland and sees the appointment of a children's commissioner as a core element of that. The Committee considered the role of the children's commissioner in significant detail and made 35 recommendations in its inquiry report. I do not intend to go into those in detail, but a few of them are central to the appointment of the children's commissioner.

The Committee heard many calls for the children's commissioner to be independent, and the possibility of the post's being part of an existing organisation was explored. We concluded, however, that the commissioner must be totally separate from all Government, departmental and public bodies. That would ensure a distinct identity and that any challenge or oversight function could be carried out independently of such bodies.

The Committee also concluded that the commissioner must have a broad remit for all children so that he can study all aspects of children's lives and be a champion for them. That was described as "having a helicopter view" and "being able to see the big picture". By having that overview, the commissioner could draw attention to areas where there are gaps or a lack of proper co-ordination.

That role, however, must not extend to include interference in family life. The primary responsibility for children must remain with the parents. Government agencies or the commissioner should step in only when the well-being of children is threatened by the failure of parents to meet their responsibilities.

There was unanimous agreement among witnesses and Committee members that the commissioner's role must include reserved matters. The commissioner must be able to ensure that children in the juvenile justice system receive their full rights. Some of the statistics

mentioned earlier highlight the difficulties faced by children in this area and the enormity of the task to be tackled by the children's commissioner.

The Committee also decided that the commissioner must have full powers of investigation, including the power to investigate complaints and initiate enquiries. As part of that, the commissioner should be able to compel the production of evidence, including the disclosure of documents, the power to enter premises and to subpoena witnesses. Similarly, the commissioner must be able to support children in court cases or to initiate cases on their behalf. However, the Committee was equally clear that those powers should be used strategically, only when all other avenues had been exhausted.

The most important people in the debate are children and young people. We must never lose sight of the fact that they are the reason for appointing a children's commissioner. I have already mentioned the need for meaningful consultation with young people in drawing up the commissioner's remit. When it comes to the appointment process, children and young people must be at the forefront of everyone's mind. They must remain our primary focus. The primary criterion for the post of commissioner must be the ability to relate directly to children. That is more important than a qualification in law or social work.

In Norway, the first ombudsman was a psychologist, and the next was a children's television personality — an entertainer. Several times in the evidence sessions we heard calls for the commissioner to be someone who is as much at ease when talking to nursery-school children as when addressing politicians.

How can we ensure that someone with that special quality is appointed? The Committee believes that the best way to do that is to have young people directly involved in the appointment process. When appointed, the commissioner must identify with children and listen to the issues that concern them.

We heard much during the evidence sessions about children's rights. I am sure that most children do not understand a great deal about the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, as someone said during the inquiry, children have a keen sense of what is fair and unfair. That is the language of rights that they understand; it is important to them that things are fair. Therefore when the commissioner is appointed, children must be able to feel that they know and can trust that person. They must feel that the commissioner is on their side and is someone who will ensure that they get a fair deal.

Although the commissioner must have teeth to act when necessary, he or she must also be able to promote the positive achievements and vision of children. As the Norwegian Ombudsman put it:

"People grow tired of you if you act as a watchdog that bites every day. If you are going to be a spokesperson for children, you must also represent the vision of children for the future".

I submit the report to the Assembly and invite Members to give it their full endorsement.

Mr Speaker: Given that this is a time-limited debate — with a limit of two hours — and that we must leave the usual amount of time for the Minister to respond, I am forced to ask Members to restrict their comments to not more than seven minutes. Even with that we may not get through all the Members who wish to speak. Therefore I appeal to those who can be more concise than seven minutes to oblige the House by doing so. I ask all Members who are speaking, including the Chairperson in his winding-up speech, to keep it to not more than seven minutes.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee of the Centre (Mr Gibson): All Committee members were struck by the enthusiasm, genuineness and sincerity of the presentations. Without doubt, they proved the need for a commissioner for children and demonstrated that there is a failing in the present system. There is no means of dovetailing and co-ordinating the work of the various statutory and other agencies that try as best they can to deal with the small percentage of people whom one person described as being "destined to fail". The appointment of a children's commissioner is seen as a means of breaking that cycle.

Not only was the case proven, but it was also made clear that the scope of a commissioner's role should cover every child from day one to age 18. In cases where the person may have been in care or need additional help, the commissioner's involvement should be extended for at least five years after that person becomes 18.

It was interesting to hear the different views. The present Ombudsman made the point that there should perhaps be a sharper focus on the role of a commissioner. However, the majority and strength of the evidence showed that the commissioner's remit should be broad-band and cover all aspects of children's lives. Those recommendations are embodied in the report.

Childproofing legislation was also looked at, and the Committee made eight recommendations on the children's commissioner's remit for that area. The Committee debated whether that remit should extend to reserved matters. It recommends that the commissioner for children should have the ability to intervene in the juvenile court system and be able to advocate and raise areas of concern.

There was much discussion about how young people could be given a voice. It is generally felt that we all sometimes take the view that adults know best. However, the view that we should give children a voice came across very forcibly. Therefore we made a further

eight recommendations on how a commissioner should develop a role for children.

We discussed how far a commissioner should be able to intervene in the legal system. We recommended that a children's commissioner should have the power to intervene in legal cases so that the rights of the child could be fully considered. We also considered to whom the commissioner should be accountable. We felt very strongly that the commissioner should be independent. However, in a democracy we must decide where the commissioner should report. We decided that the commissioner should submit an annual report to the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister and report to the appropriate Assembly Committee. That seemed to be the only secure way to address the issue. We studied the independence of all bodies and organisations.

We also studied the criteria for making the appointment, and we made suggestions on that matter. If a children's commissioner is appointed, the Assembly and the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister should turn their attention to the final important recommendation in paragraph 4.7.11.

"the commissioner for children should be given adequate resources to carry out the full remit. In setting the initial budget for the commissioner the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister should take account of funding for Commissioners in other European countries bearing in mind any differences in size or population."

The amount of funding certainly varied from one country to the next, but there were suggestive indications in the evidence.

The appointment of a children's commissioner is seen as a core element of a wider strategy that sets out a vision for the future of the children of Northern Ireland. I commend our report to the Assembly. I thank those who gave evidence, and our staff, who were very supportive and courteous. The report is worth sincere consideration by the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Dr Hendron): I congratulate Mr Poots and his Committee on this excellent report. Last December, in its report to the Assembly on residential and secure accommodation for children in Northern Ireland, the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee called for the appointment of a commissioner for children. Therefore the Committee welcomes the report from the Committee of the Centre. We now need to move speedily to introduce the necessary legislation.

One of the roles recommended for the commissioner in the report involves assessing legislation and submitting proposals and recommendations for change. That is laudable, but I would like the commissioner to have the power to ensure that the present legislation is fully implemented.

3.00 pm

If the commissioner ensures that the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 is fully implemented, we will be going a long way towards resolving many problems facing the most underprivileged children in Northern Ireland.

I agree with most of the report. However, I would like to have some idea of the cost of implementing the 35 recommendations. In recommendation 19 the Committee suggests that the commissioner should have power to intervene in legal cases. As soon as I hear the word "legal" I get very nervous about costs.

There have been arguments for a minister for children. However, as has already been mentioned, such a person would be an integral part of Government, whereas an independent commissioner could provide children's causes with much needed profile, as well as advise the Executive of their responsibilities under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

My Committee strongly believes that the treatment of children and young people in adult psychiatric wards should cease. I wonder what mental health services are to be developed for 16- to 18-year-olds. Mr Poots raised that issue also. The rights of the child are paramount, especially those of the most vulnerable children, such as those going into care, those already in care or those coming out of care. It is wrong that trusts can place children in homes already operating at full capacity and where there is a shortage of appropriately trained staff.

Before planned admission, the relevant agency should complete a placement and risk analysis. A care plan for each child should include a protective strategy, approved by the registration and inspection unit, setting out action to reduce risk and taking into account the needs of the child. All of this activity would be under the commissioner's remit.

I agree with the Committee's findings that the role of the commissioner for children should extend to reserved matters, including the juvenile justice system. Mr Poots mentioned the little boy who lost his life recently. I recall that little boy and the magistrate's comments. I pay tribute to resident magistrate, Mr Desmond Perry, who, with his colleagues, continually emphasises the need for collective responsibility for young people before the courts.

The report emphasises the need for communication with children in language that they understand, and we support that. The Chairperson of the Health and Social Services Committee of the National Assembly for Wales made the important point that the commissioner should have the opportunity to scrutinise how the police treat children and the policies that they employ towards children. Regardless of whether it is on the Falls Road or the Shankill Road, in Northern Ireland, England,

Ireland or elsewhere, people who are in an unhappy environment — particularly vulnerable adolescents — have a habit of getting into trouble with the law. Therefore it is very important that a commissioner for children look into those matters. It is important also that a children's commissioner should have powers of investigation, discovery and subpoena.

Finally, we are aware of the number of suicides in Northern Ireland. That can be only the tip of the iceberg. There are hundreds of young people in Northern Ireland who are unhappy and suffer from low self-esteem and depression and who are therefore very vulnerable. We look forward to the appointment of a children's commissioner as soon as possible.

Mr C Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the report; it is a very good report. It was largely compiled, agreed, drafted and redrafted in the middle of an election campaign, and that was no mean feat for the Committee of the Centre. I commend the staff who helped us. I would also like to place on record my appreciation of the many groups who gave evidence to us. By and large, they were very professional in their presentations and well informed on the issues.

The process of taking evidence and exchanging views with those organisations has given the Committee knowledge of the issue that will stand it in good stead when examining the legislative proposals when they come from the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister.

Some of the key recommendations or requirements for an effective children's commissioner kept jumping out at us from the evidence that was given. Most of them are reflected in the report, and I will list what I regard to be some of the most important. The children's commissioner should act as an independent watchdog for the rights of children. The commissioner should childproof existing and new legislation and policy for compliance with domestic and international human rights standards. The commissioner should be able to take cases in his or her own name or fund children to take cases where there has been a denial of children's rights. The commissioner should be empowered to enter and seize any documents, and he or she should receive adequate resources to fulfil those functions. The commissioner should be able to intervene, where appropriate, in legal proceedings that may have implications for children's rights. In response to Dr Hendron, costs should not be a factor here, as the protection of children's rights supersedes any cost issues that might arise.

The commissioner should actively engage, and consult directly with, children and young people, and have all the necessary powers to undertake effective investigations into any aspect of children's rights. He or she should encourage, resource and conduct research into children's rights and should consult regularly with children's rights

organisations and monitor the delivery or denial of children's rights for compliance with domestic and international human rights standards. The commissioner should also have the remit for all matters pertaining to children, including those matters at present reserved. He or she should be able to act as an advocate for children's rights and a channel for children's voices.

The commissioner should promote understanding and education of children's rights. He or she should also have the necessary powers to compile information and statistics on children and produce an annual report on the state of children. The commissioner should promote a culture of children's rights. The key themes emerging from all the evidence that we heard are that the office or post of children's commissioner should have adequate powers and resources, and it should be totally independent, although accountable to the Assembly.

I commend this report to the Assembly. Most of the recommendations from the various groups are contained in the report. I have no doubt that the record of today's debate will be studied by the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. That Office now has an opportunity to set a standard for others in the remit, powers and resources that it will propose to give to the children's commissioner. I hope that it will make use of this report and that it will build upon it to ensure the creation of a children's commissioner's post that will effectively promote, protect and serve the interests of all our children. I recommend this report to the Assembly. Go raibh maith agat.

Mrs E Bell: I support the motion. The Chairman of the Committee of the Centre must be congratulated for his comprehensive address. I will keep my remarks general.

Today is another important stepping stone on the path to the appointment of a children's commissioner for Northern Ireland. It is also significant because of the consensus across the parties that was evident as we worked at the report on this necessary appointment. There may be differences regarding the role, responsibilities, duties and powers to be given, but there is general agreement that in the current climate it is important to appoint a designated commissioner or even a minister for children. That will ensure that the concerns, needs and opinions of children and young people affect the policies of all Departments, thereby improving their situation in a more meaningful and practical way.

The statistics read out by the Chairman of the Committee of the Centre leave one in no doubt that children are disadvantaged, abused and hurt in different ways, almost every day. This appointment is, therefore, long overdue. All the evidence and submissions that came to the Committee pointed out that this appointment should be open and transparent. They made it clear that the office should be independent, accessible and given

adequate resources — financial and staffing — to carry out its duties without fear or favour.

It is also vital that children and young people from all backgrounds and situations are involved — although not necessarily in the actual appointment — in working with the commissioner in the implementation of the full range of duties and the development of the policies. That will ensure that childproofing takes place from the very beginning of a policy.

I refer to the recommendations on the roles and responsibilities — recommendations 9 and 14 — which Members can read for themselves. These outline the Committee's wish that the commissioner should work to improve the means of communication with children and young people.

The postholder must be accessible to all children, not just those with major problems, so that there is a vehicle of advice and support for every child. Organisations such as Childline, NSPCC and Barnardos will confirm that children, like adults, can benefit from having a contact who takes time to listen to their problems. Most children approaching the commissioner will probably do so through the courts — as a result of juvenile justice cases, social services referrals or divorce and custody cases — but the commissioner should be open to everyone who needs independent, objective advice and information.

The powers and duties laid out in the recommendations focus on children's rights, and they should prove to be a major step forward for children who find themselves, through no fault of their own, in care, detention, or suffering from mental trauma or illness caused by tragedy. Children do not recognise the difference between reserved and transferred matters, but that must not be allowed to affect their rights or prevent improvements to their situation. It is essential that we offer effective and efficient support in all situations. We must always remember that children are, first and foremost, children, and the fact that they are young offenders or victims of abuse or violence is secondary.

The recommendations also highlight the need for competent interaction between all relevant agencies. The commissioner could act as a co-ordinator so that children's rights are paramount. For that reason, the commissioner for children should also be directly accountable to the Assembly, through the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, in order to ensure that all cases receive the utmost propriety. Good work with children augurs well for everybody's future. The section on the appointment of the commissioner for children was considered carefully, in the light of all the concerns that were expressed. We hope that those concerns will be addressed. The Budget requirements of such an important post, with such a wide remit, must also be taken into account.

I thank my Colleagues on the Committee of the Centre and the Committee Clerks, who prepared the report, for

all their hard work. I also wish to thank all the deputations who came to see us. They were most efficient and gave us much food for thought. It was a pleasure to work together on such an issue. I hope that the recommendations of the report will be considered and implemented.

Ms Morrice: We welcome the publication of the report. It was a pleasure to see Committee members working together so constructively, and we congratulate the Committee on a valuable and timely document. We also applaud the Committee for taking evidence from key organisations, moving around the country and involving young people. That was a valuable process, and we hope that it will continue; it demonstrates what Members can do when they work together.

We agree that the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister should take account of the recommendations. The Women's Coalition put forward its own private Member's Bill on the issue. Many of the principles of our Bill are included in the report, so there is similar thinking. I look forward to the full implementation of the report's recommendations by the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister.

The role of the commissioner should be extended to cover children who are in receipt of post-care services, even if they are over 18. The commissioner should also be involved in the childproofing of legislation.

3.15 pm

This role is particularly important. The Executive should be required to have all Bills that are likely to be relevant to children passed as of right to the commissioner. The commissioner should also have the right to ask for legislation that has not been automatically passed to him or her.

The Committee report also provides for the commissioner to make an annual report. We support this; we also suggest that the commissioner should have the power to make other reports as he or she sees fit. Such reports may contain recommendations for action by others. In particular, the commissioner should be able to report recommendations for compliance with the provision of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, as ratified by the Government.

It would be useful if the Executive were to produce a code that sets out how the commissioner will be consulted. We strongly support the recommendation that the commissioner should also deal with reserved matters of juvenile justice. We are pleased that the Committee envisages a commissioner with adequate powers to investigate complaints, including the power to require disclosure of documents. This is a valuable recommendation; in fact, it should be the minimum standard for such offices. We lobbied for this standard when the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission was being set up.

Similarly, the proposal to enable the commissioner to make strategic interventions in legal proceedings is very wise. I must commend the statistics that the Chairperson gave this afternoon — they were horrifying and disturbing, but they represent a valuable resource for policy-making. The fact that the children's commissioner will be able to commission research on issues of concern, such as the number of children living below the poverty line, is very welcome. However, we should be careful that the children's commissioner does not spend the money that the Executive should be spending on research. There is no doubt that valuable statistics are essential to a good policy on children.

The Committee of the Centre envisages an ambitious remit for the commissioner. That is to be applauded and has our support. However, we must be given guarantees that when this remit is agreed, it will command adequate resources to carry out the tasks effectively for our children. Members have stressed the need for the commissioner to play the pivotal role in a strategy for children. If the commissioner is to be linked to a wider strategy for children, that must be taken into account. We strongly recommend the development of a strategy for children.

In conclusion, the fact that we need and want a children's commissioner is in no doubt. I am sure that the vote of the Assembly will prove that. As every Member has said today, this is long overdue. A commissioner must now be appointed as speedily as possible. We call on the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to advance its own legislation — or perhaps to seek to amend our Bill, as that would allow the process to dovetail — so that we can provide children and young people with this valuable watchdog as soon as possible.

Mr Beggs: I support the motion. I found my participation in the Committee of the Centre on this report worthwhile and interesting. I thank all the voluntary organisations and everyone who provided evidence to the Committee. It was worthwhile and timely that in the early stages information from the organisations directly involved should become available and be brought together by the Committee. It is to be hoped that that information will have a major impact on the functions of our commissioner for children.

I will pick out a few issues that are particularly relevant and should be reinforced — issues to which I contributed in the Committee Stage. Recommendation 2 talks about extending the remit of the commissioner to cover all those under the age of 21. Several Committee Members have said that there is evidence of a need for continuing support for young people, particularly when leaving care. There is evidence of low educational attainment and high rates of pregnancy shortly after leaving care. A cycle may be developing, and attention should be given to that vulnerable group so that the community can continue to support it and help to break that cycle.

Recommendation 7 recommends giving the commissioner an ability to childproof legislation. It is very important that there should be interaction at an early stage, and the views of young people should be put before the Assembly or the relevant Committee. It is too easy to overlook the effect of legislation on young people, and giving someone this responsibility will assist in drawing the relevant facts to everyone's attention.

Play facilities are almost completely overlooked in the planning process. There is little provision for green space for children, and little provision for quality play facilities, even in areas where hundreds of new houses are being developed. Developers are making large profits, and there should be a requirement, in the early stages, for space to be set aside for the young people who will live in those areas. I urge that when giving developers planning permissions, space should be set aside for play. It is of no benefit to deal with this later. It should be done at the beginning, so that people buying their houses know that a play facility will be built, and they cannot object later. Sometimes space is set aside and, subsequently, residents close to it decide that it is not in their best interests. It should be happening at the planning stage.

I am concerned about pre-school education. I have raised with the Minister my concern about the requirement for funding of pre-school groups that there should be at least eight children in the immediate pre-school year. The trouble with that is that smaller and rural communities will have no pre-school funding from the Department. I suggest that if we had a commissioner for children, that would not be allowed. Surely seven pre-school children can come together on a worthwhile basis and learn social skills. Six children, four children, what is the limit? It is not the number involved, it is the quality of the experience and education in that pre-school group that is important.

We talked about where the commissioner should highlight areas of research and where statistics are required. An important point is that the commissioner should not be doing everything himself. He needs to co-ordinate and give his views to all the other agencies to minimise duplication, so that everyone is working together, gathering the relevant information, and bringing benefit to everyone.

Initially I was shocked to find that, in Wales, young people were involved in the selection process. Most adults will find that strange, but after investigation I can see many benefits.

The main function of a commissioner is to reach out to vulnerable children. Unless a commissioner can communicate with those children and make them feel that he is acting in their interests, his level of professionalism or skills is irrelevant. What better way of establishing that communication than to involve young people? I will not

stipulate exactly how they should be involved, but they should play a part in the selection process.

It is recommended that a commissioner's term run for four years. According to the evidence received by the Committee, a one-or two-year term is not long enough a period in which to establish the office and network within the system. There was concern that a longer term could be disadvantageous if the right person were not selected at the outset. However, if everyone were satisfied with the commissioner's performance, it would be sensible to extend the initial appointment. I hope that the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister will take this issue on board along with our many other recommendations.

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

Ms Lewsley: As a member of the Committee of the Centre, I support this report. I hope that the Executive will take full account of the Committee's report and its work with regard to the commissioner for children. Our children need a strong advocate to act on their behalf. They are, as the Deputy First Minister pointed out, too often neither seen nor heard.

Despite the fact that there are 500,000 children aged 18 and under in the North, few Government structures have been put in place to promote their needs. Those needs are great, given the fact that 37% of children in the North live in families that earn less than half of the average national income. Many of our children's services are poorly funded. Our education system does not provide equality of opportunity, particularly for deprived children, as a result of which far too many leave school without any qualifications. Children are abused at home and neglected in care, and our young people are often kept in Victorian conditions under the criminal justice system.

It is because of these problems that the announcement by the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister on 29 January this year of their intention to establish a commissioner for children was so welcome. After years of campaigning and getting nowhere under direct rule, those who worked with our children at the coalface finally found, in the devolved Administration, Ministers who would listen and act.

This proves that our new Government institutions are working, and that devolution is making a difference. I hope that all Assembly parties will do everything possible to preserve these institutions. Otherwise, if we return to the neglect of direct rule, such important initiatives as the children's commissioner might be lost. All parties owe it to children to ensure that we do not face collapse in the coming weeks.

It is important that we get the details right when establishing a children's commissioner. The Committee of the Centre believes that it has done that. We believe that a commissioner for children, along the lines suggested,

would clearly reflect best practice and set an example for the rest of the world to follow.

We envisage several distinct roles for the commissioner. First, he would promote a culture of children's rights through fostering education and acting as a source of information and advice. Secondly, the commissioner should act as an advocate for children — that means taking cases to establish children's rights and checking that policies, practices and governmental procedures respect the rights of children. Thirdly, the commissioner should have full investigative powers.

A number of agencies are already engaged in the protection of children. It would make no sense for the children's commission to act as an appeal body for all of these, or to duplicate their functions.

3.30 pm

The commissioner should be able to help children when other people cannot, and should above all be able to investigate how other bodies and agencies handle complaints from children. In any case, if an agency has fallen down in its duty, the commissioner must be able to investigate that thoroughly and have all necessary powers to do so. Only if the commissioner has those powers will he or she be taken seriously.

Finally, it is critical that the commissioner is not limited to the devolved Administration. The First Minister and the Deputy First Minister are aware of the importance of ensuring that children in the criminal justice system are safeguarded, and they have invited the Northern Ireland Office onto the interdepartmental working group. It is vital that the Northern Ireland Office share in the devolved Administration's vision of a strong, independent and powerful children's commissioner.

The Committee of the Centre listens to Ministers, officials, statutory agencies and those working in the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to secure the rights of all children. As my other Committee Colleagues have done, I thank them for all their help. I am pleased to see that the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister is adopting the same inclusive approach and that, to this end, it has established an NGO forum.

It is important to listen before you act and not, as some have done, to rush into proposals that are not well thought through. I hope that the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister listens to all that has been said here today, and I look forward to seeing it act for the sake of children and their future. I support the motion.

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am delighted that we have finally reached this stage with regard to a children's commissioner. It is something we should have done long ago. I welcome the report by the Committee of the Centre and was glad to be able to contribute to it at Committee meetings.

I welcome the junior Minister to the debate and ask him if there is a timetable for this matter. The Committee has worked very hard in a short time, and that dynamic must continue until the commissioner has been appointed.

This appointment will mark a massive step forward for society and prove that we are serious about the needs and rights of children and not just paying lip service to them. To secure the best future for children, it is critical that we establish a children's commissioner from a children's rights' perspective, as opposed to a child welfare or protection perspective.

I welcome the Committee's recommendations that the children's commissioner should be independent and that he or she should have an input into reserved matters such as the juvenile justice system. This is a field where young people and the areas in which they live have been badly let down by successive British Ministers who have looked at the problem in a short-sighted way. They treated the matter as one for punishment, without putting thought or resources into reintegration and the problems that this causes.

Although I am very glad that we are finally about to have a children's commissioner, some matters still need to be addressed before we proceed. It is vital that we get this right so that the children's commissioner is approachable and accountable, not just to the Assembly but to the people whom he or she will be representing — children and young people.

Another crucial area concerns the powers that the commissioner will have. It would be a disgrace if we appointed a children's commissioner who was, in effect, a lame duck. We must ensure that he is properly resourced to carry out his duties and make a real difference to children's lives. Mr Hendron said earlier that the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 was a good piece of work. However, while it was a positive piece of legislation, it was not well resourced. The commissioner must be adequately resourced.

In that light, I am concerned that in paragraph 4.4.4 of the report the words "where other avenues of redress have failed" are included in the proposals under the heading "Duties and Powers". The denial of rights may demand immediate action by an independent body like the commissioner; in cases of abuse, for example. There may also be situations in which it is those involved in the investigating process who are denying children's rights. We should not have to wait for other avenues to be exhausted before the commissioner can act. The commissioner should have the power to carry out investigations as and when he or she thinks fit in the best interests of a child, or when approached by agencies, groups or individuals to get involved.

Paragraph 4.4.9 of the report states that the commissioner should have the power to intervene in legal cases. It is essential to clarify whether this means the power to

undertake third-party interventions. This power, if it is to be of benefit to the commissioner, must include both sets of circumstances.

It has not been recommended that the commissioner be empowered to assist a child where there is a breach of the child's rights. I recognise the need for a strategic casework approach, but it is vital that the commissioner is in a position to assist — including financially — in individual cases where the rights of children have been denied.

The role of the children's commissioner is potentially of major benefit in the area of children's rights, if the Assembly can iron out the details. Getting it right at this stage will be one of the most important things that the Assembly has done to date, and it will be something that Members will have just cause to be proud of.

I thank the Committee staff for their hard work on the report. Addressing the report's recommendations will enable the children's commissioner to become a champion of children's rights, and it will empower our children — especially the most vulnerable in society. Go raibh mile maith agat.

Mr K Robinson: I thank the Committee staff for the excellent way in which they helped us in this mammoth process. Congratulations are also to be extended to the Chairperson, who conducted the very weighty business in a fair and professional manner. I pay tribute to my Colleagues from all parties, because this undertaking is central to society.

The report represents a realistic and common-sense approach to what has unfortunately been a blight upon society up to now; the manner in which we have treated our children — the most vulnerable and valuable asset in society. The report also represents a firm signpost indicating that our community may now address the oversights, insensitivities and abuses of the past and provide a future that is bright, safe and positive for our children.

The Committee received 26 oral submissions and 24 written submissions. These came from a variety of statutory and voluntary organisations, which approached the situation in a positive and professional manner and agreed that there was a need for a children's commissioner.

Trond Waage, the Commissioner for Children in Norway, was one of the most impressive witnesses. Mr Waage not only spoke of the mechanics of the commission and how Norwegians have been edging towards their current situation since 1970; he also opened the Committee's eyes to the fact that adults sometimes fail to appreciate children's view points and approaches to life. My Colleague, Mr Beggs, said that Committee members listened in awe as Mr Waage explained how Norwegians involve their children. They use e-government and all the powers they have to allow children at every

level; as individuals; in school councils; and in local areas, to voice their concerns and to share their hopes and aspirations for the future with adults. In Norway, adults listened.

The Committee is presenting the Assembly with a framework. We can do no more. It is for the Assembly and the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to treat the framework — the signpost — with the respect that is its due. It is pointing us forward. Although some of my Colleagues have mentioned some shortcomings in the mechanics of the exercise, we all have a clear vision of the future.

The submission that impressed me most — apart from that of the Norwegian Commissioner — was from the young people in Londonderry. They said that there must be a complete change of attitude and in ways of thinking, because young people and adults almost speak different languages. That should make us pause. It is fundamental. We are trying to solve a problem from an adult perspective while young people are telling us that we cannot communicate with them at a basic linguistic level.

The Gulbenkian Foundation inquiry into effective government structures for children supported the need for a children's commissioner. Some colleagues have referred to the United Nation's Committee on the Rights of the Child, and the Council of Europe, which, in its European Strategy for Children, proposes the appointment of a commissioner. We are all agreed on the appointment of a commissioner.

There have been some sad references along the way. When the Chairperson of the Health and Social Services Committee of the National Assembly for Wales gave evidence she spoke about the 'Lost in Care' report which was based on a series of child abuse allegations in Wales. This event caused that community to stop, take stock and look at ways in which the situation might be redressed. Their recommendation was that a commissioner should be appointed. The Welsh Assembly Member impressed us with her submission.

The Northern Ireland voluntary sector document, 'Putting Children First' represents a campaign for a commissioner which has been running for many years. It recommends that the commissioner should not be appointed in isolation but as part as an overall strategy, so that all Departments will look to the needs and vital issues affecting our children. It is important that the statutory and voluntary agencies know their roles and the areas of interface with other organisations to ensure that no child is allowed to slip through the net. The child should always be at the centre of our concerns.

Our commissioner is going to be all things to all people. However, he or she must be a champion for children, a watchdog for children, and if necessary a whistle-blower

for children. We cannot allow the abuses and inactivity of the past to continue.

I am glad to say that the commissioner will report to the Assembly annually. That requirement does not impinge upon the independence of his post. It is a positive sign that he or she will be required to appear, at least once, before the Committee of the Centre. The commissioner will be there to be questioned; to report, and to let us review any of the issues raised in the Chamber so that they may be put right. I have no hesitation in commending the Committee's report to the House.

Mrs Courtney: As a member of the Committee of the Centre I support the motion. I commend the organisations that gave freely of their time in providing evidence to the Committee.

The Chairperson detailed the processes involved in the Committee coming to its conclusions, and I do not intend to dwell on those. Our proposals have come about following wide consultation with all bodies dealing with children and young people. We received presentations from the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, the Norwegian Children's Ombudsman, and the National Assembly for Wales, which has appointed a children's commissioner recently. All parties involved made clear presentations and answered questions from Committee members who sought clarification on certain issues.

The results of those meetings form part of the recommendations presented to the House today. I draw particular attention to recommendation 7, which discusses the childproofing of legislation; and recommendation 32, which says that young people should be involved in the appointment of a commissioner, and that the Committee commends the process used by the Welsh Assembly.

The Committee sought the views of young people, and for that reason we held a separate meeting at Magee College in Derry where we heard directly from young people about their concerns. They were forthright in their views, and we learned a lot from them. They felt that a commissioner could make a difference, because they were at a loss at times to understand who was responsible for looking after them.

We heard the views of the Derry Children's Commission, which has been working with children and young people for the past couple of years and has gained valuable expertise in the subject. I fully support the appointment of a commissioner, and I support the Chairperson, Mr Poots, in his call for the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to take full account of the report's 35 recommendations.

3.45 pm

The report is the result of many weeks of intensive consultation and is one of the most important documents to be tabled in the House.

The initial proposal to appoint a children's commissioner has the support of all the parties represented here. These recommendations put the flesh on the bones of that proposal and will enable it to be implemented. That is why I am pleased to commend the report to the House. I also commend everyone involved, the Chairperson, my Committee Colleagues and the staff who worked tirelessly to get the report published in time.

Mr Shannon: I rise to support the proposal and to thank the Chairperson for his leadership and the Committee members for their contributions.

There can be no doubt that there is a real need for a children's commissioner to be appointed here with a remit to look after the affairs of young people and children. For too long legislation has not been equal to the goals of preventing child abuse while maintaining parental authority. Parental authority is crucial to the maintenance of social integrity, but it is equally important that we, as public representatives, do our best to ensure that children remain free from bad parenting, abuse, maltreatment and exploitation.

Anyone who has read the report will know that all those who made a representation supported, in principle, the appointment of a children's commissioner. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was ratified by our Government, and the Council of Europe has called for the establishment of independent offices for children. That makes the call for such an appointment here irresistible. In other countries where a commissioner for children has been appointed there was as much evidence to support the appointment as there is in Northern Ireland.

The need for children to have their voices heard and acknowledged is crucial to the development of society. The report recommends working through schools, youth clubs, youth councils and involving IT to enable children to deliver their opinions and attitudes properly.

It is also essential that the appointment of any new commissioner, especially one to deal with children's issues, be an integral part of a wider political strategy. The appointment must encompass all aspects of life affecting children, whether in family centres, fostering or adoption services, domiciliary care, private and voluntary hospitals, day care or child-minding services.

There is a legitimate argument that we could go too far with children's rights. In these days of politically correct madness, there is every possibility that this could happen. To balance that, we must therefore ensure that no measure taken to put children first on our list of priorities undermines the authority of their parents. The minority who abuse their own and other people's children must not be allowed to weaken the fabric of society. The results can be positive if we strike the right balance.

The role and responsibility of a new commissioner must be founded on a commitment to represent every single child

on any issue brought to his office — irrespective of race, religion, culture, social background or whether the child is in or out of the care system. The commissioner should act so as to give the impression to every child that he or she will receive treatment equal to that of any other. It is essential to the success of the commissioner that this office be backed by the proper authority and legislation to enable him or her to pursue all cases under investigation where in the past there has been stalemate. The commissioner must have the power to carry out effective investigations and to provide and disclose all relevant documentation, and we must ensure that child services are distributed across the country in proportion with population.

The commissioner should be able to pinpoint areas of improvement and the direction of any subsequent strategy, and he should be capable of allocating resources to best effect. He or she should be able to act as a watchdog for children, and to assess and analyse the implications of legislation brought before the Assembly and the House of Commons which will have an impact on the lives of children. This post should carry the power to submit papers and reports to relevant bodies indicating where there is improvement and where policy and strategy need to be enhanced.

One issue that is essential to the success of the role is the commissioner's ability to be directly involved in reserved matters. The remit should extend to matters involving the juvenile justice system with the right to scrutinise all reserved legislation at primary level and sufficient resources to complete this task successfully. It would be a terrible disappointment if the resources were not there to carry out the job correctly.

Another issue that must be emphasised is the independent nature of the commissioner. We all agree with the majority of those who submitted evidence to the Assembly. They said that it is essential for the long-term success of the commissioner for children that the office be completely independent of Departments and public bodies. The aims, goals and projects held and implemented by the commissioner must come from a base of complete and unadulterated objectivity and impartiality. A commissioner who operates to someone else's agenda will inevitably fail to increase the profile of children.

Gone are the days when the phrase "children should be seen and not heard" was given any credibility. Instead, the rights of children have been at the forefront of political discussion and debate. It is up to the Government to ensure that an environment is created in which children's rights are upheld, their safety secured and their needs met. Northern Ireland is desperately lagging behind the rest of Europe when it comes to the rights of children and young people. The children of Northern Ireland deserve better.

Unfortunately, today's society has too often overlooked the needs of children. This has led to children

being exposed to dangers and volatile situations. Children should be allowed to act as children and should not be placed in situations that force them to grow up too quickly. It is up to the Government to ensure that children are protected from the darker elements of society.

The presence and prevalence of paedophiles in our society has never been greater. A paedophile register should include the names of people who have been convicted of paedophile activity in the United Kingdom and in the Republic of Ireland. This would allow the authorities, both in Northern Ireland and south of the border, to monitor the movement of sex offenders. Although society will never be able to guarantee total protection of the most vulnerable children and young people from those intent on committing sexual or physical abuse, this new legislation will provide the children of Northern Ireland with a commissioner — a new symbol of hope for their future. It will send out a clear signal to those who abuse children that their behaviour will no longer be tolerated.

Mrs Carson: I welcome the comprehensive report, and I congratulate the Committee for its consultation with many groups and bodies. I have concerns about some of the Committee's recommendations. They could be seen from a parent's, a grandparent's and a family point of view as authoritarian and interventionist if they were all fully implemented. It would be impossible to comprehend their impact on families, parents, teachers, social workers and even other children.

I note that there are no oral or written submissions from any church representatives. There was only one submission — from a parent's advice centre — to represent the voice of parents. Were these groups asked to attend, participate or give a written submission? I agree with the Christian Action Research and Education (CARE) group that the primary object of a children's commissioner must be to protect children. It also stated:

"It would be tragic if the Commissioner's ability to protect children from abuse was compromised by demands that he should spend his time empowering children generally."

We have to think about those two objectives.

The criteria for the appointment of a children's commissioner will need extremely careful consideration to make sure that we have the right person in the post. The Committee's recommendation says:

"The candidates for the post of commissioner for children should be based on skills, competence and experience, with an emphasis on the ability to engage directly with children, rather than necessarily having a specific professional or academic qualification."

I am concerned about the difficulty in specifying the personal requirements, because the recommendation is rather vague. It makes no recommendation about what skills, competencies or experience the Committee has in mind. These should be clearly spelt out.

Interestingly, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission says that the person who fills the post should bring status and respect, and should be popular with children. The Western Young People's Steering Group said that he or she must be easily accessible, physically and mentally, so that young people's minds are relaxed. That is a bit confusing.

Those recommendations, plus the intellectual ability required for the children's commissioner to initiate legislation, will make for an interesting appointee. I hope that the report's recommendations will not confuse or cloud the appointment of a children's commissioner. The report has given us food for thought on how the Assembly should proceed, but I urge that care and consideration be given to all possibilities. We must consider the impact of these wide-ranging recommendations on the general family unit in Northern Ireland. I want us to create an office that will fulfil our primary objective: a commissioner to protect children in all situations. I support the motion.

The Junior Minister (Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister) (Mr Haughey): On behalf of the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, I welcome the report and the debate. I have listened carefully to Members' contributions. They have been informative and interesting, and will be fully taken account of by my office as the proposals for a commissioner for children are developed. I will respond to as many of the specific points made by Members as I can, but if I do not have enough time I will send a written response to Members whose individual points have not been covered.

The appointment of a children's commissioner is one of the most significant and exciting things to occur since devolution. It is an important milestone on the road away from a society mired in conflict to a shared society where rights are the basis on which citizens are treated — and that includes children and young people.

Far from being on the sidelines of conflict, children have been deeply involved in and affected by the conflict here. Of the many people who were killed during the troubles, over 400 were children. They were denied the most basic right of all — the right to life. Countless thousands were denied the right to a normal, happy and peaceful childhood.

Having been part of, and deeply affected by, the conflict, children deserve to be part of the solution and the construction of a new society here. The Good Friday Agreement has enshrined the principles of inclusion, equality, human rights and citizenship in the system of government. The challenge now is to ensure that those principles are applied to children and young people. It is our intention that the office of the commissioner for children will translate those principles into protection for children on the ground.

Our aim is simple. It is to put Northern Ireland at the cutting edge of best practice in the protection of children's rights. Like the Committee of the Centre, the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister has been involved in dialogue with key stakeholders to ensure that its policy proposals draw on the skill and experience of those in both the statutory and non-government sectors who work with children, or represent their views.

4.00 pm

In particular, we have striven to ensure that the views of children and young people are included at this formative stage in the process. However, I should point out that we will need professional, skilled help in doing that. It is not desirable that unskilled people like ourselves should confront children and demand to know what their views are. That is unlikely to lead to the best results. We must therefore work very hard to create a conducive environment in which children can feel comfortable and free to speak their minds.

Members made specific points, and I will try to cover as many of those as possible. I welcome the emphasis laid by the Chairperson of the Committee of the Centre, Mr Poots, on the involvement of children and young people in the process. Mr Gibson, Mrs Bell and several other Members also referred to it. It is true that adults too often take the view that the whole purpose of childhood is to prepare children for adulthood so that they become good citizens. The perspective brought to bear on this situation has derived from the involvement of children in other jurisdictions and has led us to a greater awareness of the fact that children are entitled to a happy, healthy, secure and safe childhood without regard to any other consideration. Our emphasis should be on children's happiness, safety and security now, rather than on what we need to do to make sure that they turn out to be good citizens.

I also welcome the Committee Chairman's emphasis on the importance of the family framework. Mrs Carson and others also raised the importance of the position of parents and the need not to neglect that position. I do not agree entirely with Mrs Carson's caution in respect of the right of the proposed commissioner to investigate abuses and complaints. I recognise that such a power would have to be used very sensitively to avoid undue invasion of the rights of parents and an invasive or authoritarian impact on family life. Unfortunately, however, a great deal of abuse, neglect and harm to children occurs within the family framework. It is therefore essential that the commissioner has adequate powers — where there is sufficient justification, and with defined and proper safeguards — to look at the situation of children in families where they may be at risk.

The third important point in Mr Poots's contribution was his emphasis on the independence of the commissioner. That is important from various points of view. Several Members asked to whom the commissioner would be

accountable. The report produced by the Committee of the Centre suggests that the commissioner should be accountable to the Assembly but through the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. I wonder whether that is the right way to go about it. Obviously, we will take full account of the arguments made by the Committee of the Centre, but to make the commissioner accountable to a Government Department rather than directly to the Assembly bears upon the quality of his or her independence. We must look very carefully at that. I am not saying that the arguments made by the Committee of the Centre will be dismissed, but there may be other perspectives. We will want to talk to the Committee of the Centre as we develop our proposals in this regard.

I liked and approved of the emphasis that the Committee Chairperson and others put on the necessity for the children's commissioner to have responsibilities and obligations to all children — not just those at risk, in care or in certain special circumstances. That was raised again by Mr Gibson, Mrs Bell and others. It is important, and we fully intend it to be the case.

A fifth issue that arose and was referred to by a number of Members, including the Committee Chairperson, was the power that the commissioner might have to take cases. The Committee's report appears to suggest that this power might be limited to strategic interventions — sometimes referred to as class actions. I am not sure that we would want to restrict or confine the commissioner's power to intervene in cases purely within those limits. In the longer term, after we have consulted, we may wish the commissioner to have more extensive powers of intervention.

There are three ways in which he or she might intervene: by supporting an action that is being taken by a child or on its behalf by its parents; by taking the case him- or herself; or by taking the role of an *amicus curiae* — a friend of the court who can be called to give expert evidence. We must look carefully at defining the commissioner's role in a way that ensures that he or she has sufficient power to take legal cases and make legal interventions where possible. However, we must also ensure that his role does not become a power that could be oppressive or abusive.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee, Mr Gibson, referred to dovetailing, which means that policies relating to children should have an integrated impact on their situation. That mirrors the thinking of the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister and relates to the cliché of joined-up government, making sure that policies and practices mesh together without conflict or turmoil. I am aware of that and assure the Member that it is part of our thinking.

Mr Gibson referred to childproofing legislation as a desirable function for the children's commissioner. Mrs

Bell, Ms Morrice, Mr Beggs, Mrs Courtney and others also referred to it. I assure them that we are thinking carefully about how a commissioner might play such a role.

Mrs Lewsley made an interesting and important extension to that point. She said that the commissioner should not only have a role in childproofing legislation, but that he should also examine the practices of Departments and agencies to make sure that they are conducive to the welfare and good of children. Once again, we will look at that.

Mr Gibson referred to the need for children to have a voice and be able to communicate with the commissioner. However, should we not also think about giving children a voice that goes beyond the ability to communicate with the commissioner, a voice that would enable them to communicate generally and to communicate ideas? The new children's parliament in the South — the *Dáil na nÓg* — will meet for the first time shortly. We should look carefully at that to see what improvement it brings to children's situations and what improved awareness of children's views and attitudes it generates.

Mr Gibson mentioned accountability to the Assembly through the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. As I said earlier, that has merits, but we must be mindful of the independence of the commissioner, and we must look carefully at the right way to do this.

Mr Gibson also raised the issue of adequate resources, which was also mentioned by Mr Conor Murphy and Ms Gildernew. Resources are an important consideration. There is no point in establishing the post of children's commissioner if he or she does not have the resources to do the job. Mr Gibson's final point was that the proposal makes sense only as part of a wider strategy. Members should be aware that the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister is examining the role of a children's commissioner as part of a wider strategy.

Dr Hendron said that speedy progress was needed, and Ms Morrice, Ms Gildernew and others spoke about the timetable for carrying the process forward. We intend to have the consultation document on the proposal for a children's commissioner ready by August, and we are more or less on target. The consultation period could then run from August to October, allowing us to receive and consider responses.

Assuming that the process runs smoothly, we will devote November and December to preparing the legislation. We hope to introduce the legislation to the Assembly early in the new year. We hope to have developed a broad and cohesive approach to the matter by that stage. I suspect that there is a high level of consensus on the issue. The legislation would be on the statute book by spring next year. It is not possible to be any more accurate than that about the timetable. We hope to begin consultation on the broader strategy early in the new

year, and we shall consider the whole range of changes that might affect children. We will do that while moving ahead with the proposal for a children's commissioner.

My Colleague, Dr Hendron, highlighted the potential role of the commissioner in assessing existing legislation. He made the interesting and important point that it would make a considerable difference to the situation of children if existing legislation such as the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 was properly and rigorously enforced. We must bear that in mind.

Dr Hendron also spoke about the treatment of children in adult psychiatric units and the placement of children in overcrowded facilities. The children's commissioner will want to consider such matters carefully and make recommendations to the Administration, but I do not think that one should pre-empt what he or she might say. Dr Hendron also referred to the commissioner's powers of investigation, including discovery of documents, entry to premises and the power to subpoena witnesses. We are examining those powers carefully, because it is important that the office of the commissioner should have the teeth necessary to investigate complaints and reports of abuse. The commissioner should not simply make statements deploring abuse; he or she should have the powers to discover documents, subpoena witnesses, and so on, as these are necessary for the investigation of abuse.

Mr Conor Murphy said that the commissioner should have the role of a watchdog for the rights of children. That is in line with the thinking of the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. Mr Murphy and other Members raised the issue of the investigation of cases and the associated powers of entry, discovery and seizure. I have referred to that.

4.15 pm

He did make one point that other Members, including Ms Morrice, referred to, and that was about the commissioner's role in research. Unfortunately, we do not have the necessary research findings, statistics and information upon which to base a children's policy. There may be a considerable role for the commissioner in research, and we must consider quite what that will be.

Ms Morrice said that there is no need for the commissioner to duplicate what other agencies do, or could do. It is my view that it does not matter who does it, as long as we have the information and statistics that we need.

Mr Conor Murphy also referred to the need for adequate resources and powers, and other Members made the same point. He suggested that we should set a standard for cutting-edge good practice in Northern Ireland, and that is our full intention.

Mr Beggs made reference to organisations on the ground. I take his point, and we have already considered it necessary to involve such organisations. That is why we decided to set up the NGO forum. It has met three or

four times and has made a very valuable input into the development of children's policies.

Mr Beggs also referred to pre-school education. That is not something we can deal with – it is a matter for the Minister of Education. We need to consider what role the commissioner will play in such matters and make recommendations to Ministers and the Administration accordingly.

Mr Beggs also referred to the need for the commissioner to have a role in planning children's facilities such as playgrounds and playing facilities. That would obviously involve the Departments for Regional and Social Development as well as district councils, the Housing Executive, central Government, local government and various Government agencies, and that reminds us of the need for an integrated approach on the part of those organisations.

Mr Beggs made the interesting point that it would not be necessary for the Commissioner to do everything himself. Rather he should ensure that tasks are carried out by the relevant agencies and have the right to undertake to get them done if no agency is ready and willing to do them.

He also made a point about the involvement of children in the process. Given the practice that has been developed in countries such as Norway and Wales of involving children in the decision-making process, it is important that we do not do less than they are doing in this.

Ms Lewsley made the important point that devolution is making a difference. I can say without fear of contradiction that there is a good deal of enthusiasm for devolution among NGOs and the organisations that deal with children. Having our own Ministers has brought a considerable impetus to matters such as this, and these organisations are greatly enthused by the progress that we have made on children's policies during devolution.

Mr Ken Robinson also made an interesting point about children from Derry. He said that adults and children speak very different languages and that we need to have professional help to understand the language used by children so as to bring their perspective to bear upon our proposals.

I thank all the Members who contributed to the debate. We will consider very carefully all that has been said to us. I look forward to receiving the response of the Committee of the Centre to the proposals when they are published in the consultation document.

Mr Poots: I thank the Members who took part in the debate for their positive and constructive contributions. The number of Members who expressed a general welcome echoes the consensus in the Committee on the appointment of a children's commissioner for Northern Ireland and the recommendations on his role and remit. I want to pick up on a few of the points made.

Dr Hendron made reference to the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 being fully implemented. Recommendations 5, 8 and 9 all deal with that. Recommendation 5 says that the commissioner for children should act as an advocate for children's rights and monitor the delivery of these rights in Northern Ireland. Recommendation 8 says that the commissioner for children should have a role in assessing existing legislation and bringing forward proposals and recommendations for change, where appropriate. Recommendation 9 says that the commissioner for children should have a role in considering and commenting on the impact of policies and practices on children and young people. Those recommendations deal with what Dr Hendron talked about.

On the cost of implementation — and he made particular reference to legal cases — we can only go by the costs in other countries. In Wales, for example, £800,000 has been set aside. We have based our estimates on what has taken place in other countries, and the cost for Northern Ireland should be somewhere in that region.

Ms Morrice made reference to post-care services. We have recommended that children coming out of care should have help for a further three years, beyond the age of 18, after they come out of care — if help is required. In many cases it is fairly obvious that help is required. I quoted the statistics earlier.

With reference to research, recommendation 20 provides that the commissioner for children should have a responsibility to highlight to the relevant agencies areas where additional research and statistics are required and a duty to undertake or commission research, if deemed necessary, on issues of concern to children.

Mrs Carson made a number of points in relation to family life. She had some concerns about the appointment process. We believe that it is important that the commissioner can relate to children first. Academic qualifications come after that. There is little point in having someone who has academic qualifications the length of your arm, but who cannot relate to children and young people. We need someone who can actually relate and who is well qualified. The ability to relate comes first and foremost; the qualifications are secondary.

I would be wholly opposed to a children's commissioner interfering in any way in individual family life. I do not believe that a commissioner will have the time to interfere in individual family life. Ninety per cent of his time will be taken up by 5% to 10% of children and young people. The work of the commissioner is going to lie where the problems are. If the commissioner does not address those issues, and instead addresses issues in which he should not be interfering, his accountability would have to be called into question and addressed. I understand Mrs Carson's concerns, but I do not believe it will turn out to be a problem.

Mr Haughey made reference to the legal implications and said that he thought we should give the commissioner more powers. The Committee felt that the commissioner should not get bogged down in legal cases, given the problems that can prevail there. The Committee's view is that the commissioner should step in where required, when others had failed. We have had cases in Northern Ireland, and indeed in the rest of the United Kingdom, where others have failed and there was no commissioner to step in.

However, the commissioner should not be involved when others are currently doing that task. I appreciate the Minister's positive response. Our focus was on speeding up the appointment process, and the report was intended to add emphasis to that process. The appointment is not a panacea, but it is hoped that it will address the worst aspects of child abuse in Northern Ireland — whether sexual, physical or mental — and improve children's lives.

I express my sincere gratitude to the staff who worked hard in drawing up the report and to those members of the Committee who came to almost every meeting and who had the greatest input. I want to make special reference to them. I commend the report.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly approves the Report of the Committee of the Centre on its inquiry into the proposal for a commissioner for children for Northern Ireland (2/00R) and calls on the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to take full account of the recommendations.

SEED POTATOES (CROP FEES) REGULATIONS (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2001

The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development (Rev Dr Ian Paisley): I beg to move

That the Seed Potatoes (Crop Fees) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 (SR 228/2001) be annulled.

When a rule subject to negative resolution has been formally laid before the Assembly, a Statutory Committee can only approve it or seek its annulment by the Assembly. At a meeting on 11 May 2001 the Committee discussed the proposed Regulations and agreed that it could not support them, given the difficulties faced by the potato sector and farming in general. I wrote to the Minister on 16 May on behalf of the Committee with that message.

The Minister's reply of 22 May said that full cost recovery is the basic financial objective for all charging. In an earlier letter dated 13 May, giving notice of the proposed Regulation, the Minister's private secretary referred to an Ulster Farmers' Union request for the fees to be waived in 2001. He said that it was not possible to agree to that request. In other words, the clear message from the Minister and the Department was that the increase would go ahead, regardless of the Committee or anyone else.

As a Committee we do not want to have to pray against that rule. I happen to believe in prayer, but I do not want to pray on that one. However, in this case the Committee's views were blatantly ignored by the Department. The Seed Potatoes (Crop Fees) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 left the Committee no option but to put the matter before the Assembly.

I bring the motion before the House today with the full support of the Committee, at a time when the farming industry, the backbone of the Northern Ireland economy, is on its knees. Farmers have had catastrophe after disaster piled on them in recent times through no fault of their own. However, there is no need for me to revisit the curtailment of activities and financial hardships brought on farmers and their families by BSE and foot-and-mouth disease.

4.30 pm

These matters have been aired on many occasions in the House and have been acknowledged as a crisis by everybody.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in this very place, has accepted that farmers are in trouble. She has set up various initiatives to help them, which we welcome. On the other hand, her Department puts yet another financial burden on people who are already at their wits' end. These Regulations are a prime example. It does not make sense to Committee members to give

with one hand and take away with the other. For example, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has seen fit to spend money setting up a rural support line for farmers who are feeling worried or stressed, so that they can speak to a trained counsellor. This clearly recognises that current policies are creating such serious problems that they must be urgently and professionally addressed. To introduce these Regulations would add to farmers' financial worries and create even more stress; that is incomprehensible at this time.

The Minister pointed out to the Committee that the fees increase for farmers this year would be minimal. In that case, the Department could easily absorb the extra costs and relieve a much-beleaguered community from this extra pressure. The Minister may like to tell the House what additional money would be involved for the year. She had a golden opportunity to send a message of support to farmers by agreeing to set aside any increase in fees this year. The appreciation of farmers would surely have far exceeded the additional fees collected. That opportunity has now been lost.

Members may know that the Department has commissioned a policy review of the potato sector. That review is not due to be completed until late summer or early autumn this year. Other considerations aside, surely in the light of this review and the Minister's acceptance that the seed-potato sector has been in decline for several years, it is not right to impose increases in fees this year, particularly in the face of objections from producers and their representatives. We can all reconsider the issue next year, informed by the findings of the review. The Committee wants to send a positive message to farmers — "We continue to recognise your plight". I call on Assembly Members to support this prayer of annulment.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I do not wish to limit this debate, but I am conscious that the Business Committee has allocated only another 15 minutes for it.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee (Mr Savage): In rising to support my Chairman's motion, I believe that there is one guiding principle that must govern all Assembly decisions — no additional financial or regulatory burdens should be placed on farmers in Northern Ireland at this time. Farmers need breathing space to enable them to recover lost ground and loss of income. Following the problems of the devastating decade that they have endured — of which foot-and-mouth disease is only the latest manifestation — farmers need our help and support. They do not need additional Regulations and charges.

With so much concentration on livestock, the seed-potato growers are sometimes a forgotten part of the agriculture sector, but they are a very important part. In the middle of the day, everyone likes a potato. One of the principal reasons why we must actively help and support the seed-potato growers is the threat posed to them by the

enlargement of the European Union. With new member states joining the European Union, the threat of price undercutting is very real, especially after the Nice Treaty.

We hear that land has cost a mere £200 an acre for over 50 years in Poland and that agricultural labourers are paid £20 a month — that is only one example. The implications of that are serious and far-reaching, because it will be decades before their salaries and land prices reach the western European minimum, let alone the western European average.

The threat to our seed-potato growers from that source is now real. We can help them by supporting the motion from the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, and I urge Members to do that.

The cost to farmers has been rising for various reasons. I urge the Department to cut its costs and be more efficient — as farmers must. I do not want to repeat everything that the Chairperson has said, but I ask Members for their support. Give our farmers a breathing space, and let them regroup and reorganise for the years ahead.

Mr Bradley: As politicians we are all inclined to form part of the "what I want" brigade — meaning that we want as much as possible for those whom we represent; and they are no different. They too are keen to benefit from the deliberations of their politicians. The common desire often depends on the money available. Members of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development are no different from those in other Committees. We too have a lot of soul-searching to do before making decisions, particularly if there are financial implications.

In the springtime I met, as requested, with seed producers in my South Down constituency. They recognise that recovering lost markets and finding new ones is essential if the seed business is to regain its viability. The Minister and her Department cannot embark on a market-seeking exercise if they do not have adequate funding, and that makes it easy for me to understand why the Department is seeking to increase its income — albeit very minimally in this instance — as it sets about establishing the necessary marketing structures.

This may not be the best time to make the necessary increases. The seed industry has reached an all-time low as far as prices and profit are concerned. The farmers do not have the cash to meet new demands, even if those demands are in their best interests. For example, in the past it was often the case that when the beef trade was good, the potato industry was bad or vice versa. The same could be said of the dairy industry, the pig industry, the grain trade, et cetera. Farmers could depend on at least one sector of their industry to offset the difficulties that arose out of a downward trend in the viability of another.

However, the entire industry has collapsed for a multitude of reasons in the last three years. At present there are no viable sectors on Northern Ireland farms.

For that reason, it may be prudent to postpone the proposed increase for at least a year. In making this suggestion, I am tying the hands of the Minister in her efforts to find new markets for our seed producers. Nevertheless, a one-year waiver on the increase will serve the best short-term interests of the producers. I assure the Minister that if she applies a further one-year waiver, I shall — for 12 months at least — limit my questions on the marketing of seed potatoes.

Mr Kane: We should be discussing assistance to the agriculture industry this afternoon, but instead we are defending one sector against inappropriate and unacceptable additional costs.

It is disturbing that despite the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development concluding that the Seed Potato Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 are inappropriate, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is persistent about implementing them, contrary to what has been said by some who wish those Regulations to become a party political matter. This is about a fair deal for seed-potato growers in the Province, and to turn it into anything else only demonstrates an ignorance of farmers' problems.

The implementation of Regulations that add to production costs, at a time when farmers are desperately seeking a chink of light at the end of a very long tunnel, flies in the face of common sense. This is especially so since the seed potato and the entire potato sector are not subsidised. Since the potato sector has not escaped the effects of low product values in recent years, the negative effect of increased fees on the producer is clear.

We should be doing everything possible to encourage, not discourage, all sectors of the agriculture industry. The reasoning behind the implementation of these Regulations is unclear. It is no minor matter that the fees increase would be of minimal significance to the Department's budget. My party Colleagues and I believe that the damage of implementing these seed-potato Regulations far outweighs their gain. I support the annulment of these Regulations and ask that the Department and the Minister give appropriate consideration to the views of the Committee and of those affected by these damaging Regulations.

Mr McHugh: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion. I do not think that there is any need for further discussion of this issue. Our problem with the Regulations is that the Department simply forces them on farmers without taking into account the points that have been raised and, in particular, the year that is in it.

Almost all farmers, regardless of what area of production they are in, have suffered as a result of foot-and-mouth disease and the crisis in the industry over the past five years. Nevertheless, whatever the cost may be, the Department will simply impose a Regulation so that its

budget will not be affected. I agree that someone must pay for the costs of assessment and so on, but this is not the best year to do it. The Agriculture Committee agreed that particular sensitivity was needed this year when farmers are obliged to pay up. That is why I support the motion.

One of the problems with these Regulations, and with others that filter down from Europe through the Department, is that their effect on producers here is not always adequately scrutinised. A recent example places liability on the original producer for the legal implications of food traceability and for the cost of medical difficulties when people are struck down by diseases such as BSE.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers): I have noted the comments and concerns expressed on this matter, but I must oppose this motion and ask the support of the Assembly in rejecting it. My Department, like all Departments, is required to recover the cost of the statutory services that it provides from the beneficiaries of those services.

The requirement that fees should cover the full cost of service delivery where a benefit accrues to an individual business has been a justified feature of Treasury, and in our case Department of Finance and Personnel, policy for some time. I have considered all the factors, and I am as aware of the difficulties faced by the farming community as anyone else. However, I was unable to accept that there was justification for not increasing the fee at this time on that basis.

In particular, I was conscious that a decision not to increase the fees and charges levied by my Department, of which this is but one, would mean my having to fund the additional costs from my Department's resources at a time when the industry made many competing and justified calls to me for help.

4.45 pm

The main point that I want to make is that the increase in the fee is insignificant, amounting to no more than £5 over the year on average for each producer involved. The costs in Northern Ireland still compare very favourably with those levied in other parts of the UK. For example, even with the increase provided for in the Regulations, the crop fees here cost 34p per hectare. The comparative figure in Scotland is 58p and in England 81p.

The agreement with the Department of Finance and Personnel requires full cost recovery, which in this instance would have meant a 6.5% increase, but I decided to limit it to the inflationary indicator of 3%. No increases were applied from 1995-99 following a comprehensive review of our staffing and other costs, which enabled the fees to be maintained at a stable level for those years. However, it has been necessary to increase them since, as costs have increased; annulling this Regulation would widen the gap between cost and fees, which would have to

be faced later. Conversely, annulment of these Regulations would have very significant precedent-setting implications for all increases of fees and charges proposed for other areas in my Department and for other Departments as well.

The need to increase these fees is not, as has been suggested, due to a lack of appreciation on my part of the sector's difficulties. My Department is very proactive in trying to arrest and reverse the decline in the seed-potato sector here. It is not a forgotten sector, as suggested by Mr Savage — certainly not by my Department.

Since 1999 key players have been involved in examining opportunities for a support and development strategy for this sector. Several action points are being progressed on the quality and image of Northern Ireland seed, supplemented by close liaison, best practice and exploring what can be done to improve the sector's competitiveness for the home and export markets.

I have also recently commissioned a policy review of our potato sector, the emphasis of which will be on the seed-potato sub-sector. This review will involve consultations with all parties concerned and will inform strategic decisions for the future. All factors influencing the situation will be considered, particularly the significance of international factors, including over-supply in most markets, the strength of sterling and increased competition in North African markets.

The review will also address alleged quality problems with Northern Ireland seed potatoes in respect of physical factors relating to storage, packaging and transportation as well as the effectiveness of promotional and marketing effort. This is the correct way to support the industry, and my decision to increase these fees should be supported despite the obvious populist appeal of not doing so.

There is also a rebate for some tuber inspection fees, whereby 75% of fees representing potatoes exported from Northern Ireland are rebated to producers. The average cost of the increases to the individual farmer drops proportionately when account is taken of the rebate. I am sure that Members will appreciate the significant impact of that.

In conclusion, I hope that my explanation has demonstrated that it was not possible for me to follow the easy course of keeping fees at their current level. For the reasons that I have explained, it would not have been right. I accordingly ask for Members' support in rejecting the motion. If Members vote in favour of the motion, I shall reluctantly accept their decision. However, they will need to note the implications of such a decision on approving, or not, other increases in fees and charges which will come before them.

I have not ignored the Committee; I have listened to the Committee and made my decision on the basis of the need — this is a matter of public accountability that I could not ignore. The additional costs incurred from not

securing these and other future increases will have further implications which the Assembly must address.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: I bitterly regret that the Minister has not accepted the appeals made to her. I do not understand that, because for the past five years the Department was able to make no increase in these fees. As farmers are now in a worse position than ever, why could the Department not still do that? The Minister knows that farm incomes have been slashed by almost 75%.

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development could well take in the amount of money that the Minister has argued is not a big sum. If it is not a big sum, why does the Department not bear the burden? Why does it give the industry another straw that will break the camel's back?

I appeal to the House to support the Agriculture Committee in the prayer of annulment.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Seed Potato (Crop Fees) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 (SR 228/2001) be annulled.

SEED POTATO REGULATIONS (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2001

Mr Ford: I beg to move

That the Seed Potato Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 (SR 188/2001) be annulled.

On the face of it most of the Regulations are merely updating the Seeds Act (Northern Ireland) 1965 and improving the methods by which seed potatoes can be marketed in Northern Ireland — something that nobody can object to. However, I am particularly concerned with two of the measures contained in the Regulations.

Regulation 22 will prevent the planting of seed potatoes in Northern Ireland other than fully certified seed potatoes or “once saved seed” from 31 December 2001.

I understand the issues that the Minister referred to in the previous debate. I understand the need to protect Northern Ireland’s commercial markets, particularly with regard to seed crops and the need to ensure that the highest standards are applied to ensure that Northern Ireland producers can exploit overseas markets. However, that is not the issue that really matters here. High standards may be essential in some cases, but will the Minister tell the House if Regulation 22 is intended to stop individuals growing potatoes for their own consumption several years in succession? There is no justification for that.

There might be concerns if we were talking about something that grows by seed production — possible seed hybridisation between one individual’s plants and properly certified seeds in an adjacent field. However, we are talking about potatoes grown by vegetative reproduction. There is no question of hybridisation or detriment to other growers. It is simply a question of whether individuals growing a small quantity of potatoes for themselves should be required to buy seed and pay a fee which up to now they have not been required to do if they have saved seed on their farm for many generations. Is it proposed that people who continue to do that after 1 January 2002 be made criminals? It appears to me that the Regulations are saying that this will be the case.

For me, the bigger issue is contained in Regulation 11, “Genetically Modified Seed Potatoes”. I object — and the Assembly should object — to any measure appearing to put genetically modified material into the Northern Ireland environment without a full and proper debate in the Chamber. That was done when similar measures were proposed in Wales — and the National Assembly for Wales has fewer powers than we do when it comes to agriculture matters.

Undoubtedly, the Minister will tell the Assembly that Regulation 11 is merely concerned with the marketing and proper labelling of genetically modified material; it is not permitting it. If that is so, why does the Regulation appear? It is putting the cart before the horse.

There may be an EU Directive involved. However, I am speaking as one who is probably more pro-European than other members of the Agriculture Committee. There is an issue that we must take serious note of, and we have already experienced it in relation to animal diseases. A free market in living organisms should not be something that Northern Ireland rolls over and implements just because a Directive comes from Brussels. We must think about what the Directive means and what the appropriate creative thinking may mean.

To pass these Regulations with their reference to genetically modified potatoes would be to send out the wrong message at this time of crisis in agriculture.

In the previous debate Members highlighted the difficulties in the agriculture industry. I do not propose to rehearse all the arguments made by Dr Paisley and by other members of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee. They have been aired often in the Chamber.

The one great advantage we have in Northern Ireland is our clean, green image; this applies to the whole of the island, not just Northern Ireland. It is a major marketing bonus, and it is something that we must develop to its utmost. If discerning consumers in Europe are looking for such a market, then we should be seeking to maximise our benefits. Anything that would suggest that we are acting detrimentally to the clean, green image in Ireland will create difficulties for us in the long term. Any question of introducing genetically modified organisms would damage that image irrevocably. That is my opinion; Members need not agree with it.

Any decision on whether to permit genetically modified crops in Northern Ireland should be taken after a full and proper debate in the Assembly and not after a Regulation is slipped through in a 15-minute debate at the end of the day. This is effectively what is being proposed by these Regulations. If the Assembly chooses to disagree with me and permits the growing of genetically modified crops, then so be it. It may be a majority decision, but I shall know that I am right and that you are wrong.

At least let us ensure that we have a properly structured debate and that we do not slide things in through the back door. Although the majority of the Regulations are perfectly acceptable, the Assembly, in this case, should reject the Regulations as they stand and ask the Minister to bring them back to us omitting these two unacceptable items.

Mr McHugh: Go raibh maith agat. I support Mr Ford’s position on Regulations 11 and 22. Genetically modified food has been a particular bone of contention for me for several years. Consumers and politicians have been musing over the issue, asking who is to blame; if there is anything really risky about it; and whether they should allow it to go ahead.

The driving force behind genetically modified food is often big business and people with no interest in the image of locally produced food. They have a global perspective. They believe that the lowest possible price is the most important factor, and that is what drives them down the road of genetically modified food. It has nothing to do with trying to make food cheaper in poorer countries or getting round the problems of famines — one of their main arguments.

The opposite has been proven to be the case when more damage is done to the environment, to the long-term future of the industry and to small businesses. Many small businesses will get into serious difficulties if we move away from a level playing field. In the United States large companies rule, and they move everyone else out. That is what genetically modified foods have to offer us.

In the case of potatoes, the issue also puts local farmers' options at risk. They will have to import genetically modified potatoes, and they will not be able to produce food locally that has a clean, green image.

This issue should be addressed through consultation and debate with the consumer and the producer; it should not be addressed through Regulations. We are dealing with major forces, and the debate today does not give us any opportunity to examine the issues properly. The Minister must see to it that local knowledge is taken into account. Consumers want clean products on the shelves that they can be sure of and that are traceable. The Regulations should be rejected. Go raibh maith agat.

5.00 pm

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers): I have noted what Mr Ford and Mr McHugh said, but I must oppose the motion. Annulment of the Regulations would not achieve the objective sought by those Members but would, conversely, create major difficulties for our seed-potato growers and exporters, as it would remove from the Department all its statutory powers to inspect and regulate the marketing of seed potatoes. That would create a significant problem in the production of certified seed in Northern Ireland this year and would probably lead to losses for the industry in the domestic and export markets.

To put it bluntly, seed potatoes could not be sold in the absence of the Regulations. Furthermore, the anticipated benefits to the industry from the modernising measures in the Regulations would not be delivered. Concern about one area of regulation could end up removing all regulation of the sector: we should not contemplate creating such a situation. My Department would also be liable for damages for any losses suffered by the industry as a result of the non-implementation of Directive requirements. There have already been several such cases in Northern Ireland.

Mr Ford's first objection was that the certification would relate to private growers: it will not. He also objected to the introduction of Regulations for cases in which we do not have discretion. Mr Ford and Mr McHugh are rightly concerned about the control mechanisms regulating GM production. If time permits, I shall explain those in more detail, but I must emphasise that annulling the Regulations would be of no benefit as they do not change in any way the existing statutory control measures on GM foods in Northern Ireland. The Regulations simply prescribe the conditions under which GM varieties of seed potato might be marketed in future. Any other aspects of GM control would, rightly, be a matter for the whole Executive.

I shall explain why I am asking the Assembly to reject the motion and offer Members some reassurance. The concerns that have been expressed are already fully appreciated. We are all aware of the problems that have beset the seed-potato sector over the past few years. The Regulations are a partial contribution to a process that will, I hope, begin to reverse the decline in the sector's fortunes.

Time does not permit me to go into the background in detail, but I shall give the Assembly some explanation of the purpose of the Regulations. Their purpose is threefold. First, they will consolidate the 1981 Regulations, which have been amended on seven occasions, and make the Regulations more user-friendly. Secondly, we are implementing new EU obligations and complying with Directives 98/94/EC and 98/96/EC, which amended the various seed market Directives. Thirdly and most importantly, from the industry's point of view, we are modernising the Seed Potato Regulations with a view to developing the competitiveness of the seed-potato sector here and making Northern Ireland seed potatoes as appealing as possible to potential customers.

Leaving aside consolidation, it is the implementation of the Directive requirements in respect of GM seed potatoes that has prompted the motion. The Directive acknowledges that, in the light of scientific and technical developments, it is now possible to breed seed-potato varieties through genetic modification. It requires member states to introduce a legal basis for the conditions under which such GM varieties may be marketed. The Regulations introduce that legal basis for Northern Ireland and have no other implications whatsoever. They are not a green light for the growing or marketing of GM seed potatoes here. I have already said that that would be a matter for the Executive to consider before putting its decision to the House.

The Regulations do not change in any way the existing statutory control measures for GM products in Northern Ireland. Directive 2001/18/EC requires a comprehensive and transparent legislative framework to ensure that the public is consulted by either the Commission or the member state during the preparation

of measures relating to the deliberate release into the environment of genetically modified organisms.

It is my understanding that the Department of the Environment would lead such a consultative process and bring its proposals to the Committee for the Environment. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's Regulations therefore introduce a definition of "genetically modified" in line with that provided in an earlier, related European Community Directive 90/220/EEC on the deliberate release into the environment of genetically modified organisms. They also implement two provisions of Directive 98/95/EC concerned with the labelling and marketing of genetically modified seed potatoes. However, such labelling and marketing would be subject to pre-existing and stringent conditions imposed by the Department of the Environment.

I hope that I have made it clear to the Assembly that the concerns expressed about genetically modified foods are not what these Regulations are about. These Regulations have no implications for the introduction of genetically modified foods into Northern Ireland, but they have serious implications for the good of the potato sector. If the Assembly votes for this motion, I shall not be able to prevent brown rot from coming in, for example, or do whatever is necessary to support the industry, which is in a difficult position at present.

Mr Ford: I shall be brief. I confess that I am confused. On two occasions the Minister said that these Regulations referred to how genetically modified crops might be marketed. However, in her final remarks she said that they have no implications for the introduction of genetically modified material. I do not understand that. Either they do or they do not. As far as I can see, a section that is headed "Genetically modified seed potatoes" has something to do with seed potatoes.

I acknowledged that many aspects of the legislation are beneficial, but I made it clear that I resented the way in which genetically modified produce marketing Regulations had been slipped into a Bill without proper debate. The Minister has not assuaged those concerns at all. I remain concerned about the regulations as they stand. I made it clear, and Mr McHugh also made it clear, that there is concern about a section of these Regulations and not about the Regulations in their entirety. I asked the Minister to withdraw and reissue the Regulations. That should be done, but if the Minister is unwilling to withdraw them, the prayer of annulment should be said.

Question put and negatived.

LAGAN VALLEY HOSPITAL

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Members should resume their seats so that we can move on to the next item of business.

Mr Poots: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes with concern the current underfunding of the Lagan Valley Hospital in the Down Lisburn Health and Social Services Trust.

It is a matter of regret that this motion must be brought before the House. Hospitals require funding. Capitation formulae are worked out for those hospitals. In the case of the Down Lisburn Health and Social Services Trust — and the Lagan Valley Hospital in particular — those formulae are not being adhered to. Thus this motion must be brought with the support of the Members for Lagan Valley to highlight this inequity. Discrimination has taken place against the Down Lisburn Health and Social Services Trust and the Lagan Valley Hospital.

In the current year, under the new capitation formula, the trust is underfunded by £2.75 million. In the coming year, it is believed that the trust will be underfunded by between £4 and £4.5 million. The trust has already had to take action to meet the requirement of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety that the trust does not run up a deficit.

5.15 pm

In the past the Lagan Valley Hospital, overseen by Down Lisburn Health and Social Services Trust, has lived within its means and has not run up deficits, unlike other hospitals. I believe that Craigavon Hospital's deficit was about £7 million. The Royal Victoria Hospital has run up deficits year after year. Those deficits have been paid for, while a trust that has sought to live within its means is denied the funding that it should receive.

The trust has had to close ward 7, which was an acute medical ward functioning mainly as a pre-discharge unit. Many of the patients were transferred to ward 1B, which was opened only last year to deal with winter pressures. Anyone who was in Lagan Valley Hospital in 1999-2000 would understand why that ward was so necessary. Patients lay for days on trolleys in corridors. Required hygiene standards were not met. Steps had to be taken to open ward 1B so that those patients would not have to endure such conditions again.

Last year was a completely different story. Lagan Valley Hospital was full but was capable of meeting the needs of the people. I dread to think of what will happen in the winter of 2001-02. There will not be a place for some patients, who will have to be shifted to other hospitals. Those hospitals will be unable to take them, and they will again be lying on trolleys in corridors.

There is a proposal for the immediate closure of ward 14. Management and staff have met this afternoon to discuss that. I have not heard the outcome, but staff are very concerned. The closure will lead to the loss of 26 beds that had been taken up mostly by elderly patients requiring nursing hospital care. The trust intends to take action that is in one sense evasive, but that action will not meet the needs of patients. There is speculation that some patients may be sent to Drumlough House, which is full. It will therefore be necessary to put people who are in Drumlough House out into the community. Those people are not ready for that, but they will still be put out to make way for patients from ward 14, which is being closed because there is not enough funding.

Ward 1B is also under pressure and may have to close. In total, 56 or 57 beds in the Lagan Valley Hospital will be lost this year. In fairness, I must say that that includes 13 beds that were made available because of winter pressures, but the situation is unsatisfactory and must be dealt with.

The trust will also have to run down its community programmes. Anyone who understands community care will realise that that has an impact not only on the community but on hospitals, because it leads to bed-blocking. Residential and nursing homes will have beds available but will be unable to take patients because there will be no money in the community care budget. People often stay in hospital for longer than is necessary.

New service developments will be delayed because of the financial pressure on the trust. There are several reasons for that pressure. Pay awards are 3·7%, but the available funding covers only 3·5%. There have been price increases of £250,000 for heat, light and power. Foster care services demand more funding. There is reduced income from GP fundholders as fundholding is phased out. Winter pressures will not be funded this year.

Then there is the cost of maintaining winter pressures to mid-May. There are also pressures in acute services such as nursing, staffing, family planning fees, accident and emergency security and medical record storage. These things must be paid for, but the funding has not been put in place. That leads to a situation where other aspects of health care are cut.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I could take you to the Lagan Valley Hospital tonight and show you patients lying there who need medical care. Beds will not be available in Lagan Valley to meet those needs. Many of those people have relatives who visit them in hospital. People regularly travel from Lisburn, Dromore, Dromara, Glenavy and outlying towns in Lagan Valley to regularly visit their family members — perhaps their mothers and fathers — to see them and to help meet their needs. Transferring such patients to more distant hospitals will limit a family's ability to visit its relatives.

I have a question for the Minister. Are elderly people in Lagan Valley of lesser standing than elderly people elsewhere in Northern Ireland? Is it right that the most vulnerable people in society — older people who need medical care — are treated in such a way? Is it right to deny them the services that they require because the Department and the Eastern Health and Social Services Board do not supply the hospital with the funding that it is entitled to? What we are seeing here is most unfair and discriminatory. It must be dealt with.

The Hayes Report says that the Lagan Valley Hospital will have a greater role to play in the care of the elderly. The current process of bed closures flies in the face of that report. I do not accept most of its recommendations on the Lagan Valley Hospital, but that is not an issue for today. I believe that that issue will be debated at another time. Why the short-sightedness if the health boards believe what Hayes is saying? Why are they implementing a programme that is contrary to his recommendations?

I will not accept that the people of Lagan Valley are second-class citizens. Very often in the Assembly we hear of people in inner-city Belfast and people west of the Bann being treated as second-class citizens. In this instance, the people in Lagan Valley are being treated as second-class citizens. Perhaps it is not as fashionable to say that people in Lagan Valley are treated as second-class citizens as it is in the case of other areas, but it is a fact. It must be dealt with.

I implore the Minister, the Department of Health and the Eastern Health and Social Services Board to find the money that the Lagan Valley Hospital and the Down Lisburn Health and Social Services Trust should be receiving. I implore them to ensure that the people in my constituency — particularly the elderly and the vulnerable — receive the care that they are entitled to.

The Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee (Mr B Bell): I thank Mr Poots for proposing the motion. Given the seriousness of the problem, five of the six MLAs in the constituency wanted to sign it. We are united on the issue. However, the Standing Orders state that only two names can go on a motion.

The Lagan Valley Hospital is a vital asset to Lisburn and the surrounding area. The hospital and its staff have served the area very well over many years.

Lisburn Borough Council recently spearheaded a campaign to save the Lagan Valley Hospital from imminent closure. That threat passed, and the addition of a day procedures unit and the refurbishment of the accident and emergency department seemed to show that the future of the hospital as a fully operational acute hospital was safe.

I am not a sceptic by nature, but I am not optimistic that there will be adequate future funding for the Down Lisburn Health and Social Services Trust, of which Lagan Valley Hospital is an integral part.

As Mr Poots said, the proposal to close ward 14 was a big shock to the people of Lisburn and the Lagan Valley area. Like Mr Poots, I appeal to the Minister to ensure that funding is provided to ensure that this closure does not happen.

Mr Poots referred to the Hayes Report, which I support as a useful consultative document for the future of hospitals. It does, however, contain two proposals that are completely unacceptable to us and to the people of Lagan Valley. The report proposed the closure of the maternity department and the accident and emergency unit. That is inconceivable in an area such as Lisburn. Lisburn Borough Council is the largest borough in Northern Ireland, second only to Belfast — it is bigger than Derry. It is inconceivable that such an area could be left without maternity and accident and emergency services. The Belfast Area Plan predicts that the population of the Lisburn Borough Council area will increase from 115,000 to over 200,000 over the next 15 years. It is unthinkable to leave an area of that size without those facilities, but that seems to be the direction that we are going in.

The funding of the Down Lisburn Health and Social Services Trust will determine the future of services in the Lagan Valley Hospital. The trust has a potential deficit of £1.56 million, and extra resources are needed. Several factors have led to the deficit, and although Mr Poots has mentioned those, I shall spell them out. Pay awards have been set at 3.7%, but funding is set at only 3.5%. As the pay awards must be adhered to, the funding will have to be found from other sources or the number of staff will have to be cut.

The trust carried out the Telford exercise with regard to nursing staff levels. There is a shortage of 223 nursing staff in the trust. This is a recipe for disaster. Considering the fact that it would cost £3 million for the trust to employ its full complement of nurses, it is clear that the Down Lisburn Health and Social Services Trust is inadequately funded.

Other vital factors must be addressed. The price that the trust pays for heat, light and power has increased by over £250,000. Money to pay for this must be found from savings or an increased grant. As the Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee, I am not convinced that enough is being done to make these savings.

Foster care services have increased, and there has been a reduction in the income from GP fundholders, because the scheme is being phased out. Although most would agree that the fundholding scheme was misconceived from the start, an interim system should be put in place to allow such deficits to be met.

5.30 pm

Mr Poots has already mentioned the pressure on winter beds and the fact that they must be retained until

May. The trust is severely underfunded. If the full complement of nursing staff were available, that shortfall in funding would be even more acute. All trusts are under instructions to break even in this and subsequent financial years. If the Down Lisburn Health and Social Services Trust is to do so, it will have to make choices. Those choices are now under consideration.

The issue of a single ward in the Lagan Valley Hospital, although very important, is not the only issue. The Minister, her officials, the Eastern Health and Social Services Board and the trust must come together to provide adequate funding for the Down Lisburn Health and Social Services Trust and the Lagan Valley Hospital.

The trust now has a dilemma as to how it should proceed. Cuts are one path that can be taken, but they lead only to loss of efficiency and, sometimes, to loss of life. We may be seeing the last few years of the present health services system. That matter will no doubt be debated in the Assembly in future. Today we can only deal with what is on the ground — an over-stretched system that cannot cope. I ask the Minister to meet with her officials, the Eastern Health and Social Services Board and the directors of the Down Lisburn Health and Social Services Trust, as a matter of urgency, to resolve this ongoing and very difficult problem. I support the motion.

Ms Lewsley: I support the motion. Like Mr Billy Bell, I also represent Lagan Valley.

I do not need to tell the House that there is a serious risk that underfunding of the Lagan Valley Hospital will lead to severe cutbacks in services offered there. The result could be devastating for the local community and for staff morale. A recent report from the trust's director of nursing has shown that it has a shortfall of 223 nursing staff.

In order to comply with the Department's instructions not to incur a deficit — and because of the reduction in income from GP fundholders as fundholding is phased out — Down Lisburn Health and Social Services Trust will have to make savings by cutting back on services. Mr Poots said that in the last four years the trust, and Lagan Valley Hospital in particular, has, unlike other hospitals, kept within its budget. It is a sad fact that there was no incentive and no recognition of its good financial management. That only adds to the low morale in the trust.

The increased costs of heat, light and power have also been mentioned, and they are having an effect on the trust's already strained budget. There are proposals to close 13 medical beds, which are part of the winter pressure proposals, and to cut some of the 26 beds for general medical and inpatient services for elderly patients. I ask the Minister: what will happen to the elderly and the infirm? Where can they expect to go for treatment? Will they have to travel to Belfast and to other hospitals? What effect will this have on their families, many of

whom already suffer financial hardship? Having to travel further to visit relatives in hospital will put them under more financial pressure.

Possible cutbacks in community care programmes would have a disastrous effect on the most vulnerable in our society. Many people with disabilities and their families depend on care in the community to maintain them in their own homes, and for respite care. What a slap in the face it would be for carers who are already stretched to the limit, with little or no recompense for the valuable contributions they make by caring for their families and friends.

We have already seen £100,000 taken from the mental health budget for acute services in Down Lisburn Health and Social Services Trust, and I have repeatedly asked the Minister when this money will be returned. My fear now is that when it is returned it will not go back to mental health services but will be prioritised and given to some other crisis in the trust.

Some of my Colleagues mentioned the Hayes Report, and the issue of downsizing the accident and emergency facilities and the total loss of the maternity services. Again, I have to say to the Minister that this will create further hardship for families who are already living under pressure. The Hayes Report recommends a quality of care, safety and affordability — I do not see much evidence of these qualities at present in the amount of funding being given to Down Lisburn Health and Social Services Trust. Unless there is a serious undertaking from the Department to fund services in the Lagan Valley area adequately, there will be no care at all. I therefore support this motion.

Mr Davis: I stood in this Chamber in 1983 when the Eastern Health Board produced a document called 'Developing Hospital Services'. At that time there was a question mark over the whole future of Lagan Valley Hospital. Since then, during crisis periods, Lisburn Borough Council has mounted campaigns, which up to now have been successful.

My Colleagues representing Lagan Valley have given a clear account of the present dilemma facing the hospital. They have mentioned the problem of funding — or lack of funding — in the Down Lisburn Health and Social Services Trust, which is going to prevent the trust from carrying out its duties over the current financial year and into the foreseeable future. This is not something that the trust can put right on its own.

The Down Lisburn Health and Social Services Trust has been efficient in carrying out its duties. If extra funding is not provided in the short term, cuts will have to be made in the services provided. My Colleagues have already outlined where the extra costs have come from, and I want to examine how these costs will have to be met. We all attended a public meeting in Lisburn a few weeks ago. Ward 14 was mentioned earlier in the

debate, but this is only part of the dilemma. The options open to the trust include the closure of medical beds, which is part of the winter pressure proposals, and the reshaping of general inpatient services for elderly people in the Lagan Valley. These options would lead to the closure of up to 26 beds and compromise the hospital's capacity to deal with winter pressures. This would put pressure on other parts of the trust and on other hospitals in the Eastern Board area and create a back-up effect across the board area.

Other possibilities would be the reduction or postponement of the trust's capital schemes and the reduction of its community programmes. This would lead to a further increase in the trust's waiting list for community care. Such reductions in activities, coupled with less staff recruitment, delay in service development and the wholesale diversion of money might allow the trust to balance its books. That is not satisfactory. To place the service in general, the staff in particular, and ultimately the patients — mainly, in this instance, the elderly — under such strain is something that we as public representatives must try to avoid.

I understand, and the Minister is no doubt aware, that the trust has been placed in the top 40 hospitals in the United Kingdom. The trust performed particularly well in the area of patient experience. This is a tribute to the entire staff, who deserve credit for a magnificent effort. Those tools can be provided only with sufficient funding and with adequate annual increases to take account of inflation and growing needs. This debate was initiated by the proposed closure of ward 14, and it is good that it is taking place. However, the efficiency of Lagan Valley Hospital as a provider of services for the foreseeable future is at stake. It faces an uncertain long-term future, and there will be long and hard debate on the issue. Members and other public representatives have already voiced their strongly held opinions.

However, that debate is for another day. Lagan Valley Hospital must be adequately funded, and it must be allowed to carry out its functions in a manner befitting a hospital with a long and noble tradition. I hope that the Minister will take note of this and that the representatives and people of the Lagan Valley area are not being taken for granted as they have been in recent years.

Ms de Brún: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tuigim an inné a léirigh Comhaltaí faoi dhruidim thuairiscithe bharda 14 in Ospidéal Ghleann an Lagáin. Tá sé tábhachtach mar sin de go bhfreastalaíim an deis cúla na ceiste seo a mhíniú don Tionól agus cuid de na hábhair a tógadh a shoiléiriú.

Tá síorbhrú ar ár n-otharlanna, rud a léiríonn méadú ar éileamh ar sheirbhísí agus na fadhbanna áitiúla le hacmhainneacht i gcuid de na hotharlanna.

I appreciate the genuine concerns expressed by Members about the reported closure of ward 14 in Lagan Valley

Hospital. It is therefore important that I explain the background surrounding the issue, and that in doing so I help to clarify some of the matters raised. There are continuing pressures on our hospitals, and this reflects the general increase in demands and services as well as local capacity problems in some hospitals.

Whereas in the past those pressures were generally seasonal, they are now a year-round phenomenon and indicative of the serious underfunding of our health and social services over recent and successive years. I have consistently stressed that without significant additional funding our hospitals will continue to struggle, and I hope that I can count on the support of all Members in arguing the case for funds to build the capacity of our hospital and community services.

While recognising the need to secure adequate funding for our services as a whole, it is also imperative to ensure that the resources currently available are distributed according to the needs of the community. My Department uses a weighted capitation formula to ensure that boards are allocated their fair share of available resources in line with the relative needs of the population. It will never be possible to fund all needs, but such an approach at least ensures that areas with the same level of need are allocated an equal share of resources.

The capitation formula is subject to continual review and approval, and, as a result, a revised formula was implemented on a phased basis from 2001 to 2002. The Eastern Board uses the Department's formula to allocate resources to its four localities. The board's latest assessment, which does not yet take into account the most recent changes to the formula, indicates that by comparison to its equitable capitation share the Down Lisburn locality is underfunded by £2.8 million.

The assessment has been influenced by factors such as the recurrent impact of phase 1 at the Royal Victoria Hospital, the Mater Hospital new-build scheme and the Ulster community hospital pilot. However, I am informed that the Eastern Board is committed to addressing locality underfunding through continued skewing of new resources, and the 2001-02 plan for new service funds will improve the position.

Managing with limited resources calls for constant prioritisation and re-prioritisation by boards and trusts. In the current financial year, and in planning its services, Down Lisburn Health and Social Services Trust reported that it had overspent by about £1.5 million. As a contingency to deal with this overspending, one of the trust's options was to close ward 14 in the Lagan Valley Hospital. However, as a result of further discussions in the trust that option is no longer contemplated.

Mr Poots stated that up to 57 beds might be closing at Lagan Valley Hospital. I am unsure where Mr Poots got that figure.

5.45 pm

It is certainly not in line with figures that I have been given. Ward 14 is an elderly-care ward with 36 beds, 10 of which are set aside for patients with dementia; the other 26 are medical beds. I have been told that the package of measures under consideration at Lagan Valley includes the relocation of 18 medical beds from ward 14 to the main hospital. This will have the advantage of ensuring that they are nearer to facilities that will assist diagnosis of acute elderly conditions. The 10 beds in ward 14 for dementia patients will remain unaffected. This should assure Members that there is no question of discriminating against elderly patients in this area or others.

Overall, there will be a net reduction of eight beds. I have received an assurance that this will not be immediate, but that the reduction will be carefully managed over time. I have made it clear to the board and trust that my priority remains the provision of safe and effective health and social services for all users. Any changes made in Lagan Valley Hospital will have to reflect this.

In relation to the concerns about winter pressures, planning for next winter is still at an early stage. The Department is due to meet with winter pressure co-ordinators shortly to discuss this and will be considering matters such as the Lagan Valley Hospital situation then.

Comments were made about moves to nursing-home care. I have been assured that the hospital operates a strict discharge policy. Decisions to move patients into nursing care are taken by a team of clinicians, social workers and other professionals who determine the right form of care for an individual and only in that context.

On deficits, all trusts must achieve financial stability so that my Department, like others, can live within its departmental expenditure limit. Throughout 2000-01, several trusts, including the Royal Group of Hospitals NHS Trust and the Ulster Community and Hospitals Health and Social Services Trust, developed recovery plans to achieve this aim. As part of the process each trust produced a savings plan agreed with its host board to achieve efficiencies and help balance the books. The majority of these plans do not affect care services. All trusts have also been told that deficits should not be allowed to develop, and if they do arise, contingency arrangements should be made to address them. However, I emphasise again that these actions are needed in great part as a result of the serious underfunding of our health and social services over successive years.

Ms Lewsley raised the Down Lisburn Health and Social Services Trust's financial management. I personally spoke to it about this on a recent visit to Hillsborough.

Members raised a variety of points about the recommendations made in the acute hospitals review group's

report. I refer Members to the points that I made in the House yesterday. To assist me in considering the substantial issues involved, I will be inviting public and professional reaction to the report. I emphasise that no changes will be made prior to consultation.

I hope that I have effectively dealt with the points raised by Members today. I thank all who took part in the debate and hope that I have managed to address their concerns. My officials will scrutinise the record of the debate, and if I missed any points, I will write to the Members concerned.

Mr Close: The inspiration behind the tabling of this motion was, as has already been said, a public meeting that was held in the Lagan Valley Hospital some time ago. At that meeting it was pointed out to those who attended — and representatives from Lagan Valley were there in force — that a threat was hanging over ward 14 of the hospital, which is used by elderly people. One of the options was that 26 beds would be closed. This angered not only the representatives for Lagan Valley but relatives, friends, staff in the hospital and everyone we met that evening.

There was a palpable feeling of anger and distress that anyone should consider treating those most vulnerable in our society, because of their age and their frailties, as a soft touch by closing wards and chucking them out of their hospital beds into facilities that were non-existent.

Mr Poots has already said that there is a dearth — a scarcity — of residential care beds and other beds in the Lisburn area. As the Minister knows, the money is not available in the community care budget to enable the elderly to be cared for in their own homes. The sense of outrage was palpable. We recognised that we had a short time in which to take action. I am delighted and proud that all of the elected representatives have joined together in one voice, with party politics put aside and people power coming to the surface to say “Enough is enough; we will not allow this to happen to the elderly in the Lagan Valley Hospital.”

I have heard what the Minister has said, and unless I am just hearing in one ear — namely my right one — she said that the closure of ward 14 is no longer being contemplated. If that is the case, then I say, “Victory to the people of Lagan Valley, victory to their elected representatives, and most importantly, victory to the vulnerable and the frail in our society.”

This highlights an issue that goes further than this debate today. It highlights — and the Minister has already referred to it — the need for all of us to think deeply about our priorities. We are all elected representatives in an Assembly that has budgeting power and budgeting authority, and we allocate taxpayers’ money. It is incumbent

on every one of us, sitting on our respective Committees, to question seriously how money is being spent through this Assembly.

I have the privilege of holding a position on the Public Accounts Committee. Other Members and I have been astounded, annoyed and horrified at the wastage of money in this system. We must get it right. We are currently looking at a new bid procedure for 2002-03. Is it more important to the overall goals of this Assembly that more money be spent, for example, on a new computer, or on the protection of beds in our hospitals where people are sick and dying? Is it not more important that we ensure that people are not on trolleys in our hospital corridors, rather than ensuring that there is enough money for animal health compensation? It is not more important that people’s health is put at the top of our overall priorities, and that we give real and careful consideration to cutting through the type of bureaucracy that allocates money to a Department, where it is fixed, tied and locked in? Instead, we should be trying to create flexibility so that, for example, if there are pressures in the winter that would make a difference between life and death, a department can be opened up and money made available to deal with the need as it arises at any given time.

It is fundamentally wrong that planning, heritage and animal health have priority over people. We must protect those who are most vulnerable in our society. I put at the top of that list those who have served society, those who have seen the passage of time and have clocked up the years in their life.

They are the ones who have to be at the top of our list of priorities, and if we miss that, we miss our *raison d’être* and the purpose of the Assembly. As we enter this new era of Budget allocation, each of us has a responsibility to ensure that people are at the top of the pile, not an afterthought. We must ensure that the elderly in particular are not seen as a soft touch, as chattels that can be pushed from pillar to post. That is the message that should come from the Assembly today.

Mr Wells: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Unless you can direct me to a specific Standing Order, I will not take it. To which Standing Order are you referring? Please sit down.

Mr Wells: I have had the last word. I am happy.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes with concern the current underfunding of the Lagan Valley Hospital in the Down Lisburn Health and Social Services Trust.

Adjourned at 5.56pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Monday 2 July 2001

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

RESIGNATION OF THE FIRST MINISTER

Mr Speaker: On 8 May 2001, as the House will be aware, I received a sealed letter from the then First Minister and a covering note in which he asked me to open and implement the sealed letter by the end of 30 June, unless I received a letter of revocation. I received no revoking letter. I opened the sealed letter as requested, and I wish to report to the House that Mr Trimble resigned as First Minister in a letter dated 1 July 2001.

I would like to try to clarify the situation for Members. The Northern Ireland Act 1998 applies. Under section 16(7)(a) the Deputy First Minister, Mr Séamus Mallon, also ceased to hold office but may continue to exercise the functions of his office until the election of a new First Minister and a new Deputy First Minister.

On 29 June I received a letter from the then First Minister, Mr Trimble, notifying me that under section 16(5)(b) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 he had designated Sir Reg Empey to exercise the functions of the office of First Minister during the period of the vacancy. Section 16(8) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 states that an election shall be held to fill the vacancies of First Minister and Deputy First Minister within a period of six weeks, that is, by 11 August. While no date has as yet been set, I will, of course, keep Members informed.

Mr Séamus Mallon has requested leave, which I have granted, to make a personal statement on the matter of his ceasing to hold office as the Deputy First Minister.

Mr P Robinson: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I would like to have a matter placed on record. On a previous occasion — though under different Standing Orders — what everyone believed to have been a resignation from the Deputy First Minister later transpired not to be a resignation. Would you clarify that you consider this resignation to be a resignation within the terms of the legislation, and, therefore, before anybody else can carry out the First Minister's and Deputy First Minister's functions as First Minister and Deputy First Minister, an

election by the Assembly under the terms of the legislation will be required?

Mr Speaker: The Member is correct that a circumstance arose, under different Standing Orders, where there was some confusion. On this occasion I see no possibility of any confusion. The resignation has been committed to me in writing; it is dated; I have announced it to the House; it is clear and in order; and the Northern Ireland Act 1998 applies. I trust that that confirms the matter to the satisfaction of the Member and the House.

Mr McClarty: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Now that you have confirmed that the First Minister has resigned due to the failure of Sinn Féin/IRA to honour its word and commence decommissioning, can you confirm that under section 30 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 both Governments may exclude a political party if that party is in default? Furthermore, now that Gen de Chastelain has confirmed that the IRA has broken its word, is it not the case, under the legislation and Standing Orders, that the Assembly has only six weeks left to run and, therefore, the blame for any breakdown in the process lies squarely at the door of Sinn Féin/IRA, which has consistently broken its word?

Mr Speaker: I can only refer to the procedural elements of the Member's comments. In relation to what the two Governments may choose to do, there is relatively little limit on what they may do legally. They can take actions within the limits of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. However, they may also take legislation through their respective Parliaments. It is not for me to rule on any legal limits. As far as the political limits are concerned, that is not a matter for me at all.

Mr McCartney: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I wish clarification of your ruling. I understand that you received a letter on 29 June in which the former First Minister designated another Minister to exercise his functions as First Minister. Am I right in saying that at the date of that letter, when those functions were designated, no vacancy existed in the office of First Minister — that vacancy not arising until 30 June? In those circumstances was that designation properly made?

Mr Speaker: The terms of the letter were such that the nomination was to take place

“during any vacancy in that office” —

that is the office of First Minister —

“arising from my resignation of that office”.

I have looked at the matter, and it is hard to visualise any reason — other than the current circumstances — for Parliament having voted that the clause stand part of the Bill. It does not seem to me that there are any other circumstances where that subsection could apply. Therefore the matter is in order.

Mr McCartney: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Is it your ruling that a First Minister or Deputy First Minister can make a conditional appointment of a Minister to discharge his functions — conditional in the sense that that appointment is not to take place until the happening of an event which may or may not take place? In this case, Minister Empey was appointed to discharge the functions of the First Minister, but only in the event of the First Minister not having revoked his resignation — a resignation which had not at that time taken effect. Mr Speaker, the effect of that is to introduce an element of Lewis Carroll or ‘Alice in Wonderland’ to the procedures of the House.

Mr Speaker: As the Member will know, this power comes under section 16(5)(b). However, let us look at section 16(5)(a) which says that it may also be done

“during any absence or incapacity of the holder”.

Therefore, if it were to arise that the First Minister or Deputy First Minister was to go into hospital for an operation perhaps —

Mr McCartney: Or become temporarily insane.

Mr P Robinson: Or perhaps not temporarily.

Mr Speaker: That is a circumstance where it might be wise for a number of people to consult with the Speaker.

Let us assume a circumstance where the First Minister or the Deputy First Minister had sufficient insight into an upcoming possible incapacity — for instance, going into hospital for an operation. He might therefore designate another Minister to fulfil the functions of the office. It is clear that that is the purpose of section 16(5)(a). However, it is not unknown these days — and I say this with due respect to the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety — for operations to be unaccountably postponed. In advance of becoming indisposed — and this is where the question of mental incapacity does not bear — the First Minister or Deputy First Minister would have to make arrangements for his period of incapacity. Those arrangements would be conditional on the incapacity taking place, that is to say the operation proceeding.

With regard to both section 16(5)(a) and section 16(5)(b), which is the one to which the Member refers, it is only where the First Minister or the Deputy First Minister knew the probability of a matter of this kind arising — but never the certainty about what the future might hold, for that is something none of us can know, least of all Members — that he could make a nomination of this kind. It seems to me that it is in order. I cannot see that there would be any purpose in Parliament voting for this subsection unless this particular context was envisioned.

12.15 pm

Mr C Wilson: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. For the past three years other Unionists on this side of the House have appealed to Ulster Unionists such as Mr

McClarty to join us in excluding those people fronting terrorist and paramilitary organisations from this body. It is rather rare and rich to hear his comments today.

Mr Speaker: Order. Mr McClarty’s point of order was about what the two Governments might or might not do. That is a separate matter.

Mr C Wilson: Mr Speaker, I did have a point of order. It was to ask you —

Mr Speaker: I am encouraged that there was a point of order. Perhaps in completing it the Member might refer to the Standing Order that he is making the point on.

Mr C Wilson: I will. Thank you, Mr Speaker. Will you be following the procedure of allowing Members to address the comments made by Mr Mallon in his statement?

Mr Speaker: Under the precedent established in the circumstance to which Mr Robinson referred, I did permit leaders of parties, or nominees, to make brief comments. When Mr Mallon eventually gets the opportunity to make his personal statement, I will follow that precedent.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Further to the point of order made by Mr McCartney — who is not someone I like to agree with very often, or would even like to own up to agreeing with — there is an important point here. Not only is the absent person absent, insofar as Mr Trimble is not here, but his nominated caretaker is not here either.

It is important to establish precisely on what legislative basis Mr Empey is being nominated as a caretaker. As you well know, Mr Speaker, Mr Trimble was recently declared to be acting unlawfully in respect of his actions in relation to the North/South Ministerial Council attendance of Bairbre de Brún and Martin McGuinness.

If Mr Empey does attend here and is nominated and accepted as a caretaker, what will be his position in respect of the unlawful action carried out by Mr Trimble? As the caretaker designated by Mr Trimble, will he be carrying on the same unlawful actions? It is important that the House be informed of the precise terms under which Mr Empey is being nominated as a caretaker.

Mr Speaker: From the Speaker’s point of view, the terms under which the nomination has been made are the legal terms of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. I cannot enlighten the Member or the House on whether there are any political terms that exist between Mr Trimble and Sir Reg Empey.

Part of the purpose for the inclusion in the 1998 Act of the possibility of nominating a person either in respect of section 16(5)(a) or (b) is so that nominations to North/South Ministerial Council meetings and the chairing of Executive meetings and so on can continue. Those are some of the functions of the offices that could not be continued by only one person, or certainly not if neither

of the offices had anyone to fulfil or exercise its functions. The Member will have to seek clarification from others on the specific question to which he addresses himself. I can only clarify the legal and technical aspects of it.

Mr Maskey: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. The reason that I was addressing the question to you was that Mr Trimble and the person that he has nominated are not here. The House is entitled to an explanation. It is not simply a question of a political arrangement between Mr Trimble and Mr Empey; it is about the Pledge of Office. The First Minister was found to be unlawful in his actions. It is important that we get clarification on this matter from you, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: It is important to understand that the limits on what the Speaker can rule on are those aspects of the law and Standing Orders that apply to the running of the House. They do not apply to the operation of the Executive as an Executive, which is outside my remit. Therefore I cannot respond in that regard.

Given that the Member and some of his Colleagues have taken the matter to court for resolution, they have made it clear that their understanding is that such matters must be addressed by due process through the court rather than through a ruling by the Speaker. His Colleagues, having taken the matter to court, have recognised that it is outwith my authority to rule on that matter.

Mr Beggs: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Can you clarify that it would not be possible to designate someone to act as First Minister after another person has stood down as First Minister, and that the letter of 29 June had to be submitted prior to 1 July?

Mr Speaker: I can confirm that the Member is correct in that.

Mr Dalton: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Having confirmed to the House that the First Minister has resigned due to the failure of Sinn Féin/IRA to begin the process of decommissioning, can you also confirm to the House that both DUP Ministers are still in office, are still taking their salaries and are still in government with Sinn Féin/IRA?

Mr Speaker: I cannot confirm, nor is it my position to confirm, the reasons for the former First Minister's resignation. I can simply confirm the fact that he has done so. The only other matter that I can confirm at this point — and I have already done so — is that, as required by law, the Deputy First Minister is no longer in office but continues to exercise the functions of that office, as the nominee, Sir Reg Empey, fulfils the functions of the office of First Minister.

Mr P Robinson: Mr Speaker, can you confirm that there now is no First Minister, no Deputy First Minister, no acting First Minister and no acting Deputy First Minister, but that there is a former Deputy First Minister, who may fulfil functions of the office of Deputy First Minister for

a period of up to six weeks, and that there is a Minister from the Ulster Unionist Party who is carrying out the functions of the First Minister for that same period?

Secondly, Mr Speaker, perhaps you did not get the particular point that Mr McClarty made in raising his point of order. He was asking you to look at section 30 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and, in particular, at that subsection which allows the Secretary of State to put forward to you a notice requiring you to move a motion for the exclusion of a Minister, Ministers or a party. Can you confirm that Mr McClarty is wrong if he assumes that the Secretary of State himself can do the excluding?

Can you confirm that the Secretary of State can ask you only to put the motion before the Assembly and that it would be the Assembly Members who would have to exclude and, therefore, that when the then Deputy First Minister indicated on radio yesterday that this was a path that the Secretary of State should follow, he must logically have been indicating a willingness, if the Secretary of State were to do it, for himself, along with his party, to support such a proposition during any discussion and debate that would take place?

Mr Speaker: The Member has raised two or three questions, some of which I can respond to from the Chair. However, some of them require the views of Mr Mallon, and it would therefore be appropriate, as soon as possible, to give him an opportunity to say what his stance will be on this matter. I can simply say that it would be in order for him to continue to fulfil or exercise the functions of the office. On whether that is what he will choose to do, the Assembly must wait to hear what Mr Mallon says.

In relation to the comments on Mr McClarty's point of order, I do try to respond directly to the questions that Assembly Members raise — which, I will admit, is a somewhat unusual discipline for a politician. The question raised by Mr McClarty was whether the two Governments could exclude, not whether a resolution of this House might exclude. I made the response, as the House will recall, that the two Governments have the ball at their toes, in that they can put through whatever legislation they choose.

In relation to the current legislation, on which the Assembly is founded, it is clear that exclusions take place by a vote of the House. That is the current situation. I cannot speak about whether the Governments will choose to do something different. If the Member refers to section 30 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I can see nothing there that permits the Secretary of State to make an exclusion — it merely provides that he, as one of a number, may propose an exclusion. Members are familiar with that resolution procedure. Those matters should by now be relatively clear, and perhaps we can now move on to Mr Mallon's personal statement.

Leaders of parties, or their nominees, will have a chance to make a brief statement in response if they choose.

Mr Mallon: Mr Speaker —

Mr Speaker: Order. Mr Pat Doherty was on his feet before Mr Mallon rose.

Mr P Doherty: A Cheann Comhairle. On a point of order, Mr Speaker. This is further to Mr Maskey's point of order. Given that the proposed Deputy First Minister is not here, how is the Assembly to know whether he is prepared to take up his duties?

Mr Speaker: The terminology is important. There is neither a proposed Deputy First Minister, nor a proposed First Minister, but simply a current Minister who is able to exercise the functions of those posts. It is not for me to determine. However, it should be clear — and this relates to an earlier point of order — that if the Member were not prepared to exercise the functions, it is now no longer possible for anyone else to be nominated. Does the Member wish to follow that point of order?

Mr P Doherty: How do we know whether he is prepared to accept the duties, given that he is not here to say so?

Mr Speaker: I am sure that the Member is not questioning the authority with which I made my remarks and gave my opinion. The Minister has been appointed in writing, and if he chooses not to take up that appointment, I must be notified in writing, otherwise the appointment stands.

I trust that the House will give Mr Mallon the opportunity to make his personal statement.

Mr Mallon: Mr Speaker, I thank you for your permission to make a personal statement. I confirm that I did consult you — that is not, I hope, any reflection on my mental state of health — so that I could act in accordance with your guidance on personal statements. I make this statement out of respect for, and courtesy to, the Assembly. It is important that I clarify the situation as I see it.

Following the resignation of Mr Trimble, I no longer hold the office of Deputy First Minister. However, as the legislation provides, I will continue to exercise the functions of Deputy First Minister in the coming weeks to try to sustain the workings of the institutions.

I recognise the real contribution that Mr Trimble has made since devolution. However, I regret that he has chosen this time to precipitate this latest in a long series of crises. For the past three years I have witnessed with sadness a variety of efforts to hold the political process to ransom. Failure to commence devolution was matched, and has now been long and shamefully outlived, by failure to commence putting arms beyond use.

The blatant unwillingness of DUP Ministers to undertake the basic responsibility of ministerial office has been paralleled by deliberate efforts to wreck a carefully

constructed institutional balance, particularly through a refusal to nominate Sinn Féin Ministers to the North/South Ministerial Council. That the process remains — in difficulty but intact — reflects the fact that the agreement is owned not by politicians but by the people of Ireland, North and South, who overwhelmingly endorsed it.

Our duty is to the people we serve and, through them, to the agreement that they democratically endorsed. Every crisis and every interruption to the work of the institutions weakens our capacity to fulfil that duty. With duties come rights. As Deputy First Minister, I have worked to protect the rights of all. However, some want rights without responsibility. Some have not met their responsibilities under the agreement. In particular, three years and one day after this Assembly first met, weapons have still not been put beyond use by Republican or Loyalist paramilitaries.

Sinn Féin demands respect for its democratic mandate. I respect that democratic mandate. However, if Sinn Féin's best endeavours to put weapons beyond use have borne so little fruit, it is clear that the IRA does not respect that mandate and the obligations that go with it.

12.30 pm

The process that we are involved in should be about the legislative implementation of the agreement, but we have seen a succession of demands by Republicans and counter-demands by Unionists that go beyond it. Side letters have been written, and a series of secret deals have been entered into, to the detriment of the political process as a whole. Even so, they are never enough for either side.

No doubt, as we speak, further wish lists are in place or are under preparation for the next round of negotiations. The politics of demand for concessions needs to be overtaken by the politics of delivery on commitments made: delivery on putting arms beyond use, delivery on policing and delivery on the full and inclusive operation of the institutions.

We should all remember that the agreement is the only way that we can deliver a better future. It has already started to do so as regards enhanced provision for equality and human rights. We have developed a political consensus in the Executive and in the Assembly that has produced the first home-grown Programme for Government for over 30 years.

On this island we have better co-operation and shared actions under the North/South institutions that work for the benefit of the people of Ireland, both North and South. We have made progress in promoting investment and employment for people in the North of Ireland. Cynical party advantage must not be allowed to threaten the agreement, which was based on a collective

understanding that mutual and diverse interests had to be recognised.

This is a personal statement, but the events that led to today have meant that I have ranged more widely than I perhaps should have. By continuing to exercise the functions of the Deputy First Minister, I will show my commitment to the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. I will work with Reg Empey and other Colleagues in the coming weeks. My challenge to those who claim to want the full implementation of the agreement is to act in a manner designed to secure that objective.

Mr Taylor: On behalf of Ulster Unionist Members, I thank the acting Deputy First Minister for his personal statement. It was measured and reasonable in the circumstances. He mentioned the timing of the resignation of the First Minister. The timing was not of Mr Trimble's choice. The date was settled by the decision of the IRA that it would put arms beyond use by 30 June this year. That was the deadline, which the former First Minister accepted. If that event, which was well articulated by the acting Deputy First Minister — the putting of illegal arms beyond use in a way that gained the confidence of the people of Northern Ireland — did not occur, then the First Minister would resign. That was the timing of it.

I thank Mr Mallon for his tribute to the former First Minister's contribution to making the Assembly a success and to the time and effort put in by Mr Trimble into the working of the Assembly and its Executive. On occasions like this we appreciate recognition being placed on the record, and I thank Mr Mallon for that.

Northern Ireland is now in a serious situation. We have ahead of us six weeks of difficult political timing. We need to have more negotiations, and the Ulster Unionist Party is committed to trying to ensure that the Belfast Agreement is implemented in full. That means putting all illegal firearms and arsenals beyond use by all illegal groupings. That has always been our objective, and we will work towards that. We hope that it may begin in the next six weeks. If so, progress will be made in Northern Ireland. If not, however, the next stage in political developments will be to consider the exclusion from the Executive of those parties who are linked with paramilitary groups that still retain their firearms and bombs, irrespective of the desire of the people of Northern Ireland as stated in the Belfast Agreement.

Today we have to confirm that the people of Northern Ireland welcome the Belfast Agreement and what has so far come from it. We have greater peace in Northern Ireland than we have had for many years. There are improved relations between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, and between the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom. Those are all steps forward, but the job is not finished. The people want us to finish it. I hope that developments in the next six weeks will

make it possible for the Assembly to continue. If not, however, the Ulster Unionist Party's position will be that one party will have to be excluded from the Executive of the Assembly. That reality must be faced.

Mr Speaker: There are no Standing Orders in this regard, but it would not be unreasonable if any Members who speak as leaders, or as nominees of leaders, were to restrict their comments to certainly no longer than the time used by Mr Mallon to make his statement. Since he did that within six minutes, I trust that that would be the advised time for Members.

Mr P Robinson: Do I have to take the whole six minutes?

Mr Speaker: Please do not feel under any compulsion of that kind. I was not making that suggestion in advance of your speech or because I was thinking particularly of you, but simply giving general advice.

Mr P Robinson: I am grateful that you have protected my sensitivities.

I want to bring the House back down to earth. The present circumstances have been brought about because the agreement contained the seeds of its own destruction. Even though the House and its Members have refused to face up to that reality, it has now been unavoidably brought before them by the overwhelming vote of the Unionist electorate in recent elections.

As far as Mr Mallon's comments about my party are concerned, let me make it clear that my party acted wholly in accordance with its Assembly mandate. Its Ministers acted in accordance with the mandate they received from the people and which has recently been endorsed by the people. Furthermore, I agree with Mr Taylor that the only way to advance our present circumstances is for a motion to be put forward to exclude Sinn Féin/IRA from the Executive. I had hoped — although he appeared to neglect to comment on it — that the outgoing Deputy First Minister was going to advance the comments he made on radio that he was looking to the Government to put forward in this Assembly a resolution to consider that matter.

Does the Member mean that if a resolution which was not promoted initially by Unionists were brought before the Assembly, he would be prepared to consider it if Her Majesty's Government believed there to be no alternative?

If that is the case, I suspect that the earlier Her Majesty's Government advises you of their intention to act under article 30 the better. Until Sinn Féin/IRA is removed from Government, the Executive will not follow the principle that only those who believe in democratic and peaceful ways forward can be members of it. While the Provisional IRA holds on to its weapons and keeps its terror machine intact, its partner, Sinn Féin, is not entitled to be part of the democratic process

— never mind being part of Government. Until that moment arrives, Sinn Féin does not have a democratic mandate; it has a mandate to do wrong that should not be recognised democratically.

I urge those who have left office to recognise that the only way forward is the way stated clearly by the Unionist electorate in the recent election, and to act in accordance with that principle: only those who are exclusively committed to peaceful and democratic means can be part of an Executive in Northern Ireland.

Mr Speaker: As the Member's comments may have led to some uncertainty, allow me to clarify that a personal statement does not carry with it the opportunity to respond at the end to any comments that Members made.

Mr Adams: A Cheann Comhairle. Tá Séamus Mallon anseo linn agus rinne sé ráiteas pearsanta. Níl an fear eile, David Trimble, anseo agus níl Reg Empey anseo. Níl ráiteas de shaghas ar bith againn ón bheirt sin. Rinne an tUasal Mallon a dhícheall ina phost mar Leas-Chéad-Aire. Ní aontaím leis faoi gach aon rud a ndearna sé ach sílim féin go ndearna sé a dhícheall sa phost sin.

I thank Mr Mallon for being here today and for making a personal statement. The outgoing First Minister and Reg Empey are not here; therefore, we cannot debate any of these issues with them. The Sinn Féin Chief Whip has been in contact with the other Whips to try to arrange a proper emergency debate on these matters as soon as possible. It is hoped that that will happen quickly.

I pay tribute to the former Deputy First Minister for the way that he did his job. I do not agree with much of what he said earlier, but I think that he did his best, in a difficult position, to discharge his functions with fairness and balance. He took issue with the IRA on the question of weapons: that is fair enough. That matter is between him and the IRA. However, the Member also accused Republicans of making demands that are beyond the Good Friday Agreement.

I can tell the House that as a party to the agreement I kept Mr Mallon's party fully aware of any negotiations that I was involved in that perhaps Mr Mallon inadvertently was not involved in. There are many vexed issues. It is important to point out that each party has equal responsibility for these matters. No party can stand aside or above it, or try to dole out specific responsibilities to different parties. We all have an equal responsibility.

12.45 pm

Mr Taylor, or indeed his Colleagues in the DUP, will threaten to exclude parties from the Executive over the weapons issue. I am sure that the former Deputy First Minister will agree that there is no basis for doing that. One of the problems that has put us in this position is the policy of exclusion which still underpins the current Unionist leadership's position. What is all this about? This is about a crisis that the First Minister planned and

announced last October in order to bring about the suspension of the institutions and to put the blame on Republicans.

The most important point to be made is that the current leaders of the UUP and the DUP are not prepared to live on the basis of equality with their Nationalist neighbours. They are not prepared to participate in creating dispensations that are based on equity, justice and equality. I know that that view does not represent the feelings of many Unionists with whom I work.

Where does the threat to the peace process and to the political institutions come from? The threat comes from First Ministers who behave unlawfully and then walk away from their responsibilities. The threat comes from Loyalists who on a daily basis use guns to shoot Catholics and use pipe bombs and blast bombs to attack their Catholic neighbours. Those people who are heckling me now are pitifully silent on those issues. The threat also comes from within the British system itself, from those who want to return to the old days.

We are in a crisis. The British and Irish Governments must accept the fact that those of us who live in this part of Ireland are no longer prepared to have our rights and entitlements filtered through a prism of Unionism. The British Prime Minister currently has jurisdiction over this part of Ireland. Therefore, he and the Taoiseach have a responsibility to move ahead with all aspects of the agreement that they are obliged and able to deal with.

Mr Speaker: Will the Member bring his remarks to a close?

Mr Adams: There can be no more ad hoc or crisis management. The two principal players must work together.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member's time is up.

Mr Ford: It is right that every party in the Chamber should begin by paying tribute to the work that Mr Trimble has done over the past five to six years. We can all recognise the way in which he took his party forward and participated in the talks process. The way in which Mr Trimble led his party into this institution has taken the party further forward than any of his predecessors have.

We can understand the frustrations that Mr Trimble experienced in recent years. There is no doubt that the failure of Loyalists and Republicans to live up to their obligations to remove arms and put them beyond use has created enormous difficulties. Of course, that has not been the only difficulty. Unionists perceived that the SDLP refused to move on the issue of policing, and that has been equally difficult to deal with. Others can point the finger back at Unionists for their actions. Although I still believe that the agreement has brought this society closer to peace, one has only to listen to the comments in the Chamber this morning to know that we are every bit as far away from reconciliation as we ever were.

Mr Trimble's resignation may be understandable because of his frustration. However, there is no doubt that that has been deeply destabilising to the entire process. There is no way that we can make progress as a political society in Northern Ireland unless we operate on the basis that parties must meet as equals around a negotiating table. The unilateral ultimatum, whatever its concerns may have been, merely appears to others to be a way for the UUP to work out its fears about the electoral process. It did not appear to be a real attempt to get the process working.

We can take some heart from Mr Mallon's earlier comments in which he seemed to suggest that the way is now open for a proper and truly collective approach to getting the process working again. It is up to the two Governments to convene that process, but it is also up to each party to play its part in bringing that process forward openly and honestly. We should all look to ourselves, as well as to others, to firmly live up to the obligations that we undertook in the agreement.

Mr C Wilson: As I listened to the recriminations and counter-recriminations being fired across the Chamber, I was reminded of Shakespeare's words, "O what a tangled web we weave" — *[Interruption]*

Mr McCartney: It was Sir Walter Scott.

Mr C Wilson: Thank you. I bow to the greater knowledge of Mr McCartney. It is always good to have a QC working beside you.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Chair is here to correct matters of order, not literature.

Mr C Wilson: A "tangled web" was woven by Mr Trimble and the Prime Minister when they presented the Belfast Agreement to the electorate on the basis that it would offer decommissioning, peace, stability and reconciliation in the community. When we look at what is happening in the Chamber today we can see exactly where it has brought Northern Ireland in political terms.

Mr Trimble and the Prime Minister presented the Belfast Agreement for endorsement by the electorate on the basis that those who were fronting organisations inextricably linked to terrorism of any nature could not be in Government in Northern Ireland governing people they have terrorised for the last 30 years.

We watched the May 2000 deadline come and go. That was no surprise to those of us who had pointed out to the electorate at the time of the referendum that there was no requirement or commitment in the Belfast Agreement for Sinn Féin to do anything about decommissioning.

It is a sad pitch that we come to today. I listened to Mr Mallon's comments and to Peter Robinson's question of just how much store we can set by Mr Trimble's resignation. There is a riddle in Northern Ireland: when is a resignation not a resignation? When it is delivered by Mr Trimble or Mr Mallon.

Over the coming weeks, no doubt, there will be some attempt by Her Majesty's Government and the parties to the agreement to cook up another load of fudge to get around this difficult and thorny issue of decommissioning. People in Northern Ireland know that Mr Adams and his cohorts in Sinn Féin/IRA will never hand over one gun or one ounce of Semtex, because they have made it clear throughout the process that it is not their intention to do so. They have made clear their belief that they are legitimately entitled to hold those weapons.

It is rather peculiar to witness the Dublin Government's antics, its road-to-Damascus experience, and Mr Mallon's crocodile tears as they watch Mr Adams and his cohorts inflict severe damage on their political set-up. Mr Mallon and the SDLP have the most to be ashamed of. When Mr Adams and his cohorts were holed up in west Belfast, in an organisation that was staring defeat in the teeth as a result of the gallant efforts of the RUC and the Army, Mr Mallon, Mr Hume and their colleagues breathed life into them through the Hume/Adams talks that brought about this sordid mess which we now call the "peace process".

It will be no loss should the Executive collapse. In Northern Ireland we need — and Unionists need it very quickly — the ability to present people here with the chance to see proper democratic institutions replace this sorry farce. I look forward to the day when Northern Ireland has proper institutions which are not corrupted and polluted by people sitting in Government who are inextricably linked to terror.

Mr Ervine: I appreciate the efforts made by Mr Trimble. He acted against a very difficult backdrop, and we have all been aware of those circumstances for a very long time.

He did something that was unbelievable in the context of the Northern Ireland in which I grew up. He did it against a backdrop of bitterness and anger, not from those he had to negotiate against, but from those on whose behalf he was negotiating.

We watch Macedonia, Sri Lanka and other areas of conflict on our televisions and wish — indeed pray — that they will find peace. However, we seem to luxuriate in the brutal bitterness into which generations of our children are born, and we use morality as a comfort blanket. People may well continue to espouse the theories and opinions espoused by those who ran away from the negotiation process, when Mr Trimble had — to use an Americanism — the cojones to stay.

We are now faced with choices. Whether Mr Trimble made the right or wrong decision is, from this point on, neither here nor there. We are undoubtedly in a crisis: anything dated 1 July in Northern Ireland is bound to herald a crisis. However, out of the crisis may come opportunity. Those of us who were prepared — and proud — to take a step forward and negotiate the Good

Friday Agreement walked away from each other when we came out of Castle Buildings. We said goodbye to each other, but we did not have in place a process to implement the Good Friday Agreement. If any leader is in trouble, the process of peace and politics is in trouble. Rather than lean on each other like the tent poles of a wigwam, all of which will fall if one is taken away, we ran off to our respective constituencies trying to sell parameters for functioning that were mutually exclusive.

The issue of decommissioning was created by Unionism and the British Government to try to understand the intent. Having stepped forward and shown readiness to negotiate, they legitimately asked "Are these people genuine, are they real? Can it be that our society might find a way to live with itself? If it is true, I must know in my heart that it is true." They picked the wrong subject. They were saying "Give me 100% of your guns. No? Well, give me 90% or 50% or 20% or 5%." I am convinced that if the IRA were to place 5% of its weapons here before you, Mr Speaker, those people would accept that, even though 95% of the guns could still be used. Indeed, with the help of a productivity manager, the IRA could even get more than 100% effect from them. I would have preferred it if the question had been one of appreciating whether the IRA's ideology fitted the new dispensation. There has been no public, unequivocal statement of that. That is why we are in the trouble that we are in now. Unionists worry that the Rolls Royce of terrorist machines has laid down its weapons to follow its political path but is still wedded to those weapons.

What would have been a better subject? Mr Trimble could have argued — and Mr Mallon could have assisted him — that the IRA needed to tell the world that the war was over. I have argued for that. That would have made a difference to Unionists. A curtain should have been brought down on the past, without the need for inquiries that by their very nature are one-sided. The Unionist people, among whom I live, are in serious dismay. I have watched Republicanism — even Nationalism — luxuriate in that dismay.

1.00 pm

I will return to the theory that if one leader in the peace process is in trouble, we are all in trouble. It should not be forgotten that the one group which increased the expectation that IRA weapons would be put beyond use was the IRA itself. The IRA made a statement, and it was assisted by Sinn Féin in giving an explanation of it. However, no one explained the caveat included in that statement that decommissioning would be carried out in the context of the removal of the causes of conflict. The only cause of conflict that I have ever heard expressed by the IRA has been "Brits out". Explanation and understanding is needed; either the guns are over or the war is over.

Ms McWilliams: I also regret that on such a warm and beautiful day we have to come in here to such a cold

and dismal atmosphere. I regret that the Deputy First Minister had to make today's personal statement and that our First Minister has tendered his resignation. Those two posts are interdependent, and we will not resolve this problem until we acknowledge our interdependency. It is time to stop bringing problems to the table and to start bringing solutions. It is probable that we would never have reached an agreement in the first place had we continued to bring problems to the table.

On occasions such as this, a partnership might have been more effective than a plan. We have a good plan but, as Mr Ervine said, we lost the partnerships that helped to create that plan. Over the next few weeks we need to recommit ourselves to full-time negotiations. This is not a part-time peace process; it requires full-time dedication to what should be inclusive round-table negotiations. There should be no discovery afterwards of side deals that were agreed when the rest of us were not present.

That is partly the reason for our present situation. Had the process been slightly more transparent and accountable, we might not be in this crisis. However, we have been here before, so perhaps we can again get through this process of crisis management to achieve conflict transformation and one day soon — but it does take time — conflict resolution.

Over the next few weeks it would be useful to agree a definition of normalisation, because although we all speak English, each of us needs a translation of the term. If normalisation consists of demilitarisation, it also consists of taking arms out of use and putting them beyond use. If we are to speak about a normalised society, we must all agree a definition of law and order. Not only have we not yet dealt with that problem, we have neither defined nor named it.

We have perhaps a final opportunity over the next few weeks not only to confront and challenge each other about how to resolve that problem but to support each other in finally putting back in place the plan and the partnerships.

Mr McCartney: Some of the contributions made in response to Mr Mallon's personal statement have oscillated between utter hypocrisy and total farce. Political representatives of some of the most murderous terrorist organisations made contributions as if they were an amalgam of the Dalai Lama, Martin Luther King and Mother Theresa. Séamus Mallon tells us that we are enjoying a period of peace and tranquillity as never existed before, yet everyone wakes up each morning to a litany of murderous brutality — shooting, maiming and robbery.

Dr O'Hagan: Carried out by Loyalists.

Mr McCartney: Yes, carried out by Loyalists — and carried out in £4 million heists that have the approval of

the IRA high command. I hold no brief for any of those people.

Let us talk about the fundamental principles and why these institutions are inherently unstable. They are unstable because they are undemocratic. I hear Seamus Mallon talk about respecting Sinn Féin's mandate. Does Mr Mallon understand anything about democracy? You cannot participate in the democratic process while committed to, and inextricably linked with, those wedded to violence of any kind — Orange, Green, Loyalist or Republican. That is the fundamental principle of democracy.

Sinn Féin should not be in the Assembly or the Executive. They claim to have a mandate, but one thing is clear — you cannot have a mandate to do wrong. Hitler had a National Socialist Government on the basis of a popular mandate — a Government, not just a party. Mr Milosevic, who is now lodged in a prison at the Hague for wrongdoing, had a mandate from the Serbian people for his actions. Sinn Féin aka IRA cannot have a mandate to participate in democracy while they are wedded to violence. The party should not be in the Assembly because democracy cannot coexist with terror.

It is utterly wrong to suggest that they should not be here because of the terms of the Belfast Agreement. I share, and have always expressed, the view that the Belfast Agreement, which was signed up to by the SDLP and the Ulster Unionist Party, never contained any sanction imposed on Sinn Féin to deliver decommissioning by 22 May 2000. The fudge, which was agreed to by all of the so-called democratic parties, was that Sinn Féin was there on exactly the same basis as all of the other parties. They were committed under the Belfast Agreement only to use such influence as they might have to bring about decommissioning by that date.

There was a far bigger, a far stronger, and a far more fundamental reason for excluding members of Sinn Féin: they are not democrats. They are the frontmen for terrorists, and each day that they adhere to their determination not to decommission their weapons, they confirm that they are not democrats. They emphasise that they are terrorists essentially, as do the Loyalist parties that are represented here: they are absolutely no different and are equally as murderous and detestable.

The good democrats here in the form of the pro-agreement parties — the posturing whited sepulchres of the Alliance Party and the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition — hobnob with them. They work with them. They consider that they are the midwives of the agreement. They breastfeed terrorism. We must address the real question of democracy.

I have heard many plaudits for Mr Trimble and his good relationship with the Deputy First Minister. Everyone knows that the relationship has been poisonous for the last two years. That is the element of hypocrisy: Mr Ervine provides the element of farce.

Unless we begin to recognise the basic principles of democracy and until Mr Mallon is prepared to do what he said in November 1998 and put those terrorists out of business, insofar as this is a democratic process, there will be no future prospects of any value for the Assembly. Get down to basics; be honest; tell the people the truth, and stop posturing.

Mr Poots: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I am seeking clarification of the role of the Committee of the Centre, now that we do not have a First Minister or a Deputy First Minister to monitor. We are due to hold a meeting on Wednesday to arrive at our conclusions about the Single Equality Bill. Will it be in order to hold that meeting? What is the situation in relation to the junior Ministers? Are they carrying out their functions without the trappings, or are they now defunct?

Mr Speaker: The Committee monitors the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. That office, and its officials, are still in place. It would be wrong for the Committee to default on monitoring the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. I am not aware — and, in reading section 19 of the 1998 Act, can see no reason to believe — that the junior Ministers cease to hold office in these circumstances. There are other circumstances in which the junior Ministers cease to hold office, but unless someone can point out otherwise, it does not seem to me that they cease to hold office in these circumstances. There are still Ministers or Members of the Assembly continuing to carry out the functions of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister — not holding office, but exercising the functions. It would be remiss of the Committee of the Centre, or of the Assembly as a whole, not to continue to monitor that and to hold it to account.

Mr C Wilson: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Mr Poots has raised a question that demonstrates the problem for Unionists who declare that this body is dead, but still want to play with the corpse. Mr Poots and his Colleagues in the Ulster Unionist Party would be better to withdraw from all of the Committees and bring this charade —

Mr Speaker: Order. It is clear that that is not a point of order but a political point. Let us now move on.

Mr McLaughlin: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I refer to a previous ruling, and draw your attention to the comments of Mr McCartney. Will you study his remarks as reported in Hansard and make a statement to this House at an early opportunity?

Mr Speaker: Which particular point in Mr McCartney's speech —

Mr McLaughlin: He pointed in the direction of my party and said "these terrorists" when he was talking about exclusion.

Mr Speaker: In respect of rulings on parliamentary language, I have said before — and it is clear in ‘Erskine May’ — that where mention is made of individuals, matters become unparliamentary. When mention is made of groups of people, that is not necessarily unparliamentary. However, I shall study what was said and will make a ruling in the House if necessary. In any case, I will respond directly to the Member, even if it is not necessary to make a ruling.

Mr McLaughlin: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. In making your judgement on this issue, could you bear in mind those who listen in on these proceedings? In some cases, very dangerous people may take a particular lead from ill-advised comments. *[Interruption]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I cannot hear what the Member is saying.

Mr McLaughlin: I am thinking particularly of the ongoing Loyalist campaign.

Mr Speaker: I will take cognisance of the matters raised by the Member. Since he has pressed me on the issue, I must draw his attention to the fact that where comments are made which have a legal basis in terms of convictions under due process, and refer to a number of members of a group of which no particular Member is pointed out, it is extremely difficult to rule them unparliamentary. I cannot see any way that one could rule that unparliamentary. It may be that such matters do not refer to all the Members of the group — and that may be the case for the Member who raises the question, for example — but that does not necessarily render the matter inadmissible or unparliamentary. I will study the matter and respond to the Member, even if it is not appropriate for a ruling in the Chamber. *[Interruption]*

The Minster has been extremely patient. I will take a couple more points of order, and then we must leave it.

Mr J Kelly: Further to what my Colleague has said — *[Interruption]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr J Kelly: Further to what my Colleague has said, it is a matter of public concern that statements — *[Interruption]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr J Kelly: — that statements made, and language used, in this House, at a time when Nationalists are under attack by Loyalists — *[Interruption]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member will resume his seat.

Mr J Kelly: — can lead to the deaths of innocent Nationalists and Catholics in this community.

1.15 pm

Mr Speaker: Order. It is the case that Members from either side of the House may make mention of things

that increase the temperature. I can rule only on questions of whether they are parliamentary, unparliamentary or in order. It is not a question of the content of speeches.

Mr J Kelly: And the effect?

Mr Speaker: It is not possible for me to rule on what may or may not be the effect of speeches outside. However —

Mr J Kelly: Inside the House?

Mr Speaker: The effect outside the House was the one to which I think the Member was referring. Of course, he is right to draw attention to the House that what is said and done here does have an effect outside, and may have an untoward effect. It is appropriate for all Members, in their words and actions inside and outside the Chamber, to keep that very much to the fore in their minds. The Member in drawing attention to that fact is of course entirely in order.

Mr McCartney: I am acutely aware of the sensitivities that I have possibly offended — though since I spoke extemporarily, I have no recollection. If it assists, I am willing to amend what was alleged when I referred to terrorists, to the political representatives of terrorists. I would not wish any of those wicked, ill-advised people who might hear things outside to do any injury to terrorists, former terrorists, political representatives of terrorists or any other person of any description.

Mr Speaker: Order. We cannot take any more time over this matter in the Chamber. That is a clear offer from Mr McCartney that he, and some of the other Members, may clarify between each other as to exactly what is being said. That will have to take place outside the Chamber.

NORTH/SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights

Mr Speaker: If Members wish to leave and not to hear this important statement, will they please do so quietly. 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 for the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights sector held on 22 June 2001.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers): The fifth meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council for the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights sector took place on Friday, 22 June 2001, at the Loughs Agency's headquarters in Prehen. Following nomination by the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, Mr Sam Foster and I represented Northern Ireland. Mr Frank Fahey, Minister for Marine and Natural Resources represented the Irish Government. The Executive Committee noted the papers for the meeting during the week commencing 18 June.

The meeting opened with updates from the chairman of the board of the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission, Mr Peter Savage, and the chief executive of the Loughs Agency, Mr Derick Anderson.

The chairman referred to the significant contribution that the introduction of the salmon carcass tagging scheme is making to curb illegal fishing, particularly in the Foyle area. The scheme was introduced on 14 May as a conservation and protection measure requiring the tagging and recording of all wild salmon and sea trout caught by licensed commercial fishermen and anglers.

The chief executive elaborated that the response from the fishing community to the introduction of the scheme has, by and large, been excellent. Additionally, it is becoming increasingly obvious that buyers will not accept untagged salmon. The chief executive also advised Ministers of details in relation to this season's fish runs, as evidenced by data coming from the fish counters at Sion Mills and on the River Finn. On the basis of this season's data to date, stocks are looking healthy, and therefore regulations may permit an extension of the fishing season by a week.

We also heard about coarse and shellfish fishing activity. The agency has initiated surveys of the coarse fisheries in the Foyle and Carlingford areas, including the Newry canal, with a view to their future development as angling venues. While the mussel fishery in Foyle continues to develop well, and Carlingford had an excellent season, indications suggest that limited seed mussels are present in Carlingford, and landings are liable to drop over the next two to three years.

Wild oyster landings in the Foyle were average last season, and surveys undertaken by the cross-border aquaculture initiative team indicate similar landings for the forthcoming season though there are concerns about stocks for 2002. Japanese oyster production in Carlingford is stable at about 600 tonnes per annum, though developments on the County Down shore should increase this significantly.

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

Work is ongoing to bring forward a marine tourism strategy for the areas. While the strategy is not fully developed, the agency is working to consolidate angling guides for the areas, to develop training courses for hospitality providers and to clarify the existing complicated licensing system.

The agency has also resumed enforcement and protection duties that had been curtailed during the foot-and-mouth disease crisis, and work on pollution detection and prevention is ongoing.

I am satisfied that the Loughs Agency continues to deliver on its objectives in a committed and enthusiastic manner. It was gratifying to note the enthusiasm with which the agency's good work was received by Minister Fahey, who recognised that the agency's first-class management information is worthy of emulation by others.

The Council considered the agency's proposals for targeting social need (TSN) through the provision of educational opportunities for schools, the promotion of the agency's interpretive centre, the improvement of angling facilities and the development of marine tourism. The Council approved the agency's draft TSN action plan for public consultation.

The Council noted the agency's annual report for 2000, which will be published in due course. It also noted the agency's proposals to draw up a co-ordinated local aquaculture management system (CLAMS) for regulating and managing the shell fisheries of the loughs and welcomed the agency's proposal to commission a survey of local views, concerns and proposals in that vital area.

The Council approved the agency's proposals for arrangements to consult with fisheries and other interests in the areas. These involve setting up an advisory forum and focus groups to represent interests such as aquaculture, conservation and tourism. Recruitment for membership of these groups will be undertaken independently and will start soon.

The Council then considered and approved additional expenditure of £81,000 to allow the agency to complete work on its new headquarters.

Mr Shannon: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker: No points of order are taken during or after a Minister's statement. They will be taken after questions.

Ms Rodgers: Sufficient provision already exists in the Agriculture and Rural Development Department's budget to meet that extra need. The Department was also advised of plans to complete the interpretative centre, the shell of which has been completed within the new headquarters. The agency will bring forward detailed proposals at a later date. Ministers were also updated on progress in transferring the functions of the commissioners of Irish Lights to the body.

The Council agreed to meet again in the autumn. It approved a joint communiqué, a copy of which has been placed in the Assembly Library. I am making this statement on behalf of Mr Foster and myself.

Dr Birnie: I thank the Minister for her statement. I refer her to the third sentence from the end of the statement which says

"Ministers were also updated on progress in transferring the functions of the commissioners of Irish Lights to the body."

Will the Minister update the House on such progress?

Ms Rodgers: The legislation to transfer the functions to the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission is the responsibility of the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions in the United Kingdom, and the Irish Government. It is not a straightforward matter and will take some time to work through. However, progress is being made. There are unique funding arrangements for the commissioners of Irish Lights through the general lighthouse fund, and it is necessary to ensure proper accountability for that funding.

The Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions is concerned about the level of funding from the Irish Government, but that, as the Member will be aware, is a matter for the UK and Irish Governments.

Mr McGrady: I welcome the Minister's detailed statement on the advances made in the Loughs Agency. I refer to the comments she made about the Council's approval of agency proposals to have consultative or advisory focus groups. The Minister will be aware that there are conflicting interests around the shores of Carlingford Lough. On the County Down side of the lough, the Carlingford Loughshore Owners' Association have rights, as do the Mourne shellfish group, Aquamarine Cultivation.

Will the Minister indicate what further action she will take to reconcile these difficulties? Can she expand on the consultation which is going to take place and tell us when the forum or focus groups will be set up?

Ms Rodgers: I am aware of the conflict and the difficulties that arise. The Loughs Agency has proposed the establishment of an advisory forum and focus groups in which local fishery interests will be represented. The focus groups will be established for specific areas including conservation and protection, development of aquaculture, development of inland fisheries, development of marine

tourism and customer service. They will input to the work of the advisory forum.

The agency has retained consultants to recruit members to the forum and the focus groups independently so as to ensure that all interests are represented. The aim is to have the groups active by the end of the summer.

Mr Shannon: The point I was trying to make, Mr Deputy Speaker, was that there was a page missing from the copy of the Minister's statement we were given this morning. Unfortunately, as the Minister was speaking, many of us were not aware of that. The statement went from page one to page three. We cannot do anything about it now. I did take note of the Minister's —

Ms Rodgers: Page two is on the back of page one.

Mr Shannon: With great respect, Minister, it is not on the back of page one of my copy, which was one of those that were handed out earlier. We followed the Minister's comments, and we made note of them.

The statement says that it is becoming increasingly obvious that buyers will not accept untagged salmon. Can the Minister indicate what evidence there is to support that? Can she further confirm that the run of salmon has improved, and, if so, by how much? What consultation has taken place with fishing organisations to permit an extension of the fishing season for one week? Would it be appropriate to extend the season by more than one week? Page two of the statement referred to —

Mr Deputy Speaker: By my count that was five questions, Mr Shannon.

Mr Shannon: I think it was two, although I am a very bad mathematician.

I have a quick question if you will let me ask it, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is about the co-ordinated local agricultural management system (CLAMS). Does that include Strangford Lough, and if so, what consultation has taken place with local fishing organisations and individuals who depend on that for their livelihood?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Minister, I will leave it to you to decide whether you wish to answer all of those questions.

Ms Rodgers: To be honest, I had some difficulty hearing all of them. The answer to the last question is no.

As regards tagged salmon not being saleable, I cannot go into detail about that; I have to take the Lough's Agency's word for it. They informed us at the meeting that the information they were gleaning was that only tagged salmon were being accepted and that there was difficulty in selling poached salmon. So far this season the agency has seized more than 80 illegal nets, two boats and a number of salmon in the Foyle area. Recently, the agency enforcement activities have had to be curtailed, as the Member will appreciate, because of the foot-and-mouth disease situation.

The agency has recruited 11 temporary staff over the summer period to increase its protection effort. The salmon carcass tagging scheme will help reduce the level of poaching in the Foyle and Carlingford areas. Evidence of a decrease in poaching is already being shown. Last year, the Loughs Agency seized 126 nets and 222 salmon in the period from 14 May to 21 June. In the previous year 103 nets and 64 salmon were seized during the same period. This indicates the success that the Loughs Agency has had in counteracting poaching.

1.30 pm

Mr McHugh: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's statement, and in particular its reference to the focus groups and their work. The work of the cross-border bodies is important, as it involves people from both sides of the border in the future of all-Ireland fishing. The Minister mentioned Lough Foyle, Lough Erne and other inland fishing areas subject to concern about the relationship between stock levels and tourism. Will the remit of these focus groups include the ability to deliver future benefit to tourism from increased stock levels of salmon? That is a real problem in Fermanagh and for other inland lakes.

Ms Rodgers: I thank Mr McHugh for his question, but I must advise him that we are dealing with the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission, whose remit does not extend to matters regarding Lough Erne. That is a matter for Mr McGimpsey, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure. It is not within my remit to deal with Lough Erne.

Mr McFarland: I thank the Minister for her statement. I am curious about the fish counts in Sion Mills. Is it correct that the Glenelly, Owenkillew, Strule and Mourne are still closed to fishing? If so, when might these rivers open again? I understand that they were closed due to the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease.

Ms Rodgers: Due to the foot-and-mouth disease outbreak these rivers are still closed. However, these restrictions are under review. We have published guidelines explaining to anglers that where there is no contact with livestock it is all right to resume fishing, and that fishermen should do so in consultation with local farmers to reassure themselves.

Mr McMenamin: Over the past year there have been several savage attacks on bailiffs in my constituency of West Tyrone. Everyone must condemn these attacks. The Minister has already referred to my question. What action has been taken by the Loughs Agency to counteract poaching activity in its area?

Ms Rodgers: I agree with the Member's remarks, and I repeat that it is regrettable that people carrying out their duties have been attacked. I enquired at the last meeting of the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission (FCILC) whether there had been any further

attacks and was advised that none have occurred in recent times. That is good news.

Poaching activity has decreased in the area of the Loughs Agency. I have already given the figures which indicate clearly that the salmon carcass tagging scheme is up and running and is making the market unprofitable for salmon poachers.

Mr M Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Does the Minister agree that while Japanese oyster production in Carlingford Lough is stable, there is a need to improve our marketing of that product for export? Will the Minister give the House an assurance that the local fishermen who have invested a great deal in Carlingford Lough will not be undermined in the future negotiations involving the focus groups that she is setting up?

Ms Rodgers: Part of the agency's strategy will be to improve the management of the stocks, and marketing the stocks will be part of that. The agency is in the business of developing the commercial asset of the loughs. I can assure the Member that the interests of locals will not be undermined. There will be full consultation through the focus groups, and local interest groups will form part of that consultation.

Mr Kennedy: Can the Minister expand on her comments about angling at Newry Canal? Can she tell us whether Newry and Mourne District Council — which is the owner, if not charged with responsibility for the canal — is being consulted on this matter?

The Minister stated that her Department will meet the cost of the additional funding required to complete the agency's headquarters. Can she tell us whether this cost is being met from the appropriate budget heading — "intergovernmental and cross-border" — or is it being taken from another aspect of her Department's funding? Were the proper procedures used? Was the contract tendered, and what was the full extent of the work involved?

Ms Rodgers: There is ongoing consultation with Newry and Mourne District Council in relation to Newry Canal. The £81,000 funding for the headquarters is being met from within the budget.

Mr Kennedy: My question was specific. I asked whether the money is being taken from the budget already allocated for cross-border matters or from the Department's main budget.

Ms Rodgers: The money is coming from the cross-border budget.

Mr Kennedy: The other element of the question was whether a proper procedure of tendering and consultation had been adopted. Can the Minister confirm that proper procedures were undertaken?

Ms Rodgers: I assure the Member that the proper tendering procedure is undertaken at all times by the agency. That was done.

Mr Hussey: I thank the Minister for her statement. I share some of the fears expressed by other Members about how successful a tagging scheme can be in a river system, particularly in the Foyle. As Mr McMenamin said, the problem is not with the licensed fishermen but with those who take and kill salmon illegally in the Foyle.

My question relates to the marine tourism strategy, particularly in the Foyle basin. Has the Council considered the current proposals to establish a new ferry service connecting Donegal with the Limavady Borough Council area? Is it aware of that, and is it taking it on board? Will it be assisting with funding for the scheme, and will it be part of the overall marine tourism strategy?

Ms Rodgers: I thank Mr Hussey for his question. Yes, that project is being considered. The Member may be aware that a marine tourism officer has been appointed to bring forward a marine tourism strategy. The FCILC has also set up a marine tourism subgroup, which has responsibility for bringing forward proposals to form the basis for that strategy. The question of a ferry service is being considered.

PUBLIC EXPENDITURE: JUNE MONITORING

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):

This statement is made on behalf of the Executive about public spending allocations in 2001-02 in the light of the June monitoring round. That monitoring round is our main opportunity to consider how to deal with the resources made available in this financial year through the carry-over of underspending from 2000-01. The Executive also have to distribute additional resources that were added to the departmental expenditure limit following the Chancellor's Budget in March. There are also some savings that have already emerged on the basis of up-to-date information on the amounts required for some services.

As I have emphasised in previous statements on monitoring rounds, the main theme and purpose of such exercises is to adjust the allocation of resources in line with a better analysis of the cost pressures. We must ensure that the money is adjusted to take account of changes in the delivery of public services. The Executive also want to take account of the priorities and objectives in the Programme for Government and take any new opportunities to promote equality of opportunity. We must combine the pragmatic and the strategic.

The timetable for monitoring rounds is usually such that decisions must be taken and implemented quickly. Therefore, the Executive's practice has been to reach decisions through discussions between Ministers, following which I will announce the outcome, on behalf of the Executive. The Executive are always open to proposals from the Assembly and the Committees, and those views can be taken into account in future monitoring rounds. However, it has not normally been possible to consult Committees directly about the process. Many issues require urgent consideration, so that the appropriate adjustments can be made to the planning of public services by schools, hospitals, Government agencies and grant-aided bodies. On this occasion, the Executive have decided to take that approach for a substantial proportion of the proposed allocations.

I shall announce some decisions on reallocations. However, for a variety of reasons, we wish to indicate that some of the resources require further consideration before the Executive reach a decision. Some decisions can be deferred for several weeks and others until the autumn. That makes it possible to link this exercise with our consideration of the next Budget cycle. It will also present an opportunity for the Assembly and the Committees, particularly the Committee for Finance and Personnel, to give views on the remaining proposals.

We must address the question of end-of-year carry-over. The Executive have decided that underspend on capital expenditure should be carried forward automatically by the Department concerned. That reflects the reality

that the management of capital spending programmes frequently involves changes of timing that are outside the control of the spending authority concerned, when good management suggests that re-phasing or adjustment is the appropriate course of action.

1.45 pm

The end-year flexibility arrangements allow spending authorities to deal with capital allocations in a more flexible and pragmatic way than would be possible if we rigidly applied the end-of-year constraint. The Executive support that, and end-year flexibility is automatic, subject to careful monitoring and assurance that the capital expenditure is in line with the proposals in the Programme for Government. The amounts involved this year on this heading are £30 million. Those resources will be retained by the relevant Departments and spending authorities. For technical reasons, the same applies to the small amount of underspending on the GP fundholders scheme, which is coming to an end.

The amount of end-year flexibility available for consideration this year amounts to some £52 million. That excludes the already mentioned capital carry-over and represents 1.2% of the departmental allocations. It reflects generally prudent estimating by Departments as they manage their spending towards the end of each financial year. Parliament and, doubtless, this Assembly, place considerable importance on ensuring that there is no overspend, which would involve expenditure exceeding the amounts authorised under legislation and through the Supplementary Estimates. It is therefore inevitable that public sector managers ensure that excess votes are avoided, with the corollary that there is always some underspending at this sort of level. Details are set out in table 1 attached to my statement. That £52 million is now available for reallocation.

Some additional resources from the Treasury are available and have not yet been allocated. Those comprise the £18 million which was added to the Northern Ireland departmental expenditure limit in the March Budget and £4.4 million from the latest round of allocations to the Chancellor's capital modernisation fund. While those resources came from particular sources in England, they are available to spend as the Executive chooses, and we are not in any way constrained as to how we make use of them.

In this monitoring round, Departments have declared savings of £29 million compared to the allocations approved in the December Budget. The largest component of that is further receipts from house sales, amounting on this occasion to £15 million. Those are outside the estimates currently being approved through the Budget (No 2) Bill. We have a total of £104 million to allocate in this monitoring round.

I have frequently drawn attention to the constraints that we face in planning our spending. The availability of resources through savings of this nature should not in

any way delude us — or anyone else, for that matter — that our spending programmes are not under considerable pressure. There are significant demands for spending on services which are badly needed and which would be of clear benefit to the public. In this monitoring round the bids for additional resources which have been lodged exceed the amount available by a factor of two. This pales into insignificance compared to the position report presented to the Assembly a fortnight ago, which showed that the amounts sought by Departments amounted to something like 20 times the amount available. That was in a context where we, as an Executive, encouraged Departments to be judicious in the levels of additional resources they sought for next year.

Given the pressure on resources and the wide range of aspirations which Executive Ministers and Assembly Members have in mind, we need to consider very carefully how best to use those resources. The Executive is conscious that there are resource pressures, both this year and next. We want to shift the emphasis of our financial planning to a better, forward-looking basis. There are significant disadvantages in making short-term reallocations, triggered by resources becoming available as the year progresses.

It is better to be able to plan resources on a longer-term basis and give spending authorities greater stability for planning purposes. Plans can change, and we need to be ready to respond to fluctuations in cost pressures.

One option that we have is to make use of some end-year flexibility, not in 2001-02 but in 2002-03. We cannot decide this now, as we need to keep an eye on a wide range of spending pressures in the current year. However, if it is possible, we would like to consider some carry-forward so that some of the spending pressures that were identified in the position report might be addressed next year. This in turn means limiting the extent to which we commit resources this year.

Of the total of £104 million that we have available, the Executive have decided to allocate some £63 million now. Details of the additional allocations are set out in table 2 in my statement. I do not propose to explain in detail each item of additional expenditure that we are allocating at this time. I will, however, indicate some of the more substantial or significant items.

The main additional cost to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is of course the cost associated with foot-and-mouth disease. We are having to fund £6.8 million from the departmental expenditure limit for the preventative measures and other associated costs. The costs of compensation for slaughtered animals, and so on, falls to the Treasury through annually managed expenditure and do not represent a cost in our spending plans. There are also additional costs associated with BSE testing that must be addressed urgently.

Additional allocations to contribute to Belfast's bid to be the European City of Culture in 2008 have been

agreed for the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. There are also some additional staffing costs required for the Department.

Additional allocations totalling £14 million are provided for the Department of Education. That amount includes £7.8 million for teachers' performance pay and £2 million for work to extend access for the disabled.

Additional requirements in my own Department amount to £2.4 million. That mainly reflects revised estimates of costs for the delivery of services including the cost of Government office accommodation and the delivery of some core functions. In addition, £0.7 million has been set aside to cover additional costs for the Special EU Programmes Body, which will need to be put for approval to the North/South Ministerial Council.

The new allocations include £6.3 million for the Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment, or the Department of Employment and Learning as we will soon be calling it. This includes an important allocation of £3 million for the adaptation of facilities for disabled people in both further and higher education, which is vital if we are to fulfil our statutory responsibilities to those who need access to facilities which at present is difficult or impossible.

Health Service costs are again a major feature of this monitoring round. It is proposed to allocate £18 million to health services now to address some new cost factors including pay settlements at higher levels than expected and further transitional costs due to the situation at South Tyrone Hospital.

Members will recall that action was taken in the last financial year to address the issue of the trust deficits. The Department of Finance and Personnel, the Economic Policy Unit (EPU) and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety also jointly commissioned a report from consultants on the background of the trust deficit issue and the possible implications for the current and future financial years.

We recognised that the deficits could be the result of a higher activity level in trusts than was provided for in the approved budgets, in response to urgent patient demand. In that context, action to adjust the trusts' finances might not have been confined to the last financial year. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has lodged a bid for a further £10 million to address the trusts' recovery plans. The Executive have decided to look at this again over the next few weeks, in the light of the conclusions of the Deloitte & Touche report on the deficit issue, which has just been received.

Additional allocations have been made to the Department for Regional Development for a number of essential and high-priority services. The purposes of these allocations include addressing increased costs from the climate change levy and oil prices, monitoring crypto-

sporidium, and dealing with costs that affect the water and sewerage service. A total of £4.2 million is being provided for the Department for Regional Development.

A major source of savings for redistribution in this monitoring round has been the additional capital receipts generated by the Housing Executive due to favourable conditions for house sales. That has led to a reduced rental income level for the Housing Executive, and we are providing £1.5 million pounds to the Department for Social Development to make up for that. That and other activities, including re-phased provision for welfare reform and modernisation, account for the Department for Social Development's £3.6 million allocation.

We are allocating an additional £1.4 million to the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. That is to ensure that the Executive's agenda on human rights and equality can be pursued and that appropriate provision can be made for the Washington bureau, the Civic Forum and the Equality Commission.

There are further bids from Departments that we need to seriously consider over the coming months. Such is the pressure on our spending provision for next year that the Executive have decided that it might be necessary to forgo some of the bids this year so that additional uncommitted spending power can be carried forward into next year. The bids that we would defer for further consideration are listed in table 3 attached to the copies of my statement, which were given to Members. In particular, we will want to revisit the position on the health trusts when the consultants' report on the deficit issue has been received and considered by the Executive.

Other significant bids might need to be addressed later this month, but many of the bids that are listed could still be reconsidered in the next main monitoring round. At that point we would need to make a final decision on whether to hold some money back from 2001-02 to be deliberately carried forward into 2002-03. We will have drawn out the Budget proposals for Departments and put them in draft form for the Assembly by that stage. The proposals will be based on the level of resources that are available for 2002-03. We need to proceed on that basis, because at this stage we cannot be sure that it will be possible to carry any provision into 2002-03. If it is possible, we might be able to adjust the draft Budget.

If it is possible to adjust the draft Budget, the Executive will wish to take full account of the views of the Assembly Committees and of the outcome of wider consultation. The decisions that we need to take on those issues will be strongly influenced by what we hear from the Assembly Committees during the next few months. I will look, in particular, to the Finance and Personnel Committee to advise and assist on these difficult and interesting issues.

2.00 pm

It would be helpful to hear views on the nature and merit of the deferred bids, which we must return to in the autumn, and, in some cases, earlier. It will be interesting to hear views on whether we should carry forward any spending provision into next year. Members' reactions to the range of issues set out in the position report published last month will be highly influential. It is easier to see the necessity of addressing some of those bids than to find resources available to meet them.

There are real issues here, which the Assembly and the Committees should be in a position to carefully consider and influence. The Executive will consider some of those issues during July and will need to act clearly and directly in the autumn. I am not setting a deadline for comments from the Assembly Committees because the timing of the process is not ideal from the Members' perspective.

The Executive is bringing this matter to the Assembly as early as possible, having dealt with the initial round of decisions urgently, in order to make it possible for the statement to be made today. We are giving the Assembly information on what has been decided and are seeking views and input into what has not yet been decided. I look forward to hearing the views of Members on these important issues now and over the coming months.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The debate must be completed by 2.30 pm; the sacred time for Oral Answers to Questions. I call Mr Francie Molloy. I suggest that the other eight speakers limit their remarks so that as many people as possible can speak.

The Chairperson of the Finance and Personnel Committee (Mr Molloy): Go raibh maith agat, a Leas-Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his detailed statement. I will touch on some issues, as the Committee will have more questions for the Minister later today.

We note that £104 million has been made available to Departments through the Chancellor's Budget, end-of-year flexibility and the savings from Departments. We also note that Departments have underspent by almost £30 million. That is quite a lot of money for reallocation, and it raises a number of questions that Committees will want to take up in a number of ways.

What areas and circumstances have delivered these savings? Are there fundamental flaws in the process that need to be addressed? What steps will the Minister of Finance and Personnel take to ensure that money has been allocated to priority areas?

In my constituency people comment that if the same amount of money had been put into the South Tyrone hospital as had been put into the transitional costs, the hospital might still be up and running. If we continue to pay off trust deficits, is there a danger that trusts will simply keep building up deficits and that we will have

no control of the management of those trusts? It also raises the issue of the 8% rise in rates. In the light of the amount of money that is available for reallocation, we must look at the bids that were originally made.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Chairperson of the Committee for his questions, and I am sure that we will be able to pursue a number of them this afternoon.

The purpose of monitoring rounds is to identify resources available. It is good that we can identify resources that are available — it would be much more difficult if we found that resources were not available. As I spelt out in my statement, Departments want to avoid overspending — as a result they sometimes overestimate the amount they need. That is why we have some resources available at the end of the year.

We should not look at the moneys that are already available this year as some problem for which we pursue the Departments that have come forward with those moneys at this stage. We should recognise that the process of setting Estimates is not as straightforward as we would like it to be. Remember, the earlier we set the Estimates cycle in train — particularly at the request of this Assembly — the more speculative the Estimates are going to be. People will go more for fairly "broad brush" Estimates, and subsequently these will be subject to more revision and review, which is what we are seeing.

In relation to the South Tyrone Hospital, we have taken a decision based on a bid received in this monitoring round. Obviously, bids were received in previous monitoring rounds, and we are working on the basis of bids received. We recognise the significant pressure, and the Executive and I recognise the serious difficulties that would result from not meeting this bid as it has been put to us by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. Regarding possible alternatives to this bid, I refer the Member to the Minister and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

I have already said that the Executive will be looking at trust deficits again. I note the concern that the Chairman has expressed, which is not removed from the concern expressed by some Members when last we looked at this issue. I would be happy if the Committee for Finance and Personnel, or indeed the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, wanted to address us with its thinking on those issues.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Finance and Personnel Committee (Mr Leslie): I thank the Minister for his detailed statement. A couple of points occur to me. In the bids for resources, three different Departments have put in for sums amounting to about £2.4 million to pay their fuel bills. I presume that this reflects an assumption about oil prices that proved optimistic, with oil prices being higher than anticipated. Nothing has happened to oil prices, so I further presume that they were expected to fall but did not. Can the Minister comment on that,

and perhaps tell us what oil price was used in the Budget? Clearly, this could have an effect for some time. I would be interested to know what he thinks the further consequences of oil staying at about \$29 to the barrel would be.

I also want to raise a point that comes up again and again here. We have another £15 million of receipts from house sales. We convert this capital into income — putting it into the spending pool. As a consequence, rental income to the Housing Executive falls, and we are forced to make an allowance of £1.5 million for that, implying a 10% yield on those houses. What are we going to do about the housing debt that still has to be serviced? Is it prudent for us to continue to convert capital into income in this way?

Mr Durkan: This is not the first time that we have received bids in monitoring rounds to cover difficulties regarding oil prices, and it may well not be the last. If any Department, or non-departmental public body whose costs Departments are reflecting, were making assumptions in relation to fuel costs that did not stand up, then obviously we would need to look at that. However, people make assumptions on the basis of the price indications at the time the Budget is set — and that was last autumn.

It is part of that issue. The Estimates will not be perfect because not everything stands still. Not everything remains equal, and the earlier we make the Estimates cycle, as the Assembly wants us to do, the more variance there may be when it comes to out-turns.

As regards house sales, the right to buy exists. It was a particular problem in the past when the Housing Executive, as well as handing over the money from sales, had to withstand the loss of rental income. It is not unreasonable to make good that loss, and that point has been emphasised by many Members in the House, including some in the Member's own party.

We want to try to reinvest in capital where we can do so. I have indicated that we need to look at the question that the Member has raised to see what is the best way of managing a facility that may lend itself to a better and more sensible approach.

Mrs Courtney: I welcome the Minister's statement, particularly the allocation made for the childcare subsidy for lone parents under New Deal. Can the Minister confirm that the allocation will further encourage single parents to enter the labour market and avail of economic opportunities arising, and that this is further evidence of our commitment to exclude no one from the benefits as we build a society based on equality, fairness and opportunity?

Mr Durkan: I am happy to confirm that this is what the Executive are trying to do in meeting this particular bid. It should provide the Department with the necessary financial resources to meet claims for childcare subsidies during 2001. The Department for Social Development will be responsible for meeting those claims in the future.

However, as regards our commitment to social inclusion, targeting social need and to making the most of New Deal with respect to our particular regional needs and opportunities, the Executive's decision to meet that bid is a useful example of the value of devolution.

Mr Gibson: I welcome the Minister's statement and the facts and figures that he has given. The Minister posed several questions about carrying forward money. First, I would like him to consider the idea of being able to carry money forward, or give a guarantee that a project entered into can be sustained over a period of time. I am thinking of the Hayes Report, which recommends a hospital for the south-west of the Province. When it eventually arrives in Omagh, we are thinking in terms of £60 million. That money needs to be spread over time in order to purchase the land, the infrastructure and the bricks and mortar. However, the final and largest gulp of money is for the technology that will go into the building. How would that be seen in regard to financial and resource funding?

Secondly, another concern to every councillor in the west of the Province is the £15 million raised from house sales, which most of us agree should go back into housing provision to provide a modern stock of housing in the public sector at all times. Perhaps there is a budgeting arrangement whereby money is returned to the Exchequer. However, there should be some reward so that we can maintain a good level of public sector housing.

Thirdly, I noticed from the forecast figures that the Department for Regional Development is asking for £15 million to deal with the backlog of roads projects.

Four years ago, one council alone had a backlog of £32 million. If we add that to the other one in west Tyrone, that is a backlog of £64 million. That does not deal with road safety or necessary modern structural improvements. How is the Minister intending to finance —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Gibson, you are beginning to make a speech.

2.15 pm

Mr Gibson: How is the Minister intending to finance those works?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister should reply to as much of that as he can in the time.

Mr Durkan: The first question was not particularly concerned with in-year monitoring. It would not be appropriate for me to answer, in the context of monitoring round decisions, questions about outcomes that might emerge from the Hayes Report, decisions that might or might not be made and how those decisions would be brought forward in relation to a possible new hospital in the south-west. I do not think that the questions I have raised about carrying forward some money that has fallen to us this year into next year to assist with the pressures

in the position report are a relevant premise for the question that the Member asked.

In relation to house sales, the Member seems to suggest that whatever income comes in from house sales should all automatically go into the housing budget. All Departments and agencies are asked to bring forward budgets for the incoming financial year and to make their plans accordingly. The Budget that we set includes assumptions about income from house sales, just as it includes assumptions about rental income. If the money available from house sales increases significantly, then rather than automatically falling to the Housing Executive, it is right that it should fall to the block as a whole for us to decide its best use. Where income falls — as rental income falls because of house sales — the question can arise again, in relation to the block, as to whether we make good that fall in income. To suggest that added revenue should lie where it falls is unfair to those programmes that cannot generate revenue.

It is significant that the Member went on to talk about the £15 million bid for roads. It is an unusual coincidence that the extra revenue from house sales, which the Member is saying should automatically go to the Housing Executive and not be taken to the centre, is equal to the figure requested by the Department for Regional Development for roads. We would not have money available for other Departments to bid on if we chose the course that the Member recommended in the earlier part of his question.

Ms Lewsley: I congratulate the Minister on his approach, especially as it creates an opportunity for the Assembly and its Committees, particularly the Finance and Personnel Committee, to have an input into the decision-making process for the remaining resources in October. Can the Minister confirm that this is a further step in the process of opening up the budgetary process, something that would have been unheard of in the days of direct rule?

Mr Durkan: It is a reflection of the more open, and, I hope, more informed, approach that we have taken to financial planning considerations than would have been possible under direct rule. I recognise that the amount of money that we are talking about holding over for consideration in the autumn as to whether to allocate it this year or next is not huge compared to the overall Budget. Given that we will have little room to manoeuvre next year, as reflected in the position report, it is right to try to let the Assembly have a bit more of a hard shoulder to drive on than we would otherwise have. There are very challenging questions in the position report for the Executive and departmental Committees, but if we have some more scope in financial terms, it will give the Committees more scope for consideration and influence.

Mr Close: I welcome the movement toward greater flexibility and the opening of the doors that appear to have been hitherto locked in front of us. We are getting there, and some necessary steps have been taken.

There is £51 million in the provisional out-turn figure that has not been spent in the current year. Does the Minister agree that we have a golden opportunity to demonstrate that this is a caring Assembly? We should get away from having little boxes in which each Department locks its money. We should take decisions that show that the weak and vulnerable in our society — the sick and the elderly — are the number one priority. Much could be done by spending the £51 million now to ensure that the sick are not left on hospital trolleys in hospital corridors, that community care budgets are sufficient to allow elderly people — *[Interruption]*.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Members should confine themselves to asking questions. The Member is making a statement. Please ask a question.

Mr Close: Does the Minister agree that the needs of the elderly should have priority, that we should not have people on trolleys in hospital corridors and that there should be an increase in the community care budget now? We are faced with deficits in all the trust areas. Only recently, as the Minister is aware, we debated the under-funding in the Down Lisburn Trust. We know about the deficits. Rather than wait for a Deloitte Touche report, we should spend money to remove those deficits now, so that we can start afresh in the next financial year.

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr Close for his unusual welcome for my statement. I hope that his sense that our presentation is improving will be borne out by future developments.

The Member spoke about the amount of money that was left over from last year. I agree that we should be a caring Administration. However, we must also be a careful Administration. That means that we must ensure that we spend money wisely. If money does not need to be spent in the way that we had expected, it can be put to other uses.

Today, we are announcing the allocation of over £63 million, including £18 million to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, as well as funding for other key services. There are outstanding bids for other services, including further services in the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. We must address the issue of the trust recovery plans, but I remind the Member that we allocated money in a monitoring round in the last financial year to make good the problem of trust deficits. Indeed, the Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel conveyed some concerns that that might become too much of a habit. An additional bid has now been received for trust recovery plans, and those plans are based on the avoidance of future deficits. We will take action in that area, and views of the kind that the Member has expressed can be channelled through the Committee for Finance and Personnel when it considers that question.

Mr Shannon: I note what the Minister said about the extra funding. Did the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety request additional funding

for specialist drugs? A figure of £2·8 million has been set aside for that. How much money did the Department ask for? Did it ask for extra money to deal with waiting lists, for which £2 million has been set aside? I am presuming that that £2·2 million funding to address the waiting lists —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Shannon, this is the Minister of Finance and Personnel. Is it not obvious that your question should be directed to the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety?

Mr Shannon: I am asking the Minister how much money the Department of Health asked for in relation to waiting lists and specialist drugs. He should be able to answer that question.

Mr Deputy Speaker: He is showing some willingness to help you.

Mr Durkan: Mr Shannon is asking questions relating to table 3. Table 3 does not list the bids that are being met. Those are not the allocations that are being announced today. Table 2 gives the allocations that are being announced today as part of the £63 million. I have said that there are other bids that are not being met and that they will be deferred for wider consideration in the autumn, or in some cases, such as for the trust deficits and some other issues, later this month.

The amount that the Department bid for with regard to waiting lists and specialist drugs is exactly the figure that the Member read out. Those are the bids.

Mr McMenamin: I welcome the Minister's statement and the resources that have flowed from it. Does he agree that the process of resource allocation in this devolved Administration should follow our needs and not just automatically follow on from what happens in Britain, thereby demonstrating the devolution difference?

Mr Durkan: I agree that we should make our own decisions according to our own needs. We want to make many of the changes and take many of the positive steps that are taking place across the water, but we have to recognise the needs of our own particular services. In some cases, particular costs and pressures arise, not just because of our demographic make-up, but also because we have economy of scale issues and a different administrative structure.

We should also remember that taking decisions according to our own needs is not just a matter of saying that we are jealous of our own discretion. It also means that we have to be hard-headed about the choices that we make for ourselves.

Rev Dr William McCrea: There is an allocation of £63 million in this monitoring round. Does the Minister believe that the allocation made to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to meet the requirements of the elderly, many of whom feel neglected, with no money in community services, is sufficient? Could

a further allocation not be made urgently to meet the need for residential and nursing home accommodation?

Mr Durkan: I refer the Member to tables 2 and 3, which detail the bids that we have received. In a monitoring round, the Department of Finance and Personnel, working with the Economic Policy Unit, can only deal with the bids that it receives. The same applies to the Executive. We have taken decisions on that basis.

I recognise that there are services in all Departments, not least in the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, which are under pressure. I hope that Members will work on the basis of the decisions that we have had to take, and the choices that we have made, in the context of the bids that we received.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Standing Orders provide for one hour for this debate. We have only two minutes left, so I am going to move on to the next item of business.

Oral Answers to Questions

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Single Development Agency

1. **Mr Ford** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail progress on the establishment of a single development agency for Northern Ireland.

(AQO 1665/00)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Sir Reg Empey): I am pleased to report that excellent progress has been made in establishing the new agency. Last week saw the introduction of the Industrial Development Bill to the Assembly. The results of the equality impact assessment have recently been published.

The process of seeking to appoint a shadow board and chairperson is under way, and advertisements for the post of chief executive designate will appear in the media shortly.

2.30 pm

Mr Ford: I thank the Minister for that response. The Bill has been published since I tabled the question. However, is the Minister aware of a recent Alliance Party policy document which talked about the need to protect the interests of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) within the concept of the new Invest Northern Ireland (INI) single agency? If the Minister did not see the Alliance Party policy document he may have seen a very similar one from the SDLP.

Does the Minister have any information on how the interests of those existing small businesses — which perhaps have the potential for the greatest growth over the coming years — will be covered in an agency which might otherwise be dominated by the needs of inward investors?

Sir Reg Empey: I assure the Member that any agency in Northern Ireland that ignores SMEs would be better not in existence. Ours is a small company economy. Small companies employ the vast majority of people who work here; that is where the growth has occurred. However, that is not a Northern Ireland factor. The number of people who work for the Fortune 500 companies in the United States has not increased in the past 10 years; the growth has been in the small business sector.

I assure the Member that I know that great minds think alike. I am also conscious, if INI is to succeed, that it will have targets to achieve in its corporate and operating plans. The emphasis will be on increasing the birth rate of small businesses, where Northern Ireland

has a lower start-up rate — but a higher survival rate — than elsewhere in the United Kingdom. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment wants to marry those two factors to increase the number of start-ups.

Dr McDonnell: Can the Minister assure the House that the new agency will be dynamic and marketing-led rather than one that bundles the existing agencies into a lethargic, heavyweight bundle? Will any fresh faces or new ideas in marketing be brought in from the private sector? Will the excellent work of the Industrial Research and Technology Unit (IRTU) be safeguarded and possibly expanded? I see that as vital to any future industrial expansion.

Sir Reg Empey: The hon Member for South Belfast has made the latter point on virtually every occasion that he has spoken on this issue. I know how passionately he feels about the need to ensure that innovation is at the heart of what the agency does. I assure Dr McDonnell that this is not intended to be a Lego set in which agencies are simply bolted together and called a new agency; that is not the case. The aspects of policy for which IRTU is responsible will be at the core and will be, as we said in our statement, the golden thread that will run through the thinking of the new agency.

With regard to the agency being marketing-led, there must be people involved who have a marketing capability. The Department hopes to advertise for the appointment of a chief executive designate shortly, and I have given the consultants my views on that matter. It is hoped that those views will be reflected in the draft, because it is essential that we have people who understand what a customer is. I am fully aware of the hon Member's long-term interests in these matters.

Mr Speaker: The Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment is in his place. Today — noting the number of questions on the lists — we have, through the usual channels, made arrangement to proceed through the Questions for Oral Answer without any suspension between the questions to various Ministers because they may not take the full half-hour. I am grateful to Ministers and to others for agreeing to that; it makes for a smoother run of business.

It has just come to my attention that Mr Sean Neeson will not be able to be here, and therefore question number 3 has been withdrawn.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease (Tourism Promotion Funding)

2. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to give his assessment of the impact of the extra funding granted for tourism promotion to combat consequential losses due to foot-and-mouth disease.

(AQO 1664/00)

Sir Reg Empey: Extra funding for tourism promotion has been allocated against three broad objectives: to ensure damage limitation; to restore consumer confidence; and to provide selling platforms for the industry. All activities are being evaluated through detailed impact assessments, although these are not yet available. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the domestic market is beginning to recover.

Mr McCarthy: I must express my disappointment that no money has been spent so far. Can the Minister tell us whether the money will be spread across Northern Ireland? Will it be spread to hotels, guest houses, bed and breakfasts, open farms and heritage centres? Can the Minister give us some indication as to where the £1 million will go?

Sir Reg Empey: I hope that the Member may have misheard me. I did not say that none of the money has been spent; indeed a substantial amount has already been spent. The position is that the campaign is split; £762,000 is going on international marketing and £238,000 on domestic marketing.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board has a comprehensive programme that is working its way through the system. Well over half of the money has been spent. It has been spent in different markets: the European market; the North American market; and the domestic market — across the board. It has also been spent sectorally — to deal with the point the Member makes — because different sectors require different promotion. I assure the Member that that is happening.

When we reach the stage where the money has been spent and the programmes have been rolled out — and these programmes will be rolling out into the autumn — we will evaluate what we have received for that money and the impact that it is making, or has made, on the market.

Mr O'Neill: I welcome, in part, the Minister's answers to the question. Is he confident that sufficient funding has been set aside for consequential support, given that some businesses and tourist providers were seriously affected? Perhaps he is aware that the takings of some businesses, hotels and guest houses were down by 70%; others were down by 100%.

Is the Minister satisfied that he has enough money? Will he put his shoulder to the wheel with his Colleague, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in her request to get consequential payments to help these people make up the loss?

Sir Reg Empey: I am acutely aware of the point that the Member makes, though we must not confuse two different issues. We have a fund of £1 million that was put in place as a recovery measure for the industry; there is then the scheme for compensation to businesses, which does not come out of that fund. That is a separately funded project.

The full extent of how much the scheme for compensation to businesses will cost is not yet clear to the

Executive. Claims have been received — we have now passed the point by which people had to register, which was 20 June — and we are not able to assess the full extent yet. No one is going to suggest that three months worth of rates is going to compensate someone who has suffered a drop of 70% in their business. My Colleague, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, is looking at some cases, such as those of the marts that were forced to close by her Department. That is an issue that we will be dealing with separately.

On consequential resources, as a proportion of our spending and as a proportion of our population, we have allocated more resources to this issue than has anyone else in these islands. My Colleague, the Minister of Finance and Personnel, is chasing after consequential resources that we hope to get from the Treasury in respect of some of our spending on this matter. Even allowing for that, we are spending at least three times more than the consequential that we would receive as a share of national resources.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. In the light of the considerable misunderstanding, particularly in the United States, of the nature of the foot-and-mouth disease outbreak, how successful has the campaign been to attract American visitors this summer?

Sir Reg Empey: This is one of the key, sad aspects of the situation. The image of the outbreak that was portrayed by CNN featured the Prime Minister in a protective suit. Prospective visitors were asking if these suits were provided free at airports, and they feared that if they came here their hands and feet would fall off. They were asking whether there would be any food to eat. My Colleague in the Republic, James McDaid, received exactly the same bizarre enquiries, unbelievable as they might be. There is a huge misunderstanding of the situation, but the information is beginning to get through.

Sadly, the disease was also confused with BSE, which is a much more deep-seated problem. There is a downturn in the figures relating to US tourists for both jurisdictions of this island and throughout the United Kingdom. Bookings for holidays in July and August were being made around the time of the outbreak, and therefore potential visitors were put off. Some operators which had booked seats on aircraft had to cancel for financial reasons. It is too early to tell what the loss will be. We will have suffered a downturn, but industry representatives advise me that there is evidence of recovery.

Research and Development Programmes

4. **Mrs Courtney** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail any financial packages which are available to those companies wishing to invest in research and development programmes. (AQO 1673/00)

Sir Reg Empey: The Industrial Research and Technology Unit (IRTU) is dedicated to encouraging companies to invest in innovation and industrial research and development. It delivers a comprehensive range of pre-competitive and near-market investment support programmes. These include the Compete programme, which provides support by financing up to 40% — up to a total of £250,000 — of eligible costs for near-market product and process development projects. Also included is the Start programme, which assists pre-competitive research projects with a grant of up to 50% of eligible costs — up to a maximum of £2 million.

The IRTU also helps companies to access support under UK, EU and International Fund for Ireland (IFI) programmes. On a small scale, LEDU also aims to encourage companies to develop innovative products and processes.

Mrs Courtney: I thank the Minister for his response. Some of the companies I have talked to are not always aware of the support that is available. Will the Minister ensure that his Department issues details of financial packages to companies, so that they can avail of them if they wish?

Sir Reg Empey: The Department has a policy of encouraging companies, and it does this by contacting local companies through its client executives. However, I accept that there are newly formed or non-client companies which might possibly benefit from the financial packages. I take the Member's point and will ensure that her remarks are brought to the attention of the executive and directors of the IRTU.

Mr Gibson: What are the current arrangements for funding the research of our newer industries? Does the Minister consider a close link between the universities and industry to be essential? The need for closer links is particularly evident when one looks at such aspiring EU countries as Finland, in which the Oulu University is linked to 18 industries, including Nokia. Will the Minister ensure that the newer industries can be well established and that they will not suffer the continuous vagaries of the market place?

2.45 pm

Sir Reg Empey: The Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment has been working closely with my Department on those issues. We recognise that the key to success will be the degree to which we can translate the brainpower in the universities into economic development and new products. Both Departments have put a great deal of effort into that. We are in regular contact, and we do our best to join up our policies on the matter. We take it very seriously. The new agency that we are creating will be founded with the objective of ensuring that the research and development expenditure target is raised. The Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment raised that point

when we discussed the formation of the agency and emphasised that we must give it priority.

In the future, given the pressure on our traditional industries, the only thing that will distinguish us from the low-cost economies is our ability to use intellectual capital. We are fully seized of the urgency of the matter. My ministerial Colleague and I are determined to increase the percentage of GDP devoted to research and development, because that lays the foundations for the future.

Natural Gas Pipeline (South Down)

5. **Mr McGrady** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the progress made in relation to the extension of the natural gas pipeline to the south Down area; and to make a statement. (AQO 1662/00)

Sir Reg Empey: Bord Gáis Eireann and Questar have put forward proposals for a south/north pipeline that would facilitate the supply of gas to south Down and have applied for a gas conveyance licence. The gas regulator and officials from my Department are involved in negotiations with the companies on those matters.

Mr McGrady: I thank the Minister for that encouraging reply. I draw his attention to a statement made on 20 June by the gas and electricity regulator to the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee. The regulator said that one of the best ways to deal with fuel poverty would be to ensure the widespread availability of natural gas in Northern Ireland. In addition, the Executive's statement of 14 June spoke of an opportunity to achieve the goal of supplying natural gas throughout Northern Ireland. What further steps will the Department take to ensure that the network of natural gas supply will be extended, particularly to the south-east, including south Down?

Sir Reg Empey: The Member will not need any convincing from me that my Department wants to see the extension of the gas supply through as much of Northern Ireland as possible. He will also be aware that a huge amount of effort, in the Department and elsewhere, is going into achieving that. I am in regular contact with Mrs O'Rourke, the Republic's Minister for Public Enterprise. The Executive have discussed the issue in the past couple of weeks, and my Department, the Department of Finance and Personnel and the Economic Policy Unit have formed a negotiating team. During the summer months, we will refine the final proposals, which we hope to sign off in the autumn.

There are huge issues, not all of which are within our control. As Members know, our objective is to get a south/north pipeline and a north-west pipeline, so that as much of Northern Ireland as possible can have access to natural gas. However, we are in the hands of the companies which would carry that out. We have an application from the Electricity Supply Board of Ireland (ESBI) to build a power station at Coolkeeragh. That

application is dependent on there being a supply of gas in place by a certain date.

There is also the wider issue of joining up the networks to create an all-island gas market. That, in turn, is related to our links with the UK and European gas markets. That is our objective, and I have set it out on many occasions. We are pursuing it as vigorously as we can. The Executive and the Department of Finance and Personnel are involved. I hope that we will be in a position to report significant progress by the autumn.

Mr Hussey: On a similar theme of south/north connections to natural gas supplies, the Minister intimated that there is the possibility of the south/north connection coming in along the west coast of Ireland. Has the Department had any negotiations on a route that that could possibly take, with better provision for the west of the Province?

Sir Reg Empey: The answer to the detailed question is that the Department has not been in any negotiations. I am aware, however, that the Corrib field on the west coast of Ireland, which the Member referred to, looks likely to produce significant resources of natural gas. That will be available to the grid by 2003-04. The Department has not yet seen the proposals for any particular route that will have an impact on Northern Ireland. There is clearly a demand for gas in County Donegal, which could be facilitated by the Department's own north-west proposals. However, the ultimate objective is to have a totally integrated system.

It would be misleading of me to say to the hon Member that the route will go through Castlederg, but all Members of "Team West Tyrone" regularly draw the House's attention to their active promotion of their area. However, we must remember the limitations. The pipeline will not go everywhere — we must face up to that reality. Our objective is to ensure that the pipeline goes to as many places as possible, but there is a commercial limitation to what is available.

Mr McHugh: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. It is understandable that we are limited in dealing with those who control the finances. The progress towards south Down is welcome. However, is the Minister pressing the case for other areas on the basis of economic equality of opportunity so that the gas pipeline is extended to places such as Fermanagh and Tyrone?

Sir Reg Empey: That argument has been, and will continue to be, brought to bear, not only on this issue, but also on a whole range of other issues including telecoms availability and broadband. That is perfectly sensible.

The Member will be aware of course that a gas drilling licence has been in operation for some time in his area. A company recently acquired that licence from the original holder, and it may wish to start further exploration in

County Fermanagh. New technology has provided a better opportunity for the extraction of gas in the particular geological conditions in that county. Also, the price of gas has risen substantially since the original licence was granted some years ago.

I am hopeful that there may be some activity in that area, although it is not necessarily linked to the sort of project that the Member prefers. However, I suspect that people in Fermanagh will not particularly worry about which pipe the gas comes out of, if it comes at all. At the moment I am not aware of any proposal to bring a pipe up from Corrib through the western corridor. That is something that the Irish Government will have to address. If we can play any role in that, we will be more than happy to do so.

HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

Mr Speaker: Question 1, in the name of Mrs Eileen Bell, has been withdrawn. Mrs Bell will receive a written answer.

EQUAL Programme

2. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail which groups of people will be assisted through the EQUAL Programme. (AQO 1676/00)

The Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Dr Farren): There is no specified list of groups to be assisted through EQUAL, and there is scope for a wide range of applications in respect of those who experience inequality — the general target group for the programme. Consultation during the preparation of the EQUAL programme indicated that the main needs are as follows: the long-term unemployed and economically inactive men; women who face difficulties in being integrated or reintegrated into the workforce, especially those with caring responsibilities; disabled people, including those with learning difficulties and mental ill health; and young people who are described as "status zero". Those are marginalised young people who have, for whatever reason, opted out of education or training.

EQUAL will also take into account the needs of asylum seekers, minority ethnic groups, including Irish travellers, drugs and alcohol misusers, ex-prisoners and ex-offenders, older workers and the homeless.

Mr Dallat: I very much welcome the Minister's answer. Can he go further and tell us when the first applications to the EQUAL programme can be made so that people can benefit from the support he has just outlined?

Dr Farren: I am pleased to advise the Assembly that the first call for project applications for the EQUAL

programme has been made. In preparation for the process, workshops were held across Northern Ireland to provide information to potential applicants. Those workshops were very well attended, and I trust that there will now be a wide range of applications in response to the call.

Basic Skills Strategy

3. **Mr Bradley** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail what progress has been made with the preparation of a basic skills strategy for Northern Ireland. (AQO 1677/00)

Dr Farren: The Department is currently preparing a draft basic skills strategy, based on advice received from the Basic Skills Unit and taking into consideration strategies being introduced in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland. The draft strategy will be the subject of wide-ranging consultation later this year.

Mr Bradley: How will the public consultation be managed? What will the timescale be?

Dr Farren: The Department's Basic Skills Unit will consult with all relevant interest groups, including the departmental Committee, public bodies, groups involved in the voluntary or community sector, businesses, trade unions and other groups with a legitimate interest in the provision of basic skills formation. The process will allow for full participation and the opportunity to assist in the production of our own local strategy.

We propose to complete a draft strategy for presentation to the Executive and to the departmental Committee of the Assembly by early autumn. Public consultation will then take place, with final publication planned for early 2002.

Mr K Robinson: Will the Minister outline the arrangements included in his basic skills strategy to ensure that effective liaison will occur between his Department and the Department of Education, so that the problem of illiteracy and innumeracy can be more effectively addressed in school-age children before it becomes a problem in adulthood?

Dr Farren: It is a matter for concern that there are school leavers who manifest basic literacy and numeracy problems. I am fully aware that the Minister of Education is involved with the issue at school level, and both Departments are in regular consultation on this matter. Through the well-established consultation mechanism we will take account of the strategies being developed to deal with basic skills throughout the school years so that we can build on the experience thus gathered.

Given that the problem persists among the adult population, and notwithstanding the strategies being developed for those in school, it is incumbent on us to develop our own strategy aimed at adults with that deficit. That is the responsibility of my Department, but

there is regular consultation between the two Departments on this and on many other issues.

Mrs Nelis: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Is the Minister satisfied by the quality and spread of information on the availability of basic skills programmes in educational outreach centres in disadvantaged areas?

3.00 pm

Dr Farren: Part of the development of the strategy will take full account of existing provision; we are not starting from a blank sheet. We are fully aware that provision is made for basic skills training in our further education colleges and in many of our community organisations. It is an inherent requirement in all our training programmes that basic skills needs are addressed if trainees demonstrate that they have deficits in certain areas. Therefore, we are making considerable provision; our strategy seeks to build on and develop what is currently being provided so that we can be assured that a comprehensive approach to tackling basic skills needs in the adult population is undertaken.

Tourism Sector (Training)

4. **Mrs Courtney** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment whether he has made any submissions to the trade and business development sectoral body of the North/South Ministerial Council on training for the tourism sector.

(AQO 1678/00)

Dr Farren: At the last two meetings of the North/South Ministerial Council on tourism, which I attended with my Colleague Sir Reg Empey, I presented joint papers prepared by my Department and our Southern counterparts in the training authority for the hospitality and catering industry — CERT. I presented papers relating to the provision of joint programmes for training in tourism and the hospitality industry.

The initial paper outlined the current position and training arrangements in the sector in both parts of Ireland and proposed a number of joint actions. A subsequent paper, which I presented at the most recent North/South Ministerial Council meeting in Coleraine last Friday, contains a range of joint programmes to meet the varying needs of business development in the sector including the needs of micro-businesses, small and medium-sized enterprises and the larger hotels. The programmes were developed in conjunction with the industry and are designed to meet its specific needs in the short and long term. We hope that the first of the joint training programmes will be in operation within the month.

Mrs Courtney: I thank the Minister for his comprehensive response. What will these proposals cost, and when are the training courses likely to begin?

Dr Farren: The full cost of the proposals is being finalised. I am not in a position to give precise figures. I indicated in my initial answer that we hope that the first of the training programmes will take place within the month and that programmes directed at small and medium-sized enterprises will follow on between now and September. We hope that programmes which will provide for the exchange of lecturers and instructors in the hospitality and tourism sector on a North/South basis will also be put into operation.

Mr Dalton: Can the Minister indicate the anticipated level of employment for manual and managerial posts in the tourism sector? What NVQ level will people be trained to? Where does he expect such training to take place?

Dr Farren: I am afraid that without notice I am not in a position to answer the first part of the Member's question. I am not sure that the question is answerable from the information available in my Department. It is probably more likely to require information available to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

The training programmes that I referred to are essentially short-term. They deal with precise issues related to management, operational skills and exchange opportunities for lecturers and instructors in the various colleges that provide training in that area rather than courses that are directed at particular NVQ levels.

Mr McHugh: A Cheann Comhairle. Does the Minister have any plans to introduce language training in the tourism sector? It is important that staff can deal with visitors from different countries and from different parts of our own country.

Dr Farren: That question is not directly related to the issues before me. However, I will happily provide information to the Member in a written reply.

Electrical and Electronic Engineering and Software Graduates

5. **Mr McClarty** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to give his assessment of the adequacy, relative to labour market demands, of the annual output of electrical and electronic engineering and software graduates from local universities. (AQO 1671/00)

Dr Farren: Research carried out on behalf of the Northern Ireland skills task force shows a need to continue to increase the output of graduates in electronics and software. My Department is addressing the issue by increasing the number of university places. Last year enrolments in electronics increased by 41% to 811. Information and communications technology (ICT), enrolments increased by 5% to 3,960. An additional 300 places have been allocated for the academic year 2001-02 to meet the sector's needs.

Mr McClarty: What percentage of graduates from local universities stay in Northern Ireland to work?

Dr Farren: Today seems to be a day for confessing some ignorance. We are all aware of the considerable pressures on that sector of the labour market, and we frequently hear that high proportions of our graduates migrate southwards or across the Irish Sea or the Atlantic to take up job opportunities. Figures from a survey in the north-west suggest that despite the fact that some 200 to 300 people graduate each year, many graduates do not take up opportunities in electronics here because of the pressures and demands that I have just referred to.

Several recent reports, notably Professor Best's, which I have occasionally referred to in some of my answers, highlighted the fact that our output continues to be significant. However, the pressures persist, and the competition is such that we find ourselves in a tight labour market. In conjunction with the universities and further education colleges we have made considerable efforts to increase the supply of graduates and technicians in this sector of the labour force.

Mr Douglas: The Minister is aware of the need for financial commitment to the electronic training facilities in the north-west. Will funding be made available in the near future?

Dr Farren: I will have to plumb local knowledge to answer the question. I wonder if the Member is referring to Limivady College of Further Education. If he is, he will be aware that my Department is considering plans that include the provision of new facilities for training people in electrical trades.

Skills Audit (Down Area)

6. **Mr McGrady** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail what further progress has been made on the skills audit for the Down area; and to make a statement.

(AQO 1661/00)

Dr Farren: My officials met with the chief executive of Down District Council on 15 June to discuss a skills audit for the Down area. I understand that the meeting was very constructive and that a number of options were discussed. Officials are actively investigating how best to carry out such an audit and will shortly contact the Down District Council chief executive with detailed proposals.

Mr McGrady: I thank the Minister for his reply and for the progress being made in creating new high-technology jobs in the Down area through inward and indigenous investment.

Ongoing discussions about the skills audit between Down District Council and the Training and Employment Agency were mentioned. Can the Minister tell the House how many companies are involved in the audit? As far

as I am aware, the number of companies involved is quite small. Would it not be better to increase that number and extend interpretation of the audit to include software engineering and ICT in the Down/Belfast travel-to-work area?

Dr Farren: From my initial answer the Member will understand that the nature of the audit is currently under consideration. The meeting only took place on 15 June, so nothing has yet been finalised. The matter that Mr McGrady has raised will certainly be considered by officials in my own Department, by the Training and Employment Agency, and by members of Down District Council, who are already working together on this issue.

Lecturers' Salaries

7. **Dr Birnie** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to give his assessment of the adequacy of the salaries of lecturers in further education colleges. (AQO 1670/00)

Dr Farren: The terms and conditions of employment of lecturers in further education colleges are determined by the joint negotiating committee made up of representatives of college management and the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE), the lecturers' trade union.

Both sides are currently considering proposals to bring forward recommendations contained in a review of lecturers' salary scales that concluded that they have not risen as quickly as those of teachers in schools and universities.

In addition, I understand that a threshold agreement for lecturers at the top of their scale, similar to that in the schools sector, is being considered. I trust that these negotiations will have an agreed outcome.

Dr Birnie: I thank the Minister for his reply, which will give some encouragement to staff in a hard-pressed sector. Would the Minister agree that the way that pay scales have been structured in further education colleges has perhaps not provided an adequate career progression for such lecturing staff?

Dr Farren: It is not for the Minister to comment directly on the issue raised by the Member but rather to point to the fact that negotiations are now under way to deal with such matters. Insofar as the Department funds the further education sector, we have an interest in the outcome, but that interest keeps us at a remove and leaves it to the representatives of the colleges and the trade unions to work out the details of any future pay scale arrangements.

Individual Learning Accounts

8. **Ms Lewsley** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail

the number of people who have opened individual learning accounts in Northern Ireland.

(AQO 1675/00)

Dr Farren: Individual learning accounts (ILAs) continue to grow in popularity in Northern Ireland. From September 2000 to date, almost 34,000 people from Northern Ireland have opened such accounts, and 14,000 have already used them towards the costs of eligible courses. That has far surpassed our initial target of 17,500 for this year.

Ms Lewsley: Given that the number of people using the individual learning accounts has exceeded expectations, does the Minister envisage the amount of support each account can give to learners?

3.15 pm

Dr Farren: Individual learning accounts are provided under a general framework covering Great Britain as well as Northern Ireland, with some variations in each Administration. In Northern Ireland one of the main differences is that account holders taking computer courses are entitled to a discount of 80% — up to a maximum of £400 — as a special introductory offer. The maximum payment in Great Britain is £200.

Given the unexpectedly rapid uptake of accounts, and that in practice the average payment has been just over £200, I am now satisfied that the higher rate is no longer needed to stimulate usage of individual learning accounts here. Therefore, from 1 August the maximum incentive will be available at the British level. Any account holder who has booked a qualifying course before that date will continue to be entitled to the higher incentive.

Mr Davis: Will the Minister now take action to address the funding formula for further education colleges? That formula, through performance indicators, rewards only large full-time classes for 16- to 18-year-old students and does not encourage adult recruitment on a part-time or flexible basis, thus inhibiting improvements in adult literacy and numeracy demanded by the Moser Report.

Mr Speaker: I am not entirely clear that this supplementary relates to the question of individual learning accounts.

Dr Farren: It quite clearly does not. It refers to the funding formulae that apply to further education colleges. Even though I do have the answer, I am not sure whether, procedurally, I should provide it.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the Minister for clarifying this. One is sometimes hesitant to make a ruling on these matters, such is the complexity of further and higher education. On this occasion the Chair was correct. I have no doubt that the Minister will give an answer in writing at a later stage.

Mrs Nelis: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I applaud the Minister on the success of individual

learning accounts, particularly in relation to the upgrading of skills for the employed. I want to question the Minister about the disappointing uptake by the unemployed — only about 1·8%. Should the higher incentive stay in place to address skills upgrading among the unemployed to encourage them to open individual learning accounts?

Dr Farren: The general point on the incentive is that it is related to the actual cost of the course for which the individual learning account is being drawn down. Individual learning accounts are not designed primarily for the unemployed — New Deal and other programmes are more suitable for their needs. The main targets are those who have been reluctant to engage in adult learning, particularly those in low-skilled or part-time jobs who wish to enhance their skills and prospects. I hope, however, that those leaving New Deal and other programmes will be encouraged to take out an account and use it to progress and improve their skills further.

Student Finances

9. **Mrs Carson** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to give his assessment of the impact on the well-being of students in respect of the need for them to undertake part-time jobs to finance their studies. (AQO 1668/00)

Dr Farren: Undertaking part-time work is a feature of life for higher education students in many places, and it is certainly not a recent phenomenon. As a student myself — and that was not yesterday or the day before — I worked during the vacation and, indeed, during term time.

Research indicates that students working part-time can gain valuable work experience in addition to the financial benefits, which are probably the primary objective. Those working long hours may have difficulty, however, in keeping up with their academic commitments. We have had evidence from recent research regarding the impact of part-time work on those in their later school years — at sixth-form level — but we do not have the same amount of detail on the impact at university level in Northern Ireland. In general, it is a matter for students to balance the different aspects of their lives and, in particular, to maintain a focus on their studies rather than allowing part-time work to distract them from the prime purpose of being a student.

Mrs Carson: What services would the Department consider providing to students to reduce the stress they suffer while trying to balance their studies and their finances? Some American universities have a system through which they find employment for students. Would the Minister consider adopting such a scheme?

Dr Farren: Members will recall fairly frequent and lengthy discussions on the new financial support package for students. When I outlined that package I said that my Department, in conjunction with the National Union of

Students and the Union of Students in Ireland, is working on a programme of advice and information on university and student life. The programme will be directed at course applicants and current students. Students will be offered advice on how to manage their financial affairs and their approach to student life.

I trust that the provision of such advice will address some of the concerns that underlie the Member's question. I am familiar with work/study support programmes in American colleges, but I do not think that our colleges and universities have moved in that direction. Some features of such an approach exist at local level but not on the scale at which they operate across the Atlantic. However, if there are lessons there, perhaps we could encourage our colleges and universities to learn from them.

Mr J Kelly: Recent publicity highlighting the inability of students to sit exams because they could not pay their fees shows that, despite the fact that students are taking part-time jobs, student finance remains a fundamental issue that must be addressed.

Dr Farren: The matter has been addressed, and the Member is aware that the whole emphasis in my package was on helping students with their maintenance. The Member hardly needs to be reminded that almost 50% of our higher education students do not pay fees and a further 27% or 28% pay less than the full-fee contribution. The full-fee contribution is paid by only 22% of students.

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

It is regrettable that students find themselves in financial difficulties. I trust that when the new form of financial support begins to operate we will be seen to have addressed many of their problems. We will not have eliminated them all, but I like to think that we are moving in the right direction.

10. **Mr Byrne** asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail the number of meetings of the task force on employability and long-term unemployment that have taken place to date.

(AQO 1674/00)

Dr Farren: Three meetings of the task force on employability and long-term unemployment have taken place, and a schedule of monthly meetings, to run until April 2002, has been arranged.

In addition the task force has published a discussion document and has started a series of engagement meetings with organisations outside Government that have an interest in employability and may have a role to play in helping to reduce long-term unemployment.

Mr Byrne: How will the Minister ensure that as wide a range of views as possible will be taken on board, especially those of people working with the unemployed

and voluntary organisations that are experienced in dealing with the long-term unemployed?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Can the Minister please be brief?

Dr Farren: During the course of these engagement meetings we hope to meet all interested parties. A meeting took place last week involving representatives of major voluntary and community groups, among them the Organisation of the Unemployed: Northern Ireland. Future meetings will also include representatives from a similar background. Up to 300 organisations are on the list for initial circulation of information about the task force. We trust it will be possible to hear the views of all those organisations and others.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The time is up.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mrs Eileen Bell has advised us that she will be absent today. Question 3 standing in her name will therefore receive a written answer.

Multiple-Occupation Properties

1. **Mr Courtney** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline sanctions that are available to force landlords to bring properties of multiple occupation up to a habitable state. (AQO 1672/00)

The Minister for Social Development (Mr Morrow): The Housing Executive has the authority to inspect houses in multiple occupation to ensure that they are habitable. If any problems are identified, it has powers under articles 79 and 80 of the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1992 to take action to ensure that whatever work is necessary to bring a house in multiple occupation up to specified standards is carried out.

Mrs Courtney: The Minister is aware that some landlords do not fulfil their obligations. This causes great concern to many people. I had hoped that some other legislation could be enacted to force private landlords to take that responsibility. Perhaps the Minister would keep that under review.

Mr Morrow: We note the remarks made by Mrs Courtney and will give them proper consideration.

Mr Shannon: Are there adequate arrangements to ensure that safety standards in houses in multiple occupation are maintained?

Mr Morrow: The existing arrangements allow the Housing Executive to inspect houses in multiple occupation and to specify the improvements that might be necessary for better health and safety conditions. The Housing Executive has set specific standards that must be achieved. Those deal with issues such as facilities for the storage, preparation and cooking of food, the number of suitably

located water closets, the provision of an adequate number of suitably located fixed baths or showers and wash basins, an adequate means of escape from fire and other fire precautions. I am satisfied that these powers are sufficient and adequate.

Mrs Nelis: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. It is evident that the existing voluntary arrangement in respect of landlords' responsibility is not working. Does the Minister intend to introduce statutory legislation in respect of those responsibilities in the near future?

Mr Morrow: It is proposed that the new Housing Bill will include provisions to allow the Housing Executive to introduce a mandatory scheme for licensing houses in multiple occupation. This will involve a registration scheme, and only those properties which meet an acceptable standard will be permitted to register. This will further enhance the Housing Executive's powers to ensure that houses in multiple occupation meet the necessary standards. If Mrs Nelis, or any other Member, knows of a particular house that concerns them, I want to hear about it. It will be thoroughly investigated to ensure that all the regulations are being carried out.

3.30 pm

Social Inclusion

2. **Mr M Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the steps he is taking to achieve social inclusion in Northern Ireland. (AQO 1659/00)

Mr Morrow: Achieving social inclusion is a high priority for my Department. The steps that I am taking include action in urban regeneration and community development, housing, social security and child support. They are set out in my Department's corporate plan and the New TSN action plan report 'Making it Work', copies of which are available in the Assembly Library.

Mr M Murphy: Does the Minister accept that the policy of the DUP gives poor leadership for his Department — *[Interruption]*.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Murphy, you are out of order.

Mr Hamilton: What action is the Minister taking to address the social exclusion caused by the massive discrepancy between the funding available for Ulster-Scots heritage projects and that available for projects focused on the Gaelic-Irish community?

Mr Deputy Speaker: That is not directly relevant.

Mr R Hutchinson: Have any additional resources been made available to achieve social inclusion?

Mr Morrow: Yes, there are considerable additional resources. In the current financial year the Department is allocating an additional £950,000 to district councils to support local community infrastructure through the community services programme. That represents an

increase of about 40% to the current funding of £2.4 million and will strengthen local communities, increase community participation, and promote social inclusion through the stimulation and support of community groups, community activity and local advice services.

We are also making available £600,000 under the advice community initiative to projects aimed at rebuilding a sense of community by encouraging and supporting all forms of community involvement. Work has already begun on a small number of demonstration and research projects that will focus on identifying and reducing the barriers to the involvement of a number of groups, including minority ethnic communities and disabled people, with the aim of tackling problems with weak infrastructure in urban and rural settings.

Referrals to Medical Examiners

4. **Ms Lewsley** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of people claiming DLA and/or incapacity benefit who are referred to independent medical examiners. (AQO 1669/00)

Mr Morrow: Between 1 April 2000 and 31 March 2001, 13,750 medical examinations were carried out in connection with disability living allowance claims. In the same period, 42,100 people who claimed incapacity benefit were referred for examination.

Ms Lewsley: Is there a maximum time limit within which a decision on each case must be made? It is unacceptable that some claimants must wait for up to nine months for a decision.

Mr Morrow: I dealt with a similar question at the last Question Time. I understand that there has been considerable delay in the processing of some cases. We have taken on additional staff and resources to deal with the backlog. Once we have cleared the backlog, we will be in a winning position. We hope that very shortly we will be able to deal with applicants as they come in, rather than having a backlog. The Member will see a significant improvement in the whole service in the not too distant future.

Mr Hilditch: How many doctors are employed by the Social Security Agency to carry out examinations?

Mr Morrow: As I said in reply to the previous question, we have taken on additional resources.

The agency currently employs some 157 medical examiners, 37 of whom are trained solely for disability living allowance, and the remainder are trained across all benefits. Currently, an additional nine doctors are in training.

Urban and Rural Communities (Social and Economic Needs)

5. **Mr McGrady** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail his plans to carry out an assessment

into the social and economic needs of urban and rural communities; and to make a statement. (AQO 1660/00)

Mr Morrow: My Department will introduce new community support plans for the district councils' community services programme for implementation in April 2002. Communities will benefit through better assessment of their needs, better targeting of resources, improved use of community facilities and support for more local community groups.

My Department has also drawn up strategy proposals for neighbourhood renewal throughout Northern Ireland, the core aim of which is the regeneration of neighbourhoods, targeting those communities experiencing the most serious economic and social deprivation.

Mr McGrady: I thank the Minister for a very encouraging reply. I am sure that he will agree with me that many towns and villages lack the vitality and social infrastructure that would enable them to develop economically and socially, particularly for the next generation. In view of the support plans and strategy that he has referred to, would he not think it advisable to undertake an audit of these deficiencies on a district-by-district basis, so that the strategy, planning and finance could be better geared to those in greatest need, and who, indeed, identified the need in the first place?

Mr Morrow: I assure the Member and the House that there will be a targeting of needs in relation to neighbourhood renewal. My Department will carry out a widespread consultation. The decision on the allocation of scarce resources will be largely determined by information such as the impending publication of the Noble indices that update and refine the Robson indices of areas of multiple deprivation.

The point that the Member makes is a very good one. I will take it on board and look again at the question in Hansard. If I feel I have not given a full and frank answer, I will write to the Member with more information.

Mr Armstrong: Will the Minister outline what steps he has taken to address rural poverty and social exclusion due to the economic crisis in farming, and does he consider it enough?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am reluctant to accept that as a supplementary question.

Mr Kane: Can the Minister inform the House about the level of expenditure incurred by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive with regard to the spate of attacks on Housing Executive tenants?

Mr Morrow: The short answer is "No". The long answer is that I will endeavour to obtain the figures for the Member and will come back to him with the full answer in writing in the very near future.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (BEST VALUE) BILL

First Stage

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Foster): I beg leave to lay before the Assembly a Bill [NIA 19/00] to make provision imposing on district councils requirements relating to economy, efficiency and effectiveness; and for connected purposes.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Bill will be put on the list of future pending business until a date for its Second Stage has been determined.

BUDGET (NO 2) BILL

Consideration Stage

Mr Deputy Speaker: No amendments to the Bill have been tabled. I therefore propose, by leave of the Assembly, to group the six clauses of the Bill, followed by the three schedules, and the long title.

Clauses 1 to 6 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedules 1 to 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Long title agreed to.

Mr Deputy Speaker:

That concludes the Consideration Stage of the Budget (No 2) Bill. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

ASSEMBLY: SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Campbell): I beg to move

That Standing Order 10(6) be suspended for Monday 2 July 2001.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Campbell, there is some confusion at the Table as to whether you said “moved” or “not moved”.

Mr Campbell: Mr Deputy Speaker, on the understanding that some 13 Members wish to speak, I begged to move the motion.

Question put and agreed to. (Cross-community support).

Resolved:

That Standing Order 10(6) be suspended for Monday 2 July 2001.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Campbell): I beg to move

That this Assembly takes note of progress on the formulation of the regional development strategy.

I am delighted to have this opportunity to report progress on the formulation of the regional development strategy (RDS). I thank the 10 Statutory Committees for their valuable contributions. I have sought to reflect their views, as far as possible, in the latest text of the strategy that I have made available to Members.

Before I detail some of the key themes in the strategy, it would be worthwhile by way of background to set out briefly the approach that has been taken. Essentially the strategy has been prepared with a commitment to achieving a strong, spatially balanced economy; a healthy environment; and an inclusive society that tackles inequalities across the socio-economic spectrum.

The promotion of sustainable development is a key theme running through the document. However, sustainability is much more than a commitment to putting the environment at the heart of policies. It is also much more than achieving an optimal approach to sustaining physical development that makes use of our existing infrastructure. Hand in hand with that must go a commitment to sustaining communities. That is why social and economic cohesion is at the heart of the strategy.

Long-term planning is a complex process. Reaching agreement on the shape and content of the strategy has taken time — some people would say an inordinate length of time. I would argue that it is better for that unprecedented consultation to have taken place. That investment has helped set the right long-term directions for the future development of Northern Ireland.

In the course of the consultation exercise, meetings were held with all district councils; workshops were held with approximately 100 groups; and a university-led community consortium held conferences involving 400 community groups. Separate conferences and seminars were held on themes relating to the economy, rural issues and youth. Many meetings were held with individual Departments, agencies and a wide variety of groups as well as individuals. The team was also advised by a panel of international experts.

3.45 pm

The draft strategy came under the scrutiny of public examination — the first of this type to be held in Northern Ireland. That provided a further opportunity to help build consensus on the way forward for the future development of Northern Ireland. The public examination and the assistance of the independent panel

enabled the regional strategic framework to be improved and strengthened in the best interests of future development.

The draft strategy was also considered in great detail by the Committee for Regional Development and the other Statutory Committees. Once again, I thank the members of those Committees for the way in which they went about their task and for the valuable and helpful contributions that they made to help me finalise the document.

At this stage it is normal practice for the Chairperson of the relevant Committee to lead off. However, the Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development, Alban Maginness, is absent today due to the death of his mother. I tender my consolation and condolences to Mr Maginness, and I am sure all Members join with me in that regard.

Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Campbell: The strategy is firmly based on the principle of securing balanced regional development to assist all communities to realise their potential. The consultation has been inclusive and participative. Today represents a key stage in that process in allowing the House to offer its views on the formulation of the strategy.

The strategy provides the spatial context for strengthening the competitiveness of the regional economy, tackling social and economic disadvantage and protecting and enhancing Northern Ireland's physical, natural and man-made assets. It provides a context for housing, transport, air and water quality, energy and waste strategies. It will provide for an optimal framework for infrastructure providers in the public and private sectors. It also provides the important context against which development plans will be produced and against which public and private investment decisions relating to land use will be made.

I will highlight some of the key themes of the strategy and comment on my responses to areas of particular concern to Members.

An issue that has exercised almost every Member is the need to set a challenging target for the development of housing in urban areas; in short, a target for brownfield development. There is a strong consensus that the Department for Regional Development should be more ambitious than the public examination suggested when it endorsed the principle of a drive for more brownfield housing.

I have listened carefully to the concerns expressed by Members. The way forward outlined in the strategy responds in a positive, balanced and practical way to those concerns. We should seek to double the recent levels of development in urban areas between now and 2010. The level of housing development in urban areas over the past 10 years has been around 25% to 30%. The strategy signals that that level is inconsistent with the policy objectives that we set ourselves; we should

aim to double that over the next 10 years. That will set an ambitious regional target of 60% up to the first review in 2010 without the risk of town cramming.

This target will be subject to monitoring, evaluation, and a five-year review in the light of the latest housing data. Ultimately the figures that will be achieved for individual settlements will be determined by urban capacity studies that will take place through the development plan process. This approach will be copper-fastened by the sequential approach in the development plan process. The search sequence will focus firstly on the reuse of previously developed land and buildings and consideration of undeveloped land within the existing urban area before consideration outside the urban footprint. This is the strongest policy mechanism for preventing the previous trend toward greenfield development.

The test means that, in selecting sites to meet an established housing need, the brownfield sites will be allocated before the greenfield sites are considered. I hope that the House will agree that this is a clear signal that we are serious about this issue.

I now wish to turn to two other issues on the theme of housing; overzoning and affordable housing. Both issues were raised by a number of Committees.

I listened carefully to both sides of the argument about overzoning. I have come down in favour of a modest allowance for overzoning, but this will be the exception rather than the rule. Therefore, I propose to make provision in the strategy for a limited level of overzoning up to a maximum of 10% as a contingency in those situations where a potential land difficulty is likely to arise.

I stress that the preferred approach is to identify possible constraints in advance and proceed on alternative lands without overzoning. I believe that this approach is broadly consistent with the line taken by the public examination and sensibly avoids the risk of unnecessary litigation.

I turn now to affordable housing. I want to refer to this issue as it was highlighted by the Committee for Social Development. I have made it clear in the strategy that there is a commitment to make provision for affordable housing particularly, but not exclusively, for first-time buyers and those on lower incomes.

The strategy encourages the development of balanced local communities. It is crucial that we ensure that new housing developments help secure a better social mix by maintaining a balanced planning linkage where needed between market and social housing. The creation of large areas of housing of similar characteristics will not be acceptable. Therefore, the strategy will promote social housing targeted to meet identified needs and require an appropriate provision in larger developments.

In the time remaining I wish to address four other areas in the strategy. I want to say a few words about the legal context of the regional development strategy. Under current law the Department of the Environment and the Department for Social Development are required to ensure that any area plan or development scheme is consistent with the strategy when it is formulated. Concerns have been raised that “consistent with” might introduce an unnecessary and undesirable inflexibility into the planning system.

Following receipt of an opinion from senior legal counsel, I have decided to promote amending legislation that would substitute a requirement that development plans and schemes must be in general conformity with the regional development strategy. I am satisfied that the proposed amendment, which I intend to sponsor in the next sitting, preserves the authority of the regional development strategy.

I want to turn to rural matters. The strategy is as much about rural areas as it is about urban areas. Rural communities must have the opportunity to realise their full potential, to develop in their own right, and to contribute more broadly to a prosperous Northern Ireland.

The strategy signals the importance of the work on the regional transportation strategy. The strategy’s vision is to have a modern, sustainable, safe transportation system which benefits society, the economy and the environment, and which actively contributes to social inclusion and everyone’s quality of life. The regional transportation strategy will be a daughter document to the regional development strategy, serving to implement a key strand of the strategy.

In the chapter on implementation I have tried to avoid being overly prescriptive or setting up new structural or legal arrangements that would cut across other departmental responsibilities. My approach is founded on four key principles. First, Departments must work together if the strategy is to be delivered coherently. Secondly, it will not be delivered without the buy-in of local key stakeholders, by which I mean district councils and the new emerging local strategic partnership arrangements. Thirdly, I recognise that the Government alone will not deliver this strategy; there is a major role for the private sector in our future development. Fourthly, our approach, by necessity, has to be sufficiently flexible to adapt and respond to change.

The underpinning principle of the strategy is that it must be seen to relate to people’s needs, now and in the future. Every part of the country, urban and rural, must be able to relate to the strategy. I believe that the strategy does precisely that.

I express my gratitude to the team of officials that prepared the strategy. The team leader was deservedly awarded the CBE for his tremendous service to

planning. That award reflects the high esteem in which he is held.

I hope that Members agree that significant progress has been made towards the formulation of the regional development strategy. I welcome this opportunity to appraise Members of the stage reached and to seek assurance from the Assembly that the strategy is soundly based and provides the basis for its formulation.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development (Mr McFarland): Unfortunately, the Chairperson of the Regional Development Committee is unable to be here because of a family bereavement. I tender both my sympathy and that of the Committee to him at this time.

Before responding to some of the issues addressed by the Minister, I extend my thanks and the thanks of the Committee to the Minister and his officials. In particular I would like to add to the Minister’s comments and extend my thanks to departmental officials for the manner in which they have so ably taken forward this major project. They have made themselves available to the Committee on numerous occasions, sometimes at very short notice. They have responded positively to the views and comments of all the Committees, and this is clearly reflected in the latest draft of the strategy.

The Department for Regional Development is to be commended for the unprecedented level of consultation that took place. The support of a panel of international experts, the public examination and the appointment of an independent panel has ensured a rigorous examination that has taken into account a wide spectrum of views, right across Northern Ireland. The extent of the consultation process reflects the importance of the regional development strategy to Northern Ireland. I hope that this extensive consultation process, which has taken account of many different interests, will help to ensure that the strategy is successfully implemented.

The document produced by the Department sets out the proposed strategy for the future development of Northern Ireland to 2025. The proposals aim to provide and sustain a high quality of life for all citizens in the twenty-first century.

As stated in the Programme for Government, this will be the framework for tackling the deficiencies of our infrastructure and for helping the overall development of our society.

4.00 pm

It cannot be overstressed that the framework is not simply for the Department for Regional Development but for all Departments, as it will impact on a wide range of areas, such as environment, housing, rural development, tourism, business and employment opportunities. It is a framework that must overarch the work of all Departments. This strategy represents a golden opportunity

to create a vibrant and cohesive society with a strong local economy, supported by excellent public services throughout Northern Ireland.

As the Minister rightly points out, a key concern of many of the Committees was the issue of the development of housing in existing urban areas known as brownfield sites. My Committee and others were greatly concerned that there was no clear target for brownfield development. Discussions on this topic went on until the eleventh hour. I met with the Minister and officials on 25 June, and officials attended the Committee meeting last Wednesday to discuss the matter further.

The Committee members pushed the Department very hard on this issue. It is vital to send a clear message to developers and to make the rules clear to planners, that brownfield options must be explored and exhausted before consideration is given to building on greenfield sites. In Belfast this means utilising brownfield sites and then, according to the strategy, developing out through the Lagan valley and the M2/Glengormley corridor. This is crucial to ensure that our cities and towns are regenerated and made much more attractive. The regional development strategy sets the rules for future planning, and it must be right.

I am grateful to the Minister and his officials for the efforts that they have made, within tight deadlines, to revise the text of the document on the issue of brownfield sites. A target of 60% is now specified. That will be revisited in light of the urban capacity studies being carried out by the Department of the Environment.

I urge developers and planners to abide by the rules laid down in the document. Future local area plans will be based on this document. I also strongly urge my Colleague, the Minister of the Environment, to quickly process the urban capacity studies which will provide a database of all brownfield sites.

I trust that the Planning Division will take account of all brownfield sites, regardless of size, so that an accurate figure is reached. It is to be hoped that this will lead to figures in excess of 60% being achieved for urban development to accommodate the 160,000 new dwellings required over the next 15 years. I caution against limiting the scope of the database. I understand that there are some proposals to include only those sites with more than a 10-house capacity. This will suit the larger developer, because he will sooner get out onto the greenfield sites. The parameters of the database must be brought down, or it will not identify all sites available for brownfield development, particularly in the large cities.

I would like to touch upon the issue of overzoning. This was another area that exercised the Regional Development Committee. In the past, developers have been allowed to overzone a housing development by as much as 25% in some cases. The Committee was concerned that developers were treating overzoning as a

standard planning practice. The major consequence of this practice has been sizeable encroachments onto the green belt. It was also noted that in England there was no allowance for overzoning. Following discussions with the Minister and his officials, the ability of developers to overzone has been greatly reduced. Although the Minister has limited overzoning to a maximum level of 10%, I am reassured that he regards this as the exception, rather than the rule. In the light of this, however, I ask the Minister to liaise with his ministerial Colleague, Mr Foster, to ensure that stringent rules are put in place to assess developers' requests for overzoning.

The Minister also referred to the need to provide affordable housing for first-time buyers and those on low incomes. This is to be welcomed. There has been a growing trend among developers to target the more affluent areas, as a means of maximising returns. We need to be conscious of developing a cohesive and inclusive society. This can be partly addressed by seeking to provide those at the lower end of the social scale with affordable and accessible housing.

I am pleased that the Minister acknowledged that a balance must be struck between rural and urban development. Indeed, the regional development strategy will undoubtedly play a critical role in rural development. Provincial towns and their rural hinterland are heavily dependent on good physical infrastructure and an efficient and effective public transport system in order to support local commerce and allow businesses to remain competitive and continue to grow.

Many Members felt that too strong an emphasis was placed on the Belfast metropolitan area, and references to other areas were simply a bolt-on to the plans for the Greater Belfast area. The Committee for Regional Development was of the view that the strategy must provide opportunities for all parts of our community and that there must be balanced development across all of Northern Ireland.

I am pleased to report to the Assembly that the Department responded positively to the Committees' comments and subsequently made amendments to the document, including significant improvements to the section on Londonderry as the regional city for the north-west. There was also a notably stronger emphasis on developing the major provincial towns as main hubs, providing key public services and employment opportunities for both townspeople and the rural communities.

I caution, however, that the success of rural development, as with all other areas of the strategy, is dependent on how the strategy is implemented. That was a major concern for the Committee. There is little point in developing a plan if it cannot be successfully implemented. Other Departments must be fully committed to the strategy and play their role in its implementation. To this end, the Committee recommended that ministerial weight should

be given to those tasked with implementation. I am pleased to note that an interdepartmental group, to be chaired by the Minister for Regional Development, will be set up.

I note the Minister's intention to bring forward amending legislation, whereby development plans and schemes must be in general conformity with the regional development strategy, and his reassurance that that amendment will not dilute the authority of the regional development strategy. Given that all Departments, particularly the Department of the Environment, must fully embrace the regional development strategy, I seek assurance from the Minister that that will be carefully monitored and areas of non-compliance speedily addressed.

As a general plea, I urge the Minister and the Department to implement the strategy promptly, and for all other Departments, district councils and all others involved to fully and honestly play their roles in its implementation. I also urge the Department to press on with development and implementation of the regional transportation strategy, which will complement the regional development strategy and, indeed, is vital to it.

We must all look very critically at how the necessary funding for the regional development strategy is to be found. The Committee for Regional Development has examined the position report issued by the Executive Committee and will write to the Committee for Finance and Personnel on implications. It is clear that alternative means of funding must be found to ensure that the improvements to our roads and water infrastructure, and the transport system, can go ahead. The Committee for Regional Development will be carefully monitoring and examining progress on that issue.

Finally, I thank all Committees that provided constructive comments on the draft regional strategy. On behalf of the Chairperson, I want to pay particular tribute to the members of the Committee for Regional Development who have painstakingly examined and studied the various drafts of the regional development strategies. They have made very useful and constructive comments and suggestions to guide and advise the Department so that we now have a strategy that provides a vital framework for the planned future development of our country over the next 25 years and beyond. I support the motion.

Mr Byrne: I welcome the opportunity to debate the Department for Regional Development's draft regional development strategy and commend the Minister for bringing forward the motion. The devising of a regional development strategy has been a complex process and will be of fundamental importance in addressing the needs of Northern Ireland, which has experienced uneven and unequal development over the last 30 years or more. That uneven development has led to social exclusion, which has underscored the political upheaval experienced within the restrictive political and geographic boundaries of this region. With devolution, the Assembly now has

the opportunity to deliver real change to Northern Ireland and to implement a sustainable and comprehensive regional development strategy that can, as the Programme for Government states, make a difference to the everyday lives of our people.

I welcome the draft regional development strategy's recognition that the promotion of social cohesion, together with economic development, is of critical importance along with the promotion of equality of opportunity and spatial equity throughout the region as a whole.

The key objectives of any comprehensive regional development strategy should include the following: balanced and sustainable growth; social and economic inclusion; protection of the physical, natural and man-made assets of the region; and the provision of a spatial framework for the development of key public services. All those factors are addressed, and, importantly, the regional development strategy recognises the needs of both urban and rural communities. The spatial development strategy promotes a balance between urban and rural development and takes into consideration the environment and the quality of life. It is of fundamental importance that urban and rural development must co-exist and complement each other. Increased urbanisation should not be regarded as the primary economic driver.

The concept of decentralisation of services is addressed in the RDS, and that is welcome. However, the Executive should lead by example. Entire sections of Government Departments should be relocated from Belfast to what the RDS designates as the main urban hubs. Such a policy would help us to achieve more balanced growth beyond the Greater Belfast area. Overall, the regional development strategy is innovative and dynamic. It addresses many of our concerns about issues covered in earlier drafts, and contains many positive proposals relating to urban and rural development, transportation strategy, housing needs, environmental concerns and the tourism infrastructure.

Transport policy should include the core principles of equality, choice, efficiency and accessibility, as well as taking into consideration environmental concerns and public safety. The regional development strategy takes an innovative look at how to obtain the right mix of private and public transport. The strategy recognises that, if economic development and social inclusion are to be encouraged, Northern Ireland needs an integrated transportation system. I am pleased to find that the strategy contains some new proposals for improving public transport. However, it is a long-term policy, with targets set over a period of 10 years. More needs to be done in the medium term to enhance public transport and make it a viable option for commuters. We all await the regional transportation strategy because of its vital role in enabling the regional development strategy to be realised.

The commitments to improve cross-border road and rail links are also welcome. It is important that the

transport infrastructure be upgraded in an all-Ireland and European context. The measures to upgrade the roads in rural Northern Ireland are long overdue, and I am pleased to read that the strategy proposes a more integrated approach to transportation in rural areas. That will improve accessibility, with the objective of sustaining rural communities.

There was a welcome acknowledgement in the strategy that different parts of the region require different planning processes. Developments in the Belfast travel-to-work area must be more constrained. I am from a rural area and, therefore, have not been heavily involved in the discussions on brownfield development. However, I welcome the fact that the Minister has set more challenging targets for brownfield development in Belfast.

The expansion of the North's links with the rest of the world is of key importance for the economic development of the region. Our airports and seaports must be developed. The ports at Warrenpoint and Lisahally provide an important service to their respective hinterlands.

The regional development strategy is an imaginative document, which has the capacity to address the problems associated with uneven development in the region. Its proposals are not rigid and can be adapted and tailored as circumstances require to ensure that the principles of equality and social justice remain at its core. During the consultation period, my party suggested that the regional development strategy should be reviewed every five years to assess its success in meeting its objectives and assess the need for any adjustments. We welcome the Minister's commitment in that regard.

We welcome the fact that district councils will be consulted in the coming months on how they can play an active role in the implementation of the strategy.

As 'Shaping Our Future' states, it is vital that we obtain a more joined-up and co-ordinated approach that meets the needs of local communities, and we welcome the commitment given to participate in the decision-making process. In the past, the North did not have any proper development proposals that sought to achieve social equity as well as economic regeneration.

4.15 pm

It is important that the Department implements a sustainable regional development strategy with the capacity and flexibility to meet the developing needs of the region and to improve the quality of life for everyone in Northern Ireland irrespective of location or class.

I welcome what the Minister said about implementation and trying to promote stronger co-operation between the Department for Regional Development and the Department of the Environment. That is vital as we try to realise implementation over the next 20 years. Decentralisation was flagged up and it is contained in

the document in a positive way that will be good for the entire region.

Mr P Robinson: I congratulate the Minister for Regional Development in bringing the draft to the Assembly. In particular, I endorse the remarks made concerning the Warrenpoint and Londonderry ports. I had the pleasure of touring both ports, and I saw the valuable work that they do and the great potential for development there. I hope that none of us will forget the Belfast port — how could we? The House will return to that subject before too long when it looks at the future of the port and the surrounding land that could be developed.

I join the Minister in his words of praise and commendation for those who were closely associated with the preparation of the draft strategy; the team leader, in particular. From my sojourn in that Department I know about the valuable work that he and his team have done and how reliable they are. I congratulate him on being awarded the CBE. Many people will see that as a well-deserved honour, and I am sure that the Assembly congratulates him.

We must not forget the director of the regional plan team who was also closely associated with the preparation of the report, and the deputy secretary who had an overseeing role. From my days in the Department I know that the permanent secretary was very supportive of the project; he put a lot of enthusiasm into it and gave a great deal of encouragement to those who were involved. They will all be delighted — even to simply get it out of their office — to see it come to this stage of preparation and fruition.

It is important that the Assembly recognise the considerable work that went into producing the pictures and text in front of us and the work carried out by the independent panel that consulted perhaps more widely than for any previous consultation on Government policy. It provided a report that I was happy to receive when I was Minister for that Department and am happy to welcome now.

It might be worthwhile, while I am in the praising mood, to mention the Committee for Regional Development. I am sure that the Minister benefited from its work to the same extent as I did. The Committee provided me with valuable advice about the plan, as I am sure it did for the Minister, and it has made its mark on the draft that was produced.

I want to deal with two issues that seem to have changed from when I was more intimately involved with the preparation of the plan. I would like to know the Department's thinking on these matters. First, there is the status of the report. There had been a legal basis for the report, which is set out on page three of the draft. The Strategic Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 requires Northern Ireland Departments to

“have regard to the regional development strategy”

in exercising any functions in relation to development. In particular, planning policy, development plans and development schemes prepared by the Department of the Environment and the Department for Social Development are required in future to be

“consistent with the regional development strategy.”

The report says that this means that in practice they should be in broad harmony with the strategic objectives and policies of the regional development strategy.

I note that an attempt has been made in that “addendum” to give some type of definition to the legislation, which says

“consistent with the regional development strategy”.

However, page 200 of the report, which covers the legal framework, states — as the Minister did — that we can expect proposals to be brought before the Assembly in the near future, if the Assembly survives. The proposals will promote amending legislation, which would substitute the original wording with a requirement that development plans

“must be in general conformity with the regional development strategy”.

I am sure that lawyers could make a meal out of the difference between the words “consistent with” and “in broad conformity with”. As a layman, I would be happy if the Minister told me why it is necessary to bring in amending legislation to change the wording. Are people unhappy with their Departments acting consistently with the regional development strategy? Why have we produced what seems to be a more flexible or loose approach to the strategy? I would like to know the reasoning behind the slight of hand in the draft. It may be that there is no major reason behind it — alarm bells may be ringing unnecessarily.

The second issue, raised by the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee, concerns brownfield sites. The most significant policy statement in the regional development strategy deals with the issue of brownfield and greenfield development. Anyone who has taken a careful interest throughout the process will be aware of the evolution of the strategy in that regard. The Regional Development Committee is correct in drawing attention to such a key issue.

As a Member for a Belfast constituency, I see the absolute necessity of revitalising the inner-city parts of Belfast. Even the middle of the city needs to be revitalised. I am sure that Members can advance similar cases for more rural areas. The public examination recommended 40% brownfield development. The latest graphs show a target of 60%, but the target is dependent on the urban capacity studies.

I welcome the direction of the policy aspiration. However, I am not convinced about how it advances the

brownfield site case to have a target of 40% or 60%. I suspect it is more likely to be used in areas as a maximum rather than a target. For example, what argument would be advanced if, in a town somewhere in Northern Ireland, they can produce brownfield sites representing 80% of the requirement? Would people simply stay at the figure of 60%, rather than go beyond it? Under the draft, they might have to stop at 60%, but I am sure that that was not the intention of the report. The House can agree that we should strive to encourage as much brownfield development as possible. That would be consistent with concerns that many of us have about town cramming.

As a representative of a local government borough, I am appalled by the number of applications for high-density apartment developments, almost invariably to be built in existing residential areas where one or two houses will be knocked down with perhaps 10 or 20 being built in their place.

There is a danger that putting a quota on brownfield development will force the planning department towards town cramming. However, brownfield development is good not only because it helps to regenerate inner- and middle-city areas, but it breathes new life into areas that have become run-down and dilapidated over the years. It offers those areas a fresh start and revitalisation for communities.

Brownfield development also brings an economic boost to shopkeepers in inner- and middle-city areas who must vie with the out-of-town shopping centres and major supermarket developments that have eaten into the retail market. It is a more sustainable form of development and enables the provision of a more effective public transport system.

A key difficulty we face in encouraging people to get out of their cars and onto public transport is land-use pattern. That has made the provision of an effective public transport system almost impossible. Northern Ireland is a society that has two and a half times as many road miles as the rest of the UK, and disparate settlement patterns are not easily accommodated by any public transport system.

The strategy will not solve all our problems, but it is a start. Over the next 30 years it will give us an opportunity to make a difference to some of the problems that have been created over the past 30 years. That is why land-use planning is so important.

I am delighted that we now have a strategic framework for Northern Ireland which will soon be backed by the Belfast metropolitan area plan and the other area plans so that we can move forward strategically on planning matters. For too long planning applications for major developments have come forward on a piecemeal basis, often decided by article 31 inquiries that form no part of the overall planning strategy but rather are developer led.

However, I am concerned that the percentage figure is being submitted. Regardless of what the urban capacity study brings forward as available brownfield sites, should we not use the maximum number of sites, no matter what that number might be? We should tie ourselves to the outcome of the urban capacity study rather than to an artificial or aspirational figure. The Committee — and I suspect the Minister — has made it very clear that the aspiration is to use the maximum number of sites under the urban capacity study. Can the Minister tell me the advantage of putting a percentage figure into the draft, as opposed to a requirement, that the planners operate on the maximum number of sites in the urban capacity study?

Finally, I would like to alert the Minister to something. Every Member of the House has probably received a letter from the Construction Employers Federation (it arrived with general Assembly correspondence). For those of us who have the instinctive ability to read between the lines, it is fairly clear that in that communication the potential for legal challenge is being pointed up, should the Minister depart from the procedures that have been laid down.

Is the Minister satisfied that if he departs from the panel's report in this way, that he will not find that the courts, as opposed to the Assembly, will decide the report? The construction industry may well say that it was not consulted about the change. What steps can he take to ensure that the primacy for the future of development is with the Assembly rather than with the courts?

4.30 pm

Mr McNamee: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom cupla pointe gearr a dhéanamh i dtaobh an rúin. I want to make a few brief points on the draft regional development strategy. At the outset I have to say that I am somewhat concerned about the unfortunate timing of the debate. This document sets out the strategic framework for the development of this part of Ireland for the next 25 years. It comes to the Assembly when some people are in recess mode or in resignation mode, and the importance of this document has been overshadowed by other events today. There might have been a more appropriate time for this matter to be debated.

This is an important document, and it will have inter-departmental consequences. It will be an overarching strategy, which will guide the strategies of individual Departments in relation to housing and other development, transportation, the environment and economic development. Given this, I recommend that all Members consider this the final form of the document and take on board its content. As a strategic document it is significant, for it will influence the shaping of this region for the next 25 years.

It is clear from the Minister's contribution and from discussions we have had with departmental officials

over the last few months that they have taken on board the views of the Regional Development Committee and of other Committees that contributed to the consultation on the document. Each of the issues raised by the Committee during the consultation has been listened to and dealt with in the redrafting of the document. As a member of the Regional Development Committee, I welcome the praise and thanks that the Minister and other Members have expressed to the Committee.

One of the issues raised at the outset was the sense of imbalance in the initial draft of the document with its focus on the Belfast metropolitan area and the city of Derry, as opposed to the rural regions of the North. The document now indicates that there will be a balanced approach to the entire region. In identifying the key transport corridors and the regional centres and rural hubs, it has addressed concerns about the overemphasis on the Belfast metropolitan area as opposed to the rural areas. In stating that, while the document sets out to promote equality of life and availability of services to everyone, we have to bear in mind that two thirds of the population of this region live in smaller towns and the countryside.

The section on transportation addresses the existing rail network provision, while the overall aim of the document is to provide a vision of development in the next 25 years. The rail network in the Belfast metropolitan area and the key links between Belfast and Derry, and Belfast and Dublin, are examined. However, I am disappointed that, although this is a vision document, it does not deal with the further development and expansion of the rail network between, for instance, Portadown, Armagh, Dungannon, Omagh, Strabane and Derry.

In recent months a significant part of the Committee's time has been spent in establishing appropriate levels of brownfield site development and discussing the overzoning which has taken place in area plans. There was an initial concern that the Belfast metropolitan area was being overemphasised. However, that area has — and will continue to have — the largest population and the highest level of economic activity in the region, and its development is important to the whole region. At present Belfast metropolitan area is expanding, but the city centre is declining, and much of that centre is relatively underpopulated. A target for the development of brownfield sites is needed to deal with this. I welcome the Minister's statement that there needs to be a clear signal in regard to the development of brownfield sites.

When the land database has been completed and assessed, there will need to be a much more ambitious target for the Belfast metropolitan area than would be feasible or achievable in any other urban centre in the region. We will need to revisit this matter when the land database is completed and when we are assessing the potential in that field.

The document is strategy-based, and it will only be successful if it is effectively implemented. The Minister proposed the introduction of amending legislation to create a requirement that other Departments' policies be "in general conformity" rather than consistent with the regional development strategy. This amendment is designed to create more flexibility in the planning system. I accept that point, but I hope that the term "must be in general conformity" will not weaken the basic strategy inherent in the document.

An interdepartmental steering group of officials, chaired by the Minister, to monitor the progress of the strategy's implementation, is proposed. The group will report annually to the Assembly, and I am sure that the Minister for Regional Development and the officials on this steering group at any given time will be very capable. However, I hope that during the monitoring process, there will be ongoing consultation with other Committees and Ministers on the implementation of the strategy.

I thank the departmental officials who had to endure the many questions raised by Committee members, who were not prepared to accept woolly answers. The officials considered our concerns and returned to the Committee several times before producing their final draft.

Mr Ervine: There is much to commend the strategy document, and for that I praise the Minister and his officials. However, I have some concerns. There is little point in repeating what other Members have said, but I concur with the points that Mr Peter Robinson and Mr McNamee made about how determined we must be to see the strategy implemented.

I have a couple of difficulties with the strategy. I do not believe that it adequately defines the requirements — I emphasise the word "requirements" — of our society with regard to greenfield and brownfield development. The Minister has the capacity to create a new ethos. I have said that before. Rather than go round counting brownfield sites and the number of buildings that might be erected on such sites, we should be proactive in the development and creation of brownfield sites.

We should encourage developers to believe that there is a genuine opportunity and that they should use brownfield sites because they will have to wait a long time for a greenfield site. We have not addressed the matter fully. The strategy document says that the proportion of housing development in urban areas should be double the current level of 25-30%. That means 50% to, at most, 60%. In that respect, the document does not set out a clear indicator or indicate a decisive, determined attitude on the part of the Minister and the Assembly. It is not enough.

Vehicular travel is up by 3%, although we have a policy of asking people to use public transport, to use bicycles or to walk. Brownfield sites are already on transport corridors, which would ensure that people have ample opportunity to avail themselves of the daily services that

pass by their door, street or avenue. There is much to commend the strategy, and I do not want to be too churlish, but I must flag up the fact that that issue will be raised repeatedly.

Overzoning will disrupt the percentage balance between brownfield and greenfield development. I want someone to do the mathematics and tell me that we will maintain the balance between brownfield and greenfield sites at the rate that the Minister and the Assembly would like. We are not likely to overzone too many brownfield sites, but we will overzone greenfield sites. The Minister must consider that carefully. There should not have been any overzoning. It has been of benefit only to the developer, against the best interests of our society. Perhaps that is not what the Department has in mind, but that is what has happened.

Ms Morrice: This is a valuable and important document, which sets out a plan for the strategic development of Northern Ireland over the next 25 years. It is a tremendously important tome. While other Members have focused mainly on the brownfield/greenfield variation, I want to come to that at a later stage, along with other issues.

4.45 pm

I want to point out what I think is one of the most serious flaws in this regional development strategy. I have done a little research of my own, and I have discovered that Northern Ireland has the highest birth rate and one of the youngest populations in the European Union. Yet this regional development strategy concentrates more on our cars than on our kids. If you typed the word "children" in to your computer you could count on your fingers the number of times it would come up. If you typed in the word "car" it would be there — you would need more than 100 fingers to count the number of times it came up.

We have a car culture, instead of a kid culture. It is disgraceful that 26% of this population is under the age of 17 and, according to our regulations, cannot drive a car, and yet there is virtually nothing to accommodate kids and young people in this regional development strategy. That is about 400,000 children — if my calculations are correct. Where are children and young people to be found here?

A Member: Under the transport strategy.

Ms Morrice: The transport strategy I am told. I am sorry; kids do not drive. Let me explain where I am coming from on this.

A Member: Public transport strategy.

Ms Morrice: If I am allowed to continue, I will get to public transport. I am going to recommend that public transport prices should be brought down and reduced greatly to accommodate children.

There are sprawling housing estates all over this country, accommodating thousands of families, and yet there are no communal swings or slides among them. New housing developments are being built, but there is no public transport, no community facilities and not one children's play area. However, there is plenty of room for cars to be parked.

Planning Policy Statement 7 states that

"All proposals for residential development will be expected to conform to all of the following criteria"

Here we have wonderful guidelines, which I do not condemn — in fact I applaud — respecting the context; the character; the built heritage; open space — certainly; grass lands — great; woodlands; discreet groups of trees — great; local neighbourhood facilities — we are getting closer; walking and cycling; people whose mobility is impaired; traffic-calming measures — excellent; one whole piece for adequate and appropriate provision for parking — I am assuming that it is referring to our cars, not our kids. There is not one mention here of children.

What about a play area for children? Even seating for the elderly could have been brought in there. There is a huge lack. I am appealing to civil servants for just one more addition saying "communal play areas for kids". In creating areas of new high-density housing development, we are establishing a kid in a cul-de-sac culture. How many people move in to new housing developments and find that their kids have nowhere to play but on the streets between the cars? We often wonder why some kids turn to joyriding. Something must be done for our children.

The Republic of Ireland have brought in new legislation saying that every 100 houses should have communal — *[Interruption]*

Mr S Wilson: Would the Member look at the strategic framework document that we are meant to be debating today?

Ms Morrice: May I ask which page the Member would like me to refer to, and I will?

Mr S Wilson: So far the Member has looked at the Republic of Ireland and a policy guidance note, but I have heard nothing about this document.

Ms Morrice: With respect, Mr Deputy Speaker, allow me to go to our regional framework document. On each page, I have underlined areas that focus on car parking and transport — but no kids, no kids, no kids. Here is one example from page 123. 'Criteria for an expanded or new settlement proposal'. Very good. It says:

"In this event, the preferred location would be on the commuter rail network".

Walking, cycling and the use of public transport are mentioned, but there is no mention of children. 26% of our population is under the age of 17, and they are not mentioned.

I have mentioned the Republic of Ireland. I will also mention Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece and France. Walk around and you will see children's play areas on every street corner. In Belfast, town centre managers wonder why they have to compete with out-of-town shopping developments. Yet I ask you — if a mother with three children under the age of six comes into Belfast, where does she put her children? There is not one swing, not one slide — nowhere for children to play in the centre of town.

Mr P Robinson: Will the Member give way?

Ms Morrice: Yes.

Mr P Robinson: The Member might like to look at page 74. She might be happy to read the section on Community Greenways, which provides for cycle routes, wildlife habitat, parks, playing fields, school grounds, open spaces, private lands and golf courses.

Mr Deputy Speaker: In some cases, Members have spoken for over 15 minutes. The Business Committee has agreed a very limited time for this debate. I must advise Members that if they decide to give way, or if they speak for a very long time, the amount of time allocated to other Members of his or her party will subsequently be reduced. Please bear that in mind.

Ms Morrice: I am grateful for that elucidation from Mr Peter Robinson. I believe that golf was mentioned but not play facilities. Greenfield sites, yes. I am talking about play facilities — a swing and a slide. We are talking here about the future of our children. It is about time that we put our words into action. We need to change our priorities and to focus our energy away from cars and onto our kids.

We must use legislation to oblige developers to provide communal children's play areas as well as other community needs. We also need to develop a children's play strategy at local council level.

It is also essential that we have a youth leisure strategy that includes free outdoor facilities for our youth. For example, what about a skateboard park? A BMX track? Go-kart racing? Cheaper rates for children in leisure centres and on public transport are vital.

I will turn to road safety, which is an essential part of this strategy. I was flabbergasted to see that road safety merits five lines on page 172 of the strategy. We need greater emphasis on road safety for the sake of our kids, including obligatory traffic-calming measures around schools and in residential areas. We need greatly reduced speed limits; stricter enforcement of speed regulations; the use of walking buses to schools; and cycle tracks on main roads and on routes to and from schools.

I will admit that the regional development strategy is a good start. We must get it right, and getting our priorities right is the way to do that.

My last recommendations are as follows. We need a community impact assessment to impose an obligation on developers to consult communities when new developments are going up.

On the subject of brownfield versus greenfield sites, it has all been said. We agree absolutely with Mr Robinson that it should go beyond 60% for brownfield development, and I thank him for putting that point to us so that we can make it loud and clear. Brownfield must be the priority, and it must go beyond 60%.

Finally, I ask for much stricter laying down of legislation and targets — and not only targets for brownfield and greenfield sites, but for issues such as waste recycling, CO2 emissions, cutting greenhouse gases, play areas and youth leisure. We need targets, targets, targets. Administrators, civil servants and Ministers should not be scared to be tough on this one. We need change, and we need it now for the good of our kids.

Mr McCarthy: Having had very little time to digest the report, my comments will be brief. First, I welcome the new acceptance by the Minister and his Department of listening to the community and the Committee. I hope that that continues throughout the years ahead.

Northern Ireland's population is increasing, and more and more people want their own homes — and rightly so. This report tries to set out a strategy to encourage and manage this growth. Laudable as that aim is, the report fails in several crucial ways both the current and the future population. I hope that improvements will be made.

The report predicts the need for an additional 160,000 houses in the next 15 years, with a need for a total of 250,000 by the year 2025. This demand may lead to the urbanisation of a further 30 sq miles, which is the equivalent of the creation of a new city. I do not know what other Members think, but I cannot fathom where this new building is going to take place. Will our villages start to sprawl? Will our towns suffer from overdevelopment? These are very serious questions.

Much has already been said with regards to brownfield/greenfield areas for development — and rightly so. Alliance is committed to ensuring that at least 50%, and up to 60%, or whatever is available of new developments, are built on brownfield land. This is the only way we can protect the rural countryside and the greenfields in and adjacent to the cities.

The report recognises the importance of this strategy, but, rather than embracing it now to apply to future developments, it suggests that a target of 50% to 60% be achieved in 10 years. This is a target set for the whole of the region rather than a particular part of Northern Ireland. Little or not enough mention is made of development in the Belfast metropolitan area and its hinterlands — an area from which, according to this report, half of the demand for the new houses will come.

In addition, this report allows for overzoning of 10% in existing plans. I am not happy with this proposal, and it ought to be dropped altogether. How can we talk about planned growth when we are already admitting that our plans may need to allow for more houses, more demands on infrastructure and more development? We must make our priorities clear.

Growth must be managed and sustainable. We simply cannot permit overzoning. We must encourage renovation. We need a commitment to conversion of existing buildings wherever possible, rather than demolition. When new building is unavoidable, it should be allowed only when the replacement buildings constitute architectural gain. This report does little to protect architectural heritage. Whenever possible, we must encourage brownfield development. This report does not go far enough in those areas, and we would like — demand even — to see greater protection of all our green areas whilst encouraging growth.

In conclusion, I ask the Minister and his Department to keep on listening to what the community is saying and to act accordingly.

5.00 pm

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Foster): I congratulate the Minister for Regional Development and his Department on bringing forward the regional development strategy. It reflects a great deal of thought and hard work. My officials also put a great deal of time and effort into framing the Department's input to the process. The strategy will be an important element in the overall framework of planning policy. It will provide a guide for the preparation of development plans by the Department of the Environment, and it will assist citizens and developers in understanding the policy context within which specific proposals for physical development will be considered by the Planning Service.

Against that background, I am grateful to the Minister for Regional Development for agreeing to bring forward an amendment to the Strategic Planning Order to make the relationship between the strategy and the development plans more flexible. The Minister is aware of my concern that the strategy should be sufficiently flexible to be able to accommodate unforeseen demographic social, economic and technological changes. That is essential, because no one can predict how all those variables will move over 25 years.

It is not only circumstances that can change over time. The strategy before the House contains many expressions of policy, including over 40 strategic planning guidelines. All Ministers and Departments will be obliged to have regard to those in the discharge of their development functions. It is possible, even likely, that the current policy preferences of Ministers and the Assembly, as embedded in the strategy, will change as time passes. It is important that the processes for reviewing and revising the strategy are responsive and expeditious.

I have recommended that to Mr Campbell, and I am grateful that he has made adjustments accordingly.

Two statements of policy in the strategy deserve particular attention in that regard. First is the target for increasing the proportion of housing development on brownfield sites. I sympathise with that aspiration because of its relevance to the Department of the Environment's commitment to sustainable development. It is hoped that the target can be achieved, but I am obliged to the Minister for Regional Development for accepting my suggestion that the impacts of that policy be carefully monitored. That intention is now reflected in the text.

My concern is primarily with the interests of those people on lower incomes and first-time house buyers. Members are conscious of the rise in house prices and of the financial strain that that places on many of our constituents — notwithstanding the benefit of historically low mortgage lending rates. It is possible, though not inevitable, that the policy of brownfield development could put further pressure on land and house prices. The strategy predicts the need for up to 250,000 extra dwellings over the next 25 years, so there will be a lot of demand on the system.

The Department of the Environment will do its best to ensure an adequate supply of brownfield land through the development plan process. I am glad to say that as a result of the Executive's Budget for 2001-02, the Department of the Environment is achieving a greater degree of forward momentum on development planning. However, Members must not lose sight of the fact that sustainable development has social and economic as well as environmental objectives, and that affordable housing is an important dimension of social inclusion. Therefore the Assembly has a duty to monitor the impacts of this policy.

The strategy also touches on many other aspects of the public interest. Existing retail planning policy seeks to balance the interests of consumers with the objective of maintaining the vitality and viability of town centres. The strategy makes specific reference to Belfast city centre. I am sure that Members share the desire that the strategy will be successful in providing an alternative retail offer to the citizens of Belfast and beyond. I am taking assurance from the fact that a number of consortia have proposals for major retail developments in the city centre. The Department of the Environment has already received planning applications for two of those.

It is hoped that the strategy has maintained an appropriate balance between the objectives of maintaining the vitality of Belfast city centre and of promoting the interests of our citizens and constituents as consumers. Planning policy exists to promote the public interest, not to maintain the existing patterns of economic and commercial activity through protectionism.

The strategy is an important document which has widespread implications for all public services and for the citizens of Northern Ireland. I have drawn attention to what I believe to be some of the strategy's most important features. It is hoped that the strategy will prove to be an effective and flexible addition to the framework of planning policy. The Department of the Environment will seek to play its full part in translating its provisions into better planning development throughout the region.

Mr Deputy Speaker: A substantial number of people have asked to speak. Since there has been no time limit on the first round of Members speaking, it is now necessary to impose a time limit of six minutes on each Member still to speak.

Mr Bradley: The regional development strategy is undoubtedly one of the most significant publications that will pass through the Assembly in the foreseeable future — however long or short the political future of the House might be. I was pleased to hear the Minister referring to his plans for the next session of the Assembly.

I thank the Minister for his courtesy in paying attention to individual Members during his attendance at Committee meetings — everyone got a fair hearing. His willingness to listen is appreciated.

The views of a wide and varied section of the people of Northern Ireland have been condensed and presented in this 200-plus page draft report as the way to shape our future for the next quarter of a century at least — as our population moves toward the two million mark.

I have selected a few sections of the draft to which I attach special significance. I welcome the rural development objectives identified to promote an attractive and prosperous rural area, and the importance attached to a co-ordinated and integrated approach. The essential need for rural-proofing of policies and rural participation as identified are both welcome inclusions.

I note that the agricultural and farming community come in for little or no mention in the draft. Nevertheless, I am satisfied that the rural-proofing aspect of the programme will adequately deal with farming matters when the opportunities arise.

In the same section, I welcome the paragraphs relating to matters such as local housing needs and the continuing development of long-established rural communities. The desire to reinforce those communities is to be welcomed. However, from the unfortunate experience of so many communities throughout Northern Ireland recently, this may be difficult to achieve as those with hidden agendas continue to move in on unsuspecting rural neighbourhoods, which results in an eventual loss of identity.

As regards greenbelts, areas of outstanding natural beauty and other designated rural areas, I accept that such levels of protection in the Mourne and elsewhere

are inevitable. Having said that, some effort would have to be made to address the financial burden imposed upon those who, because of the environmental regulations, are prohibited from building a dwelling even for a family member on land that they own within the confines of restricted zones. Members from the Glens of Antrim and other policy areas will understand the sense of unfairness that planning refusals bring to the young people of such areas.

I believe that the acceptance of brownfield sites in rural areas, just as in the proposal for urban areas, would present an opportunity to build, once proof that a dwelling once stood there is established. A brownfield rural policy could be developed, and I am certain that a degree of acceptance would be forthcoming from applicants on matters relating to the requirements on size, design and setting of such rural dwellings. Such approval would also help to provide the affordable housing referred to by the Minister, as the purchase price of a site would, in most cases, be nil.

The draft goes into reasonable detail on economic issues, and the need to develop modern infrastructures is clearly identified. The need to increase links with neighbouring regions and to capitalise on trans-regional development opportunities is also highlighted. This is long overdue recognition of the economic potential that exists along the eastern seaboard of the island.

Any proposal that can bring forward the upgrading to European route status of the link road between Larne and Rosslare is to be welcomed. Needless to say the complete upgrading of the stretch of the A1 from Loughbrickland to the border still remains one of the economic priorities of business people, road users and people from the Newry and south Down areas.

On the issue of infrastructure, I call on the relevant Departments to look seriously at the need to provide well-planned ring roads around developing towns. Every road into and out of Newry is jammed with traffic on an almost all-day basis due to the ongoing developments on the periphery and the lack of vision of those responsible for planning ahead. I am sure that many Members in this Assembly can identify with the situations I am describing.

Chapter 10 contains a section dealing with the promotion of regional gateways as economic development opportunities. There is a reference in that section to my home port of Warrenpoint. The importance of the port, and the challenges faced in the years ahead, have been referred to by previous Secretaries of State, Ministers and those in responsible positions with economic interest. I would be grateful if the Minister for Regional Development would give an assurance that he and his Department will provide maximum support to help meet the needs identified by Warrenpoint Harbour Authority as it goes about shaping the port's future.

I welcome the fact that many of the mistakes made in the designing and planning of our residential developments are to be corrected. For example, I am pleased that open space retention and speed restrictions within estates are to be the subject of major planning legislation.

The Minister should, in conjunction with the district councils, conduct a study that would identify public rights of way that could be reopened. The proposed legislation on access to the countryside will probably throw up many problems. Reopening our rights of way might solve those problems.

I join the Minister in paying tribute to his officials and the staff who worked with the Committee on the effort that has gone into the latest draft. I am also pleased that the proposal that it might be financially prudent to abandon the maintenance of many rural roads, which we discussed at a meeting in the city centre, has not been included in the draft. I thank the Minister of the Environment for his attendance earlier in the debate. It was clear from his speech that the Department of the Environment has a major role to play alongside the Department for Regional Development in shaping our future.

Mr R Hutchinson: I join Members in paying tribute to the Minister and his officials. As a member of the Regional Development Committee, I know exactly what their input has been and how often they came to speak to us at short notice. They were always willing to listen and take our comments on board. I thank them publicly for that. Many Members have spoken at length about the major aspects of the strategy. I shall not repeat their comments. There are, however, several things relating to my constituency that must be highlighted.

The Member for North Down (Ms Morrice) mentioned the lack of provision in the document for the needs of children. On page 195, the document refers to the intention to

“provide opportunities for more active lifestyles by maintaining and enhancing sporting facilities in the region, creating networks of Community Greenways in cities and towns”.

Ms Morrice: I was noting a lack of actual play facilities.

Mr R Hutchinson: We will not win that argument.

I cannot say whether 60% is the best figure for brownfield development. The Committee felt that there was a need to draw the attention of planners and developers to the fact that people are sick, sore and tired of the way that development is carried out willy-nilly throughout the country. I am delighted that that has been taken on board, and I trust that planners will listen to what has been said.

The Minister said that 10% would be a maximum for zoning, and I am delighted that that is the case. The strategy refers to housing requirements and the need to

widen opportunity and choice, to improve the supply and quality of housing and to promote sustainable development. It is important that we make provision for the first-time buyer. Many of us have been in that position and know exactly what it is like. There must be housing for people in the lower income bracket.

5.15 pm

We all realise that the transport system in Northern Ireland has been allowed to decline over the last few years. There have been many difficulties, especially with the railway network. Many of us were horrified when the Department's representatives came to the Committee and were totally frank and honest about showing how horrendous the Northern Ireland railway network is and how it needs to be improved. I am delighted that this has been taken on board. We are already beginning to see changes in the railway network; new stock is being acquired, and there is a realisation of the need to improve the system. In my home town of Larne there is a need for a transport system connection with the boats and links to the European network.

The infrastructure of our road system is such that many of us have been left worrying that it has been allowed to get into such a state that it will take a long time to bring it up to a reasonable standard. I congratulate the Minister and the Department for beginning work on the A8 from Belfast to Larne. We look forward to that being finished, for we realise how important that road is.

Finally, I have one important question for the Minister. Can he tell the House how he will implement the strategy? We can talk about it; we can have the document in front of us, but how will it be implemented?

Mrs Carson: I welcome this wide-ranging document detailing the strategy for the development of Northern Ireland for the next 25 years, and I congratulate all the people involved. It is a massive document, and we can barely scratch the surface of it today.

I wish to make only a few points, one of which I have been making since I first saw the draft proposals which were presented to MLAs at an induction session in the Europa Hotel about three years ago. It was pointed out that the A29 from Newry to Coleraine, via Armagh, Dungannon and Cookstown, is still designated as only a link corridor. This road carries exceptionally heavy traffic, and, at times, has more heavy vehicles than the A4 coming west off the M1. I cannot understand how the towns of Newry, Armagh, Dungannon and Cookstown can be designated as main hubs without this road's being upgraded. Much of the cross-border northbound traffic from Newry uses this route. These hub towns cannot play their proposed roles if the whole road system is inadequate. The internal road networks of Northern Ireland must be of equal importance, at least, to other proposed cross-frontier routes towards Sligo and Monaghan.

The historic underfunding of the road network in the western rural region needs to be redressed, with priority being given to the upgrading of the routes associated with the key transport corridors, link corridors and the trunk roads. I look forward to seeing an upgraded and integrated transport network for the entire western region.

I welcome the points made in the strategy document about strengthening the present rail system. Again, I must plug the west. We lost our entire rail system in the 1950s, and no further consideration has been given to any western link. A link, perhaps along the M1 going west to Fermanagh, and a similar system to the TGV or Deutsche Bahn networks in France and Germany, would have been welcome. Road congestion can be averted only when a more radical approach is taken to remove heavy lorries and the single occupancy of other vehicles. These must be replaced by a reliable transport system.

Walking and cycling are to be greatly encouraged. However, they will only develop with safer roads and with a healthy education policy in schools. Public transport in rural areas must be of a quality and availability that will ensure accessibility for everyone wishing to use it. People cannot access education, training provisions and even employment without a decent road system. It is an issue which must be addressed if the strategy is to be achieved fully.

I welcome the intention on pages 96 and 97 to sustain and extend forestry resources in Northern Ireland, which is the least wooded region in Europe, with only 6% coverage compared with the European Union average of 32%. Our woodlands need to be expanded and protected, but we must not forget our hedgerows. Hedges are vitally important for wildlife. Stewardship is required to protect the hedgerows and the large trees that are an important part of our hedgerows.

I particularly welcome the chapter on caring for the environment. It is up to us to ensure that the next generation, and subsequent generations, are educated and imbued with the urge to care for the environment in Northern Ireland, and that they do not make any more of it, as the cliché says. The environment needs to be protected from progress.

There has been a proliferation of telecommunication masts. Wind turbines are now the popular environmentally-friendly source of power being promoted. Will our mountains and hills be further defaced by wind turbines? Why must these turbines be at the skyline if the prevailing wind speed is greater below a ridge or high ground? That is true, if gardening magazines are to be believed.

I am disappointed with the brief reference to climatic change and global warming. Any person interested in the environment, or even in farming, knows that the change has already taken place, and it is taking place rapidly. I want more detailed study and research on climatic change.

Our built heritage, archaeological and architectural, also needs protecting. So many important buildings have been destroyed or demolished with derisory fines given to the culprits. Legislation for the protection of built heritage must be amended and strengthened. The Department needs to be totally committed to prosecuting those who ignore conservation orders. Consistent criteria for planners are also needed to ensure adequate protection of our built heritage and to control unsympathetic development in rural areas.

In conclusion, I ask that the proposals contained in the strategy be translated effectively into action. I support the motion.

Mrs Courtney: I welcome the draft regional development strategy. It is a very comprehensive report covering housing, transport, economic development and the environment, as well as rural development, which is often neglected. I will concentrate on chapter 7, the north-west region, which recognises Derry as the regional city and hub of the north-west.

The draft follows on from the original 'Shaping Our Future' document, which was warmly welcomed by Derry City Council. That report recognised Derry for the first time as not only the regional capital of the north-west but also as the second city of Northern Ireland. The draft regional development strategy further strengthens Derry's position in Northern Ireland. For example, strategic objectives state that Derry will have a pivotal role in cross-border and international trading relationships.

Derry is already the main urban centre for the north-west of the island and is also a proven bridge for investment, particularly between America and Europe. It is recognised as one of the fastest growing urban centres in the region over the last 25 years. It has a young, expanding population, with a number of new hi-tech jobs, but it is also recognised that there is a decline in traditional employment in the textile industry, for example. There is also a high level of unemployment in the region.

The importance of the cross-border element is recognised as critical to our development, and I welcome the commitment to encourage further cross-border working for mutual benefit.

I welcome the draft report's recognition that the economy of the north-west is central to the region. A key focus of that is the development into Donegal.

I welcome the commitment on page 85 to examine the potential for the improvement of transport links to and from the Port of Lisahally, the industrial areas at Maydown and Campsie and the City of Derry Airport. I warmly endorse those proposals.

The section on rural Northern Ireland recognises the importance of the rural economy to the rest of Northern Ireland. Page 86 states that continuing management of

the rural environment is essential to maintain the distinctive rural landscapes, which are important environmental economic resources. It is essential that these environmental assets be conserved.

A summary of the key driving forces for rural change is on page 91, and it covers economic, social and environmental points. I endorse those points.

In the annex, the guiding principles in the regional development strategy include a people-and community-focused approach; a sustainable approach to development; achieving a more cohesive society; achieving competitiveness; and adopting an integrated approach to the future development of the region. The rural development strategy will be monitored continually and reviewed formally every five years.

I also endorse the need for a proper transportation strategy for all of Northern Ireland and for the planning process to be part of the regional development strategy. That is critical for our future development.

This important document provides a strategy for the next 25 years. I welcome it, and I congratulate the Minister for bringing it forward.

Mr Carrick: I also welcome this very useful document. It is probably not exhaustive, but it is comprehensive. It is not infallible. Some issues have not been addressed, but I do not have time to deal with those issues. There are other issues, which are in the document and which I want to prioritise in my remarks.

I recognise that this is an overarching strategic framework. It is not a blueprint or a master plan, as is acknowledged in the document.

With regard to my constituency, Upper Bann, I welcome the reference in chapter 9 to Craigavon and Banbridge as counter-magnets to the Belfast metropolitan area as regards housing needs. However, I cannot help but draw the conclusion that there appears to be a greater emphasis on the needs of the Belfast metropolitan area than on those of other areas of Northern Ireland.

Craigavon is recognised as the third major growth area in Northern Ireland, and in that context I turn to the market towns of Portadown, Lurgan and Brownlow, and the reference on page 101 to town centres. There is a great opportunity to be creative and imaginative in the development and redevelopment of our town centres, in particular the existing brownfield sites. However, there is one important caveat. In order to be properly developed and exploited, some of the brownfield sites require additional infrastructure so as to create and develop opportunity sites. In the implementation of the strategy I hope that due cognizance will be taken of the need to create additional infrastructure in the inner-town areas to develop brownfield sites that were hitherto landlocked.

5.30 pm

With regard to the rural environment, I recognise the need for the proper conservation of natural habitats and wetlands. However, I want to draw the attention of the Minister, his co-Ministers and the Department to a phenomenon that has happened in the past few years — the undue flooding of certain pasture lands and arable lands that were hitherto used in commercial production. The agriculture industry cannot afford the permanent loss of traditional pasture land and arable land, and I would like to think that recognition will be given to what I call the traditional commercial lands, which in the interim have become wetlands, to ensure that that is not permanent. I hope that some action will be taken to bring those lands that were lost in the recent flooding phenomenon, particularly in the Upper Bann area and in the Birches area where I come from, back into commercial production.

In connection with transportation, Craigavon is on the main rail route from Belfast to Dublin and, as the third-largest growth area in Northern Ireland, is strategically placed for further development. I am thankful that recognition was given to that fact and that the strategic plan provides for 8,500 houses. That represents about two thirds of what some professionals in the planning market want for Craigavon. The figure of 12,000 houses was mooted during the consultation process.

Craigavon and Banbridge have a strong and successful business culture, and they are strategically placed on the Belfast to Dublin rail corridor. Reference was also made to the road from Portadown to Armagh — the A3 — which links the Northway with the M12 and the M1 and places Craigavon in an advantageous position.

Craigavon has the best-value housing in Northern Ireland with average prices at approximately £20,000 below those in Lisburn or Belfast. It also boasts Galen Pharmaceuticals, the only £1 million business in Northern Ireland and the recent winner of the Northern Ireland Innovation in Business award. I therefore commend Craigavon and Banbridge to the Minister, particularly with regard to their strategic position and the infrastructure that is already there, although improvements are required.

Mr Beggs: I welcome the increased focus given to the brownfield sites and support their increased use in future developments from both an environmental and a social point of view.

The proposals for the regional transportation system are particularly relevant to my constituency of East Antrim and to Northern Ireland in general. I am concerned at the amount of emphasis given to the Belfast to Dublin intercity links compared to other infrastructural linkages on an east/west basis. The document specifies the need for a high-quality intercity linkage between Belfast and Dublin, but it describes the need only for good linkages for other onward connections such as the ro-ro connection from Larne to Scotland; in other words those linkages

are to be of a lesser quality. It is important that those high-quality linkages should be extended from Belfast to Larne. Larne should be included in the main emphasis on the eastern seaboard corridor.

The document places emphasis on investment in the Dublin/Belfast area. It mentions the potential for a new motorway linking Lisburn to Newry and the possibility of a new rail commuter line for that area. No improvements are specified for the northern section that links Belfast and the majority of the population of Northern Ireland, through Larne, to Scotland. That is a vital route for our economy and for tourism, because the rural facility at Larne is an important way to encourage tourists to come to Northern Ireland.

The document describes the Belfast/Dublin corridor as a focus for economic development and tourism. I argue that there is a need to promote tourism and economic development in other areas through the east/west link.

With regard to rail services, I welcome the Belfast metropolitan area plan's stress on the importance of park- and-ride facilities and investment. However, the importance of the trans-European rail network to Larne has not been stated. The quality of the onward service to Larne is not emphasised to the same extent as other routes. This is an important route, not just in terms of the Belfast metropolitan area plan, but also in a European context. The bulk of the rail commuter traffic comes from the Carrickfergus area. However, unless there is investment in the rail service to Larne, the congestion that occurs at Mallusk will continue. By upgrading the rail service from Larne to Belfast, people can be encouraged to move from road to rail. The congestion that clogs up the Greater Belfast transport system affects onward transport to Ballymena, Londonderry, Coleraine, Magherafelt and the Newtownabbey area and is a major cause of delay in the transport system of Northern Ireland.

I am concerned about the road network shown in diagram 11 — the regional strategic transport network. I noticed that the borough of Carrickfergus, which boasts a population of around 30,000, does not get a trunk road, a link road or a link corridor. No preference is expressed as to the quality of the road service that should connect Carrickfergus onward to Larne or back towards Belfast. Given that smaller towns such as Newcastle and Ballycastle are deemed to be worthy of connections using trunk networks, it is very strange that the document places no importance on the road system of a sizeable town like Carrickfergus. The transport systems for the coastal area of east Antrim must be reassessed. That area is of importance to the economy and to the future potential of tourism in Northern Ireland. I welcome much of the report, but some areas need to be addressed further.

Ms Hanna: I welcome the latest draft of the regional strategic framework document and the Minister's comments

on brownfield sites. I am concerned that so little time has been allowed to consider this important and far-reaching document. We have only had the document for two days; that is an inadequate amount of time to do it justice. The report will have a tremendous impact on many aspects of life in Northern Ireland, and we must get it right.

The Environment Committee, the Regional Development Committee and the Social Development Committee had concerns about previous drafts of this document, and I am pleased that some of our suggestions have been taken up.

I welcome the inclusion of the 60% target for regional brownfield development, and I hope that that is a minimum target. I am, however, concerned that no specific target has been set for Belfast, the largest urban area in Northern Ireland. If the Department can undertake the complicated task of setting a target for the whole of Northern Ireland, I cannot understand why one cannot be set for the Belfast metropolitan area. Unless a specific target for brownfield development is set at this point, Belfast may face years of drift and insecurity until a goal is finally reached. That may not happen until the Belfast metropolitan plan is in place in 2005 or 2006.

We need to implement policies that will swell the capacity of the brownfield building industry. By setting specific brownfield targets for an urban area such as Belfast, site flow will be stimulated and the brownfield site base increased. The Department must take the lead in supporting that transition.

I welcome the University of Ulster's work in conducting the urban capacity project. It is essential that we know the location and extent of the brownfield sites before we can set realistic targets. A specific target for brownfield development is needed to support planning policies and enforcement in Belfast. It would ensure that planners direct developers to brownfield sites and encourage them to create attractive areas, rather than simply taking the easiest pickings. If we are to protect what is left of our greenfield sites, it is vital that we do not disrupt our settled community any further and cause even more social problems, as is happening in Belfast at the moment.

The option of providing additional housing by converting existing buildings was mentioned. Incentives equal to the tax incentives for new build, to encourage the reuse and conversion of buildings rather than their demolition, would be welcome. I encourage the relevant Ministers to make strong representations to change the current situation. That would encourage the regeneration of our towns and cities, and at the same time maintain the character of the built environment. In general I welcome the strategy and hope that it becomes a reality.

Mr Shannon: I also welcome the proposals. I know that they are only in draft form at the moment, but they are nonetheless very important.

The Minister has raised several key issues that concern people in my constituency of Strangford and those further afield. These proposals form the basis for a regional development strategy.

I will mention a few issues that are important to the people whom I represent. We welcome the conclusion that the strategy should not designate major or key service centres or regional towns, a decision that is important for several reasons. The way in which the major service centres were designated in the former draft strategy was disastrous to the future of the borough of Ards, because it was based on the perceived ability of the district town to accommodate housing growth.

The problem was exacerbated when 'Strategy 2010', the Department's economic development strategy, followed the 'Shaping Our Future' draft proposals and suggested that the emphasis on jobs growth should centre on the major service areas. That made it difficult for Ards Borough Council to attract much-needed industrial development.

The borough of Ards, as many Members know, has suffered greatly, especially in recent times. Some 1,000 jobs, mainly in the textile industries, have been lost. Any new strategy must pave the way for the attraction of new industries and ensure not only that sufficient land is available for industrial development but that the quest for new jobs is facilitated. We want to make sure that boroughs such as Ards have that opportunity, and I believe that that can happen as a result of this proposal.

I urge the Department to carry out further consideration of how the strategy should be revised in order to strike a balance between the efficiency of investment and inclusiveness. They would thereby find a solution to keep areas experiencing problems, such as the borough of Ards, at the forefront in the quest for jobs. We want to ensure that there is fair play in attracting jobs; that is why this regional development strategy is so important.

5.45 pm

I also welcome the fact that the report refers to link corridors, especially the A20. We strongly believe that it is important for us to develop the route between Ards and Belfast from an industrial point of view. It is the key to taking our products further afield, whether to the harbours at Belfast or Larne, or other areas.

We also feel that there should be a strategy that advocates the extension of the E-way, which is mentioned in the strategy, to Comber and Newtownards. This is a light rapid transit route, and it is important that something along those lines be at least considered and financial assistance set aside for it. There is a vast build-up of traffic in all the areas coming from Ards and Comber, with people from Ards and Killinchy coming through Comber, and those from the Ards peninsula coming

across from Bangor and using Ards town. This E-way may be a way of addressing some of our concerns in relation to transport.

I will quickly hit on some other issues that we are concerned about. We believe there is a developer's charter, which the Planning Service seems to be presently operating. We are concerned that the developer seems to be able to almost call the tune or fire the shots in relation to any development. Many Members have touched on brownfield development. Obviously, we believe that brownfield land should be used first. However, it is important that councils have the vesting powers to acquire that land, and we ask the Minister to look at this. The Minister mentioned diversification in the rural economy. That is certainly an issue of great importance for the area I represent. I ask the Minister to ensure that the rural economy is given that opportunity.

Regarding coastal zone management, one issue that some Members have touched on today has been global climate change. I make this point because when it comes to development, whether for the fishing industry in our area, or housing or business, the global climate change can be a significant factor in forcing or driving change in the area that we represent.

One last point is in relation to the need for councils to be the catalyst in their areas. I am sure the Minister will touch on the role of councils and the role he perceives for them. The council role is vital for the regional development strategy framework, and together the councils and the Assembly can reach the objective to enliven and revitalise the communities we represent. I support what the Minister has said.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Hussey, I ask you to be brief to allow the Minister time to respond.

Mr Hussey: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to get in very briefly. I will go straight to the couple of concerns I have. We are looking at a draft document, and I certainly hope that the final document will reflect what those responsible will feel necessary.

I will begin by making a complaint that Strabane is not identified as a gateway on the map on page 45. On listening to radio reports, I note that there is a huge volume of traffic using the Strabane/Lifford crossing. This is a major North/South gateway and should be recognised as such.

On page 81 there is reference to the north-west development corridor running from Londonderry to Letterkenny. I would have thought that the Northern Ireland Assembly should be considering the development corridor running through the Foyle valley. The reference on page 83 to the extension of the natural gas pipeline to Londonderry should refer to Londonderry and beyond.

I agree with P J Bradley's comments on the vibrancy of the rural communities. This strategy reflects the ability of people to build, live and work in the rural community, should it be via greater recognition of existing sites in the countryside; and I would further extend that because there are always small pieces of land on a farm that cannot be used. The rural community should have greater leeway to utilise such land through the provision of additional housing.

The spatial framework for tourism is covered on page 146. Is anybody in the Assembly going to tell me that Sion Mills does not have any industrial heritage? Are we being told that there are no castles in Tyrone and County Londonderry? That appears to be the case when you look at the map on that page. Apparently there are no forest parks west of Omagh, nor is there horse riding beyond the Mourne.

I agree with Mr McNamee's remarks, which were supported by Mrs Carson, about the re-establishment, or at least the thought of re-establishing, the circular rail route that once existed in Northern Ireland.

On page 150 of the report, which covers activity-based holidays, there is no mention of hunting, shooting and fishing. We all know that these are major sources of foreign income from tourists participating in those particular activities. Finally, on page 178, are we being told that there are no areas of natural beauty and no scenic quality west of the A4? I close with those remarks.

Mr Campbell: I sympathise with Mr Beggs, who struggled a little with his paperwork towards the end of his speech. Given that I have had to listen to 17 contributions on a variety of topics, I am sure that he and others will sympathise with me as I try to respond to as many of them as possible. If there are issues that I inadvertently do not refer to specifically or in sufficient detail, my staff and the officials who are diligently taking notes will respond in writing.

I thank Members for their response to the document. It took a considerably long time to prepare, and it has been through the mill on several occasions with the Committee for Regional Development and other Committees. I respond positively to the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee, who asked for assurances that the monitoring of the strategy would be tackled diligently, and that an annual progress report be presented to the Committee. I assure him that that will be the case.

The Deputy Chairperson and several others referred to public transport and railways. Given the knowledge that Members have about what formerly was called the "consolidation option", I do not need to mention the difficulties we had in recent months regarding the railway system in Northern Ireland. I do not like the term "consolidation option". However, it was used in the task force report, and the adoption by the Assembly of that option meant £105 million being spent merely to

get the consolidation option. It is hoped that the money will be spent over the next three years on preserving the existing railway infrastructure.

Members will understand that the expansion of the railway system to Armagh, north and south, Fermanagh, Tyrone, west of Omagh, and to all points north, south, east and west would require hundreds of millions of pounds.

Nonetheless, I remain in favour of railways and public transportation in general. I will require resources to put that into practice. I want to emphasise the commitment that exists in the regional development strategy to the transport proposals that will flow from it and be a part of it. I also want to assure the Deputy Chairperson that any non-compliance in the implementation of relevant measures will be closely monitored and acted on.

Several Members referred to harbours in their own areas. Warrenpoint and Londonderry harbours, and the others, have caused me much consideration. Members will also be aware that I am currently exploring what legislative changes could be brought about to allow those harbours to develop and to diversify. Naturally, I want to see a regional development strategy that would allow that to occur. I will be monitoring that closely, and I hope that the strategy will not only permit that, but will prompt harbour authority officers to take advantage of that change.

Several Members referred to the issue of brownfield development. As I suspected, that issue was to dominate Members' contributions. Before focusing on it, I want to refer to an issue of general conformity that has taken up many hours in the Department for Regional Development and in the Department of the Environment: what steps can I take to ensure flexibility between the strategy and the development plans?

Following receipt of legal opinion, I am going to promote amending legislation in the next session to substitute the regional development strategy for the requirement that development plans and development schemes must be in general conformity. These statutory provisions, including the proposed amendment, provide the legal framework in which implementation of the strategy will proceed. However, these provisions will be kept under review to ensure that they provide a sufficiently flexible, yet effective, legal framework. I am satisfied that the proposed change will still preserve the authority of the regional development strategy. I hope that that is helpful.

Many tributes were paid to the senior civil servants working on the strategy, and I concur with those. Mr Peter Robinson referred to a number of senior civil servants, notably the permanent secretary who will shortly be retiring after many years in the Department. I want to take this opportunity to commend him and to wish him well in his imminent retirement.

I did not schedule today's debate to coincide with any possible resignation or recess. In fact, as I said earlier,

the regional development strategy has been through the mill several times with the Regional Development Committee and other Committees.

Any consideration of timing is in regard to the commitment I gave to the Minister of the Environment to try to present the current draft to the Assembly before the summer recess.

6.00 pm

I will discuss the important issue of brownfield percentages, which many Members mentioned. For many months a wide range of views has been expressed on this highly topical issue. Some were concerned that the Department would set too low a target for brownfield housing development. They felt that the target should be more in line with the English target of 60%. That concern was expressed by the Belfast Metropolitan Residents Group.

Others, however, were equally concerned that the target might be too high and would unnecessarily stifle the supply of land for greenfield suburban residential development, which consumers want. That point was made by greenfield housebuilders and the Construction Employers Federation. I have weighed up those arguments, and I have listened carefully to Members' views.

My view, which is shared by the Assembly Committees, is that, as in other parts of the United Kingdom, policy can influence the actions and performance of the housing market. I am therefore signalling a clear direction of policy change towards seeking to achieve substantially more housing in our urban areas. That will greatly assist the continuing revitalisation of our cities and towns. I stress that, in practice, this will be worked out primarily through the development plan process, taking into account urban capacity studies. I expect the level of brownfield performance to vary from town to town, in the light of local characteristics and capacity.

The strategy sets an ambitious regional target to double, over 10 years, the recent level of achievement — which was 25% to 30% — for the location of housing growth within existing urban areas of cities and towns with a population of more than 5,000. Effectively, this sets an ambitious regional target of up to 60% to be met before the first full review in 2010. That target has been increased from the 40% figure recommended by the public examination panel, and it reflects a genuine move towards more sustainable patterns of development for the region. In setting the target, practice and achievement throughout the United Kingdom has been taken into consideration.

In regard to the restriction of greenfield sites, I am committed to a change in direction that emphasises the development of brownfield sites. That does not rule out greenfield development but places an emphasis on more housing in existing urban areas. Progress towards the regional target will be monitored, and after five years an

assessment of whether any adjustment is necessary will be made.

The issue of town cramming was also raised. The strategy aims to encourage an increase in the density of urban housing, particularly in existing urban areas, which is appropriate in scale and design to the cities and towns of Northern Ireland. The aim is to encourage higher-density housing schemes, through imaginative and innovative design, without town cramming. However, the strategy makes it clear that the aim of achieving an overall increase in town densities must not be interpreted as a broad mandate to impose overdeveloped and unsympathetic housing schemes on existing residential areas. Redevelopment of existing houses and the development of infill sites in such areas need to be handled with sensitivity. The overriding objective in such areas must be to avoid any significant erosion of the environmental quality, amenities and privacy enjoyed by existing residents.

Ms Morrice raised the issue of provision for children. Her view was that it should be kids, not cars. She said that the children of Northern Ireland were not catered for in the document. I urge Members to read the document carefully. They will see that in every respect we have endeavoured to ensure that people from throughout Northern Ireland, regardless of age or geographical location, are catered for.

Mr S Wilson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Campbell: I am not sure what the procedure is, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker: It is not normal for a Minister to give way when he is making a winding-up speech.

Mr Campbell: I would have given way, had I been allowed to.

I encourage Members to read the entire document. Other Members spoke about the growth of villages and towns. The spatial development policy will address that.

I take on board the issues raised by Members from west of the Bann, such as Mrs Carson, who mentioned the A29. I am sure that my officials will respond to her query. Mrs Courtney spoke about the regional capital of the north-west. Londonderry is recognised as such in the document, and she will agree that that ought to be the case. Mr Carrick raised some issues affecting Craigavon and Banbridge. Members must understand that the Belfast metropolitan area is the largest conurbation, but that other expanding areas such as Craigavon and Banbridge, and areas west of the Bann such as Omagh, and areas in Fermanagh, are also recognised.

I apologise for not being able to talk about the E-way or about Ards Borough, Strabane, Larne and the many other areas that were mentioned. I will ensure that my officials respond to those individual queries, however long that may take. I commend the regional development strategy to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly takes note of progress on the formulation of the regional development strategy.

Adjourned at 6.08 pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 3 July 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 Defective Premises (Landlord's Liability) Act (Northern Ireland) 2001 and to the Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Act (Northern Ireland) 2001. These Acts became law on 2 July 2001.

ASSEMBLY: UNPARLIAMENTARY LANGUAGE

Mr Speaker: On Tuesday 26 June Dr Paisley raised a point of order regarding language used by the then First Minister during a personal statement by the Minister for Regional Development, Mr Campbell, the previous day. Dr Paisley asked for a ruling on whether the remark was unparliamentary.

I have examined Hansard and consulted with officials on the practice in other places. I believe that there was some ambiguity and that the then First Minister attempted at the time to correct his remark, but that this was not recorded correctly in the Official Report of the debate. A corrigendum was issued with the report of yesterday's proceedings.

The use of the word "coward" is regarded as unparliamentary in other places, and it seems to me that it cannot be regarded as anything different in this place. While there may be some question as to whether this is the case when it is modified by the adjective "political", I have decided that the word "coward", whether or not modified by an adjective, should be regarded as unparliamentary. However, in the absence of a previous ruling on this specific term, and in view of the fact that the First Minister attempted to qualify his remark, I do not propose to take any retrospective action. I emphasise that in future the use of the word "coward" will be regarded as unparliamentary language, whether modified by an adjective or not, and any Member using it will be asked to withdraw it.

Yet again I must take the opportunity to urge Members to reflect on the tenor and content of their remarks. It does no service to Members or their constituents if business cannot be conducted in a seemly manner. I will not hesitate to take firm action against any Member who wilfully and persistently continues to ignore these directions or any other directions from the Speaker. I trust that the matter is clear.

Mr S Wilson: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. You have shown remarkable leniency —

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has not been called and therefore will not be heard. *[Interruption]*. Order. The Member has not been called and will not be heard.

Mr S Wilson: You have shown particular —

Mr Speaker: Order. I call the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Mr McGimpsey.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McGimpsey) rose. —*[Interruption]*.

Mr Speaker: Order. It is perfectly clear that the Member wishes to be thrown out. I am therefore suspending proceedings.

The sitting was suspended at 10.36 am

On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —

10.45 am

Mr Speaker: The Member who wished to make himself heard has received correspondence from me. I hope that he will give it due consideration.

I have received —

Mr S Wilson: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Since you have —

Mr Speaker: I am not calling the Member to make a point of order. I have corresponded with him, and I asked him —

Mr S Wilson: You asked me to give consideration —

Mr Speaker: Order. Due consideration requires some reflection, preferably in silence. I trust that the Member will give the letter due consideration. The Member will resume his seat.

NORTH/SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

Inland Waterways

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure that he wishes to make a statement on the North/South Ministerial Council meeting on waterways which was held on 27 June 2001.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McGimpsey): The third North/South Ministerial Council sectoral meeting on inland waterways took place in Enniskillen, County Fermanagh, on Wednesday 27 June 2001.

Following nomination by the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, Dr Farren and I represented the Northern Ireland Administration. The Irish Government were represented by Síle de Valera TD, Minister for Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands. I am making this report on behalf of myself and Dr Farren, who has approved the report.

The meeting opened with a progress report from the chief executive of Waterways Ireland, Mr John Martin. The Council noted that there had been disruption to work programmes due to restricted access on account of the threat of foot-and-mouth disease but that operations are now returning to normal. Since my last report to the Assembly, three major projects on the Shannon navigation at Limerick, Ballinasloe and Boyle have been completed, opening up those venues to boats for the first time. In Northern Ireland, work has been carried out to replace the lock gates at Movinagher on the Lower Bann navigation, and two public jetties at Devenish on Lough Erne have recently been refurbished.

The Council visited Waterways Ireland's temporary headquarters in Enniskillen and met some of the staff there. Overall, 220 professional, technical and industrial staff have now been transferred to Waterways Ireland, while a further 28 administrative staff have been temporarily seconded to the organisation. The recruitment process for the directors' posts commenced recently.

The Council approved Waterways Ireland's plans for promotion and marketing of inland waterways. Work is progressing on the development of a three-year strategy to promote the hire boat sector on the island as a separate niche market. A working group has been set up with representation from the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, Bord Fáilte and the hire boat sectors on both sides of the border to take this forward. A new brochure will be published shortly. Waterways Ireland will also prepare a longer-term marketing and promotion strategy in consultation with the cross-border tourism company, Tourism Ireland Ltd and other relevant stakeholders.

A promotions advisory group will be set up with representation from community, commercial and private user groups, as well as the tourism sector. The Council approved the setting up of a new marketing and communications directorate by Waterways Ireland to deliver these important marketing and promotions functions.

The Council received a report on the updated feasibility study on the Ulster Canal, which has been carried out by ESB International and Ferguson McIlveen. A number of options for restoration were assessed, and economic appraisals were undertaken. The preferred option recommended by the consultants and endorsed by Waterways Ireland is for restoration of the canal with six-metre-wide locks along a modified route that would link into the River Blackwater at the Lough Neagh end and the River Finn at the Lough Erne end.

The updated capital cost for the construction works is £89 million at 2000 prices. The construction phase of the project is estimated to take about seven years to complete. When inflation is taken into account, the final construction costs will be significantly higher than £89 million. The economic appraisal for the preferred option indicates a net present cost of £39 million at 2000 prices, discounting the projected cash flows over the estimated life of the project using the 6% discount rate currently applicable to UK public sector projects.

The Council recognised that there are non-monetary benefits that have to be considered. The Council noted Waterways Ireland's assessment of the feasibility study report. Now the two Governments must consider the report and determine the way forward. An executive summary of the consultants' report will be released to inform and promote public debate on the issues involved.

The Council approved both the selection process for recruitment of the chief executive officer and the draft strategic development plan for Foras na Gaeilge.

The Council agreed to meet again in sectoral format in autumn 2001.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr O'Neill): I welcome the Minister's statement and would like to record the Committee's pleasure that, despite some disruption caused by foot-and-mouth disease, a number of projects have been completed on both sides of the border. We are also glad that staffing levels have improved. Can the Minister tell us when Waterways Ireland's full complement of 380 employees, which he mentioned recently, will be achieved, and when the appointment of directors will be completed?

It is also good to see that the Council visited the temporary headquarters of Waterways Ireland in Enniskillen. Can the Minister tell us what stage the arrangements for the permanent headquarters are at? I am also glad that preparations for the three-year development strategy for

the hire boat sector are underway. Can the Minister tell us the timescale for the completion of these?

It is good to see the preparation that is being done on the longer-term marketing and promotions strategy in consultation with Tourism Ireland Ltd. One of the key issues emerging from the Committee's current inquiry into cultural tourism and the arts is that, to date, we have not been as effective as we could be in promoting and marketing our attractions. The Committee would like to know what priority will be accorded to this strategy as well as to the establishment of the promotions advisory group and the new marketing and communications directorate. We see this as being key to the developments in this area.

The Committee is glad to know that ESB International —

Mr Speaker: Order. I remind the House that this is an opportunity for questions to the Minister on his statement. It is not an opportunity for a further statement from the Committee on its views on these matters.

Mr O'Neill: I have asked four questions, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I know. It is an opportunity for Members to ask the Minister one question. The Minister is not required to answer more than one question. I must prevail on the Member to restrict himself to simply asking questions.

Mr O'Neill: Mr Speaker, I crave your indulgence. I have one more important question.

Mr Speaker: I will permit the Member to ask the question, but I am rather struck by how teachers and former teachers seem to be coming to the end of term. Need I say more?

Mr O'Neill: Fortunately, there is no detention at this stage. With regard to the report of Ferguson McIlveen and the feasibility study on the Ulster Canal, on which the Committee welcomes progress, how will the Minister proceed with his consideration? How quickly does he expect to arrive at a way forward? How does he intend to address the resources issue, which the Committee considers to be important, as does the Minister?

Mr McGimpsey: I will respond to as many of these points as possible. Staff recruitment is under way. Waterways Ireland currently employs 220 staff, has 28 seconded staff, and is rapidly moving towards the full complement of 380. There have been difficulties, not least suspension, which slowed down the rate and process of recruitment. That has prevented Waterways Ireland from reaching its full staff complement, although it is working as quickly as it can.

Although I do not have a specific date for when Waterways Ireland expects to be fully manned, the process is being taken seriously and is being dealt with as a matter of urgency. It should not spin out over one or two

years. I can write to the Member to give him a better appreciation of it.

The headquarters will be in Enniskillen, with 70 full-time jobs. The selection of a site is being undertaken by Construction Services, which is acting in an advisory capacity to Waterways Ireland. There are seven proposals on five sites, from which a shortlist of three will be drawn up. Those three proposals will go to a full feasibility study, which will include planning. The decision on the final site will be made after this process.

The Member mentioned the marketing of Waterways Ireland. I cannot give a specific date for that, but I can give the Member the chronology as it has built up. Water-based tourism is one of the prime *raison d'être* for reinvesting in and reinvigorating our inland waterways and canals. The potential is there, but there is no point in doing all this work if we do not promote it and go after the market.

Marketing is a matter for consideration by Waterways Ireland, which has decided to appoint a director for promotions and is currently in discussions with Bord Fáilte, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and the new tourist body, Tourism Ireland Ltd. Waterways Ireland is also working with local communities and local commercial sectors — boat hire companies, for example — and is dealing with the stakeholders as they bring forward a promotional strategy for internal and international marketing.

11.00 am

An updated feasibility study on the Ulster Canal has been conducted, and the cost at 2000 prices is £89 million. Because of the lifetime of the canal, construction will take seven years by traditional methods and with traditional funding. The price, therefore, will rise. Roughly half of the canal is in Northern Ireland and the rest is in the Irish Republic, so the arrangement is for an almost fifty-fifty split in relation to finding the capital. There are, however, opportunities for attracting private finance into that investment, and it is important that we explore those avenues as we move forward. There is good business potential in the recreation of the Ulster canal system, and I have no doubt that private finance can be attracted. We must look at that in more depth.

There are hidden benefits — for example, in targeting social need. Canals go through rural areas and areas that suffer from low economic activity. The experience in the Irish Republic, on the mainland and in Europe is that this type of development in such areas greatly enhances local communities.

There are other factors to be considered, but the feasibility study is based primarily on the previous study for a six-metre-wide canal to allow use by existing boats on Lough Erne. That is the next step.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mrs Nelis): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. Can he give us some detail of the approved plan by Waterways Ireland for promotion and marketing? When will the new brochure on the hire boat sector on both sides of the border be available? Will the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee be given a preview of any promotional material? In the past, I have seen brochures produced by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board that did not live up to the standards expected of a major tourist organisation. Will the Committee have any input into the new marketing strategy?

Finally, I express my concern at the illegal exclusion of our Ministers from the cross-border Ministerial Council meetings.

Mr McGimpsey: In my response to Mr O'Neill, I dealt with the promotion and marketing of Waterways Ireland. As I said, that process is under way. The short-term and longer-term marketing and promotion are being looked at with Tourism Ireland, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, Bord Fáilte and the relevant stakeholders. I have no doubt that brochures will be produced. Waterways Ireland is a stand-alone body, answering to the North/ South Ministerial Council and, therefore, to the Assembly. I have no doubt that arrangements can be made to allow Committee input into the promotions strategy.

I hear what you say about previous strategies not always living up to what had been anticipated. Given the history of the last 25 years, it was a difficult sell. Matters are now improving greatly. There is huge potential, and, as I said in an earlier answer, canals act as economic generators. Canals are a benefit to the community as a whole and especially to the communities situated close to them.

Mr Speaker: Order. I encourage all Members to address the House through the Chair. One needs to remind oneself of that from time to time.

Mrs Carson: I welcome the Minister's report, and I hope that he enjoyed his day in the centre of the universe — Enniskillen, one of the most beautiful places.

I note that three major projects have been completed on the Shannon. Are there any major projects for the Erne system in the pipeline? I am delighted that the two jetties at Devenish have been refurbished. The work was necessary on that important site, which gets a lot of traffic. Will other jetties on the lough be refurbished and extended?

The Lough Erne system is experiencing increased pressure from boat traffic coming from the Republic of Ireland. Can the Minister give details of the number of craft entering the system from the Shannon waterways?

Is there a monitoring system in place? I ask because of the increased pressure on the public jetties.

Mr Speaker: Order. I find teachers difficult to control, particularly as regards the number of questions they tend to ask. It is an occupational hazard. Could the Member restrict her questions?

Mrs Carson: I have finished.

Mr McGimpsey: Three major projects were completed recently at Limerick, Ballinasloe and Boyle. As regards Lough Erne, six public jetties at Muckross, Bellanaleck, Magho, Inishdavar, Devenish East and Devenish West have been completely refurbished. A new floating jetty has been placed on the Lower Bann at Toome, and the gates at Movinagher Lough were replaced recently. There is an ongoing maintenance and capital programme for waterways, and it applies to Lough Erne because Upper and Lower Lough Erne are an integral part of the system. Those matters are under way as a matter of course.

Mrs Carson asked about projects in Northern Ireland. I referred to the Ulster Canal and the upgrade feasibility study that is now with us. The executive summary will be given to the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee and placed in the Library. I announced recently that we are conducting a study into the Lagan navigation system. That is another major part of the scheme. If the River Lagan navigation system were completed, with navigation through Lough Neagh, it would connect Belfast, through the Ulster Canal, to the Shannon waterways. That is an exciting prospect, offering huge potential for tourism earnings.

Mr Hilditch: The Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee, having voiced concerns about feasibility studies relating to tourism in Northern Ireland, would like to ask the Minister to indicate when the report on the Ulster Canal project will be available. We do not want to see another Navan Fort situation or the similar problems that are found at many other tourist attractions.

How many are on the working group set up to consider the promotion and marketing of inland waterways? Will the Minister give his assessment of the projects completed to date in view of the major developments that have taken place in the Republic compared with the minor works in Northern Ireland? Did all completed projects meet their budgetary targets?

Mr McGimpsey: I have referred to the issues that Mr Hilditch raises. The executive summary of the canal report will be available to the Committee and will be placed in the Library. It reached us last week and will be a matter for discussion between the Committee and myself. It is a major project, so it is important that the Committee put forward its views.

The Member asked about completed projects. I gave a sense of what has happened. We must understand that there has been major investment in canals and inland

waterways in the Irish Republic over a number of years and that they have a major system in operation now. The Republic needs to work on six road bridges in order to bring the Royal Canal back into operation. That work is beginning immediately. The Republic's system is advanced; the system here is not. As Members know, nothing was spent on canals and inland navigation in Northern Ireland during the past 25 years. We are starting from a lower base, which means that large amounts of capital must be found. That is why it is important that Waterways Ireland and the Department, in consultation with the Committee, consider the question of resources more broadly than just relying on Assembly Budgets. It will not be feasible to find the money from the Assembly Budget under the current financial restrictions.

Waterways Ireland is recruiting a director of promotions. The body has also assembled a group of stakeholders in the area — such as Lough Erne boat owners, other users and local councils — who are looking for help from the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, Bord Fáilte and Tourism Ireland Ltd. The group wants to promote a strategy, and anyone is welcome to contribute good ideas. As I said to Mrs Nelis, I will ensure that the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee has an opportunity to make a contribution to that process.

Mr McMenamin: I am definitely not a teacher — I never was.

Canals are certainly part of our heritage, and the restoration of canals must be applauded. My local council, Strabane District Council, is carrying out a feasibility study on the restoration of the canal. I want to let the Minister know that there is life in the north-west and that we are looking for funds for the restoration of Strabane Canal.

What steps has the Minister taken to resolve the problem of the proposed development of a footbridge that will create an obstacle to navigation on the Newry Canal at Scarva? The creation of such obstacles must be avoided if we are to encourage and promote the wider use of our inland waterways.

Mr McGimpsey: I note what Mr McMenamin said about the Strabane Canal and the north-west. To be frank, I must admit that I was not aware that there had been a canal in Strabane.

The Member referred to a footbridge at Scarva on the Newry-Portadown Canal, which was an important navigation canal in the nineteenth century. That canal is on the list for refurbishment. It was an important link to Portadown and was part of the network of canals. I had no input into the decision on the construction of the footbridge at Scarva. My Department was not asked for permission, and it is not clear to me what our interest in that was. In examining such matters, we would consider it a retrograde step to build a bridge over a canal, without allowing sufficient space underneath it to allow

for the navigation of boats. Questions must be asked about that.

As I understand it, the Newry-Portadown Canal was listed by the Environment and Heritage Service, which may have been an extreme step at the time. However, that step would seem not to have worked if they have allowed the construction of a bridge over the canal that does not permit navigation, even though they knew — as everybody does — about the remit of Waterways Ireland and the interest of this House in the reinstatement of our canal network.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh ráiteas an Aire ar leibhéal amháin ach ar leibhéal eile tá mé míshásta leis. I welcome the report and the fact that the meeting took place, but, again, I want to record my dissatisfaction and protest at the continued unlawful exclusion of Sinn Féin Ministers from North/South Council meetings.

I want to concentrate on the feasibility study on the Ulster Canal and on the crucial matter of facilitating and promoting public debate on the issue. I was concerned at the comments made by the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mrs Carson) about the pressure on Lough Erne created by traffic from the Republic. I would have thought that there would be a universal welcome for visitors to Lough Erne. Fermanagh District Council has a progressive attitude towards that issue.

When will the executive summary of the consultants' report be released into the public domain? That is necessary for meaningful public debate to take place. Further to the question asked by the Committee Chairperson, Mr O'Neill, can the Minister give preliminary details of how that project could be financed by the two Governments?

11.15 am

Mr McGimpsey: We will make the executive summary available immediately to members of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee, and it will be placed in the Library. That will be a step forward. We have just received the report, which is very technical and comprises several volumes, and we are still trying to assimilate it. The executive summary is the first step towards doing that, and its contents will be shared immediately.

It is important that we have a public debate on the matter, so that people can get an appreciation of the importance of the scheme, the economic benefits that will flow from the recreation of the canals network, and the potential for water-based tourism from which big earnings can be made. Other countries that have developed their canal networks have profited in that way, and that is the *raison d'être* of Waterways Ireland. It wants to create a network that will attract visitors, and we will all benefit from that. We want to ensure that facilities such as Lough Erne are used and that visitors are attracted to

these areas. Mr McElduff may have had made another point, but I have answered most of his questions.

We have not yet addressed the issue of finance. The study states that the revenue consequences will be positive — in other words, once the canal is operational, the revenue from it will more than take care of planned maintenance, renewals and refurbishment. The capital cost is high — £89 million at last year's prices — and we should be a wee bit more imaginative rather than simply taking the traditional funding route. There are means of attracting private finance investment for such a scheme.

Mr J Wilson: I congratulate the Minister, his Department and Lisburn Borough Council on the recent world canals conference, which was held for three days in Dublin and one day in Northern Ireland. They made an excellent contribution, and our officials and Lisburn Borough Council have much to be pleased about. It was an excellent few days. I attended the conference with the Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure, Mr O'Neill.

Is the Minister aware of the generally held view that those employed in the Lough Erne boat hire businesses are losing out in the tourism market, principally because of the exchange rate? For the most part, tourists are hiring their boats in the South before immediately travelling north to Upper and Lower Lough Erne. Is he aware — this has been referred to already — of the shortage of public jetties and private moorings in Lough Erne? That is another handicap for the tourist industry north of the border.

Will the Minister address the matter of ownership of the foreshore? The foreshore is the portion of land surrounding both lakes that was exposed when, some years ago, the water level of the lake decreased considerably. I understand that only 9% of the foreshore is owned by adjacent landowners. I can only assume that the other 91% is owned by the Crown, and that raises questions with regard to Waterways Ireland.

Will the Minister also examine the matter of ownership of the bedrock and soil of the lake — the portion beyond the foreshore? I draw that to the Minister's attention because the handicaps created by foot-and-mouth disease and the exchange rate have this year created additional problems for those involved in the boat-hire business in Northern Ireland, on top of their existing problems. When those who work in the boat-hire industry attempt to develop their own businesses, they are being asked to hand over large sums of money for foreshore land. Indeed, if we were to go further and try to put a breakwater into the lake, the owner of the bedrock would be looking for thousands of pounds. Is the Minister aware that Northern Ireland boat-hirers are considerably handicapped because of that? If not, will he raise the matters with Waterways Ireland?

Mr McGimpsey: There is a cost difference between hiring boats in the Irish Republic and hiring them in Northern Ireland. It is primarily to do with the exchange rate and the disparity between the punt and the pound. There are advantages in hiring boats in the Irish Republic. However, set against that is that fact that anyone who wants to tour that area must drive the boat up to Lough Erne. It is a case of swings and roundabouts.

I am not clear about how I could alleviate the problem. The exchange rate and the differential between the pound and the punt are beyond the responsibility of my Department — and, indeed, of the House. It is important that we consider what else can be done to compensate other areas. First, we must get a sense of the scope of the problem. There is always anecdotal evidence of the problem, but Waterways Ireland could usefully undertake to establish its size and scope.

There has been a lack of investment over a number of years in jetties on Lough Erne. Waterways Ireland is looking at the issue and seeking to make investment. To date, six public jetties on Lough Erne have been completely refurbished. There is ongoing capital investment in our waterways.

I understand that the issue regarding the ownership of the foreshore of Lower Lough Erne came about because the depth of the water in the lough was lowered some time ago, leaving a portion of land between the old and new waterlines. My understanding is that the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development owns the bulk of the foreshore, although it has sold off some of the foreshore, which is now in private ownership. I will ask further questions on the matter and get details about the actual ownership of the foreshore. I am not clear about who owns the bedrock and the soil beneath the water. I will find out and write to the Member.

Mr Shannon: The Minister said that the construction costs for restoration of the Ulster Canal would rise above £89 million. Considering that the economic appraisal for the preferred option is based on a figure of £39 million, how will the Minister ensure that costs are kept down, and how will he ensure that the project does not go over budget, inevitably creating a drain on the public purse?

What involvement has Waterways Ireland had with local businesses to develop tourism? Has sufficient discussion taken place with local people, and have the needs of disabled been considered?

Mr McGimpsey: As far as Waterways Ireland is concerned, the promotion strategy will take stakeholders — specifically the responsible tourist promotion bodies — into account. Local businesses are important stakeholders, and their views will be taken into account. Disability access to waterways is important, and over the past 12 months my Department has invested in construction work and will continue to do so. There has been underinvestment in that area for many years, but the issue now takes priority. The cost is £89 million at

2000 prices, but that cost will rise when inflation is taken into account.

Against that, because Governments do what Governments do, and the Civil Service does what the Civil Service does, we must also consider the estimated life of the canal, which is 56 years. There is a discount rate for the total cost, and we end up with a net present cost. If allowance is made for that, for income generated during the construction period and for maintenance costs, the net present cost is about £39 million, which makes the Ulster Canal unviable. However, that does not mean that it should not go ahead. We have considered private finance and private investment for the Ulster Canal. Economic activity along the canal network, as enjoyed in other countries, will be attractive to business and private investment. I am convinced that we will not need to meet the full amount of capital cost.

We must be imaginative and look to the market. There are ways and means of doing that. An estimate of inflation can be incorporated into the cost, although I cannot govern the future. Completing the project on time and on cost is a construction management problem, and a proper investigation should be conducted to ensure that the work includes everything that is required.

Mr Dallat: As a teacher, I promise to be brief. My limited knowledge of local history informs me that there has been no serious dredging on the Lower Bann since the 1930s. I accept the Minister's suggestion that there will be enormous benefits for people on that side of Lough Neagh if the proposals go ahead. Can he ensure that the Lower Bann will be shipshape for the visitors who will undoubtedly travel further north than they have in the past?

Mr McGimpsey: The Lower Bann is a navigable waterway and falls within the remit of Waterways Ireland. It will be treated in the same way as other waterways, in that capital will be invested as and when it is required or becomes available. Work and investment are ongoing, and Waterways Ireland will make cases for various areas, including the Lower Bann.

Mr Gibson: Can the Minister tell us how many miles of the Ulster Canal are in Northern Ireland and how many miles are in the Irish Republic? Have the 220 people who have been relocated to Enniskillen been subject to fair employment legislation, as required by section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which is used by every agency that employs people in Northern Ireland? What is the religious balance among those 220 people, and how many are likely to be employed, bearing in mind that an all-Ireland body is being planted in Enniskillen? Given the historic nature of Enniskillen people may have some response to make to the idea of an all-Ireland body being planted there.

11.30 am

Mr McGimpsey: Fair employment practices will be followed at all times in recruitment, and equality

statements have been produced by Waterways Ireland and will be adopted as equality schemes. I do not know what stage the schemes are at; they may already have been adopted.

The 28 staff who were seconded to Waterways Ireland came from other Government bodies and have been subject to standard Government recruitment practices. The 70 staff in Enniskillen will also be subject to standard recruitment practices, including fair employment practices. Everything that should be done under the terms of the agreement and of section 75 will be done.

I do not know the length of the canal in miles, but I will ask, and I will forward the information. Roughly half the length of the Ulster Canal lies in Northern Ireland, and roughly half lies in the Irish Republic. The arrangement, as far as Waterways Ireland is concerned, is that we bear the capital costs in Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic's Government bear the capital cost in the Irish Republic. Running costs are based on a percentage. Last year, our running costs were 9% of the total budget. That percentage will vary as more staff are taken on from, for example, the Rivers Agency to take on the work of managing the navigations in Northern Ireland. Next year, Northern Ireland's share of the budget will rise to 12%.

NORTH/SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

Special EU Programmes Body

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of Finance and Personnel that he wishes to make a statement on the meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council for the special EU programmes sector held on 20 June 2001.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):

Mr Dermot Nesbitt and I attended the sectoral meeting on 20 June 2001. The Irish Government were represented by Mr Charlie McCreevy TD, Minister for Finance. This report has been approved by Mr Nesbitt and is made on his behalf.

This was the fourth meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in this format. Although the North/South Ministerial Council in the special EU programmes sector met just over two months ago, on 9 April, this meeting was needed to endorse the Peace II programme complement that was agreed by the monitoring committee on 15 June and had to be sent to the European Commission by 22 June. We also needed to set out a clear programme of work for the body over the summer months for the implementation of the Peace II programme. The delivery of the programme depends on putting in place the final arrangements for its implementation. It is vital that that should happen quickly. The other substantive item on the agenda was a review of progress on implementing the common chapter. We also needed to set out a clear programme of work for the summer in that area.

The chief executive of the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) reported on progress made by the body since the meeting on 9 April. The report covered a range of topics, including progress to date on the selection of intermediary funding bodies, the development of local strategy partnerships, the current position on gap funding in Northern Ireland and accommodation issues. The chief executive advised that four local strategy partnerships had been established to date and that work was continuing to establish local strategy partnerships in the remaining district council areas. The Council noted the progress made by the body on those matters.

The Council underlined, as it had done at previous meetings, the importance of the role of the body, and the EU programmes coming under its remit, in contributing to the development of peace and reconciliation and maximising social and economic benefits on the island, not least in the border areas.

The Council noted that between 1995 and the end of the current round of structural fund programmes in 2006, the European Union will have contributed about 1·3 billion

euros to North/South programmes. It will continue to play an important role in support of the peace process.

The first paper tabled at the meeting reviewed the progress made to date and outlined the next steps towards implementation of the common chapter contained in the Northern Ireland structural funds plan and the National Development Plan for Ireland. That set out a strategic framework for building on and developing North/South and wider co-operation across a broad range of sectors and activities in the context of those plans. The paper highlighted the fact that, under the Belfast Agreement, North/South co-operation has been placed on a new basis through the establishment of the North/South Ministerial Council and the new institutional framework outlined in strand two. In this context, the North/South Ministerial Council provides a strategic focus for taking forward implementation of the common chapter. Moreover, the SEUPB has been given a statutory mandate to monitor and promote implementation of the common chapter under the direction of the North/South Ministerial Council.

The Council welcomed as timely a report by the two Finance Departments on progress to date in taking forward the co-operative actions outlined in the common chapter. This report showed that while commitment to implementation of the common chapter had been clearly stated, there was a need for greater clarity on a number of the issues involved. In order to ensure the maximum effectiveness of the common chapter in delivering practical benefits both North and South, and to set out more clearly the policy and administrative framework within which the SEUPB will perform its important role in monitoring and promoting implementation of the document, the report pointed to the need for a clearly defined action plan to address the issues involved. Accordingly, the report recommended the establishment of a working group, chaired by the two Finance Departments, to review the issues identified and to bring forward proposals for action to the next North/South Ministerial Council sectoral meeting in this format. The Council noted the progress to date on the implementation of the common chapter and approved the establishment of the working group as recommended in that report.

The Council was advised that the Peace II monitoring committee had agreed the programme complement at its meeting on 15 June 2001 and that this completed the final stage of development of the programme. The complement, which was prepared by the SEUPB as managing authority for the programme, contains detailed information on how the funds allocated will be spent. The Council endorsed the approval of the programme complement and agreed that it should be sent to the European Commission for information, as required by structural funds regulation.

The Council also noted with satisfaction the progress made to date on the implementation of the Peace II programme. The programme complement apart, there are a number of associated stages that must be completed to

enable full implementation of the programme. These include the appointment of intermediary funding bodies (IFBs) to deliver elements of the programme and the development of the local strategy partnerships in Northern Ireland. It was agreed, given the key role that IFBs had to play in the delivery of the programme, that priority should be given to concluding contract negotiations with IFBs and that a deadline of 20 July should be set.

The Council received an overview on the progress to date in relation to spend and closure of the current Peace I and INTERREG II programmes. Under EU regulations, all funding under both programmes is required to be fully expended by 31 December 2001. The Council noted that overall expenditure currently stands at 86% for Peace I and 89% for INTERREG II and that the SEUPB would provide a further progress report on the implementation of both programmes at the next North/South Ministerial Council meeting in this sector. The Council also agreed that the body should provide monthly reports to the two Finance Departments on the closure of the programmes.

The Council received a report on progress made to date on negotiations involving the two Finance Departments, the body, and the European Commission on INTERREG III programme proposals. The Council was advised that the European Commission's comments on the draft INTERREG IIIA programme had been forwarded to the Northern Ireland and Southern authorities in May and that a meeting had taken place in Brussels on 1 June involving the European Commission, the two Finance Departments and the programmes body.

The Council was advised that it is planned to submit a revised programme to the European Commission by mid-August and that it is expected that negotiations on this programme will be completed in the early autumn. The Council noted the current position of the negotiations and stressed the need to ensure that these were progressed quickly so that the programme could be implemented on the ground as soon as possible. Given the delay in getting this programme up and running, the Council indicated that it hoped to hear about significant progress in this area at the next North/South Ministerial Council sectoral meeting in this format.

The Council received a report that provided an update on the staffing and recruitment position for the implementation body. The Council was advised that the SEUPB is currently engaged in a recruitment exercise to fill the five posts that were approved by the North/South Ministerial Council at the sectoral meeting in April and four other posts that were approved by the Council in the initial staffing structure for the body on 16 June 2000. It is hoped that these appointments will be made in the near future.

The Council was also advised that the exercise to carry out a full analysis and evaluation of the proposed staffing

structure for the body was ongoing. Although some work remains to be done, it is expected that this will be completed by the end of the summer. The Council agreed that in the meantime the body could proceed to recruit a further 19 staff to replace lower-tier staff, within the staffing levels agreed in the initial structure, who are currently on secondment or who are on short-term contracts with the body. It was acknowledged that recruitment of these posts now, followed by recruitment of second-tier management posts after completion of the full evaluation, would allow for a phased replacement, which would avoid any sudden depletion of staff and should assist in a more organised transfer of knowledge.

The Council noted that the cost of these staff would be met from within the approved budget for the body and urged the Finance Departments to work with the body to ensure that the whole staffing exercise is completed as soon as possible.

11.45 am

It was agreed that the Council would meet again in this format in Northern Ireland in October 2001. The exact venue for the meeting has yet to be confirmed.

The Council agreed the text of a joint communiqué, which was issued following the meeting, and a copy of this has been placed in the Assembly Library.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Mr Molloy): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister of Finance and Personnel's statement on this meeting, which brings us up to date with the European programmes. It is important that we move swiftly to implement this because of the gaps that have arisen in funding.

Is the Minister satisfied that the arrangements that have been put in place will allow the funds to be drawn down and wholly utilised? When does the Minister plan to put the money into use? The report notes the establishment of a working group to examine aspects of the common chapter. Precisely what issues are to be addressed by this group? Will the Minister assure the Assembly that this will not introduce a delay in the distribution of funds that are much needed on the ground?

I raise the issue of gap funding because it is becoming clear that gap funding applications from a number of the most disadvantaged areas have been refused, and a number of projects have collapsed as a result. Is the Minister aware of this? Can he do anything to ensure that the gap funding will be put in place to prevent schemes from falling apart?

Finally, why has only 86% of the Peace II money been spent at this date?

Mr Durkan: I recognise the Committee's keen interest in the whole area of EU structural funds, not least in respect of the Peace programme.

As regards a timetable, the fact that the programme complement has been agreed by the monitoring committee allows us now to take the next step of preparing to call for applications for the funding. We also need to complete work on the contracts for the intermediary funding bodies, so we are working towards seeing the first allocations from the Peace II fund being issued in the autumn.

We appreciate that that means we will be developing some of these arrangements over the summer. We want to take steps to make sure that people are fully informed — as people's patterns are not very regular during the summer — but we also share the sense of urgency articulated by Mr Molloy.

The work that is to take place on the common chapter should not in any way delay any of the necessary work, particularly in bringing forward the Peace II programme. The cross-border provisions in the Peace II programme are not necessarily predicated or dependent on the development of the commitments in the common chapter, although we want to bring both forward together.

The report that I referred to in my statement identified several difficulties in realising the prospectus that is common to both the previous common chapter and the present common chapter plans. The working group is trying to recognise those difficulties and to find solutions to them. However, that should not hold up any of the work that we need to undertake to get Peace II on-stream.

With regard to gap funding, it will do no harm to remind Members that when we were bringing in the interim funding arrangements, groups were lobbying us and saying that £3 million was needed for gap funding in this financial year. The arrangements that we have put in place for the six months to October of this year have seen a total of £10 million in interim funding being awarded. Therefore the current arrangements have provided £10 million in gap funding for that six-month period. That compares well with the total of £9 million gap funding that we issued in the last financial year, and it certainly compares favourably with the £3 million that the lobby groups asked for.

As Mr Molloy said, not everyone was successful in those applications. Departments had to make a judgement on the basis of Peace II criteria. Decisions can be queried and subsequently reviewed. People who have been unsuccessful in gap funding applications under these arrangements can reapply when the Department of Finance and Personnel calls for applications in the new round for the full programme. Anyone who has been successful in gap funding applications also has to make a full and proper application in the new round.

Mr Hussey: Mr Speaker, I will try not to give you the problems that you had earlier with an ex-teacher.

Will the Minister put more meat on the bones of the procedures for selection of the intermediary funding bodies?

I agree with the Chairperson of the Finance and Personnel Committee, who has already referred to the gap funding scenario. Will the Minister inform the House of the percentage of groups that have been unsuccessful? The Minister told the House, in his answer to Mr Molloy, how much money has been distributed, but it would be useful to know the percentage of groups that have been successful and unsuccessful. It would also be useful if the criteria or scoring system used for groups that appeal decisions were made available to all groups, so that they could ascertain the likelihood of the success of an appeal.

The Minister is aware of particular concerns in the Unionist community about the effectiveness of Peace I. Can the Minister confirm that those concerns have been addressed in the proposed implementation of the Peace II programme, together with an increased sustainability requirement? As Peace I comes to an end in which there appears to have been some back-end loading of projects, which explains the 14% still to be distributed, will the Minister assure the House that the end monitoring of the entire Peace programme will include a review of the effectiveness of Peace I in the Unionist community? A front-end loading of Peace II may be required to redress that balance.

Mr Durkan: All Members will recognise that there were delays in getting aspects of Peace I up and running, which meant that the spending rate ran behind in some respects. However, steps are being taken to ensure that all spending is completed before the end of this year.

As well as the lessons taught us by Peace I, the Department of Finance and Personnel is trying to recognise the issues that the Member refers to concerning uptake of the programme. It is essential that all sections of the community have an equal opportunity to benefit from the programme. That is why — and I repeat this for the umpteenth time in the House — under Peace II, horizontal principles have been adopted and are inherent in all aspects of the programme, and those principles address equality and balance considerations.

Members of the monitoring committee also expressed concerns about these issues. The programme complement has been agreed by the monitoring committee not only on the basis of some of the commitments given about the programme complement, but also because of the significance of the horizontal principles.

Decisions can only be made on the basis of applications received. Applications received from areas or groups that meet the criteria will be well favoured. Money cannot simply be withheld on the basis that other applications were not received. As we know from our experience of Peace I, we need to make sure that we have a reasonable allocation and reasonable drawdown rates. Members need to look at all of these issues in the round.

The local strategy partnerships will be able to carry forward many important lessons of the previous programme

to the intermediary funding bodies (IFBs). Many of the issues that involved some differential uptakes as far as Peace I was concerned will be well reflected on by local strategy partnerships, IFBs and Government Departments in Peace II.

IFBs were appointed using a competitive tendering process, as previously indicated to the House. The outcome of the process was the subject of a press release and was notified to the Finance and Personnel Committee.

Ms Lewsley: The Minister mentioned the 20 July deadline for concluding the contract negotiations with the IFBs. Will he confirm that every effort will be made to conclude these negotiations within the deadline and ensure, in a speedy and satisfactory way, that IFBs are ready to do their job, which is to feed this money through to help the groups on the ground?

Mr Durkan: When the North/South Ministerial Council agreed the deadline of 20 July last week, it was with the intention of meeting that deadline. We hope that agreement can be reached sooner.

We recognise the importance of ensuring that the overall programme is implementable. We need to ensure that the key position of IFBs, who will be responsible for distributing about 34% of the total value of the programme, is clearly established. While the tendering process and evaluation exercise that took place identified the bodies that should be appointed, there are other outstanding issues and some contractual points to be sorted out. Those are being pursued, not with a view to creating any delays or difficulties, but with a view to assisting in certainty and making sure that IFBs are best placed to perform their roles in a timely way. They should ensure that the managing and paying authorities are in the best place to ensure that the rest of the programme complements well and properly with those arrangements.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: I do not welcome the statement. It has serious implications for the future of this funding as it applies to Northern Ireland.

I know a little about the programme as I, together with my two MEP Colleagues, sponsored it originally. At first, the Irish Republic wanted to get its hands on this money. The three of us were determined that the greater proportion of this money would come to Northern Ireland as the people here have suffered the most. We said — generously, if I may add — that the border counties had been affected by the problems. We decided unanimously that there would be money for that.

The new cross-border body is getting its hands on all this money. I do not know what legal right it has to have anything to do with Peace I or INTERREG II, because that was not originally in its agreement, and it was not operating when those programmes came about. Ministers have been telling people in Northern Ireland that the money has run out. We now find out that 86% of the funds

allocated for peace has been spent and the remainder has not. This money could have been made available to those operations that had to shut down. These are serious matters, which the Assembly should take cognisance of.

12.00

Is the Minister saying that all the money coming from Europe has to be scrutinised by the joint board? What about the money directed specially to Northern Ireland? I know that there is not yet a structure in place for monitoring the situation — meetings have been called but have not taken place. I did, however, attend a meeting with the Minister's party leader, and we had a long discussion about the monitoring of the money from Peace II. We need to know how this will be structured. Originally the three MEPs nominated two representatives to the main monitoring body. I have been pressing the Minister for information on what is to happen with regard to that but, so far, have not received any. I am surprised that it seems to have been delegated to Mr Nesbitt, who finds it difficult to organise his diary in order to meet the people who should be making representation to him. There has been difficulty in getting this matter settled. It needs to be settled. The money used to come to Northern Ireland, but it seems that the spending and monitoring of it is now in the hands of the Irish Republic. That is the key to the whole situation. The Minister —

Mr Speaker: Will the Member bring his question to a close?

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: My question is simple. Mr Durkan and I have talked about this matter. I put the question to him personally, eyeball to eyeball. I made the situation crystal clear to him, and he knows my position. You do not need a dictionary to understand what I am getting at.

Mr Durkan: I acknowledge fully the insights Dr Paisley has as a Member of the European Parliament who was very much involved in securing the Peace I programme. That being said, there are several misapprehensions under which he is labouring.

First, 80% of the Peace II moneys are to be spent in Northern Ireland, 20% in the border regions. The Special EU Programmes Body is the managing authority for Peace II. That is in position and is legal. There is no question of anything else being changed or moved in that regard.

Secondly, we need to be clear about the Peace I money and the 86% spend rate. The money has all been allocated. The problem is that not all of it has been drawn down and spent. Under the European Union regulations, we do not have the freedom to decide to spend the money on something else. We have to follow the regulations. Money can only be spent within the confines of the measures for which it has been allocated. Where it is clear that money may not be spent on a relevant project, it will have to go to designated reserve projects. It is not

a case of going to another project that is currently in funding difficulties. The regulations and the programmes will not allow us to do that.

With regard to the monitoring arrangements for Peace II, in case it has escaped Members' notice there are monitoring committees in place. There is a community support framework (CSF) monitoring committee as required by European regulations, created on a format agreed by social partners and others, including local government, arising from the interim CSF monitoring committee.

Monitoring committees for the programme for building sustainable prosperity and the Peace II programme have been set up and are already functioning, having been tasked with approving the programme complements. There are five sub-regional representatives who give voice to local government interests and perspectives on the CSF monitoring committee. They are from five political parties, all of which are represented in the Assembly.

The two programme monitoring committees comprise representatives from four parties, including the Member's own party. The Peace II monitoring committee, which is a North/South body, and which is chaired by the Special EU Programmes Body, includes, for instance, a DUP MLA. Those arrangements are in place.

Dr Paisley referred to the Northern Ireland Partnership Board, which was just one aspect of the Peace I programme. It did not monitor the whole programme; it oversaw district partnership measures alone.

Under the new programme, we will be setting up a Northern Ireland regional partnership board. It will not only oversee local strategy partnerships, but will promote, foster and sponsor the wider development of partnerships, rather than micromanaging the local partnerships. Not least, it will try to improve the interaction of Government Departments and statutory agencies in regard to the work of partnerships. It will also try to build more partnership links between the different districts.

Because it will have a wider ambit, it is appropriate that the chairperson of the regional partnership board should be from the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. It will be the responsibility of the two junior Ministers. The secretariat for that body will be the Special EU Programmes Body. It will be an arrangement particular to Northern Ireland, because it is specifically the regional partnership board for Northern Ireland. Members should not be under any misapprehension that services, arrangements or facilities that apply specifically to Northern Ireland cannot be provided by the Special EU Programmes Body — it is entirely competent.

Mr Neeson: I welcome the Minister's statement. However, in common with Dr Paisley, I think that many grey areas remain, particularly in regard to the relationship between the Special EU Programmes Body and the

monitoring committee that has already been established in Northern Ireland. Despite the Minister's attempt to outline the relationships, the details are still unclear.

Secondly, have all the intermediary funding bodies (IFBs) been identified?

Finally, the local strategy partnerships will have an important part to play in regard to the Peace II funds. Has a deadline been set for the establishment of the outstanding partnerships?

Mr Durkan: I am surprised that Mr Neeson, who is a member of the CSF monitoring committee, feels that there are grey areas. The role of the managing authority, as prescribed in European regulations, is clear. The Special EU Programmes Body is the managing authority for the Peace II programme. Equally, the European regulations set out the role of monitoring committees. In this round of funding, we are adhering to and applying the criteria for the operation of these committees in an effective way. The Peace II monitoring committee is chaired by the Special EU Programmes Body. This committee involves representatives from the social partners, from local government and even from Government Departments, some of whom are members, although most attend as advisers.

I cannot see where there is a grey area in the relationship between the monitoring committee and the body; the body is chairing the committee. The committee has agreed the programme complement, but it has identified some outstanding issues of concern, about which it will want to be satisfied as the programme gets under way and develops. The feedback that I have received from the two programme monitoring committees, not least at the last meeting of the CSF monitoring committee, which I chaired in Derry last week, is that people are very impressed with how those committees are operating. Their role is much clearer and more meaningful than in the previous round.

In respect of IFBs, I refer the Member to the answer that I have already given. The tendering process and the evaluation exercise have identified appropriate IFBs to cover the various measures for which they were asked to submit. That list has been identified and is a matter of public information. It has also been given to the House. We now want to conclude the necessary contractual negotiations by 20 July.

Ms Morrice: As the European Commission's Northern Ireland representative when Peace I was drawn up, I also have a special interest in this. I thank the Minister for the regular updates on the European programme and funding and how it is working. However, it has become clear through the interventions of Members that there are many grey areas and a great deal of confusion among Members and Committees. If we cannot understand how this system works, then the most important people — those who are trying to access funding and who are far further down the line of receiving information — must

be extremely confused. What plans does the Minister have to adopt a more proactive approach to supplying information on these issues? It should not be a matter of statements being issued now and again or questions being asked of the Minister. Is he prepared to publish a guide to funding for recipients?

Will the Assembly get the opportunity to review the programme complement and the common chapter? Members would appreciate a debate on the report. That would be a better way of letting them have the details. I also want to know about other forms of assistance and guidance for groups applying for gap funding. What should they do, and which areas should they apply for?

Finally, I want to ask about INTERREG III. The Council was advised of the European Commission's comments on the draft, which is now being revised. Can the Minister elucidate that? What did the European Commission not like about our proposal on INTERREG III? What changes are being made, and will the Assembly be able to see them?

Mr Durkan: There are a number of points there. I remind Members that information has been given to the House and is also available in a number of other forms, including the various documents that have been published.

Ms Morrice mentioned the programme complement and the common chapter. The common chapter is not part of the programme complement, but part of the community support framework that was adopted last December. It has been the subject of previous questions and discussion in the House and in Committees and has been cleared. The common chapter is also reflected in the National Development Plan for Ireland.

12.15 pm

Many Members — and I am not referring particularly to Ms Morrice — ask practically the same question each time I make a statement. They do not appear to listen to the answers, and then they complain about grey areas. I ask Members to consider that and apply it when the documentation is published and furnished to them. Many of the representations that I receive suggest that many people are “clueing in” to some of the arrangements that are in place. In particular, the very successful operation of the monitoring committees and the commitment of their members has been of great assistance in that regard.

Ms Morrice rightly made a point in relation to communication and information. All the monitoring committees have been impressing that since the first day of their existence. For example, last week the CSF monitoring committee agreed the appointment of a working group to take forward a communication strategy precisely in order to make good some of the points raised here. Let us remember, however, that because of the urgency of getting this programme under way and of getting funding on the ground, we cannot wait until there is a perfect communication strategy. The SEUPB has been working

to make sure that a range of facilities will be available for people to have information on the programme, on the types of measures that will be considered and on the relevant managing authorities for those measures. That will now be part of our work, as we have completed the agreement on the programme complements.

As has happened in relation to other programmes, the European Commission raised points concerning particular aspects of the regulations with regard to INTERREG III. The intent of particular issues has been queried, and, as INTERREG III is a cross-border programme, part of the questioning was to make sure that what was being said meant the same thing in both jurisdictions. That was agreed at the last North/South Ministerial Council meeting in this format, and I am quite happy that we will be able to answer the fairly straightforward questions raised by the Commission.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement and his comprehensive responses to several questions. On behalf of the North/South Ministerial Council, the Minister underlined the importance of the SEUPB's role in contributing to the development of peace and reconciliation and in maximising social and economic benefits on the island as a whole, not least in the border areas.

The Minister referred to the Special EU Programmes Body's statutory mandate in relation to monitoring the implementation of the common chapter. A number of programmes touch on health or education responsibilities. While the Minister is not directly responsible, I would like to know how he sees that in respect of the continuing unlawful ban imposed by David Trimble on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Minister of Education. Can the Minister advise the Members of any adverse effect of that ban in relation to those Departments' having input into such programmes as they come forward?

Mr Durkan: The Council recognised that development of the common chapter to date has not been satisfactory. There are several considerations. There has naturally been preoccupation with bringing forward the structural funds programme and the Peace programme. The concentration has been on negotiations with the European Commission and on working with the monitoring committees. Also, the common chapter is incorporated in the National Development Plan for Ireland in the South and in the community support framework in the North, but not always on a like-for-like basis. There are a number of issues.

The common chapter, as it applies in the South, is not confined strictly to EU funding. In the North, because it is in the community support framework, it is. There are therefore a number of meshing issues that we need to resolve. Those are not just between jurisdictions; we recognise that there are some meshing issues within

jurisdictions as well. The working group was set up to try to ensure that we have plans for progress.

There is no point in having the perfect common chapter. The Member will have heard me say before that we had the common chapter seven years ago — it was a great book, but the movie was never made. This time, we need to ensure that we move forward. To develop and implement the common chapter, the Special EU Programmes Body needs to have a certain role in promoting and monitoring it. However, it would be entirely remiss for either the North/South Ministerial Council or myself, as Minister of Finance and Personnel here, to say that it is entirely up to the body. The body will not be able to monitor and promote very much unless the Government make the appropriate decisions and have the will to make something of the common chapter. That is why the working group is important.

Developing and operating the common chapter will involve a range of Departments, both North and South. As things develop, it might well also involve some of the different sectoral formats of the North/South Ministerial Council. To date, it has not significantly done so. Any difficulties that there have been concerning any of the sectoral formats in the North/South Ministerial Council, or concerning the common chapter, cannot therefore be blamed on any of the difficulties that there were with North/South Ministerial Council appointments. The successful implementation of the common chapter will involve a range of different formats, including North/South Ministerial Council formats.

Mr Byrne: I too welcome the Minister's statement and, in particular, the confirmation of the staffing arrangements that are being put in place for the Special EU Programmes Body. Can the Minister confirm that that body will continue to receive the strong and active support of both Departments of Finance, thereby enabling it to carry out its important work in building peace and co-operation? Can he also confirm that the people, North and South, want to see continued peace-related progress being made?

Can the Minister give a commitment that a practical and meaningful common chapter programme of work will be formulated and acted upon, thus demonstrating active practical North/South co-operation and development along the border zone in particular?

Mr Durkan: The Member raised several points. I hope that it is clear to Members from what I have said that I, Charlie McCreevey TD and the North/South Ministerial Council are clear about the important role of the Special EU Programmes Body. We recognise the work that it has done in establishing itself and the necessary lead-in work that it has undertaken to bring Peace II on-stream. We are therefore committed to supporting the body's direct practical needs in relation to funding and staffing. Again, that was reflected in the

statement. The Departments of Finance, North and South, and the North/South Ministerial Council will want to continue to work with the body to ensure that it can discharge its role across a range of programmes in the way that it needs to. People should appreciate the complexity and diversity of working demands that the body will face.

As I indicated, we want to ensure that we have a work plan for the common chapter that translates it into a programme for achievement and delivery, not just a text of aspiration. We have to get away from the "it's the thought that counts" approach to these matters. That is why we have established the working group and why I look forward to having a work plan. I hope that the plan will be not just practical, but will have strategic merit. It should indeed benefit border areas, but the scope of the common chapter and the benefits that it might bring are not confined to border areas.

Mr Shannon: Over the years, many people have expressed concerns about the allocation of funding. What steps will be taken to ensure that funding is equally allocated between areas that are perceived to be Unionist and those that are Nationalist? There has been a large shortfall in funding for Unionist areas. Will funding targets be set, and, if so, who will monitor them? Will safeguards be put in place to prevent shortfalls? Are measures in place to ensure that both communities benefit from the programme?

Mr Durkan: The Member has raised a familiar point. First, I refer the Member to my previous answer, when I spoke about horizontal principles, including balance and equality. I also remind Members that we must operate in accordance with section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Authorities are required to pay due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity.

An equality impact assessment was carried out on the policies in the structural funds plan to ensure that they did not directly or indirectly discriminate against or disadvantage any group. The assessment also identified the scope for enhancing equality of opportunity. Since then, we have consulted the Equality Commission and decided to update the assessment, in the light of the further refinements that have been made to the programme's priorities and the more detailed information that was available in the programme complements.

Summaries of the operational programmes and details of the programme complements were sent to about 650 consultees, and some helpful comments were made. We are analysing the results of that exercise. The main questions related to communications, accessibility and monitoring. The programme monitoring committees and the community support framework monitoring committee want to see those issues pursued. Everyone involved is well seized of those issues.

We cannot predetermine a certain geographical distribution of funding. To do so would be to disregard

the merit of particular projects or how well they measure up against the criteria set out by the Department and the European Commission. There would not be much point in negotiating the criteria with the European Commission or agreeing the details of the complements with the monitoring committees if, at the end of the exercise, the project were simply a geographical carve-up.

I hope that Members are reassured that all necessary steps will be taken to ensure that we fulfil all the criteria, objectives and statutory obligations that relate to the programme or are derived from the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Mr McHugh: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The Minister's statement contains some comprehensive answers. However, I have listened to a great deal of negative comment from Members about the fairness of the distribution of funding. I hope that such complaints will not be used against members of my community in this round or to justify allocating funding in the opposite direction. The new round allows for single identity work. That is a mistake; it allows communities to remain in splendid isolation and exclude themselves from working with other local communities.

12.30 pm

My question relates to the importance of the implementation of local strategy partnerships, with district councils being well in the running on this occasion. The Minister mentioned four local strategy partnerships. Is there a resistance on the part of councils to the inclusion of partnerships that were previously in place and to people from the voluntary sector being stakeholders? If the situation changes, how will this impact on the round of funding?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for the welcome he gave to my original statement. I hope that the Member's fears will have been allayed by my previous response: allocations will be made according to the criteria set down in the details of the measures and on the basis of merit. Every effort will be made to ensure that people are made aware of the funding and take advantage of it and that the application process is accessible.

There will be no discrimination against anyone on any grounds. Not only will the authorities that manage the measures ensure that that is the case but the monitoring committees will also want to be satisfied that there is no discrimination, as will the European Commission, which attends committee meetings.

Sean Neeson put a question earlier about local strategy partnerships. Although I answered several of his questions, I omitted to answer that one. At the North/South Ministerial Council sectoral meeting it was reported that four local strategy partnerships had already been established. Judging from the feedback that we have received, it

looks as if a number of local strategy partnerships will be established.

Where the establishment of local strategy partnerships has been agreed within two months of the programme complement's being agreed, 22 June, those partnerships will be entitled to receive their allocation of moneys under priority three. If agreement has not been reached on the establishment of local strategy partnerships, the existing district partnerships in those areas will receive 25% of the funding under priority three. The allocation of the remaining money will be determined when agreement is reached.

I assure Members that while there have been some misunderstandings and misgivings about the changing nature of the scope of partnership at district level, most people, not least those in the community and voluntary sectors, have been reassured of our aims.

First, we want to extend the scope of partnership and thereby extend the leverage of interest that those involved in partnership will have. Secondly, we are trying to extend the life cycle of partnership and make it more sustainable so that it does not perish when Peace II moneys run out.

Councils are being asked to play a more corporate role in the new partnership arrangements. This is not to allow them to muscle in and dictate to the partnerships but rather to ensure that the corporate work of councils is informed and influenced by the strategic thinking of the partnerships. Equally, the local statutory agencies must be involved, and we want to ensure that these agencies work their passage on the partnerships to a greater extent than they had previously done in Peace I.

That will involve negotiations at local level. Fifty per cent of the partnerships will represent Government, including statutory agencies and local government. They will determine the balance themselves. The remaining 50% will involve social partners, the four pillars of which are the community and voluntary sector, the business sector, the trade union sector and those with agricultural or rural interests. Among the details being ironed out are the precise numbers and configuration rather than wholesale issues of principle. I am not aware of any difficulties or resistance from local government.

The sitting was suspended at 12.36 pm.

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

2.00 pm

WINTER SERVICE REVIEW

Mr Deputy Speaker: I have received notice that the Minister for Regional Development wishes to make a statement on the winter service review.

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Campbell): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for granting me time in the busy schedule of the House to make a statement on the review of my Department's winter service activities. I realise that it is a rather unseasonal topic, given that it is the height of summer, but it is an important issue, as indicated by the high level of interest among public representatives and the public.

Members might recall my statement to the House in January 2001 following the heavy snowfall of Christmas week, the heaviest since 1982. I announced that I had commissioned a review, with a final report to be completed by the end of June, so that the proposals could be effectively implemented in time for winter. A second heavy snowfall occurred at the end of February, and this was also considered in the review.

The review was undertaken by a team of senior Roads Service officials and outside experts, including Mr Mike Moore, director of environmental services for North Yorkshire County Council, in whose area snow frequently falls on the high moors.

I am grateful for the comments and advice of the Regional Development Committee, which met team members on 17 January 2001 at the start of the review and again more recently, when it heard the preliminary recommendations. Members of the Committee who have seen the detailed presentation of the review findings will agree that the review has been very thorough and has taken proper consideration of the issues raised by Members. It has been very worthwhile.

Most people believe that in exceptional winter conditions some disruption is to be expected, but there is always scope for improvement in our handling of those events. I am pleased that the Roads Service has drawn on the experience of last winter to develop better procedures.

One of the key points highlighted in the review is the need for a different approach to tackling heavy snow, by contrast to the routine salting of ice and frost. For example, during normal icy conditions, salt is sprayed at a rate of around 20 grams per square metre, and a gritter carries enough salt to cover the entire route. A gritter travels in one direction but spreads salt over both lanes,

so the average treatment time for a route is approximately three hours.

By contrast, during heavy snow, salt has to be spread at twice the normal rate, and the gritters have to return to depot in mid-route to replenish. They also need to plough in both directions, and it can take more than a day to clear heavy snow from the standard network. The review makes several recommendations for addressing those difficult conditions.

The first recommendation is to increase snow-clearing capacity by adapting normal lorries to carry snowplough blades. The second is the phasing in of quick-mounting kits to cut the time needed to fit snow blades to vehicles. The third is to ensure that the workforce has regular training and practice in snow-clearing activities. The fourth is the prioritising of snow-clearing routes so that in extreme conditions the most important roads are tackled first. Finally, the review recommends enlisting the help of other agencies, such as district councils, to help clear busy town centre footpaths in periods of prolonged lying snow, and employing contractors and farmers to help clear snow from local roads using their own equipment.

The review also looked at procedures during normal frost conditions. As a public representative, I realise that many motorists greatly appreciate the salting service provided in times of ice and frost, so much so that there is a great demand to extend the normal salted road network. However, we must be practical, and we must carefully consider the resource implications. The salted road network comprises 28% of all roads and covers 80% of the traffic, because it targets busier roads. That amounts to over 4,200 miles of roadway, which is equivalent to twice the distance from Belfast to Moscow. This length of roadway is treated in just over three hours. It is a massive undertaking.

The review found that Northern Ireland has the greatest length of salted road network per head of population of any region in the UK and the Republic of Ireland. It is equal with Scotland, where winters are more severe, and is more than twice the average in England. Some of my officials said that we are "at the top of the league" in the UK. We should be trying — and I will be endeavouring — to win the European Champions' League, rather than simply being the UK league champions.

We also must remember that RUC statistics show that frost, ice and snow are a factor in only 2.5% of all road injury accidents. Less than 1% occur on roads outside the normal salted road network. Extending the salted road network is not the best way of achieving a targeted reduction in road casualties. To do that, we would be better spending resources on proper funding for road maintenance, which would improve the wet-weather skidding resistance of road surfaces throughout the year, not just in winter, or increasing the allocation for the accident remedial and traffic-calming programmes. The

traffic-calming programmes have a proven track record of cutting accidents by 40%. I am sure that Members will recall my recent announcement in the House about the increase in traffic-calming programmes.

A modest increase in the salted road network is, however, justified. It currently includes roads carrying more than 1,500 vehicles per day, or 1,000 vehicles per day in hilly areas. I have accepted the review team's recommendation to increase the weighting for buses in service. For example, a 40-seater bus would be counted as 40 vehicles for the purpose of the criteria. I have also accepted the recommendation that each small settlement that has more than 100 dwellings within its area plan boundary should have a salted road link via the shortest route to the current salted road network. While precise routes still have to be worked out, we estimate that it will increase the salted network by up to 4%. Members may ask for more, but we already sit at the top of the UK league, and to do even more salting would inevitably mean doing less of something else. The number of people coming forward with suggestions for that has been remarkably small.

During conditions of prolonged ice or snow, Roads Service will also be taking a more flexible approach to requests for salting routes outside the salted network on a one-off basis. Other measures coming out of the review include earlier target times for completing morning salting runs to match the start of morning peaks on the main commuter routes, which are creeping forward year by year.

Finally, a new communications strategy is being developed, which will see an improved winter service leaflet being more widely distributed. In addition, Roads Service is developing systems so that real-time information on salting activities can be relayed electronically to the broadcast media. This will mean that motorists listening to breakfast radio can be kept up to date with road conditions and salting operations.

I have accepted the recommendations of the review team and asked Roads Service to implement them as far as possible for the coming winter. These measures will have a cost. In an average winter, that could be up to £0.5 million over and above the typical expenditure, which has been around £4.5 million per winter. In a severe winter, the cost will be much greater. However, my Department has not allowed cost restraints to impact on its response to emergency situations. That was demonstrated last winter, when we spread almost 75,000 tonnes of salt — 60% more than the average — and spent £1.2 million more than the normal budget.

I hope that the wide level of interest in winter service operations from all sections of the House will be remembered when consideration is given to my Department's bid for additional winter service resources in the appropriate estimating rounds.

I am grateful for the opportunity to make this statement to the House. I hope the House will agree that the measures I have announced today will help my Department to meet its main winter service objective, which is to help main road traffic move freely and safely in wintry conditions by spreading salt at the most effective times.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development (Mr McFarland): I welcome the Minister's statement and thank him for his discussions with the Regional Development Committee last week on this issue.

Clearly, we cannot grit all our roads, and there are substantial parts of the Province where minor roads fall outside the gritting schedule. Will the Minister consider encouraging local farmers to grit stretches of the road? Will he also consider placing strategic piles of grit in certain places on those roads that are not part of the gritted network, and encouraging local firms or farmers to help spread that grit? That would ease the load and the cost to the Department.

Mr Campbell: I thank the Deputy Chairperson for the positive nature of his comments. The review team considered the option of using farmers to help with normal salting operations. Consideration was given to it, and I will briefly outline why it was not pursued.

2.15 pm

First, it would significantly increase the amount of salting and, therefore, the cost. Salting in that rather piecemeal way would be less efficient and more expensive than using a larger-capacity gritter. Secondly, there would be problems of command and control in contacting the farmers to tell them when to grit. There would also be the likelihood of discontinuous treatment, with roads being salted for a few miles but then the treatment being discontinued without any warning to motorists. That would create obvious problems.

There could be a significant response problem were we to employ persons who did not prove to be as reliable as others. If, through illness, or some other reason, they were not able to turn out, there would be an assumption that a road had been gritted when in fact it had not. That would be totally unacceptable to motorists.

The option of trying to get farmers to assist is an attractive one, but these reasons make it very difficult in the normal course of events to use them. As I said in my speech, the Roads Service at divisional level will be advertising, prior to this winter, to offer a standby contract to applicants who have suitable equipment and insurance. Farmers, as well as other contractors, will be able to apply for those positions.

Mr Bradley: This is an excellent statement, without any mention of the rocky road ahead. I share the Minister's view, expressed in his statement, that it has been a very

thorough review. It has certainly gone into great detail. I have just a few points.

On the issue of the volume of traffic that determines the gritting criteria, I welcome the change from 1,500 vehicles per day to 1,000 vehicles per day, but I am not completely satisfied. My long-held view is that the figure should relate to a given number of vehicles in any hour of a 24-hour period. The term "morning peaks", as used in the Minister's statement, perhaps reflects my line of thinking.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Are you coming to your question, Mr Bradley?

Mr Bradley: Here it is, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is my understanding from last week's meeting with the Department's officials that the intention was to ensure that at least one route to and from rural schools would be gritted or cleared to prevent school closures during severe weather. Will the Minister confirm that my understanding is correct?

Mr Campbell: I thank the Member for his broadly positive response. I will just establish the criterion for him. It has been 1,500 vehicles per day. I understand, however, the rationale that says that there may be a specific number of vehicles using a route at a precise time and that for the remainder of the day it might be relatively underused. There are difficulties in trying to establish the number of vehicles at a precise moment in a day. The normal practice has been to establish a 24-hour day in which a particular number of vehicles use a road.

There are major problems in establishing a precise time at which a significant number of vehicles are using a road. If we were able to do that, it would show that significantly more roads had significantly more cars on them at, say, 9.00 am — school time. We would then be back to the resource implications of trying to cover more roads, with significantly greater costs. The criterion is 1,500 vehicles per day, but in hilly areas, mountainous regions or in other difficult circumstances, the criterion is 1,000 vehicles per day. The change that I have made gives greater weighting to the buses that are using lesser-used roads. Previously, a lesser weighting was given to buses using such roads. That should bring more roads into the salted network.

The issue of minor roads to schools was looked at in the review. I hope that, as a result of the recommendations, small settlements — those with more than 100 dwellings within an area plan boundary — will have a salted link road to the salted route network. Therefore, even if they are in an area that is not close to a salted route network, there will be a road that will connect them to it. In that sense there will be a salted route between small settlements, schools and the overall salted network.

Mr Gibson: I am pleased that the Minister has accepted the review's recommendations on this issue. People in

west Tyrone will particularly welcome his comments about small settlements. It is vitally important that they be connected to the major salted routes in case of emergencies.

There is another issue that I am concerned about. There are many salt and grit boxes in rural areas. During times of normal frost — I am not talking about heavy snow — there is sometimes excessive use of grit in the mornings, the supply becomes depleted, and nobody seems to replenish it. In order to deal with, for instance, a five- or six-day spell of frost, there needs to be adequate replenishment of grit. Also, what is being done with regard to village and town footpaths? The greatest numbers of personal accidents happen during frosty periods.

My last point concerns the suitability of the equipment used to move the snow to the side of the road. It can cause more problems. Many of the snowploughs push the snow into farmers' lanes, and you can end up with lanes jammed and roads that nobody can access. Can we ensure that the equipment used pushes the snow right off the road and does not jam the lanes along the route?

Mr Campbell: The Member raised a number of issues, and I will try to deal with each of them. The availability of salt from depots was looked at during the review. One of the problems was that there seemed to be some representation to allow the public access to the depots to acquire salt to be used on roads outside the salted network or on farm lanes. That would have safety implications at a very busy time in the depots. With large gritters and loading shovels manoeuvring and reversing, there would be the possibility of accidents and claims arising from that. The safety of the public in the depots would have to be taken account of. The outcome of the review is that at the moment, salt boxes and grit piles are provided near to the points where they are most needed. One of the lessons learned from last winter is that those boxes and grit piles must be regularly replenished throughout frosty and snowy weather. The Department will endeavour to do that.

I know from Members' representations to me, and having made representations myself with regard to footways in Coleraine over the Christmas period, that there can be severe difficulties in pedestrian zones and on footways. However, it is at that time that Roads Service resources are stretched to the limit in trying to keep the main traffic routes open.

One of the first services to be stopped on occasions of severe weather conditions is the refuse collection carried out by district councils. In that case, district councils might be able to assist by spreading salt on busy town centre footways; Roads Service will gladly supply them with salt to do so. Some councils have expressed an interest in assisting in that way, and Roads Service will be in touch with all councils before next winter to see if local agreements can be reached to secure that assistance.

Mr Gibson's final point related to Roads Service's capacity to move snow without leaving it in another location where it can block access to and from lanes or minor roads. That point was addressed in the review. As I said earlier, staff will be trained in the fastest and most efficient way of loading the devices to clear the snow, and in the best and most efficient method of moving it from the roadway.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Ten more Members wish to ask questions, and only 32 minutes remain. I will therefore commend brevity in the length and number of questions asked.

Mr McNamee: I welcome the Minister's statement; I do not think it at all unseasonal. It is proper that a review of the winter services take place and that the recommendations be put in place now; they should be implemented prior to the winter season rather than when the first severe weather warning is announced. I particularly welcome the recommendation to have a communication strategy.

When priority roads have been cleared by snowploughs during prolonged snow cover, will the ploughs then be deployed to clear the lesser-used roads? The review also recommended that contractors and farmers should be employed and involved in clearing snow in local areas. Does the Minister anticipate that the necessary advertising, recruitment and contracts will take effect in time for the forthcoming winter?

Mr Campbell: I place great store on communication. Communication to motorists in the mornings when they begin their journeys is particularly important. It is important for them to know if a road has been cleared or is likely to be cleared in the immediate future. That is fundamental, and it is hoped that it will be of considerable assistance this winter.

2.30 pm

As I said in my statement, the salted network comprises 28% of the road network in Northern Ireland. That 28% represents the most heavily travelled routes, and therefore some 80% of the traffic. Where there is snow and frost to such an extent that the main roads, which carry that 80% of traffic, are severely affected — and this happened last Christmas — Roads Service will concentrate on those roads and on that network. Once the salted road network has been cleared — either due to the efficiency of Roads Service or a slight improvement in conditions — it may be possible to try to clear minor roads that are not part of the network. Flexibility in the system will allow Roads Service to do this on a one-off basis, although there will be resource implications. The more often we do it, the more often we will exceed the amount of money allocated for winter service operations, which at the moment is just under £5 million, and the more often I will be coming back to the House to try to get additional moneys.

Trying to ensure that rural communities are not cut off is an issue that concentrated the minds of those on the review team. Undoubtedly, it will be foremost in the minds of all Roads Service officials this winter. I hope and expect that all communications and advertising will take place before winter comes so that the entire community will be aware of the position.

Mr J Wilson: I thank the Minister for his statement and the attention that he and his Department are giving to the problems we have experienced during the recent winter.

The Minister will be aware of my South Antrim constituency. It can be described as a north/south axis stretching from urban Newtownabbey to the slopes of the Colin Mountain and Elliot's Hill in the north, and the boundary between south Antrim and Ballymena. It was in that area over the recent winter that the farming and rural community was, as we say in the country, "blocked in" for a period of almost four days. When I eventually got to the area I found that a subcontractor had been trying to open roads over a large rural area. He appeared to have only two small pieces of machinery. He was not —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Are you coming to your question?

Mr J Wilson: Yes. The subcontractor was not even from my own county, never mind the Newtownabbey direction. Is the Minister giving attention to the need to be ready with more resources in a situation such as this? The resources available then were not able to cope with the situation.

I have seen the technology that is now in place, and I hope the Minister will accept that, last year, the one thing for which he was criticised more than any other was for being caught on the hop. If the Minister has the technology — and I was impressed with it — providing a link between the weather forecasters, himself, and his regional managers, why was he caught on the hop so often, when the cats and dogs on the street knew —

Mr Deputy Speaker: This is getting very —

Mr J Wilson: —that there was a severe frost and that there was going to be snow. However, we went out on to our roads the next morning to find that apparently Roads Service had not been in attendance.

Mr Campbell: I take Mr Wilson's comments about his constituency and the subcontractor on board. I will not go through the guided tour he gave me.

I expect that the training that Roads Service staff will undertake will be completed by winter. They will be in touch with subcontractors such as the one Mr Wilson mentioned. They will be aware of the best way they can operate in the winter and of the best and most productive way they can ensure that designated roads are cleared. I hope and expect that the first-hand training given to Roads Service staff will be passed on to subcontractors.

The other issue is the extent of the snowfall. I am glad that Mr Jim Wilson used the word "apparently" in his question just now. I agree with him that a person rising in the morning and seeing a road covered in snow or frost would naturally assume that it had not been salted. It is not always an accurate assumption, because the road could be salted or gritted and then there could be a further snowfall. Given the extent of the salted road network — over 4,000 miles, which has to be covered in less than three hours — it is possible that roads could be salted and subsequently frosted over. It is difficult to salt roads in such a way that everyone can find the network clear, with no snow having fallen in the 30 minutes or 45 minutes since the roads were salted.

The review was carried out to make the best scheme in the UK a better scheme. As I said earlier — somewhat tongue in cheek — while we are the best in the UK, I want us to be the best in Europe. The Champions' League is what we want.

Mr Byrne: I welcome the Minister's statement. The Regional Development Committee made a meaningful contribution to that review.

Did Roads Service consider salting at least one route to each school, particularly those in rural areas where there is great concern each winter about public safety? People in rural areas would appreciate that.

Mr Campbell: I thought that I had paid tribute to the Committee already. I thank the Committee for its help and assistance in considering the outcome of the review.

The review considered rural schools. The difficulty is that there is usually more than one access road to each school. The problem — without going into specific detail — is that if a particular route between the salted road network and a small rural school were to be salted, then people living on the wrong side of the salted minor road would have to make additional journeys. Such people might have to go several miles in order to get to the salted minor road, thereby increasing the possibility of motorists believing that they were encountering more risk.

Therefore, while the review looked at the possibility of salting a minor road between the salted road network and a rural school, it was simply not possible to do it in a way that would minimise journey time. If it were possible to achieve this, we would look at the situation again. If Members know of specific roads that could be salted and that would not disadvantage a number of parents leaving children to school, then I will look at such a situation.

Mr Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I would like to talk about school bus routes in my own area of Newry and Mourne, and in particular in the areas around Mayobridge, Ballyholland and Rathfriland.

Last winter the minor roads in these hilly areas, which are served by four or five bus routes, were taken off the gritting schedule. Although I welcome the Minister's statement and what he is trying to do, he does not go far enough. These minor roads should be prioritised before death or injury occurs on school bus routes.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I think the Member intended to ask a question. Perhaps the Minister will answer it.

Mr Campbell: I have outlined the resource implications before, and I tried to do so again today. For example, if I were to increase the percentage of traffic covered by the salted network from the existing 80% to 90%, it would cost several million pounds. If I were to try to cover 100%, which most would accept as being virtually impossible, it would cost many millions of pounds. It is therefore a question of devising a mechanism to treat the maximum mileage of road and accommodate the maximum number of vehicles on the salted network within the resources available to me.

I understand the concerns about rural areas, and it is about these areas that Members speak most consistently, but in practical terms they have the lowest density of traffic. Today I announced a change in the weighting to be applied to buses — for example, school buses. This will increase the number of minor rural roads included on the salted network. As I said, for the purposes of the criteria, a 40-seater bus is counted as 40 vehicles. That ought to mean that a greater number of small rural roads on which school buses take children to rural schools will become part of the salted route network. However, it would cost several million pounds to cover every eventuality for every rural school on every rural route.

In the past I have made bids for additional funding for winter maintenance, but unfortunately they have been unsuccessful. However, I will continue to bid for an increase in the amount of resources deployed for winter service.

Mr Kennedy: I welcome the Minister's statement, but I query the administrative outwork and the practical terms of his statement. He refers to enlisting the help of other agencies, such as district councils. Does he intend to pay district councils for their assistance, so that they can recoup some of their costs? As a member of a local authority, I must declare an interest in this matter.

Will the Minister consider, even at this late stage, compiling a register of willing contractors, including local farmers, who could be organised to salt the roads network, particularly minor roads in constituencies such as Newry and Armagh, which need obvious and urgent attention during winter conditions?

Mr Campbell: The question of councils will be dealt with in the near future, in the light of the correspondence that will flow from the Roads Service to each of the 26 district councils. I do not want to go into specifics, but most interested observers will see the practical difficulties

encountered by councils when there is substantial snowfall. In times of heavy snowfall, the refuse collection service is usually reduced considerably or stopped.

It would be a positive and productive use of council staff's time if it were possible, between Roads Service and local councils, to devise a system to deploy that labour to clear footways and pedestrian areas. Roads Service and councils will discuss that in some detail before any agreement is reached, but the communication between them will be under way within a few months — well in advance of the winter.

2.45 pm

Mr Kennedy referred to how farmers can be included. I said earlier that there will be a standby contract with applicants with suitable equipment and insurance. That will almost exclusively be in rural areas, where they are required because the roads are outside the salted route network. Farmers and other contractors will be entitled to apply, and I encourage them to do so. When they do, and the successful applicants are ready to begin, they must be suitably trained in the use of the machinery in order to get the maximum efficiency from the post.

Mr Dallat: There does not appear to be any reference to cross-border co-operation. I spent several hours marooned on the Newry-Killeen border crossing on December 28. Can the Minister assure the House that main crossing points will receive priority in a co-ordinated way so that there is no repeat of last winter's failures, when many people, including the elderly and young children, were left stranded for hours?

Mr Campbell: I assume from the Member's comments that the road that he mentioned is on the salted route network. It is obvious that, in extreme conditions, there can be difficulties in keeping even the salted route network open. However, any main road on the salted route network — whether it is cross-border or not — is a priority route, and resources are deployed to keep it clear. The principle that I have announced will also apply on other roads — again, cross-border or not — outside the salted route network. Where the salted route network is clear and resources allow Roads Service to try to clear other roads on a one-off basis, resources will be deployed to keep those roads clear.

I intend that the roads that carry 80% of traffic, whether internal to Northern Ireland or cross-border, will be kept clear. The review is designed to achieve that objective. I hope, and confidently expect, that that will be the case.

Mr Hay: The review has pinpointed a number of problems. I want to ask the Minister about information that is available to the public. On many occasions when there has been a severe winter or overnight snow, there has been a lack of information to the public, and especially motorists, about which roads are blocked and the timetable for clearing them. I want the Minister to take

the point about how the public is informed of road conditions when there is a heavy snowfall.

Mr Campbell: As I said in response to a previous question, I have taken a particular interest in this issue. Of all the aspects of the review, this can go the furthest in assisting members of the public. The possession of information about whether roads are blocked or clear will assist them in making decisions about their journeys. That is why I want to see — and will expect to see — the communications strategy in place in advance of the winter service leaflet being more widely distributed. We now have a whole network in Northern Ireland of major broadcasting stations and minor commercial radio stations. Many people tune in to those on car radios, or at home before leaving. If we can get real-time information to motorists or potential motorists, that will greatly assist them in their journeys.

By way of a caveat, I must add that the weather enters the equation. For example, even if at 6.45 am a local radio station — wherever it might be in Northern Ireland — indicates that a particular road is clear, there may well be heavy snow at 6.55 am. That would, of course, mean that the information that people received 10 minutes previously was obsolete.

There is a difficulty. There is no precise scientific answer to this question. However, in general terms, the communications resource, if used properly, can go a substantial way to being of significant assistance to all motorists, particularly in very severe wintry conditions.

Mr McHugh: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I have to welcome any review which might improve the situation regarding roads in the winter. Looking at the situation last year — or in any year — quite often in rural areas, heavy snow means that everything stops. It can even happen in cities, as was the case on one particular day last year.

It is welcome that the figure of 1,500 vehicles per day has been reduced to 1,000. Is the latter figure based on urban areas rather than rural areas? If so, areas such as Fermanagh or Tyrone would have only a very small length of minor roads gritted or salted. That is a difficulty. We have some link roads between main roads that are used a lot by heavy lorries, although perhaps not by school buses. There are difficulties with the surfaces of particular roads —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Are you coming to a question?

Mr McHugh: My question is being asked in context. Is there a possibility that roads within striking distance of the criterion of 1,000 vehicles could be included at some point? They are particularly difficult at a local level.

Mr Campbell: Most of the roads outside the salted network are in rural areas, because rural areas are, for the most part, less populated than urban areas. Those roads falling outside the salted route network are therefore

almost exclusively rural roads. The criterion of 1,000 vehicles per day refers to areas of mountainous or hilly terrain. I should elaborate on the matter of buses, particularly in relation to rural schools. Where a number of buses use lightly travelled routes, each 40-seater bus counts as 40 vehicles towards meeting the criterion. Each year, Roads Service staff review the roads network to identify roads that may be coming close to entry into the salted network.

The problem is that if Roads Service were to make roads that carry 900 or 950 vehicles per day a point of reference, next year MLAs and councillors would say that there are roads that carry 800 or 850 vehicles per day, a figure that almost meets the 900-vehicle benchmark. That would bring us back to the resource implications. Therefore there are difficulties and problems, but there is also flexibility.

For a further year, sympathetic consideration will be given to winter gritting of those roads that currently come close to the 1,000-vehicle-per-day criterion in hilly areas. In the following year, the number of vehicles on those roads may increase slightly, with the total coming close to or exceeding the 1,000-vehicle-per-day criterion. If that happened, the road would be placed on the salted route network.

Mrs Carson: I listened carefully to the Minister's statement, which deals with an issue that needed to be addressed given last winter's road conditions. However, can the Minister tell me whether all bus routes to rural schools will be gritted?

Mr Campbell: I will try to be as clear as I can and clearer, obviously, than I have been. Every rural road that meets the criteria will be salted. Rural and urban roads are on the salted route network if they meet the criteria. It follows that if they are not on the salted route network, they do not meet the criteria. The outcome of today's statement will be to increase the number of roads on the salted road network. I admit that the increase will be marginal, but given the resources at my disposal it is difficult to see how it could be otherwise.

The Member is concerned about rural schools. In the case of small rural roads in areas that do not meet the criteria, the Department is endeavouring to look at small settlements in those rural areas with more than 100 dwellings within the area plan boundary and to provide them with a salted road link via the shortest route to the current salted network. That will not automatically mean that every rural school has a salted road leading to it. However, rural roads that meet the criteria will be salted.

Mrs Courtney: I welcome the Minister's statement and in particular the recommendations to use the help of local farmers and local district councils to keep footpaths clear. As the Minister is aware, the terrain in the council area of Derry is steep and difficult to negotiate. I listened to the responses that the Minister gave to Mr Kennedy

and to Mr Gibson. Can he confirm that the schemes will be well advertised, with contracts drawn up in advance so that, in the event of a heavy snowfall or a severe frost, the risk to the public will be minimised?

Mr Campbell: I suppose that the short answer is yes. The problem is that however well the scheme is advertised, people will miss it. Some months should elapse between today and the start of the winter schedule. At that time, we will try to maximise local media coverage through radio stations, television and newspapers so that as many people as possible are aware of the schedule, what it means and what roads it covers in their area.

Dr Birnie: What management and control systems exist in the Department for Regional Development to ensure that the distribution of ploughs and gritters reflects the variable distribution of snow, because snow does not, of course, fall evenly across the Province?

3.00 pm

Mr Campbell: The Member has raised a very important and interesting point. Although I will probably get in trouble with my staff for saying this, I encourage the hon Member — and other Members — to go to the Roads Service meteorological survey office, where they will, I hope, be given a résumé that shows exactly how each of the district council areas is covered and how the reports are sent in on a frequent basis throughout the day. Those reports mean that at any given time, engineers across Northern Ireland are aware of the temperatures throughout Northern Ireland, the depth of any snow and the potential for more snow and frost. During the very bad weather last winter, I went to the office to get a report. I heavily recommend that Members do that — or rather I “actively” recommend it; otherwise Members might think that I am talking about snowfall. They will see the extent to which Roads Service goes to try to ensure that account is taken of the differentials that Dr Birnie mentioned.

Mr Davis: Given the amount of salt being used and the size of the road network being covered, is there any evidence of long-term effects on the roads? If there is, how much money will be coming out of the Minister’s budget to repair those roads?

Mr Campbell: The Member is talking about the unfortunate corollary of the steps that I have proposed. Taking a dispassionate view, the money that is required to salt the roads for two years would build a bypass. Using salt on the salted route network does have an effect on the roads, and that has an impact on the maintenance budget throughout Northern Ireland. However, given the pressures that we face and the demands from the community regarding the extent of the salted route network, it is a very finely balanced judgement.

In my statement I said that 75,000 tonnes of salt were spread last winter. That does have an effect on the structure

of the roads, but we are also under pressure to ensure that the roads are made as safe as possible to travel on during extreme weather conditions. The downside, as Mr Davis says, is that that has a cost effect that, unfortunately, is reflected in my maintenance budget.

Mr Hamilton: Most of the questions today have, rightly, concerned rural roads. Grit boxes are provided at the bases of steep hills in towns so that people can grit them themselves. However, over the past few years I have received several complaints from people who live near hills which are not deemed steep enough for a grit box to be provided but which, when the frost comes in the winter, do present serious problems for traffic. Does the Minister intend to review the criteria that govern the provision of grit boxes in towns?

Mr Campbell: The issue of salt boxes and grit piles causes difficulties, particularly during the periodic visits by Roads Service officials to local councils. Invariably, during the winter visit, local councils make representations such as the one that Mr Hamilton has just made.

It is difficult to provide a salt box or grit pile at every incline, regardless of its steepness or the number of dwellings on it. Roads Service officials will deal sympathetically with requests from people who live on an incline, from their local representatives — MPs, MLAs or councillors — or from the corporate body of the council.

I am aware, as are others, of instances in which a council has asked Roads Service officials to consider more closely the provision of salt boxes. I expect Roads Service officials to treat the matter in a sympathetic manner. I would like details of requests for salt boxes that have not been met, and I will ask my Roads Service officials to explain the decisions.

Mr Poots: The Minister referred to the provision for footpaths in town centres and the need for collaboration with agencies such as district councils. Will the Roads Service liaise with the district councils at an early stage to establish ways to clear and grit footpaths in winter? The Department is trying to encourage people to use means of transport other than cars. Last winter, many pedestrians had to walk on the roads, which was very dangerous. I would like footpaths to be cleared and gritted.

Mr Campbell: I am at a disadvantage, because I have not been present for the entire debate. The Roads Service will write to every district council to try to reach a series of agreements with them. Mr Poots is correct to state that many footpaths and pedestrian zones become dangerous in extreme weather conditions. There have been occasions on which council staff could have cleared those footpaths and zones, but were not asked to do so because the necessary agreements had not been put in place.

The review will speed up that process and ensure that there is urgent communication with councils over the next couple of months, well in advance of the winter

gritting season. I hope that, at that stage, councils will be able to enter into an agreement with the Roads Service. Although the agreements will be voluntary, the public will benefit from them.

The Deputy Speaker: Time is up. I congratulate the Minister and Members on keeping the debate brief.

INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT BILL

Second Stage

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Sir Reg Empey): I beg to move

That the Second Stage of the Industrial Development Bill [NIA 18/00] be agreed.

Members will recall that the Agenda for Government identified the focusing of the economic development agencies on new economic challenges as a key issue. In taking that matter forward by means of the Industrial Development Bill, I have considered how the economic development agencies within the remit of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment can be reorganised to meet those new challenges in the most efficient and effective manner.

As a first step, I commissioned detailed research on the current arrangements and on how economic development support is administered in other parts of the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, mainland Europe and further afield. I also sought a detailed report on local enterprise provision. Last October, I issued a consultative paper entitled 'Towards a new structure for economic development support in Northern Ireland'. It was sent to members of the Executive, to the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee, to business bodies and to other social partners, among others, through the Economic Development Forum and the Northern Ireland Public Alliance, the trade union representing staff in the existing agencies.

Responses were received from over 40 interested parties, representing a wide cross section of opinion. The overwhelming weight of opinion supported the view that the time was now right for better and more efficient delivery of economic development support services and that the best and most efficient means of achieving that was through the establishment of a new single agency. The predominate opinion was that such an agency would have more flexibility, more credibility and would be more responsive to the needs of its clients if it were at arm's length from Government.

The Industrial Development Bill will establish a single economic development agency as a non-departmental public body. Members will recall that I recently proposed that the new body be known as Invest Northern Ireland (INI). The Bill transfers the powers provided by the Industrial Development (Northern Ireland) Order 1982 to Invest Northern Ireland. That will allow it to exercise the functions currently within the remit of the Industrial Development Board (IDB), the Local Enterprise Development Unit (LEDU), the Industrial Research and Technology Unit (IRTU), the business support division of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment — formerly part of the Training and Employment

Agency — and the business support activities of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. It also transfers the current assets and liabilities of those bodies and amends the Industrial Development (Northern Ireland) Order 1982 and the related legislation that underpins their activities.

The main purpose of the Bill, therefore, is to establish Invest Northern Ireland and transfer powers to it. Although the Bill specifies the parameters of matters such as membership and remuneration of the board of Invest Northern Ireland, as well as staffing and financial arrangements, it seeks only minor variations to existing powers in respect of the provision of financial assistance to business. Consequently, the Bill has no significant impact on the policy and functions of existing agencies.

The Bill consists of eight clauses and four schedules. I will briefly outline the key aspects of the principal clauses. First, I must point out that the Bill should be read in conjunction with the Industrial Development (Northern Ireland) Order 1982, as the main functions of Invest Northern Ireland will derive from Part III of that Order.

Clause 1 establishes Invest Northern Ireland as a body corporate, and, in tandem with schedule 1, sets out its status, constitution and procedures. Paragraph 1 of schedule 1 defines Invest Northern Ireland's status as a non-departmental public body; it is not, therefore, an agent of or the property of the Crown. Paragraphs 2 to 4 cover the setting up of the board of Invest Northern Ireland. They enable the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to appoint a chairperson and a board consisting of between 10 and 20 members. The composition will reflect experience in the various activities of Invest Northern Ireland and shall, as far as possible, be representative of the community in Northern Ireland. The Bill also allows for a member of the board to be appointed as deputy chairperson. All appointments will be for up to five years.

It is intended that both the chairperson and members of the Invest Northern Ireland board will receive remuneration and allowances at a level determined by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. As Members will have noted, advertisements have already appeared in the local and national press seeking to recruit persons to a shadow board, which should be in place before the end of August 2001. We plan to advertise the post of chief executive designate before the summer is over. The chief executive designate will assist the shadow board in its deliberations on the preparatory work essential to the establishment of Invest Northern Ireland. For this reason, paragraph 5 of schedule 1 provides that the Department will appoint the first chief executive of Invest Northern Ireland. I will, of course, consult the members of the shadow board and involve them in that most important appointment. Invest Northern Ireland will appoint every subsequent chief executive.

3.15 pm

Paragraph 5 also provides for Invest Northern Ireland to appoint additional staff as it considers appropriate.

Paragraph 6 allows for staff employed in the Northern Ireland Civil Service to be seconded to Invest Northern Ireland. It is envisaged that, in the first instance, a significant body of civil servants will be seconded to Invest Northern Ireland for a transitional period. That will mean that, from day one, Invest Northern Ireland will employ staff who are experienced in its field of operation. Through time, staff on secondment will have to decide whether to return to the Northern Ireland Civil Service or become permanent staff of Invest Northern Ireland.

Paragraph 7 empowers Invest Northern Ireland to determine employees' remuneration and allowances, to maintain pension arrangements and pay gratuities. Those determinations will require the prior approval of my Department and the Department of Finance and Personnel. Paragraphs 8 to 12 empower Invest Northern Ireland to establish committees and the proceedings governing their meetings. The accountability of Invest Northern Ireland is of paramount importance, and paragraphs 16 to 18 allow for the funding of Invest Northern Ireland by the Department. Those paragraphs also set out the requirement that the agency produce proper accounts for each financial year. As a non-departmental public body, Invest Northern Ireland will be able to make payments in accordance with terms and conditions to be agreed with my Department and the Department of Finance and Personnel.

Officials in my Department and the Department of Finance and Personnel are already working on the practical details of the new accountability arrangements. I look forward to working in co-operation with my ministerial Colleague, Mark Durkan, and the members of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment to ensure that we achieve the essential balance between maximum freedom and flexibility for Invest Northern Ireland and appropriate control and proper accountability.

From the financial year ending March 2003, Invest Northern Ireland must produce proper accounts and make them available to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG). The Department will then lay the subsequent C&AG report and the accounts before the House for scrutiny. Similarly, the Bill requires Invest Northern Ireland to produce for the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment an annual report, which will be laid before the Assembly.

Paragraph 19 brings Invest Northern Ireland within the scope of the Commissioner for Complaints (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 and thereby brings it within the scope of section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Clause 2 and schedule 3 transfer existing industrial development powers to Invest Northern Ireland, thus creating its powers. In broad terms, that means that from the appointed day, Invest Northern Ireland will exercise the functions previously carried out under Part III of the

Industrial Development (Northern Ireland) Order 1982 and article 3 of the Energy Efficiency (Northern Ireland) Order 1999. Clause 2(1)(a) will enable Invest Northern Ireland to provide financial assistance for industrial undertakings. Clause 2(1)(b) enables Invest Northern Ireland to take action for the purpose of promoting the efficient use of energy in industry.

Clause 2(3) obligates Invest Northern Ireland to advise the Department generally on the formulation of its industrial development policy. Although the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment will retain responsibility for economic development policy, an essential aspect of that will be guided by the practical experiences of Invest Northern Ireland in its crucial role of programme delivery. Clauses 2(4) and (5) empower the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to issue directions to Invest Northern Ireland after consulting with it.

Schedule 3 sets out the amendments that the Bill makes to the Industrial Development (Northern Ireland) Order 1982 and the Energy Efficiency (Northern Ireland) Order 1999. Paragraph 15 amends schedule 2 of the Industrial Development (Northern Ireland) Order with regard to the compulsory purchase of land by Invest Northern Ireland. It will enable the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to make a vesting order at the request of and on behalf of Invest Northern Ireland if the latter proposes to acquire land without agreement. One of the effects of the amendment will be to lessen the likelihood of any criticism that the body seeking the vesting order and the actual vesting body are one and the same.

Clause 3 and schedule 2 dissolve the existing bodies. Subsections (1) to (3) effect, from the appointed day, the dissolution of the Industrial Development Board (IDB), the Local Enterprise Development Unit (LEDU) and the Industrial Research and Technology Unit (IRTU). Clause 3(4) removes the Northern Ireland Tourist Board's powers to provide assistance for the purposes of providing or improving tourist accommodation. The power to provide assistance for those purposes will be exercised by Invest Northern Ireland under article 7 of the Industrial Development (Northern Ireland) Order 1982, as amended by this Bill. The Northern Ireland Tourist Board will no longer have the power to offer grant assistance for tourist accommodation. From now on, tourism businesses will be treated like any other businesses. That change is made in response to points raised by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and the wider tourism sector.

Schedule 2 makes provision for the transfer of the relevant property, rights, liabilities and staff to Invest Northern Ireland. That will involve the transfer of permanent staff from LEDU and the Tourist Board and the transfer of property, rights and liabilities from LEDU, the Tourist Board, the Department, IDB and IRTU. It also specifies the transitional arrangements for the preparation

and laying of the necessary final accounts and reports of the bodies being dissolved.

Clause 5 details amendments and repeals. Clause 5(2) removes an existing restriction in article 7(6) of the 1982 Order, with regard to the taking of equity as a means of offering financial assistance. Current policy thinking no longer sees the taking of equity as a last resort, and the amendment will enable Invest Northern Ireland to utilise the taking of equity more proactively in offers of financial assistance. That brings the legislation into line with existing practice. Reflecting 'Strategy 2010' thinking, it also offers the prospect that the Exchequer will benefit from the most successful projects, because the Government will have the opportunity to share in the success of companies.

Subsection (3) is a technical amendment to deal with a minor anomaly in the charging of interest on loans made under the 1982 Order. There have been instances where the principal and interest on a loan are not repaid by means of instalments but are repayable in total on or before a specified date. In such cases article 7(7) of the 1982 Order does not apply, and additional interest cannot therefore be charged. Hence, I am seeking to modify the provision to allow for additional interest to be charged irrespective of whether the principal or interest is repayable by instalments.

Clause 6 retains in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment the powers under the 1982 Order to offer financial assistance to the gas and electricity industries, responsibility for which will remain with my Department. It is, however, only a temporary saving until the issue can be fully addressed in forthcoming energy legislation. The saving therefore expires three years from the appointed day.

Clause 7 gives the Department the power to bring the provisions of the Bill into force by order. As Members will be aware, it is intended that Invest Northern Ireland be established in early 2002.

I hope that the Bill will pave the way to the creation of what I believe is the desire of all Members and the wider business community: a new and vibrant economic development agency. The Bill will establish Invest Northern Ireland and will enable it to respond quickly, efficiently and effectively in an intensely competitive global marketplace in which the emphasis must be on getting the job done and not on bureaucracy.

I want to express once again our appreciation for the professionalism and hard work of those currently employed in the existing agencies. They have had exceptional years, especially last year. The moves that we are making are not a reflection on their abilities but rather an understanding that the nature of business and the relationship between Government and business must change in modern circumstances.

Northern Ireland is slowly climbing back to normality, and it is essential that we capitalise on the new opportunities that are opening up to us. If we are to attract the best, we must modernise, innovate and seek new and better ways of doing the job. The Industrial Development Bill lays the necessary foundations to enable us to realise our vision for a new and better Northern Irish economy, and I hereby commend the Bill to the Assembly.

Dr Birnie: I pay tribute to the Minister. This change has been mooted for a long time, and he has taken the initiative and acted. The separation between the two main agencies, IDB and LEDU, based on company size, has created confusion. A precedent was recently set in the Republic of Ireland, where one agency was brought into being with two internal branches, one relating to industry of home origin and the other to externally owned firms.

I want to make three points about the Bill. The first is the need to build on past achievements; the second is getting the right person for the top of the new agency; and the third is the need for the general policy and direction of the agency to focus, as the Minister said, on raising the productivity of the Northern Ireland economy.

There is a need for a balanced view of the past. At the end of his speech, the Minister rightly said that as we are now marking the end of a series of agencies — or their incorporation together into one larger body — it is appropriate to pay tribute to all those who have worked in those bodies in previous decades. The bookshelves groan under the weight of the reports and books that have sought to evaluate those agencies over the past 25 years: the Northern Ireland Economic Council; the Economic Research Centre; the Economic and Social Research Institute; and others. I confess that I was involved with one or two of them.

As IDB and LEDU pass into history, we should note that since 1969 they have had to labour under more difficult circumstances than those faced by their counterparts in Wales, Scotland or the Republic of Ireland. It is also worth saying — the point has been made in this House, and it may be made this afternoon — that, contrary to the allegation that there was a bias in the way in which those agencies worked in different parts of the Province, all the available academic studies suggest that the distribution of inward investment into Northern Ireland was equitable. I refer to, for example, a study conducted in the department of economics at Queen's University, which came to that conclusion.

IDB and LEDU have had different cultures for dealing with companies. It is important that the good is preserved when we bring them together. For example, in the past decade, LEDU has built up a system of creating strong relationships with companies that were identified as having high growth potential.

My second point relates to the importance of getting the right person at the top of the new agency. It is not

possible to go into specifics, but it would be desirable to have someone with a high level of business experience and wider international experience. They will have to be paid accordingly. It may not be populist politics to say so, but the salary should reflect internationally competitive standards for executive pay.

Finally, with regard to the broader policy environment, the agency should focus on raising the productivity, or output per head, of the Northern Ireland economy. There is a good argument to be made that that has been the crucial problem facing our economy since 1921, because it has fed through into so many other characteristics, such as relatively high rates of unemployment.

3.30 pm

Our levels of gross domestic product per head have moved up slowly toward those in the rest of the United Kingdom and Europe, but it has been a slow, and irregular, process of so-called convergence. Indeed, since about 1990, the available indications suggest that our standard of living has got stuck at roughly four fifths of the United Kingdom and European Union average. There are no clear trends of improvement. Similarly, there has been a shortfall in relative productivity, especially in manufacturing and some other sectors. During the early part of the 1990s, our wage levels began to decline in relation to those in the rest of the United Kingdom.

On a previous occasion, when referring to the development of the single agency, the Minister talked about innovation and research and development as the golden thread that would run through the structure and purpose of the new body. I welcome that, not least because there is so much evidence to show that increasing the level of research and development will, in turn, have an impact on the level of relative productivity and general industrial competitiveness. With those three points in mind, I commend the Bill.

Dr McDonnell: The amalgamation of the IDB, LEDU, the Industrial Research and Technology Unit, the business function of the Tourist Board and the business support division of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment was a high priority on the wish-list of much of the corporate community — indeed, most of the political community — in Northern Ireland for many years. I am thankful that that wish is now set to become reality.

I pay tribute to the work of many. I have no doubt that the process would have been significantly slower, and perhaps non-existent, had it not been for the work of the Executive, the Assembly and the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment. Although I do not want to single out any individual, I feel that Members will forgive me for recognising the unique role played by the Minister. He has shown a single-minded determination to make the changes that he feels are required to face the commercial challenges of the twenty-first century. Many of us agree with him. Perhaps it is no accident, for his

views were honed in the city hall in Belfast where, in the past, he and myself and others experienced only frustration and despair in dealing with the predecessor of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

That said, the Bill is largely functional. It is difficult to disagree with it, because the functional role is largely taking over the existing liabilities and responsibilities. My serious concerns with the new agency are to do with its philosophy and culture, rather than the purely functional aspects. The Minister, in the course of his speech, suggested that the philosophy and culture would not change too much. I worry about that. I believe that the culture has to change quite a lot.

If we were to use a couple of words to sum up the restructuring process, they would be “creating synergy”. At the heart of the process is the hope that the synergy of combining public sector experience with private sector expertise will significantly strengthen the hand of those promoting and nurturing new business in Northern Ireland. It has long been held that to get the proper calibre of investment, to provide the growth strategies required for new business and to target new areas for research, we needed to have a much stronger private sector influence. I hope that the decision to open up a space for private sector influence will make a significant contribution to the welfare of the whole community.

We have been assured that Invest Northern Ireland will not simply be IDB with three additional arms flailing about wildly. I believe that there is still a risk of such an outcome. The work of the new agency could be hampered by a heavy overlay of bureaucracy. The Civil Service has a key role to play in the process but, for better or worse, it should not have the dominant role. Too much bureaucracy strangles the culture of enterprise and risk. The safety mentality is at odds with the corporate culture of the bodies that we are trying to attract. Getting the balance right between, on the one hand, accountability and political control and, on the other, opening things up to commercial realities is at the nub of the matter.

Like other Members who have spoken, I salute the IDB and other bodies such as LEDU and the IRTU for the work that they have done. Invest Northern Ireland must be market-led and outcome-driven. We must speak the language of corporate USA, corporate Europe and corporate Britain — the language of marketing. The new agency must decide what it wants to achieve and what shape Northern Ireland business — Northern Ireland plc — should take in the next five, 10, or 15 years.

The top priority for the new agency — I have mentioned it before — is to create an open, dynamic and committed strategy for research and development. If that is not built in at the core of everything and at every level, we will never be able to do what we want to do. We have had some successes recently with call centres, software projects, and so on, but research and

development is crucially important if we are to identify the opportunities offered by rapidly evolving technology. It is not a new approach on this island. In the 1980s, senior figures in the Industrial Development Agency (IDA) and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment in the South made a major effort to identify opportunities and put their economy in a position to attract new investment. The result was what is referred to as the “Celtic tiger”. I would not overrate the “Celtic tiger”, but the Southern Irish economy was given a major boost.

We cannot offer a 10% corporation tax rate here, but we can offer many advantages. Our greatest strength is our people. There is a large pool of well-trained, highly educated people, ready and able to work, if the work is available for them. We also have a range of incentives that we can offer to those who might wish to invest here. We cannot simply react to events; we must think and act strategically, and research and development is a key component of that.

If we want to be market leaders in new and emerging fields, it is imperative that research and development be at the top of our list of priorities. We have had many success stories in the past few years in areas as diverse as global e-mail, wireless application protocol (WAP) technology and electronic components. Many indigenous companies triumphed. We must encourage others, and to do that we need an environment that is conducive to doing business.

Above all, we need to remove the fear and stigma of failure in business. Last August some Committee members accompanied the Minister on a visit to the United States, where failure is almost a qualification for future success. Those who have failed and have used that experience to come back and succeed are among the top business people in the United States. However, those who do not try at all will never succeed.

In Silicon Valley, California, which we hear a great deal about, the most respected leaders are those who have failed. Some of them have failed more than once and yet rise and fight again. In Northern Ireland, we tend to write off people who fail. In doing so, we are probably choking our potential future resource. Someone who has almost made it to the summit of Mount Everest has a hell of a lot of experience that can be brought to bear in climbing a slightly less elevated mountain.

Invest Northern Ireland should be a guiding light in creating a more business-friendly environment and in doing so should be the engine that makes things happen. If that can be attained, the restructuring will have achieved many of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment's objectives.

Ms Morrice: I welcome the Bill and the close co-operation that there has been between the Minister and the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

The Industrial Development Bill is an important step in the modernisation of Northern Ireland's approach to economic and industrial development. It is important that we get it right. The new agency is a vast undertaking, and it will become a super-agency with a combined budget for this year of at least £200 million.

The important message at the end of the Minister's statement was that the emphasis must be on getting the job done and not on bureaucracy. There is an absolute commitment that Invest Northern Ireland will not become tied up in its own bureaucracy as a result of being a super-agency. It must always keep its feet on the ground and get its priorities right.

The Minister mentioned the composition of the board; he suggested that, as far as possible, it should be representative of the community. That representation of the community should take gender balance into account. Sadly, there has been a lack of women at the top of the economic development tree in Northern Ireland. That is reflected in the world of economic development. It is one area in which women do not appear at the top of the management structure. It would be appropriate if as much as possible could be done to make the board representative of the gender balance in Northern Ireland.

Certain staffing representations were made, and the Equality Commission proofed the Bill on those grounds. The facts speak for themselves. A breakdown of staff according to gender is available for the new agency. Fifty-one per cent of the staff are female and 49% are male — exactly representative of society. However, at senior management level — principal and above — 16% of the staff are female and 84% are male. That is not acceptable today. Proactive measures are needed to encourage the promotion of women. Thirty-nine per cent of staff in middle management are female, but something must be done to break that glass ceiling and allow women to rise to their rightful positions in top management in economic development. It is right that people are nominated to the economic development forum, but it would be nice if something could be done to get more women involved in the forum. Their voices are important at that level also.

3.45 pm

I want to talk about the geographical balance of the aid provided by the agencies in Northern Ireland. It may be a policy matter, but perhaps it could be reflected in the functions of the new agency. I have read the figures of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and its agencies on the geographical spread of funding and support.

I will begin with the Industrial Research Technology Unit (IRTU) and the thousands of pounds committed. I note that north Down and south Down are at the bottom of the heap as regards research and development. It comes as quite a surprise to me that that is the case, when other

areas can rise to £2 million or £3 million. My calculation is that south Down is getting £0.2 million. The geographical balance of aid is important.

I would like to talk about the geographical balance of IDB assistance by district council area. Although I represent North Down, I am astounded that Moyle does not feature. Perhaps there is a statistical explanation for that. There has been virtually nothing for Moyle in investments and IDB assistance by district council area in the last five years — and nothing for Armagh.

Mr Paisley Jnr: Will the Member give way?

Ms Morrice: No, I want to get to these points.

There has been nothing for Armagh, and that is an important point. I would be interested to hear the explanation for it. It could not be because those areas have no investment potential.

I welcome the fact that the Bill will promote the efficient use of energy in industry. It is part and parcel of the amalgamation that is part of the legislation. I would like to see much greater advances in that area, and I would like more notice to be taken of energy efficiency, renewable energy and aid for renewable energy. That is an important priority. Dr McDonnell referred to research and development. That is important, but I believe that green energy, whether it be energy efficiency or renewable energy, is very important.

The Minister said that there should be

“maximum freedom and flexibility for Invest Northern Ireland and appropriate control and proper accountability”.

That is vitally important, and we will watch it with a great deal of interest. Dr McDonnell commented on the philosophy and culture. We believe that as far as possible there should be a grass-roots culture, which should protect and invest in local indigenous industry, while being farsighted in getting new industries on board.

Mrs Courtney: I commend the Minister for getting the Bill to this stage. He has gone into great detail about the new agency, Invest Northern Ireland, and the transfer of staff.

I would like to make a special plea to the Minister, and he will not be surprised to hear that it is for the north-west. Derry has been recognised in report after report as a regional hub. Would it not be eminently sensible for Invest Northern Ireland to have a substantial presence in the Maiden City? The closure of the IDB office some years ago left a particularly bitter taste in the mouth of the people of Derry, especially of those people who were actively involved in the economic and industrial regeneration of the city. The Minister has a unique opportunity to correct a wrong and at the same time to build upon Derry's spirit of enterprise and innovation. I ask the Minister to facilitate Invest Northern Ireland in locating a substantial presence in the north-west,

particularly in our own Maiden City — not just a few additional jobs in the Derry office, but a real presence. It is important that the Minister act now. After Invest Northern Ireland is set up, the arms-length relationship will reduce the Minister's influence in decisions on job locations. For too long, the people of Derry have had to make do, without a substantial presence. I ask the Minister to address the matter.

Mr McHugh: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. This is an important Bill, and it has the impact that the Committee wanted. However, for the rest of us, its importance lies in what the new body might do in comparison with what has been done in the past in our own areas. I welcome the change to what is perhaps a superagency, but an important factor is that people will be watching what will happen. This body is not LEDU and IDB repackaged; it must make an impact on its own. However, I am concerned that there has been some jockeying of the previous bodies to make way for the future body. I hope that this is a change for the better.

Since 1982, massive changes have taken place in the global economy. The new body will have a completely different agenda to work to. It must deliver locally for small and medium-sized businesses in rural areas, and it must help the individual. An agency with glossy annuals is of no use if it neglects the representatives of small business who read of what can be achieved in the media but can achieve nothing for themselves. That perception must be surmounted by the new body; it must make a different image for itself by helping small businesses to achieve.

It was said that IDB and LEDU have delivered equitably. Fermanagh people would not necessarily go along with that. The difficulty with the way that those bodies were set up was that they were not able to deliver to small businesses. We hope that that will change. The economy in Fermanagh and Tyrone is like that of many other rural areas. It depends on small rather than large businesses. Businesses that create jobs for 50 plus employees often fall between two stools, while businesses started by single entrepreneurs that create between five and 10 jobs fail for lack of capital. The local challenge must be dealt with. Competitiveness and benchmarking against the achievements of the South and other countries such as the USA are critical. The South is the world's second largest exporter of IT software, the first being the USA. That is a considerable achievement, but such an approach also runs the risk of putting all the eggs in one basket.

I look forward to seeing the outcomes and achievements of this body. There is a mindset among people in many institutions — including, in some instances, the Civil Service — that everything stops at the end of the M1. Such people do not consider sending investors to places west of the Bann. That mindset must change. At the very least, investors must be encouraged to move to

other areas. In the South, investment in the outer reaches is actively promoted. Perhaps that can be done here.

There is no doubt that we are limited to areas that people want to invest in. Some people may want to build their factory in Belfast or Craigavon, and we cannot do much about that. However, local Governments such as ours can actively promote areas, encourage investors to visit those areas and to see them as places where corporate people can enjoy a good quality of life. Quality of life is almost as important as the distance one has to travel for business.

The IT industry does not require transport over long distances. It can also work to enhance the environment in areas such as Fermanagh, where the environment is an important factor. On the other hand, people such as Sean Quinn would not be allowed to build anything today if it were up to the planners.

Designated tourism areas are important. We will gain much from tourism, but there are other industries that we would like to see moving to Fermanagh and Tyrone. The changes that will come as a result of the erection of the new body will be for the betterment of the people in those areas, improving their quality of life and creating jobs.

Sir Reg Empey: I have listened carefully to what was said, and I will try to reply to as many points as possible. We will look at Hansard later and, if necessary, I will pick up on any concerns that Members have expressed if I miss them now.

Dr Birnie referred to the importance of having the right person at the top of the organisation. I assure him that the Department has been thinking about that. We have appointed special consultants, with whom I spent some time in London, and we went through the profile of the type of person that we would wish to see occupying that position. We also recognise Dr McDonnell's point that the appointee would have to be given a package appropriate to the post. We have taken advice on that. We have compared the situation with that in other jurisdictions, and we believe that we have arrived at a competitive package. I made it clear to the consultants that the person must know what a customer is. That type of experience is crucial to performing what will be a very important function. The person involved will preside over an organisation of 700 or 800 people with a budget of approximately £200 million per annum. It is an important and responsible job. It will involve interfacing with the public sector, and there are accountability issues. Therefore it is a high profile position.

Dr Birnie also mentioned the issue of productivity per head. There are a number of ways in which the Minister and my Department will continue to influence that. Three-year corporate plans will have to be produced, and there will be an annual operating plan. We will have to agree those plans, and it will be clear that we have to

set out targets and objectives for the agency. That is the mechanism through which we intend to have influence over those issues. Targets based on benchmarking and scoping studies will have to be set, and the Assembly will have to be able to evaluate whether those targets are being achieved. Indeed, that will be one of the ways of measuring the success, or otherwise, of the agency.

4.00 pm

Raising performance levels and having a balanced view of the past are important, but it is felt that we have moved on, that businesses have changed and that the previous agencies were set up at different points over a 30-year period. Dr Birnie referred to the unique way that Northern Ireland previously divided businesses by size, when the principles very often remained the same. Also, large employers are no longer around as they were 30 years ago. It is time for a change. I want to make it clear to Members that it is not simply a matter of bolting together the existing agencies — we are creating a new one. I want to come back to that point.

Dr Birnie and Dr McDonnell referred to research and development, which I said was the golden thread that will run right through the agency. There is absolutely no doubt — Dr Birnie and Dr McDonnell have raised this point on many occasions — that if the innovation strategy is not brought right to the core of the agency, we will have failed. I readily accept that.

Things have moved on, and there must be a different approach. Many ideas have been generated through research in universities, by private companies and even in the public sector. Industry can convert those ideas into productive processes or tradable services that will enable us to bring products to the market and differentiate us from the low-wage economies.

Dr McDonnell also mentioned the philosophy of the agency. I hope that he did not pick me up wrongly. I do not anticipate that we will simply carry forward what was there before. There must be a new approach. I accept entirely that it must be based on innovation. Private sector involvement and influence will, of course, be crucial. However, we readily accept — and the Minister of Finance and Personnel is watching this closely — that although that there has been a reduction in the assistance offered by the state over recent years, it is not only money that matters to businesses. They require a whole range of other services and assistance that can be critical to their ability to survive and grow. The growth of small businesses and an increase in the start rate will be two of the benchmarks and targets that we must set. Although the sustainability of our new businesses is quite high, our start rate is low. That is another challenge that has been set up for us.

The concept of IDB with three additional arms flailing around is certainly not my vision, nor that of the Committee or of Members. We see a totally different organisation,

but the new agency must start somewhere, and it will start with persons who currently work for the other bodies. It will take time to get going, but it will ultimately have control of its own destiny. Our task will be to ensure that the new agency is set targets and asked to do things that are realistic.

I have referred to the stigma of failure. Dr McDonnell is of a similar view to myself. It is a problem in Northern Ireland and in these islands. In the United States, the attitude varies from place to place, but people there do not wear bags over their heads if a business does not work out. As Dr McDonnell said, those people are often at a premium because they have had an important experience.

The issue of accountability has been mentioned. The new agency has been referred to as a very large organisation with a substantial budget. However, while wanting to have the maximum flexibility, we also want to ensure that the accountability arrangements are appropriate and that this House continues to have sight of and control of the resource. As I said in my opening statement, my officials are working with officials from the Department of Finance and Personnel to ensure that the issues of accountability are properly dealt with. The Department of Finance and Personnel has specific responsibility for those issues, and we will work closely with it as we move forward to ensure that there is access for the Comptroller and Auditor General and that Members of this House have full and free access to all financial and other information.

Ms Morrice referred to a number of issues, and I want to draw one or two points to her attention. She raised the question of gender issues, not only at board level but also at staff and other levels. She will be aware that some weeks ago we advertised very widely in local papers and further afield for membership of the board. We received in excess of 150 responses, but I have to say that the number of applications from women was in single figures. I want to put on record that, from a gender point of view, that response was exceedingly low and disappointing. That does not go into the nature and quality of the applications received, which are now being dealt with; rather, it refers to the volume of applications from women. That is a matter of very grave concern to our officials, who are currently interviewing for the board. We have of course brought in an independent figure to sit in on those interviews, and I am satisfied that the structure of those will meet with Members' approval.

Clearly, the concern about gender relates not only to the board. I take Ms Morrice's point. When this agency is up and running it will have its own equality schemes, and those will have to be approved in the normal way. Currently, schemes such as IDB's are covered by the departmental scheme. IDB is at present an integral part of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Industry. There is no doubt that there is an awareness of the issue,

not only in the economic development agencies but throughout the service. I know that the Minister of Finance and Personnel is watching these matters carefully, as we have made commitments in the Programme for Government to achieve progress in these matters right across the board.

I must make a number of points on the geographical balance of aid. IDB and the economic development agencies have client companies in different locations. Moyle was mentioned, and regrettably we have only two client companies in that district council area. It is not necessarily the case that those particular businesses either come forward with, or can be encouraged to — or wish to — put themselves forward for, any of the schemes operated by the Department. It also depends on the nature of the businesses. Ms Morrice also mentioned north Down and south Down. Again, with regard to research and development, it depends on the concentration of businesses and where the most appropriate businesses for that type of activity are located. There are historical issues that are outside our control. I can assure the Member that the question of distribution is one that is continuously and consistently brought to our attention. However, Members have to be aware that business is where business is.

Mr McHugh — and this also relates to Ms Morrice's question — raised the issue of distribution west of the Bann. As the Member knows, the Department has a number of targets. One of those is that 75% of first-time visits should be to New TSN areas. We slightly exceeded that target last year, with about 76% of first-time visits going to New TSN areas.

Where possible, we encourage companies to visit and to invest, and, as I have said many times before in the House, we do bring forward enhanced offers of assistance to companies that are prepared to invest in New TSN areas. On some occasions, companies will avail of those opportunities, but on other occasions they will refuse them point-blank. We cannot force companies — and the Member acknowledged this — to establish themselves in areas where they do not consider it to be in their interests to do so. We can encourage and persuade, but we cannot force.

The commitment to try to achieve distribution along these lines is undoubtedly there. The Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr McHugh) will be aware that I have been in that constituency on a number of occasions recently. I am aware of the difficulties, and I am aware of the feeling of isolation and the feeling that perhaps Belfast-based agencies do not care. However, I assure Mr McHugh that that is not the case: we do care; I care. There are commitments in the departmental plans, and I believe that it is for us to ensure that the agency is charged, when established, with achieving targets that are consistent with the Programme for Government objectives.

Mrs Courtney, uncharacteristically, encouraged me to ensure that additional investment went to Londonderry. I cannot imagine why that was so. It seems to come up frequently. On a serious note, there is a commitment that the new agency will have a regional dimension. That commitment has been made frequently in the House, and I reiterate it today. I cannot yet say precisely where the offices will be located, but there is a commitment to having a significant regional dimension.

For practical reasons, the Department must take some action to establish the shadow board and to appoint the chief executive. If we do not, it will be next year before the board has any statutory powers, and we cannot wait that long. Therefore the Department must take the lead and get a few things started. However, I want to consult with the shadow board, which I hope to appoint before long, so that it can have ownership of some of these policy issues.

I repeat that we are initially appointing a small shadow board because I did not wish to anticipate the decisions of the House or the Committees on the actual size of the board, which will be dealt with in the legislation. The intention is that when the legislation is passed, there will be a second tranche of appointments to the board to bring it up to its agreed final strength. People who applied for positions on the shadow board and who were not appointed will, if they so wish, be automatically re-entered for the second stage of the competition.

I place on record my thanks to my departmental staff, and in particular those in the restructuring branch, for the long hours and months — indeed, over a year's work — that have gone into this; it has been painstaking. There have been many hills and hollows to get over, but the realisation of our objectives is closer than ever before.

I hope that I have covered most of the points that were made. If I have failed to do so, we will pick them up later and contact Members with any points that were missed. The aim and objective of the Bill is not simply to shuffle the pack: it is not simply doing it for the sake of doing it.

4.15 pm

The reason for the Bill is to ensure that a fresh look is brought to the economy. The current economy is different from the one that existed 30 years ago when some of those organisations were founded. The nature of business then was totally different from today. If we go back only five years, the extent to which the economy has changed is dramatic. The pace of events, globalisation, the move away from traditional industries, and the rise of Third-World countries with their low-labour-cost economies were not threats 20 or 30 years ago.

We are a very small region, and nobody owes Northern Ireland a living. Therefore we have to make sure that everything we do maximises the results and the cost-

effectiveness of business. That will ensure that our economy can grow and strengthen itself. Several Members have identified structural weaknesses, but we have achieved great things in a short time. All of the agencies are entitled to receive their share of criticism. However, I would like to remind people that 20 or 30 years ago, when people were marketing Northern Ireland, the CNN image of this place was a war zone. People were knocking on doors and trying to sell Northern Ireland as a place for investment.

Since I started this job, it has never ceased to amaze me that we have such a resilient economy, although it has weaknesses. Scotland, Wales, the Republic and mainland Europe did not have to deal with the problem that we faced, which was a huge marketing disadvantage. We must understand the backdrop against which those who were charged with the job of trying to market this Province had to work. There are significant pockets of unemployment, but here we are today, enjoying the lowest rates of unemployment for generations. That is a tribute not only to the workforce and the businesspeople who have shown such resilience, but also to the agency and Department staff who attempted to maintain a degree of economic stability against a background that was anything but stable.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Second Stage of the Industrial Development Bill (NIA 18/00) be agreed.

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

BUDGET (NO 2) BILL

Further Consideration Stage

Clauses 1 to 6 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedules 1 to 3 agreed to.

Long title agreed to.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That concludes the Further Consideration Stage of the Budget (No 2) Bill. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Assembly Standing Orders

The following motion stood on the Order Paper:

In Standing Order 58 delete all and insert:

“(1) There shall be a Standing Committee of the Assembly to be known as the Audit Committee which shall:

- (a) exercise the functions laid upon the Assembly by Section 66 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998;
- (b) recommend to the Assembly the annual salary payable to the holder of the office of Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland in accordance with Article 4(1) of the Audit (Northern Ireland) Order 1987; and
- (c) recommend to the Assembly a person to be nominated for appointment to the office of Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland in accordance with Section 65(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

(2) In discharging its functions under this Standing Order the Committee shall have regard to the advice of the Public Accounts Committee and the Department of Finance and Personnel.

(3) In accordance with Section 66(2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, no more than one member of the Committee may be a member of the Public Accounts Committee.

(4) The Committee shall have a membership of five and a quorum of two.”

[The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Mr C Murphy)]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Is the motion moved or not moved?

The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Mr C Murphy): Not moved, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

Madam Deputy Speaker: We move to the next motion on the Order Paper.

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

I beg to move

In Standing Order 10(2), line 3, delete “10.30 am” and insert “12.00 midday”.

On 23 April the Assembly agreed to suspend, until the summer recess, Standing Order 10(2), which sets the times of the Monday sittings as from 10.30 am to 6.00 pm. The purpose of the suspension was to give the Business Committee the freedom to set a later starting time for Monday sittings. This would allow parties time to consider the forthcoming week’s business. When I introduced the motion I made the point that the 10.30 am start time did not allow parties sufficient time to hold meetings; neither did it provide them with the opportunity to discuss amendments to motions that had been tabled that morning.

In moving that motion, I explained that the Committee’s research on Monday plenary timings showed that less than six hours were spent in plenary on Mondays. Those

six hours were almost always interrupted by a lunch break that, until the 23 April, lasted on average 1 hour and 45 minutes. The research also showed that business often stopped before 6.00 pm. These conclusions led the Committee to believe that a start time of 12.00 pm would provide sufficient time on a Monday for the Assembly to conduct its business.

However, rather than make a permanent change, the Committee agreed that the new timings should be experimental until the summer recess, whereupon decisions on a permanent change could be taken. During the debate on the motion, several Members expressed concerns about the proposed new timings. They were concerned that the Business Committee would have less time for Monday’s business, that the time for debate would be reduced and that Wednesday sittings might be needed in order to complete business. My response was to emphasise that a change would only become permanent if it proved beneficial to the Assembly.

A LeasCheann Comhairle, the Committee on Procedures has reviewed this experiment and is content that the change has been beneficial and that Members’ concerns have proved unfounded. Members may be interested to note that of the six Monday sittings since the new start time of noon was introduced, only two have lasted until 6.00 pm; three have finished before 5.00 pm; there has been a lunch break during four of the sittings; and on two occasions the lunch break has lasted more than an hour. To date, it has not been necessary to sit on a Wednesday.

The Assembly is sitting this Wednesday, but not because of a lack of time on Monday. Rather, it is due to the requirements of the five-day rule for stages of legislation as set out in Standing Orders, and this Wednesday is the earliest date that three Bills on the Order Paper can have their Final Stage considered. In the light of the above facts, it is clear that Members’ initial concerns on this proposal have not been realised. There has been sufficient time to consider Assembly business, and there have been no complaints to the Procedures Committee from the Business Committee about time pressures or about its being forced to curtail the time allocated to items of business. Similarly, there has been no adverse impact on the Assembly commitment to family-friendly policies as there has been no extension to plenary times on a Tuesday.

In conclusion, the Committee on Procedures believes this proposal is of benefit to the Assembly and supports the change to Standard Orders.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

In Standing Order 10(2) line 3 delete “10.30 am” and insert “12 midday”.

Mr C Murphy: I beg to move

In Standing Order 64 delete all and insert:

“(1) A Register of Members’ Interests, which shall list the categories of registrable interest, shall be established, published and made available for public inspection.

(2) The Clerk of Standards shall compile, and from time to time publish, the Register of Members’ Interests.

(3) Every Member of the Assembly shall inform the Clerk of Standards of such particulars of his/her registrable interests as shall be required, and of any alterations to such interests within four weeks of each change occurring.

(4) Before taking part in any debate or proceeding of the Assembly or its Committees, a Member shall declare any interest, financial or otherwise, which is relevant to that debate or proceeding, where such interest is held by the Member or an immediate relative.

(5) No Member of the Assembly shall, in any proceeding of the Assembly, in return for payment or benefit mentioned in paragraph 61 of the Guide to the Rules Relating to the Conduct of Members, approved by the Assembly on 14 December 1999 [‘the Guide’]:

(a) advocate or initiate any cause or matter on behalf of any outside body or individual;

(b) urge any other Member of the Assembly to do so.

(6) Where it appears to the Committee on Standards and Privileges that a Member has failed to comply with, or has contravened any provision of this Order, the Committee may make a report to the Assembly.

(7) A report made under paragraph (6) may contain a recommendation that the Member:

(a) be excluded from proceedings of the Assembly for a specified period; and

(b) have his/her rights and privileges as a Member withdrawn for that period.

(8) In this Standing Order:-

‘Financial interest’ means any registrable interest other than one falling within paragraph 26 or 27 of the Guide;

‘Registrable interest’ means any category of registrable interest falling within paragraphs 14 to 37 of the Guide.”

The proposed amendment to Standing Order 64 will give effect to the principal recommendations of the report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges entitled ‘Inquiry into the Possible Appointment of an Assembly Commissioner for Standards’, which was considered and approved unanimously by the Assembly on 2 April 2001.

Also, the current Standing Order 64 does not conform fully to what is set out in the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Section 43 of the 1998 Act states that Standing Orders shall provide for

“a register of interests of members of the Assembly”.

Registrable interests are to be as defined in Standing Orders, and currently there is no such definition. The current Standing Order also mentions pecuniary interests. This is not defined, nor is it in the wording of the 1998 Act, which refers to financial interest. The Act says “as defined in standing orders”.

The Assembly legal adviser has suggested that the definitions as set out in the ‘Guide to the Rules relating to the Conduct of Members’, which was approved by

the Assembly on 14 December 1999, are sufficient. The proposed amendment to this Standing Order includes replacing the term “pecuniary interest” with “financial interest”, defines the categories of registrable interests and financial interests and makes clear the responsibility of the Assembly Clerk of Standards for the compilation and publication of the Register of Members’ Interests.

Paragraphs 6 and 7 are new to the Standing Order and give the Committee on Standards and Privileges the authority to make recommendations for sanctions and penalties to be imposed upon any Member of the Assembly against whom a complaint has been upheld. This is provided for in section 43(5) of the 1998 Act.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

In Standing order 64 delete all and insert:

“(1) A Register of Members’ Interests, which shall list the categories of registrable interest, shall be established, published and made available for public inspection.

(2) The Clerk of Standards shall compile, and from time to time publish, the Register of Members’ Interests.

(3) Every Member of the Assembly shall inform the Clerk of Standards of such particulars of his/her registrable interests as shall be required, and of any alterations to such interests within four weeks of each change occurring.

(4) Before taking part in any debate or proceeding of the Assembly or its Committees, a Member shall declare any interest, financial or otherwise, which is relevant to that debate or proceeding, where such interest is held by the Member or an immediate relative.

(5) No Member of the Assembly shall, in any proceeding of the Assembly, in return for payment or benefit mentioned in paragraph 61 of the Guide to the Rules Relating to the Conduct of Members, approved by the Assembly on 14 December 1999 [‘the Guide’]:

(a) advocate or initiate any cause or matter on behalf of any outside body or individual;

(b) urge any other Member of the Assembly to do so.

(6) Where it appears to the Committee on Standards and Privileges that a Member has failed to comply with, or has contravened any provision of this Order, the Committee may make a report to the Assembly.

(7) A report made under paragraph (6) may contain a recommendation that the Member:

(a) be excluded from proceedings of the Assembly for a specified period; and

(b) have his/her rights and privileges as a Member withdrawn for that period.

(8) In this Standing Order:-

‘Financial interest’ means any registrable interest other than one falling within paragraph 26 or 27 of the Guide;

‘Registrable interest’ means any category of registrable interest falling within paragraphs 14 to 37 of the Guide.”

4.30 pm

Mr C Murphy: I beg to move

In Standing Order 57 delete all and insert:

“57. COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS AND PRIVILEGES

(1) There shall be a Standing Committee of the Assembly called the Committee on Standards and Privileges:

- (a) to consider specific matters relating to privilege referred to it by the Assembly;
- (b) to oversee the work of the Assembly Clerk of Standards; to examine the arrangements for the compilation, maintenance and accessibility of the Register of Members’ Interests and any other registers of interests established by the Assembly; and to review from time to time the form and content of those registers;
- (c) to consider any matter relating to the conduct of Members including specific complaints in relation to alleged breaches of any code of conduct to which the Assembly has agreed and which have been drawn to the Committee’s attention;
- (d) to recommend any modifications to the code of conduct mentioned in paragraph (c);
- (e) to perform the functions described in Standing Order 64(6) and (7);
- (f) to make a report to the Assembly on any matter falling within this Standing Order.

(2) The Committee shall be appointed at the commencement of every Assembly and shall have power to send for persons, papers and records that are relevant to its enquiries.

(3) There shall be an officer of the Assembly, to be known as the Assembly Commissioner for Standards, who shall carry out an investigation into any matter falling within paragraph (4) referred to him by the Assembly Clerk of Standards and shall make a report thereon to the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

(4) Those matters are:

- (a) matters relating to Members and Assembly privilege, including alleged breach of privilege;
- (b) specific complaints about Members made in relation to the registering or declaring of interests; and
- (c) matters relating to the conduct of Members, including specific complaints in relation to alleged contravention of:
 - (i) the Code of Conduct for Members of the Assembly; or
 - (ii) the Guide to the Rules Relating to the Conduct of Members, approved by the Assembly on 14 December 1999.

(5) A report made under paragraph (3) may not include any recommendations for any sanction or penalty to be imposed upon any Member of the Assembly.

(6) The Assembly Commissioner for Standards shall not, in the exercise of any of his functions, be subject to the direction or control of the Assembly.

(7) The Assembly may not dismiss the Assembly Commissioner for Standards unless:

- (a) the Assembly so resolves; and
- (b) the resolution is passed with the support of a number of Members of the Assembly which equals or exceeds two-thirds of the total number of seats in the Assembly.”

In moving the motion, the Committee on Procedures is putting into effect the recommendations of a report, which was unanimously agreed by the Assembly on 2 April 2001, making provision for it to be the duty of the Committee on Standards and Privileges to oversee the work of the Assembly Clerk of Standards, examine the arrangements for the compilation, maintenance, accessibility and review of a Register of Members’ Interests and any other registers of interest, consider specific matters relating to privilege referred to the Committee and any matters relating to the conduct of Members which are brought to the Committee’s attention, make a report to the Assembly on any matter falling within this Standing Order and recommend to the Assembly that sanctions be applied to any Member who has failed to comply with or who has contravened any provision of this Standing Order.

In addition to implementing the recommendations of the Committee’s report, the proposed Standing Order will also provide for the appointment of an Assembly Commissioner for Standards to investigate and report on matters relating to Assembly Members and Assembly privilege. It sets out the matters which the commissioner may investigate, including alleged breach of privilege, complaints in relation to the declaration or registration of interests, alleged contravention of the Code of Conduct and the ‘Guide to the Rules relating to the Conduct of Members’. It enables the commissioner to carry out his or her functions without being under the direction or control of the Assembly. A recommendation to the Assembly on sanctions against any Member will remain within the remit of the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

Finally, the Standing Order sets out the procedure for the dismissal of the commissioner. The requirement for any such resolution would require the support of a number of Members equal to at least two thirds of the total number of Assembly seats, that is, of 72 Members. That is the same as for the removal from office of the Comptroller and Auditor General as laid down in section 65(2)(b) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. I understand that further legal advice has led to an amendment to this motion being brought forward by the Chairperson of the Committee on Standards and Privileges. This Standing Order and Standing Order 64 are intended to ensure that we as Members are seen to behave with propriety. This is an important issue, and one which we, as Members, will be well aware is currently the cause of considerable public interest and concern.

The Chairperson of the Committee on Standards and Privileges (Mr McClelland): I beg to move the following amendment:

In proposed Standing Order 57(7) line 1 delete “the Assembly may not dismiss” and insert after “Standards” “shall not be dismissed”.

As the Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures said, the amendments to Standing Order 57 would provide the means to ensure implementation in principle

of the recommendations of the first report by the Committee on Standards and Privileges, inquiring into the possible appointment of an Assembly Commissioner for Standards.

I support this motion, which will give effect to the Committee's recommendations on sanctions and privileges and will provide the enabling power for the Commissioner for Standards to investigate complaints made against Members of the Assembly. In supporting the motion, it has also become necessary for me to move an amendment to section 7 of the Standing Order.

Following last-minute legal advice, it has become apparent that a minor adjustment to section 7 is required in order to ensure that the terms of the Standing Order accurately reflect the role and responsibility of the Assembly if consideration is being given to the dismissal of an Assembly Commissioner for Standards. The intention of section 7 is to put in place a framework in which the Assembly shall determine that an Assembly Commissioner for Standards is to be dismissed. As currently drafted, however, there is an ambiguous reference to the dismissal process. My proposed amendment makes an adjustment to this wording and removes any ambiguity relating to the powers of the Assembly.

In moving this amendment, I want to emphasise, as Chairperson of the Committee on Standards and Privileges, my broad support for the motion put down by Conor Murphy. I ask all Members to support the motion as amended because it will provide reassurance to the general public that Assembly Members perform their responsibility to the highest standard that they rightly expect.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful for the opportunity to query the reason for the amendment. One concern that I have is that it would remove any procedure that the Assembly would have to police the work of the commissioner. While the commissioner would carry out — and be expected to carry out — an important role, it would also be vital that he or she would be subject to some degree of control by the Assembly. I am at a loss to know why, as I understand the amendment, the Assembly may not dismiss a commissioner under any circumstances.

It seems I have the wrong end of the stick.

Mr McClelland: As I have said, the purpose of the amendment is to remove any ambiguity in the wording; that is the primary concern. The Assembly would make the decision about the removal of a commissioner, but it is the Assembly Commission that would carry out the work. Its aim is to remove the ambiguity of the process, rather than to create a further problem.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Mr Murphy, do you also want the opportunity to wind up?

Mr C Murphy: No, Mr McClelland has answered Mr Kennedy's query.

Question That the amendment be made put and agreed to (with cross-community support).

Main Question, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

In Standing Order 57 delete all and insert:

“57. COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS AND PRIVILEGES

(1) There shall be a Standing Committee of the Assembly called the Committee on Standards and Privileges:

- (a) to consider specific matters relating to privilege referred to it by the Assembly;
- (b) to oversee the work of the Assembly Clerk of Standards; to examine the arrangements for the compilation, maintenance and accessibility of the Register of Members' Interests and any other registers of interests established by the Assembly; and to review from time to time the form and content of those registers;
- (c) to consider any matter relating to the conduct of Members including specific complaints in relation to alleged breaches of any code of conduct to which the Assembly has agreed and which have been drawn to the Committee's attention;
- (d) to recommend any modification to the code of conduct mentioned in paragraph (c);
- (e) to perform the functions described in Standing Order 64(6) and (7);
- (f) to make a report to the Assembly on any matter falling within this Standing Order.

(2) The Committee shall be appointed at the commencement of every Assembly and shall have power to send for persons, papers and records that are relevant to its enquiries.

(3) There shall be an officer of the Assembly, to be known as the Assembly Commissioner for Standards, who shall carry out an investigation into any matter falling within paragraph (4) referred to him by the Assembly Clerk of Standards and shall make a report thereon to the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

(4) Those matters are:

- (a) matters relating to Members and Assembly privilege, including alleged breach of privilege;
- (b) specific complaints about Members made in relation to the registering or declaring of interests; and
- (c) matters relating to the conduct of Members, including specific complaints in relation to alleged contravention of:
 - (i) the Code of Conduct for Members of the Assembly; or
 - (ii) the Guide to the Rules Relating to the Conduct of Members, approved by the Assembly on 14 December 1999.

(5) A report made under paragraph (3) may not include any recommendations for any sanction or penalty to be imposed upon any Member of the Assembly.

(6) The Assembly Commissioner for Standards shall not, in the exercise of any of his functions, be subject to the direction or control of the Assembly.

(7) The Assembly Commissioner for Standards shall not be dismissed unless:

- (a) the Assembly so resolves; and
- (b) the resolution is passed with the support of a number of Members of the Assembly which equals or exceeds two-thirds of the total number of seats in the Assembly.”

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Mr Molloy): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

I beg to move

That this Assembly takes note of the report prepared by the Committee for Finance and Personnel following its inquiry in to the use of public-private partnerships (7/00/R).

Members will have received copies of the Committee for Finance and Personnel's report on the use of public-private partnerships (PPP) yesterday. The Committee's inquiry into PPP addresses an issue of critical importance. It is a key time in the debate on the role of the private sector in public services. The issues are vital and relevant to the Assembly, to the Executive and, most importantly, to the public at large.

We face a very serious problem in how we finance and procure major improvements to the public infrastructure. Finance will be needed over the coming years to fulfil the deficit. The shortfall runs into billions of pounds. It is estimated that health, education and housing need at least £850 million now. Water, roads and public transport will need about £4 billion over the next 10 to 20 years.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel confirmed the size of the problem we face. In his evidence to the Committee he said:

"If we use all the resources in the Northern Ireland block for investment in the conventional procurement manner, we will fail to achieve our goals."

The Committee agreed that in pursuing its scrutiny and policy advice role, it needs to examine the extent of the deficit of investment in public services and infrastructure and the part that public-private partnerships might play in financing the deficit and improving services.

The Committee began its inquiry in March. It has generated a great deal of interest from a wide range of people and organisations involved in the debate on PPP. We heard from people working locally, in Dublin, London and further afield. They came from hospitals, schools, trade unions, the academic world, international private sector companies and financial institutions, and local and central Government. Nearly 60 substantial papers were submitted, and the key people from those areas were questioned. We examined a range of PPP projects and their effect on users, their value for money, the effects of committing money over a long term, and the patterns and trends that are starting to emerge.

The Committee members spent many hours reading, hearing and analysing evidence. No one to whom we spoke was neutral. People were either enthusiastic or critical of PPP.

I want to thank publicly all those who contributed to the report. In particular, the Committee wants to express its appreciation of the work of the Assembly staff — the Clerks and various people who served the Committee, and the Hansard staff — and also to thank those who provided hospitality and helped during its visits to various locations.

The Committee agreed that, ideally, public finance is preferred for investment. It can be provided at lower interest rates than are generally available in private finance. Using public money ensures that responsibility for provision of public services remains firmly in the public sector.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel, and the Executive, must address the problems of the Barnett formula. That has contributed to underinvestment here. They must seek an increase in grants if public money is to be used to tackle the infrastructure deficit. We recognise that the Treasury is unlikely to meet all of the outstanding financial needs from increased public expenditure in the short term. If that turns out to be true, we must look at other sources of finance to help address the deficit. However, we must continue to lobby and ensure that we get a fair proportion.

4.45 pm

The Committee heard evidence on the benefits of revenue and capital bonds, which were deemed a cheaper means of financing public sector projects than PPP. Representatives from the Department for Regional Development also discussed the possibility of a not-for-profit regional investment trust, financed by bonds. The Executive need to rigorously investigate these methods, and the Department of Finance and Personnel, in its own review, needs to clarify their suitability.

The Committee acknowledged that PPPs could be a valuable tool or means of investment if used in the right circumstances. Many of the witnesses, including users of PPPs, were enthusiastic about their benefits. However, other witnesses warned us of the dangers and disadvantages of PPPs, especially if they are used incorrectly. Members will be aware of the ongoing debate on the role of the private sector in public service provision. The Committee calls for caution to be taken in regard to PPP. Care needs to be taken in deciding how, where, and when this method is adopted. We should not blindly follow others down the PPP route.

A recent report by the Institute of Public Policy Research — 'Building Better Partnerships' — argues in favour of a pragmatic rather than dogmatic approach to the use of the private sector in public service provision. It also calls for the reform of PPPs if the Government are to succeed in improving the quality of publicly funded services. Their views echo the Committee's own, and the report gives added weight to our conclusions and recommendations.

The Committee believes that the findings and recommendations of the inquiry will help to ensure that any decisions on PPP are properly taken and that due regard will be given to the overall investment needs of the public sector. More effective use of PPPs and other methods will accelerate investment in public sector infrastructure. This will improve the quality of our public services and economic development.

We discovered that a well-planned programme of PPP projects is being established in the education sector. I congratulate the Minister of Education, the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment and their staff on their work in this field.

Nevertheless, we lag behind in other key areas. We need to quickly develop a co-ordinated investment strategy that establishes a sustained programme and flow of projects across administrative boundaries. There will be a need for effective leadership from the Assembly and the Executive, and for a commitment from everyone involved.

A key factor in developing the programme will be the demonstration of value for money throughout the life of each project. I emphasise that this must continue throughout the life of projects. The establishment of value for money will highlight the impact of long-term spending commitments on the Programme for Government and on the quality of public services. The establishment of value for money must involve much greater openness and public accountability in the decision-making process. This point was stressed by many witnesses, particularly trade union representatives.

Among our recommendations is the need to instil in the public a confidence that effective action is being taken to address the deficit. My Committee has made some important recommendations in its report. It is important that the Assembly and the Executive be seen to act quickly and decisively on these recommendations. The recommendations focus on the strategy and structures needed if the Assembly is to be assured that investment in the public sector infrastructure is being tackled effectively and that it will give the best possible value for money. We have learned several important lessons about PPP. The report gives examples of good practice that should be adopted by Departments when they are considering investment. I commend them to the Executive working group, which is reviewing PPP from a departmental perspective.

Members will find the full details of the recommendations in the report. I will concentrate briefly on two key areas. I will start with recommendation 1. First, and of crucial importance, is the need to establish an effective investment strategy. The Programme for Government begins to address this issue, but we need to go much further. The Programme for Government should, of course, underpin the strategy. This should be a unified, cross-departmental investment strategy to address how

the deficit in the public infrastructure should be financed and managed in the future. We need to take the idea of joined-up government seriously when we consider investment, especially in areas where investment cuts across public sector boundaries.

A co-ordinated programme of strategic projects should support the strategy. That will enable, for example, early investment to be channelled into pathfinder projects that can best meet the strategy's objectives — clearly demonstrating value for money and the early development of a broader skill base in the public and private sectors. It is vital that the strategy have the support of all concerned. That includes the private and voluntary sectors and local communities.

PPP is supposed to be all about partnerships, and a social partnership approach should be adopted to achieve this consensus. Departments and their public and private partners need to reassess how they share information. Achieving that support may be difficult. We only have to look at the problems encountered in agreeing health priorities to understand the difficulties of achieving consensus. However, it is important that this happens, if we are to get value for money and provide long-term benefits to the public.

I now move to recommendation 2. The second key recommendation is that the Executive need to establish ministerial responsibility for driving the investment strategy forward. The Minister should be responsible for achieving a partnership across Departments and public bodies. There should be a common approach wherever possible.

The Committee considered that the Minister should set up a temporary working group of representatives from each Department. The group would then develop and drive the strategy forward in the coming months. It would also initiate work on the most appropriate investment methods to be used. Other tasks would be to promote a sustainable flow of projects and to look at the methodologies, skills and guidance.

The Committee also felt that it was important that the group begin the development of a social partnership approach. We found that this was of benefit when we looked at the Dublin situation, where social partnership, and the role of the partners, was crucial in taking forward an investment strategy. Although this work will get the process going, the Committee agreed that the strategy needs to be driven forward over the coming years. Therefore the Committee has recommended that a central investment board or procurement body be established under the control of a designated Minister. That would take on the activities of the working group, and it would become a centre of excellence on investment, procurement and advice for all Departments.

The issues addressed in this report are matters of crucial importance to our future social and economic well-being. My Committee took its duty very seriously

and worked hard to achieve consensus and to agree a report that reflects its concerns and proposals for tackling the investment deficit. I commend this report to the Assembly, a *LeasCheann Comhairle*.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Mr Leslie): I thank the Chairman for his very thorough review of this report that the Committee has just published. This was a major undertaking into an area of potential public procurement that is a hot potato of conflicting opinions. We, I hope, encountered, and gave proper consideration to, all of them.

My first point is that it would be far easier to do this review in 10 years' time, when you would be able to draw on, perhaps, a maximum of 15 years' experience of private finance initiatives and public-private partnerships. The initiative started in 1994. The first projects appeared a few years later, and most of the projects that the Committee looked at were very much in their infancy. While it is easy to identify problems that occurred when putting together the contracts, conducting the negotiations and dealing with the bids, it is impossible at this stage to accurately judge how well a 30-year contract has been costed when it has only run for three years.

There is therefore a considerable act of faith involved, particularly by those who are strong advocates of the private finance initiative and public-private partnerships. However, we do not have the luxury of being able to put the clock forward 10 years, so we have to base our assessment on the evidence currently available. The Committee has therefore tried to present as balanced a view as possible of that evidence, given that some of it is inconclusive.

There are a number of important points that raise various issues. First, the provision of public services, which really started to accelerate from the post-war reforms, has meant that 50 years later the Government have become a huge owner and manager of property. Government Departments are now starting to question whether that should be such a major activity of government.

The Committee has recently heard from the buildings and maintenance section of the Department of Finance and Personnel. It has put on the table a bill for £37 million for urgently required refurbishment to key buildings. The spending and prioritisation of that money, and the awarding of the contracts, will be a big job. Over the next few years, it will inevitably involve a great deal of effort. That is an example of an ongoing activity that the Government are confronting.

Members are familiar with the figures involved in the education sector, where £500 million is required to address the shortfall in school buildings. At current rates of spending from traditional procurement methods, that will probably take somewhere in the region of 15 years — perhaps longer — to achieve. During those 15 years, other bills will land.

The Department of Education in particular has been active in using PPPs because it can, in effect, bring some of that expenditure forward. To some extent, it means spending tomorrow's money today. If £60 million can be spent every year on school buildings, that will mean £600 million being spent over 10 years. By financing the activity through the private sector and paying for it in instalments, the building programme can be brought forward. However, it will have to be paid for in the end — one way or another.

There is a delusion among people that somehow or other you do not pay for it; you most certainly do pay for it — the public sector pays for it. If you buy something through hire purchase it is likely that you will pay a bit more for it than would otherwise be the case. However, one must balance that factor against the benefit of getting the use of the asset much earlier than would otherwise occur.

Another point relating to schools was put to us, with considerable vigour, by the Department of Education and Science in Dublin. Departmental officials stressed to us the great benefit that schoolteachers derive from not having to be concerned with the management and maintenance of the building in which they work.

The feeling in Dublin was that this was so valuable that it was not all that necessary for them to try to put a cost on it. They were in a much happier position than us. They have the money to meet all of their building requirements and can choose whether to do it by traditional public procurement or by some form of PPP.

5.00 pm

In a number of cases, they have deliberately chosen to use PPP because of the benefit they foresee in schools not having to be concerned with the problems of management and maintenance of buildings. Therefore one can draw a tentative conclusion that if it is cost-neutral between the traditional procurement and PPP alternatives, then the extra benefits tend to favour going down the PPP route.

Even if there is some cost disadvantage in going down the PPP route, it may still be worthwhile if you think you will get extra benefits from how you will be able to use the facility. The difficulty is in trying to judge the size of the numbers involved over the lifetime of these projects — a typical period would be 20 to 30 years.

There is perhaps a tail-end benefit, and it relates to the current state of the Government estate. The Government own very fine Victorian buildings, which are not particularly helpful for modern use, though they were undoubtedly magnificent state-of-the-art buildings in their day. The same situation may occur now. In 30 years' time we may own a building that was good to have in 2000 but does not suit its purpose in 2030. It might be beneficial if such a building did not belong to the Government at

that time. It could be put back into the lap of the private sector to do something else with, while the Government could contract for a new building that would be state-of-the-art in 2030.

When you are building, one of the advantages you are likely to get through PPP is that you will receive the best of private sector innovation, and you are likely to get the benefit of leading-edge construction techniques.

As the private service provider would be responsible for maintaining the building, it would have to assess carefully the trade-off between how much it spends on construction and how much it will have to spend on maintenance. Under public procurement, the tendency would be to save money now, but possibly pay for that with maintenance costs in the future. The way in which that particular cake is divided is one of the cores of controversy concerning the worthiness of PPPs.

There is another issue arising, and it is one that is particularly topical at the moment. It concerns the fate of public service employees if a private service provider takes over the part of the public service in which they work. We heard a considerable amount of evidence from trade unions on this matter. We also heard from the private sector. The Government at Westminster have made some pronouncements on this matter recently regarding health service employees. It was said that they could be seconded to the private sector. We have not heard a detailed reaction from the private sector about this yet. However, I strongly suspect that it may prove to be much more difficult in practice than the Government imagine. I do not think that that will be the last word on this subject.

I did not find the evidence presented to us about the potential problems for public service employees particularly convincing. It seemed to me that the evidence for the emergence of a two-tier workforce implied that the private sector part of the workforce was the better tier to be in. I do not think that we would have heard so much about it if it were felt that public sector employees were in an advantageous position.

However, I acknowledge that the development of PPPs will remain a controversial issue for some time.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

I have been talking mainly about buildings in relation to schools and hospitals. The Committee was focused, in its deliberations, on the built infrastructure deficit and did not look into the potential for providing public services through the private sector. Had it done so it would not have come up with much enthusiasm for going down that course. It is worth emphasising that we are talking about the deficit in the built infrastructure and how that might be addressed in the short term.

Irrespective of whether infrastructure is built by public procurement or by public-private partnerships, the same construction firms are going to be involved. It is a

question of the contract under which they carry out the activity. If we were to engage in a major programme of public-private partnerships with a view to accelerating the speed at which we renew and replace our public service infrastructure, the construction industry is going to have to gear up to meet that need. It is reasonable for the construction industry to require a clear plan laid down over some time so that it can gear up to meet the need.

Turning away from the area of schools and hospitals, I want to talk about transport, which is the other principal area for using public-private partnerships. This is highly topical subject recently because of the ongoing wrangle about the London Underground. That example is not a helpful one, because the London Underground is a large-scale project, in excess of anything that would concern us. There are, however, some points of principle involved that are relevant to any city looking to improve its public transport.

When building schools and hospitals one simply looks at how to draw down forthcoming Government expenditure and how, through PPP, private finance might be mobilised to accelerate the rate of build. However when looking at transport there is a wider range of options. Public transport generates revenue in the form of fares, and the revenue stream provides an opportunity to raise money in other ways. Mention has been made of the use of bonds, although I am concerned at the undefined and imprecise way this is talked about. It is not likely that the Executive of the Northern Ireland Assembly are going to issue a bond. Going by previous experience, that would cause considerable difficulties with the Treasury. It is possible that there may be devices whereby a separate entity could be set up which owned a proportion of the fares of a public transport service and where those fares acted as security to service a bond. With that money it might be possible to expand the service to be provided. That is, however, predicated on the basis that the fare base is big enough. With our relatively small population, I suspect that we would be looking at an injection of public money as well. That is not a good reason for not getting involved in that; there may be a combined strategy there that would be suitable.

There is also the question of congestion charging, that is, charging people to take their cars into Belfast.

It is also possible to raise money through tolls. The key to this is the existence of sufficient demand for the use of the road for which you wish to charge a toll. It is preferable to have an alternative, so that the payment of the toll is an entirely voluntary act. For some reason people think that it is acceptable to pay a fare to travel by rail but that it should cost nothing to drive their car on a road. That is not necessarily realistic for a motorist who wants to travel at the same time as many others. However, if a motorist has the choice between queuing on an existing crowded road or paying a toll to drive down a brand new highway, he will eventually go down

the new road when he is in a rush. After that he will never travel on the old road again. That has been the experience in regard to the toll roads in Dublin.

We must be prepared to be imaginative, and there is a likelihood of short-term unpopularity until the benefits flow through. However, political parties must decide whether they are prepared to take on this responsibility in order to achieve a long-term benefit. We must remember that the payment of tolls and congestion charges is a voluntary act. There are other ways of travelling free of charge, but they might mean a longer journey.

I seem to have been talking for some time, Mr Speaker. I do not normally have this much time. I will try to wind up.

Mr Molloy: You must use it all when you get it.

Mr Leslie: Absolutely. The question of whether Northern Ireland gets a fair deal from the Treasury under the Barnett formula frequently arises in the House. It is not useful to speculate about the creation of a new formula when making plans to address our infrastructure deficit. We must work with the figures that are currently available. If we were able to persuade the Treasury to give us more money, it would be a nice problem to have, and we would have no difficulty in allocating these funds. Realistically, we have to work with what we have now, and with conservative projections of what it will be worth in the future. We must remember that Northern Ireland receives some £10 billion from the Treasury, and our tax base is estimated at around only £5 billion. We therefore have to take the view that we are being treated generously.

We are identifying the benefits of PPPs and the considerable problems involved, which are well highlighted in our report. One of the main benefits of PPPs is that they force Governments to plan and budget for the long term — not just to build things, but to maintain them to the same standard. By engaging in a contract for 30 years, a Government is tying up money for 30 years. By entering into more contracts, the Government ties up more money, which might otherwise have been available in, for example, 10 years' time. Nonetheless, there are considerable opportunities for accelerating the rate at which we address our infrastructure deficit. Several of these would soon benefit Northern Ireland considerably.

Mr Close: As the Chairperson of the Committee has stated, this debate comes at an opportune time. This debate, its outworkings, and the decisions that will be taken in response to it, could shape decisions that affect our community for several years to come. They will have an impact on our society for many years.

5.15 pm

It is an unpalatable fact that the public infrastructure in Northern Ireland is in a very poor state. That is not an exaggeration — it is an understatement. It is estimated

that several billion pounds are urgently required to put right the clear deficit in investment over the past 30 years, and to right the wrongs of neglect and violence.

Pages 47 and 48 of volume one of the report draw attention to the priorities published by the Executive in the Programme for Government in February 2001. The 33 paragraphs on those two pages should not be dismissed as a wish-list, but should be seen as the needs of our society if we are to achieve the goals that we have set ourselves.

I will highlight some of those points, such as the need to provide for an anticipated 250,000 new households over the next 25 years and the need to address hospital waiting lists — 18% of patients in Northern Ireland have been on waiting lists for over 12 months. Community health and social care support also needs to be addressed, because there are 4,000 people waiting for that. Demographic changes clearly show that there will be increasing pressures on available resources.

The shortage of university places must also be addressed. Many young people leave Northern Ireland to further their education, and most of them do not return. The need to address the deficiencies in our roads, public transport, energy, telecommunications, and water and sewerage infrastructures has already been mentioned. By 2005, waste water treatment works must achieve 80% compliance with environmental and heritage standards.

The crux of the issue is that the Executive need to operate collectively to bring about the necessary improvements in the Barnett formula. Barnett does not recognise or adequately address the needs of the people of Northern Ireland. It is therefore incumbent on the Executive to operate collectively — and I stress the word “collectively” — to ensure that the Treasury gives financial expression to our needs.

I live in the real world, and I recognise that waiting in hope for the justification of our needs in equity and fair play to be realised and recognised by the Treasury will take a long time. To do nothing is not an option in this situation. We must tackle our huge problems sooner rather than later, because time, in this respect, costs a lot of money. It is therefore imperative that alternatives be examined. The publication of our report comes at an opportune time.

It would be wrong to see public-private partnerships as a panacea for all our ills. The cheapest money must be public finance. Any alternative must, by definition, be seen to be more expensive. Hire purchase is always more expensive than cash purchase.

It would be equally wrong to erect ideological barriers against public-private partnerships. Partnership undoubtedly has an important role to play, but lessons must be learned from the past. We must learn how to protect employees and avoid spending public money on bad employers. We

need to recognise that risk ultimately lies with the public sector. We should not be drawn into heavily front-loaded contracts with no real idea of the full delivery costs over the full term of the contract. In short, we must see that value for money is the key over the full term.

We must be conscious of the effects that long-term contracts will have in future, and we must demonstrate clearly that lessons have been learnt from the past. For example, we are still paying very dearly — very dearly — for long-term contracts in the privatisation of the electricity industry in Northern Ireland.

The report from the Finance and Personnel Committee sets down vitally important recommendations that are aimed at ensuring that we make progress in addressing underinvestment in a constructive, methodical and joined-up manner. Co-ordination must be the name of the game, and it must be done by a team headed by a Minister who will be responsible for driving forward a unified service-wide investment strategy that will have accepted and examined all possible options.

Although our terms of reference were clearly focused on public-private partnerships and PFIs, whoever leads our investment strategy team should examine closely all alternatives and options, including what Mr Leslie called “bonds”. Mr Leslie should read a recent paper by Prof Austin Smyth and Jamie Delargy entitled ‘Bonds – a Capital Idea’. It emphasises the strong potential that bonds offer for dealing with our infrastructure deficit, and it draws particular attention to the non-profit owned company that deals with the Welsh water and sewerage system. I also draw attention to the recent ‘Building Better Partnerships’ report by one of the top think tanks. It gives an analytical breakdown of the pros and cons of PPPs and the direction in which we should go in future.

The report that the Finance and Personnel Committee produced after much work and thoughtful consideration should be the cornerstone upon which we build a centre of excellence for future investment and procurement. That goal should not be outside our reach. We have a golden opportunity to strive for excellence, and this report provides the cornerstone.

I join the Chairperson of the Finance and Personnel Committee in expressing my gratitude to our staff who dealt admirably with a very complex and serious issue. The hours that they were obliged to work because of tight timescales must be recognised. Their admirable work has produced a report that should be a cornerstone for the future.

Ms McWilliams: This is a very comprehensive report that left me with as many questions as it did answers on the way forward. The Chairperson of the Committee referred to the Department of Education and the Department of Further and Higher Education, Training and Employment, which are probably the only two Departments that can give us any detailed information. They

were the only Departments to ask for additional funding in the spring Supplementary Estimates for last year, and as such I found very little detailed information on the report’s main recommendations. The report gave a guarded welcome to a greater introduction of PPPs. However, it seems to me that it does not have the information to make such a recommendation.

Has the Committee considered referring some of these issues to the Civic Forum, particularly where a recommendation is made for a unified service-wide investment strategy? It is a novel idea, and it draws on the support of the voluntary and community sector and the private sector. Given that the Civic Forum involves those sectors as well as the trades unions, it may, for once, be useful for the Assembly or an Assembly Committee to ask the Civic Forum to put those sectors together to test their ideas on the way forward on public-private partnerships.

It seems to me that the issue is going the same way as many previous recommendations from the Executive, and that is to hand most of the work to an inter-departmental group that then relies on civil servants to bring the ideas forward. I suggest that we go to the sectors that work with the problems of finance and securing resources and ask for their views.

There are four areas that the report needs to do more work on. First, there is the question of the openness, transparency and accountability of the public-private partnerships that are in place. Secondly, there is the issue of the impact of public-private partnerships on the community, particularly where the report refers to the need to meet the human rights and equality obligations set by the Executive. Thirdly, there is very little in the report about alternative methods of procurement, despite Mr Leslie’s views today. Seamus Close mentioned bonds, and there are many questions still to be answered and many technical problems with the Treasury’s views on public bonds. Finally, there is the issue of risk transfer.

The major issue is the lack of openness and transparency in public-private partnerships. The report explains how one individual asked for a business case, and even though there were commercial interests at stake, he could not get information about Transport 2000 from one Department. If we cannot get that information, how can we provide empirical data that shows that public-private partnerships work?

The report states that

“Project information does not appear to be kept in a uniform manner. This leads to inconsistent findings, making comparisons difficult, if not indeed impossible. Finally there appears to be an absence of research on the socio-economic impact of the individual projects on relevant communities.”

Given that, how can the report reconcile its conclusion that, albeit cautiously, we should pursue public-private partnerships?

All the information seems to lie with the bidder or the contractor, so it is easy for them to demonstrate value for money because that depends on what they include or exclude and how they determine what costs will be counted and over what period. Some projects may be value for money but unaffordable. They can also be poor value for money and unaffordable. The difficulty is that schemes may be pruned to make them affordable, or that extra public resources — as we know has been the case — get thrown at them, hence the land sales, asset transfers, capital grants and capacity and service reductions that are so prominent in hospitals, schools and in the passport agency projects that we know about.

Experience in England indicates that the value of either private finance initiatives or public-private partnerships shows the estimated size of the capital element to be financed by the private sector but excludes the public sector contributions. That comes back to the point I made about the lack of transparency. I know from my own constituency that in general land sales and asset transfers were arranged with extremely advantageous terms for the private sector.

That brings me to the impact of public-private partnerships on local communities. We have section 75 and the Human Rights Act, and this is probably the most audited Assembly in the Western World — if not the entire world. Every policy must be audited and ticked off on how it impacts on certain categories of people and communities. However, we are going forward with a policy without knowing what its impacts will be.

Let me give Members an example of one public-private partnership that did not work and was disadvantageous to a local community.

5.30 pm

Wellington College, which was in great need of replacement, went down the PPP road. A consortium of builders was put together under the name of Northwin Developments. The consortium put in a successful application for planning permission. However, a problem arose when the Department of the Environment told it that part of the land had been designated for playing fields. By this stage the consortium was now the owner of the land, and as the owner, it decided that it could do what it liked with the land. The consortium decided to put up more housing than had been scheduled in the original plans. It claimed that the land was left over after it had finished building the school.

The community was not against the new school or the first proposal for the number of houses to be built. However, as the planning process continued the community discovered that their playing fields, which was the only piece of open land they had, were also going to be built on. This was an interesting example, because the Department of the Environment said that the consortium could not build on the land, but the Department of Education

said that the consortium owned the land and could therefore do what it wanted with it.

I attended a public inquiry where a debate took place about what should happen and about what powers were available. Ultimately, it was extremely disadvantageous to the community to be told that they really did not have to be consulted about what happened to the playing fields.

I want to see the conditions that would be put on future PPPs. I did not see much about that in the report. I have great concerns too for the future if supermarkets and high-density developments were to be built on the small number of playing fields and green spaces that we have in a city such as Belfast. Undoubtedly, much of this is taking place because of developments between the public and the private sectors.

I also have concerns about management. The report has some worrying conclusions and makes comments about schools being managed by people who have been a part of the contractual arrangements. Presumably this could apply to hospitals as well. Many questions still need to be asked.

I have concerns about the difference between the objectives of the public and private sectors. The private sector has moral obligations to investors that take priority over social obligations to customers. On the other hand, we are told that the public sector is motivated by social responsibility and environmental awareness. Therein lies the crux of the problem: two sets of objectives that fly in the face of each other. Experience to date suggests that the private sector's objectives will win over those of the public sector.

There is scant mention of other methods of procurement in the report, although it talks about a non-profit making trust for infrastructure investment. However, that is all — it simply refers to it and says that it would require significant further development. The report more or less dismisses the idea out of hand. As well as non-profit making organisations, there are public bonds — and those leave as many questions as they answer. We really do not know what we are talking about here, and the report does not offer us much enlightenment.

What are the alternative funding arrangements or methods of procurement? The terms of reference state that the Committee was looking specifically at public-private partnerships, but that does not forbid the opportunity to go into detail about what exists elsewhere, particularly as the Committee was attempting to examine international as well as national experiences.

We come to risk transfer and the whole-life costs of a project. The contractor is clearly in a very powerful position here. The risks may be minimal if the project works.

If a public-private partnership does not work, the public sector will have to take on the risk and costs of that failure. The Executive must deliberate this question

if they are to go down this road and hand the risk over to trusts and boards.

As an aside, if the Executive were to consider the option of bonds, I wonder how much credit a long-term investor would give us for a bond given the current state of the Assembly and the Executive. Failed private projects are very worrying.

Mr Leslie: Does the Member agree that in circumstances in which the asset has been built, and the private sector provider has gone bust, the public sector is in the best possible position because it has the asset and has not fully paid for it?

Ms McWilliams: That is assuming that, at that stage, the asset has any worth. The providers that go bust are the ones who supply badly constructed buildings in the first place. We have seen examples of that in England — and they have come about as a result of shady deals. The partnerships that we want to invest in are those that do not have a high risk attached to them. The assets that have been handed over to the public sector — and as usual the poor public sector picks up the pieces — are those that have been dodgy from the outset.

Many people wonder whether it was value for money. The assets become affordable only because developers have cut so many costs and corners. Then, in order to manage the assets, the private sector providers must ask for more money from the public sector to keep going. The public sector continues to bail them out until eventually it has to take over.

Finally, trade unions do not oppose these partnerships simply because of private funding. Nowadays, trade unions are trying to find out what is good value for money. However, they have urged a cautious approach, particularly where there are huge implications for workers. Which parts of the Health Service will remain as its profitable side? In contrast, which parts will be thought of as the poor sisters of the Health Service? That issue is a particularly interesting one for those of us who are involved in projects like mental health, rather than the acute side of the Health Service.

Most importantly, the report has not suggested criteria that can determine whether a project is suitable for PPPs. I hoped that this report would give us criteria that we might call “useful pieces of audit”, by which we could decide to tick off on a project. Those responsible for the report could not answer that — they said the information was not available to them. Ultimately, I am disappointed. I strongly commend the Committee for its initiative in undertaking the first stage of a much longer-term project for the examination of PPPs.

Ms Lewsley: First, I would like to point out that the resources available under the existing Barnett formula are insufficient to meet the needs of our society. It would be desirable to have all our public services provided

from public resources, but unfortunately that is not possible. Therefore we have to look at innovative means by which we can fund our public services. I am not advocating PPP or PFI for the sake of it. Rather we need to use those approaches because financial realism dictates that in-house financial turnover is inadequate.

It is essential to leave no step untaken in attempting to address the poisonous legacy of the underinvestment that occurred under direct rule. It is a system that the detractors of the Good Friday Agreement wish to return to. We must not only address underinvestment but increase resources so that we can achieve more ambitious targets for society.

For example, we could have three or four capital programmes through PFI or PPP that could be used in the future. We need to ensure that the effects of what we have talked about, with regard to joined-up government, are being delivered. We will need to ensure that we have a skilled workforce ready to deal with the demand.

It is important that PPP or PFI initiatives be publicly accountable, be value for money and, most of all, be transparent. The reality, which has been touched on already by several Members, is that we need to increase the educational provision for our children, create better roads, build a stronger economy and increase and improve the care of our sick, elderly and most vulnerable. These ambitions drive us forward and spur us to action. However, if we are to achieve our goals we must back them up with a clearly thought out financial strategy. The PFI/PPP instrument is one — and only one — way of achieving those goals.

When we utilise the instruments of PFI and PPP, we need to ensure that we evaluate their pertinence and impact. We must realise, as Seamus Close said, that this is not a panacea for all our ills. However, we should not, and cannot, discount it before due consideration. That would be absurd and would be doing a great disservice to our people, especially those most in need. Whatever we do must be consistent with the core commitment to social and democratic objectives — the creation of equality of opportunity, targeting social need and high-quality public services. We need to derive benefits from the use of PPP. Indeed, we should have as a ministerial approach “Ask not what your Department can do for PPP or PFI, rather what can PPP or PFI do for your Department’s needs”. There is a need to properly examine this complex area, and I am sure that this report will contribute significantly to the debate. Furthermore, this is why I welcome the high level task force announced by the Minister of Finance and Personnel.

In conclusion, properly used PFI and PPP, which will enable provision of services free at the point of delivery, can have a place in the overall financial strategy of any Administration. However, it should not — and I am sure will not — become an objective. Rather it should always

remain a strategic option. At this point, I, like the other members of the Finance and Personnel Committee, wish to add my thanks and appreciation to the staff for their commitment and the tireless amount of work that they put into compiling this report, which I support.

Mr Weir: I welcome this report by the Committee for Finance and Personnel. It is very comprehensive and includes evidence from a wide range of witnesses ranging from harsh critics of the idea of PPP through to people promoting the idea with evangelical zeal.

Anybody who took the time to read the report will have noticed that several things became abundantly clear from the evidence. There is undoubtedly a major infrastructure deficit and a concern over the lack of delivery of public services. Reference was made to issues of devolution and direct rule. Certainly, infrastructure has suffered under direct rule, but it is not a problem relating solely to Northern Ireland. If you had followed all the issues in the general election, you would have seen widespread concern throughout the UK, and, indeed, beyond, at the lack of investment in public services.

No matter how much we readjust Barnett, or look at moving it around, the advantage that can be brought purely by way of traditional public procurement methods is not going to be able to meet the full demands of public expectation and demand for increase in investment into public services and infrastructure. As indicated by the Minister, that route is simply not going to be sufficient. Consequently, we have to look at other means including PPP. I appreciate that the report takes a very cautious view to PPP, which I think is right. We are not in a position to be able to evaluate how PPP has worked at the end of a full life-size implementation of any of the projects, because we are still at the early stages.

The report is even more cautious on bond schemes, which are at a much earlier stage of development in, for example, the Department for Regional Development.

5.45 pm

It is right to keep an open mind as to which method we use to find additional investment for public services. It is clear that PPPs and perhaps bond schemes have to be considered, but it is important always to realise that they are only tools to achieve public investment. Be it PPP or anything else, we are looking at a means to an end rather than an end in itself. That is the crucial thing to remember.

Northern Ireland has been slow to go down the road of PPP. Indeed, compared with the rest of the United Kingdom or the Republic of Ireland, we are well behind. While there is a certain disadvantage in that, we should take advantage of the adage and look elsewhere for examples of the route that we as a Province should take.

It has been said that a wise person learns by his mistakes, but an even wiser person learns by the mistakes of

others. If we apply that adage, there are certain things in the report that can point to a direction by which I hope we can avoid some of the mistakes that have been made elsewhere. Particularly in its recommendations, the report concentrates less on a particular model for PPPs or bond schemes that is the panacea to all our problems, but looks at what is best practice and the structures that should apply. Thus, the idea of the need to pool experience and to pool that level of expertise throughout the Civil Service in order to provide the best infrastructure decisions is important.

The desire to co-ordinate very much runs through the recommendations, whether by way of having a Minister designated to look after the issue through the working group, or by way of the central investment body. All those things are focused on the key aims of pooling experience and expertise and of co-ordination. Here I take issue with some of the things that another Member said. Whatever route we take to deal with the infrastructure deficit — the current public procurement, bond schemes or PPPs (and it is likely to be some combination of those) — in years to come we will see a greater degree of private sector involvement. As such, the dichotomy between the traditional means of public procurement and PPP is perhaps not always as great as it is portrayed. If, for example, a school or hospital is being built, you can take the methodology of PPP and use that scheme, but even if you use the traditional procurement method you are contracting out the building of that school or hospital. Some of the risks that relate to the private sector will be there consistently, no matter which route you take.

Several issues arise out of that. There is a need for a sustainable deal flow within any investment strategy. One of the concerns that several Members had at the start of the inquiry was that if we went down the route of PPP, the local private sector would be overwhelmed by the amount of contracts coming online, and that that would create problems.

However, one piece of evidence that came from the local private sector was that its concern at the moment is the reverse — that the deals and contracts that have been made available by the public sector have been so insufficient, and so stuttering in their delivery, that there is a danger of not getting the opportunity to build up the level of expertise, and that the sustainable deal flow is not being created. Therefore we have to, via the methods that have been outlined in the report, produce that sustainable deal flow in order to ensure that local firms in Northern Ireland are best able to deal with the problems they are facing.

We are facing some sort of mix of public procurement and PPP in the future. There are benefits to be gained from the competition between those two sectors that will be beneficial to the public purse. There is also the issue of standardisation of contracts to ensure that

there is transparency, but also that we do not have undue cost and undue delay in fulfilling some of these deals.

There is also the issue of value for money. It is important that we do not simply look at the cheapest route to produce a particular infrastructure. Indeed, as has been said, it would be a mistake to do so. Some of the qualitative issues must also be considered in relation to the benefits of PPP, as outlined by James Leslie and others, such as the freeing-up of resources. If the contractors not only design and build a building but also operate the building, they have a greater incentive not to cut corners and to provide something that is sustainable for the long term.

PPP and public procurement as a whole must be used as a means to an end and as a device to accelerate public investment. However, care must be taken that in dealing with long-term contracts we do not tie up so much public investment as to reduce flexibility for the future. The opportunity exists for the public sector to ensure that resources can be reallocated in the future.

The report's recommendations map out a sensible and cautious way forward to deal with the public sector investment deficit. Unless we start tackling the infrastructure issue now, and through the method put forward by the Committee, we will only be storing up trouble for the future. This is a cautious, but realistic, way forward, and I commend the report to the House.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):

Like other Members, I welcome the report of the Committee for Finance and Personnel on public-private partnerships. It is, as some Members have said, very timely. It deserves serious consideration by all of us with an interest in the future development of the infrastructure of our public services. It is a weighty and wide-ranging report. If I wanted to be cheeky, I might say that we are being asked to debate a report of great weight and size, and we have only had a few days to consider it. I could turn the tables on the usual complaint that is made against myself and the Executive by the Committee.

The amount of work that has gone into the report — and importantly the amount of work that should flow from the report and follow up on some of its ground-turning work — means that it does not come to the end of its life cycle just by virtue of this debate. This is a take-note debate; we are not coming to full determinations or conclusions about any of the report's recommendations. The report itself rightly points out that further work must be done on a number of issues and that there are other issues that we must explore, but it gives good pointers as to the premises on which that future work should be based.

As the Executive have emphasised in the Programme for Government, the resources available from the taxpayer are finite and are stretched by the need to provide for services at greater levels of need than the UK average. The Executive must address a legacy of historical underfunding, which many Members have referred to,

in the infrastructure of our public services. Currently many parts of the public services, especially health, education and transport, require levels of capital investment far in excess of the resources that are available if we are to simply fund them in the traditional manner. It is essential that the Executive and Departments explore new ways of financing and providing services such as public-private partnerships and the range of forms that they might take, providing they are affordable, deliver value for money and provide effective solutions to meet the needs of our public services.

We need to examine all options carefully and objectively, and to develop a clear policy in this area. All those points are underlined at various stages in the report, and in various ways by many of those who gave evidence to the Committee.

Under direct rule, our vital services were underfunded for years. Those issues are not confined solely to direct rule. I do not pretend that they are simply a function of direct rule, but the historic reality is that we have a legacy of underinvestment. The Executive are determined to break those patterns, but, as we have already stressed, the resources available for funding our public services are limited and hard-pressed, and are already stretched by the need for us to provide services at greater levels of need than elsewhere. Therefore we have to research and examine carefully how we fund and deliver public services, not least — but not only — in areas such as health and education.

No one should be under the illusion that there is a miracle cure. Solutions that focus on alternative sources of borrowing are not sufficient because of the way the spending rules operate, and I will come to that point again when dealing with the questions Members raised about bonds.

I recognise that recently there has been considerable media coverage of this subject, including concerns expressed in certain quarters — especially by trade unions — about the use of public-private partnerships in delivering public services. In addition, the recently published report by the Institute of Public Policy Research in London, which some Members referred to, provides further evidence about the use of PPPs that also deserves careful consideration. The high-level working group being set up to review the use of PPPs in public services by March 2002, in accordance with commitments set out in the Programme for Government, will address these issues. I will soon be giving the Committee for Finance and Personnel a copy of the terms of reference that I have agreed with the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. Copies will be placed in the Assembly Library in due course.

The working group will take into account evidence from many quarters on the benefits and constraints of using PPP. It will also look at the report published last

week by the Institute of Public Policy Research, and, in particular, the report published today by the Committee for Finance and Personnel and the many helpful pointers that it gives.

I do not propose to deal with the detailed recommendations of the report now, with one exception that I will come to soon. The recommendations deserve serious consideration and not some knee-jerk or summary response. The quality and detail of the work that was put into the report, both by those who made submissions and by those who worked to put the report together, deserves equally thorough consideration.

6.00 pm

I want to express a debt of thanks that the Assembly owes to the Committee for being able to gather such a wide cross-section of views and input from all sectors, not just from here but from further afield, in what is a very important and complex subject.

That wide spectrum of views is, in itself, important to acknowledge. The evidence gathered as a result will be all the more valuable as a source of information upon which the PPP working group established on behalf of the Executive will be able to build in its deliberations.

I said that I did not want to dwell unduly on any particular recommendations in the report. However, I think it would be helpful to pick up on some of the points that have been made in the debate. I do not necessarily want to reply to them but to join in the exchange of observations.

Some Members raised concerns or reflected concerns expressed by others. It is clear that public service employees have a number of misgivings about developments in this field. I understand and appreciate those, and many of them arise from particular experiences of previous private finance initiative projects that have taken place elsewhere. We are all learning a number of lessons. The report properly reflects some of those fears. It highlights some of the downsides but also emphasises that action can be taken to minimise those and to maximise advantages.

Reference was made to proposals from the Labour Government with regard to the NHS. I should point out that they are confined to pilot projects that are to be reported on by the end of the year. I am not aware of any commitment to extend secondment of public sector employees to private operators.

James Leslie made the point that has been made elsewhere in the media recently about a comparison with hire purchase. I am not disputing that comparison on some levels. However, people need to recognise — as Mr Leslie did — that there can be advantages in terms of better value for money in the service delivered and scope for third party revenue.

We also need to remember that it is not always necessarily best for the public to own and manage as

many buildings as it might need to use for any given purpose. There can be advantages in sweating assets to get the best overall benefit. There are issues in the context of resource accounting and budgeting that we cannot ignore.

Some Members referred to bonds. As Peter Weir pointed out, the report from the Committee is very measured and reasonable in its approach to this issue. The idea of bonds has been explored before now; it is not entirely new. We all need to understand, as some Members have reflected, that bonds are just a form of borrowing. They do not necessarily open new doors for us. I remind Members that we are subject to a departmental expenditure limit.

As my officials keep telling me, it does exactly what it says on the tin. Borrowing does not allow us to spend more. Bonds might help us as part of a wider PPP approach if the private partner can avail of advantageous borrowing terms, but the concept of acquiring capital in this way, as it is being sold at the minute, is not as effective a solution as one might think.

In regard to the Welsh Water model, we need to understand that a high credit rating is needed to acquire servicing bonds on the international bond market. One Member asked what credit rating we, as a regional Administration, would be given in current circumstances. We should recognise that the Welsh Water credit rating was achieved only after privatisation and 10 years of capital investment of £2.5 billion. We need to remember that all that glitters is not necessarily gold.

Monica McWilliams discussed the sale of surplus assets as part of PPP deals and the idea that such action is like selling the family's silver to meet today's needs. Such assets, if they are part of PPP deals, must be clearly determined as being surplus to requirements for the foreseeable future. That can release value that can enhance the affordability of deals. If surplus assets are not disposed of they become a drain on public expenditure resources, particularly in the context of resource accounting and budgeting.

Mr Leslie said that PPP requires long-term budgeting. Under resource accounting and budgeting, the procurement of an asset by conventional means leads to a call on the resource budget for as long as the asset is held. Resource accounting and budgeting means that we will bear the cost of holding assets and that will be a real cost. There will always be the choice of selling the asset. We must consider the idea of holding and managing only those assets that we need to provide priority services.

When introducing the Government Resources and Accounts Bill, I said that in the context of resource accounting and budgeting the Assembly will be controlling not only the flow and allocation of expenditure but the stock of assets that it possesses. We therefore need to take this into consideration. Potential conflicts of objective

between the private and public sectors were mentioned. We need to ensure that we negotiate terms and arrangements that give us contracts that tie private sector aims and methods to the achievement of public sector requirements at the best available cost to ourselves.

The report rightly registers the idea of a not-for-profit trust, but it does not go into handstands on the subject. We looked at the matter at official level and came to the same conclusion. We are not conclusively negative, but we remain unclear about how much of a contribution that approach might make. We have not ruled out further exploration but have indicated that it is not as easy an answer as has been suggested. I accept that the report does not suggest any easy answer in that regard, or in any other respect. The report calls for much hard work to be carried out in regard to many difficult issues in order to deliver much needed services and to reduce the many difficulties that exist across a range of services. An operator will only get paid if services are provided to the standards contracted for. At worst in a PFI deal, the asset will revert to public service ownership.

At one level, the Department needs to ensure that there is greater understanding of the various interests in the impetus that there would be in any deal, particularly if we are trying to bring forward new models. I am particularly interested in the Committee's emphasis on the need to ensure service-wide developments. That is not on a basis of one size fitting all. However, there needs to be enough information and openness about developments to make sure that best practice can be broadcast, replicated and picked up by others.

Equally, we have to bear in mind that there will be a need for a degree of commercial confidentiality. Too much disclosure might do more to prevent us getting better deals in the future than to ensure that we get better deals.

Monica McWilliams suggested referring the report to the Civic Forum. I have no argument with the Forum being recruited to look at any issue. However, in making her observation, Prof McWilliams said that the inter-departmental working group looking at the issues would consist only of civil servants. I must point out that the working group will comprise representatives from all sectors — the private, public and voluntary sectors and the trade unions. It will work on an open and organic basis to turn over a number of the issues that have been well opened by the report and that we need to consider further, as the report rightly requests us to do.

The point about the working group's being able to involve a range of social interests brings me back to one of the key recommendations in the report. It advocates that the support of key players, such as the private and voluntary sectors and local communities, be sought and that a social partnership approach should be used to achieve that support. That is a significant and healthy proposal. It is entirely in tune with the Executive's desire to secure

widespread support for how public services are to be developed and delivered in the future. It is consistent with the Department's plans for the composition of the high-level working group.

The Department of Finance and Personnel is committed to exploring funding opportunities in these islands and beyond. That will also be reflected in the composition of the working group.

The notion of social partnerships helping to bring new light and dimensions to the concept of PPPs is timely. It rhymes well with the emphasis that the Executive have been placing on the development of the partnership model in the context of the next round of EU programmes.

I recall an earlier exchange in the House concerning EU programmes when I said that the local strategy partnerships might have an influence not only on what local government or statutory agencies were doing but also on some private finance decisions. Some Members asked what I meant, and they wondered how those socially based local partnerships could have that sort of influence. Therefore the thinking of the Committee rhymes very well with the thinking of the Executive in that regard.

It is noteworthy that the report reflects a cross-party consensus in the Committee for Finance and Personnel on the use of PPPs.

6.15 pm

In that respect it reinforces the view that it is only through various forms of partnership, including PPP, that we can realistically hope to see the type of modern, well-resourced and well-managed public services that our people deserve in the twenty-first century.

I congratulate the Committee and its staff for producing a report on this complex issue in such a relatively short time. I assure Members that the findings will be taken into account fully in the months ahead as the PPP working group undertakes its task. I can say with every confidence that the Committee for Finance and Personnel will make sure that its findings and recommendations for further work will be followed up by the Department and the Executive.

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister and all of the Members who participated in the debate. I welcome the support or otherwise for the report and the Minister's agreement on the need to tackle the deficit urgently and constructively.

Mr Leslie mentioned the ownership of buildings. It is a very important issue. In relocating Government offices, the fact that the Government own buildings means that it can be difficult to locate elsewhere. We found that there were difficulties when there were old buildings that were no longer serviceable. We felt that a complete break had to be made sometimes.

I support Seamus Close's statement about the Barnett formula. Further work needs to be done in order to

address the matter. The Minister cautioned that in raising the issue of the Barnett formula we also have to come up with alternatives to it. Our report is partly concerned with that matter.

Monica McWilliams said that the report does not give clear indications. We recognise that quite a lot of work has to be done. The aim of the report is to start debate in the Assembly and in the Executive about the direction we should take. We hope that we have addressed some of the issues and concerns that she raised.

We would welcome a wider debate within the Civic Forum. There was nothing to stop members of the Civic Forum answering our advertisement for people to come forward and give evidence. It is important that we mention that.

The ongoing review of PPP by the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister will consider all of this, and that is another aspect. We agree that there is a need for transparency, and that is one of the issues that came up in the report. However, there is also the issue of confidentiality. Sometimes it is not in the best interests of the Assembly, or for the public purse, to divulge information that will be of benefit to those who are in competition. We must achieve a balance. The Committee recognised that all of the information should be available, and that is one of the issues that we have highlighted.

It is important to state that the Committee is not recommending that we go down the road of PPP; we are saying the opposite. We are saying that PPP may be used in a number of different occasions, and that in certain circumstances it could be beneficial. However, it is not to be used in all circumstances. It is not the be-all and end-all.

The report is trying to put together a strategy to help deal with PPP and other finance issues and to put together a structure that will ensure that investment is achieved in whatever contracts are entered into. We have looked at that situation thoroughly.

The issue of land sales arose during our investigations. The Committee advocates that the social partnership approach in dealing with investment needs to be in consultation with the local community and with its involvement. It does not mean simply paying lip service to local consultations or the community view but taking their ideas on board.

One of the recommendations that arose from our consultations was that land was not a good mechanism for putting together a partnership. It is best to take the land issue out of the matter completely, and it would then be clear what you were dealing with in pure cash terms.

Ms McWilliams stated that we had dismissed the not-for-profit trusts, but to the contrary we marked that up as an alternative, and we had long discussions on the matter. We did not want to go down the road of having

PPPs as the only means of raising finance; we wanted to deal with the alternatives. This inquiry was dealing with PPPs, and to institute another investigation into bonds and other methods would have taken the Committee into a diversion. The report endeavoured to stay within the terms of reference.

We are recommending to the Executive that we look at alternatives. The Committee recognised the need to determine value for money by establishing the risks to be transferred and to put that structure together.

One thing that came across very clearly in a number of projects that we considered here, in Dublin and in England was the fact that contractors operated a better build policy, because they knew that they would be responsible for maintaining the building for 25 or 30 years. It was pointed out that the contractors actually changed the type and strength of materials that go into the building of a school or other structure when they realised that part of the contract involved the maintenance of that building. That is one of the advantages that we pointed up.

School buildings are underutilised. With this particular type and design of project there is the opportunity for communities to use the buildings in a more inclusive way.

Ms Lewsley mentioned that PPP was a tool in the mechanism of dealing with the deficits. I welcomed the Member's comment that there must be a continuous assessment and revaluation. That is part of the whole process, not just at the first stage and then it is over and done with. The Dublin people went for continuous revaluation and looking at situations with a view to making money.

Mr Weir mentioned the Committee's caution in relation to PPP. I agree with him that it is too early to evaluate fully the impact of these projects. None of them has been running for long enough to carry out a proper assessment. I do not know where some Members got the idea that buildings built under the PPP initiative were falling down around us; we found that these projects had not been in existence long enough to fall down.

The deal flow idea came across from the business community, and that is to do with investment by the private sector. We need to send a clear direction that we are dealing with investment; it is not just PPP. There is an opportunity for investment there.

The quality of building has to be taken into account, and the report points out the danger of PPP projects falling apart, because they do not have a proper deal flow.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel dealt with the issue of affordability and value for money and stated that there are no miracle cures. The fact that there are no miracle cures is one of the issues that we strongly pointed up in the report. There are some projects that will be of benefit if we go down this road, but PPP is not the panacea for everything. We have to look at the

options. Some avenues we may not go down at all, and public finance may be the preferred option if that were available.

On the issue of privatisation, there is a danger of the mistakes and baggage of the past being repeated in respect of the privatisation of the present Health Service and other services. This was not done well in the past, and the involvement of trade unions brought the issue into question. We should not confuse privatisation with PPP or finance-raising mechanisms.

That may be the case for some. However, as James Leslie pointed out, most of the people that we talked to said that those who transferred to the private sector would not return to the public sector.

I welcome the Minister's commitment to the social partnership. This issue was discussed in our Dublin meetings. There was involvement from all the different partners — the trade unions, the employers and various other structures — in putting together this type of project. Putting that social partnership together was the means of ensuring that there was continuity, that all the issues were addressed and that there was a mechanism for comeback.

We found the same thing when we talked to people who were managing schools. The maintenance of the building was taken out of their hands, and they were free to run educational establishments and not simply act as caretakers. They had an opportunity to put someone in charge of a building's maintenance, and the contractor had the overall responsibility.

This has been a useful debate. It is to be hoped that the report will be of benefit to all in the future and that along with this debate it sets the scene for further work. The Minister is correct in saying that we are simply marking out work for the future. It is the role of the Executive and the Committees to scrutinise and to ensure that the infrastructure and investment is tackled in this way.

The Committee for Finance and Personnel will return to this subject in the autumn when the Finance Minister will report to the Committee on his consideration of the report and its recommendations. I trust that there will be an opportunity for the Assembly to hear about agreement and real progress for investment in the future.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly takes note of the report prepared by the Committee for Finance and Personnel following its Inquiry into the use of Public-Private Partnerships.

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [*Mr Speaker*]

TOURISM IN THE NORTH ANTRIM AREA

Mr Paisley Jnr: As Members know, Adjournment debates afford them the opportunity to raise issues concerning their constituencies. I have chosen to raise the issue of tourism in the North Antrim area. I welcome the opportunity to do this in the last Adjournment debate of this session, and possibly of this Assembly, given what happened at the beginning of the week.

Yesterday the House debated the Department for Regional Development's strategy, which mentions a number of key strategic issues concerning tourism in Northern Ireland. These have some relevance when applied to our constituencies. Today we debated and progressed the Industrial Development Bill, which is also relevant when we consider its proposals on the functions of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. Now we can discuss tourism specifically in the context of a constituency. All three issues are therefore linked. In Northern Ireland nothing happens in a vacuum, so they are linked by the long-term strategy for Northern Ireland and the organisation for delivering that strategy for tourism in North Antrim.

Tourism relies on a strategy, and if it is to be successful in constituencies and not just in Northern Ireland as a whole, it is essential to have a strategy for each area. I hope that such a strategy exists. I would be interested to hear the Minister's response to a number of points that I intend to raise during this debate.

I welcome the Industrial Development Bill's proposals regarding the functions of the Tourist Board. These will be helpful, especially in focusing on specific constituency issues. I will give that a fair wind.

As I said, in Northern Ireland nothing happens in a vacuum. Foot-and-mouth disease was not specifically related to farming in North Antrim. It was related to the entire business of Northern Ireland — Northern Ireland plc.

Foot-and-mouth disease had a devastating effect on tourism and on farming in my constituency; at the peak of the disease tourist numbers fell. Bed and breakfasts, hoteliers and restaurateurs all suffered financially. I hope that the Minister can introduce recovery plans for his areas of responsibility.

6.30 pm

In a neighbouring constituency to mine the North West 200 was cancelled. That was a devastating blow to my constituency because it robbed the area of holidaymakers,

day trippers and visitors to the races and the practice sessions. It had an effect on the number of people who stayed and spent money. That effect must be addressed through a recovery plan.

The responsibility falls to several Ministers, not just to Sir Reg Empey, and I hope that there is some joined-up government action such as rate rebates for bed and breakfasts, hoteliers and restaurateurs. Special emergency grants would help them bridge the gap between this year's season and next year's. I hope that those businesses are given assistance to upgrade their facilities so that they become much more attractive holiday destinations.

I hope too that there will be consequential compensation for the tourist industry, as that would be very helpful to my constituency. However, I appreciate that not all those things are in the remit of the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. I urge him to make that case to the Prime Minister and to other Colleagues.

The Department for Regional Development's strategy made some specific points about tourism generally in Northern Ireland and my constituency in particular. It sets the scene for the future and for a constituency-specific strategy. If we are to strengthen Northern Ireland we must enhance its attractiveness to international and local tourists.

I have full confidence in the owners of bed and breakfasts, hotels and restaurants throughout Northern Ireland. However, they need encouragement, encouragement that should not be misinterpreted as interference. Those businesses should be encouraged to have a free hand to develop tourism, not to hinder it.

I hope that Northern Ireland can attract tourists and offer them something when they get here. Getting tourists hooked on Northern Ireland is one thing; keeping them in the Province, encouraging them to return to North Antrim to see the Glens, Slemish or the Giant's Causeway is a different thing altogether.

If we are successful as a magnet for worldwide tourism we must recognise the implications it will have for Northern Ireland's development. We shall have to build partnerships between the public and private sectors, and that flows directly from the last debate. It is essential that those partnerships be established.

We require joined-up government. Any tourism strategy must have a location infrastructure to allow tourists easy access to the area. In my constituency it is very difficult to get planning permission for bed and breakfasts and motels. The Department for Regional Development's strategy, which the House debated yesterday, recommends that motels and bed and breakfasts be at the edge of towns or at major tourist crossroads, preferably on regional transport networks.

I recently had great trouble trying to convince the planners in my constituency of the need for a bed and breakfast motel/coffee-house facility along the A26

outside Ballymoney. Such a facility is missing. People who would normally just pass through the area could stay overnight. That could be critical for local business.

Northern Ireland also has the potential, as has my constituency, to offer itself as a major area for sports tourism. I know that the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has some interest in that, given his time on the Sports Council. I hope that the opportunity is given to develop a world-class region, whether it be for golfing facilities or to host golfing events. Developers should be given the opportunity to build world-class golf courses, unhindered by unnecessary and restrictive planning considerations. I hope the planners will permit the development of these facilities in picturesque areas.

This should not be limited to golf courses. Members will know that I have a particular interest in motor sport, and I hope that the Minister is prepared to press the case for a specially designed motor sport facility. I would prefer it to be in my constituency, but if that is not possible I do not really mind. I hope that he is pressing his party and ministerial Colleague to make an announcement soon on the issue of a dedicated, state-of-the-art, modern motor sport centre. Northern Ireland requires that vision if it is to capitalise on the tourism opportunities available, and from those will flow economic and social opportunities.

There is a need for a destination resort concept. In many constituencies people whose normal reaction would be "Not in my back yard" would cry out "Please put it in my back yard". I hope that the new tourism board will be able to come up with that destination resort concept. I make a bid now that it should go to North Antrim, and I hope it gets there very soon. I heard it said on a radio programme not so long ago that we do not want a "Disney-type experience". Northern Ireland needs such an experience — apart from this place — and certainly requires something that will attract tourists, provide a focus for them and to which they will return year in, year out. I hope that efforts are being made to draw up such a strategy.

Recently I met with people from the Mid-Glens Foot-and-mouth Disease Regeneration Group, who reiterated the view of a strategy for North Antrim. They said that it is necessary to emphasise that the Glens are back in business, whether farming, tourism or any other. The Minister has a responsibility to really beat that drum, and the sooner people hear that the sooner we can recover some of what was lost in the early part of the tourist season.

How do we assess the current tourism policy in North Antrim? I suppose a school report might read "misdirected at times", "tries very hard but can get distracted" and "overall, could do a lot better". That would not be the most satisfactory result, but I am not here to knock either the tourist industry or the tourism board. They have a very difficult job to do, but even if we appreciate

the difficulties they face we must make sure that they try a lot harder and are given every encouragement.

In North Antrim we offer magnificent tourism opportunities. Slemish, the Glens and the Giant's Causeway provide some of the most spectacular countryside for the visitor. The visitor, however, requires places to stay and things to do. Many of Northern Ireland's key destinations do not compare favourably with such equivalents as the Lake District or the Cotswolds with regard to overall visitor experience. Increasing the visitor experience is a key issue, and I hope that the Minister can indicate how he intends to do that in my constituency.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) figures for self-catering facilities demonstrate the problems that exist. In Northern Ireland in 1995, 8,795 weeks were sold; that accounts for about 54% of the available space. In 1999 that had fallen to 41%, and there has been no real growth in the number of weeks sold since.

In the north-east the NITB figures show that in 1995 occupancy was at 57%. However, in 1999 — the last year for which figures are available — 3,550 weeks were sold, accounting for about 39% of total occupancy.

Some of that drop can be accredited to seasonal issues such as the Drumcree factor. However, not all of it can, and we must face up to that. The fact is that, if it is to increase, the tourist experience must be developed with a strategy. I hope that the Minister can outline what that strategy will be for my constituency in particular.

The NITB has figures that show the level of tourism-related employment. The Minister knows that Moyle is an employment black spot. The jobs issue there is critical. Of all of the areas in my constituency, Moyle is crucially in need of jobs. One or two jobs could make a difference because it is so small. However, the NITB figures claim that, in 1995, 3,575 people were employed in the north Antrim area. By 1999 there seemed to have been impressive growth with 5,054 people employed in the hotel and tourist sector. That growth looks good on paper, but what is it based on? It is not based on actual jobs, but on what the small print in the NITB report refers to as

“full-time equivalent jobs supported by tourism spend and estimated as a proportion of total spend.”

That shows that they are not real jobs — the figures were massaged. I hope that the Minister can provide Members with the real figures, and I suggest that the number is considerably lower than the 5,054 that were indicated. The new Invest Northern Ireland (INI) board has taken on some of the powers of the NITB, and I hope that it can produce more accurate figures and that the Minister can give us that assurance.

An important strategic review of the Giant's Causeway called ‘Managing Our Future’ was published in 1997. It was drawn up by several Government agencies including

the NITB, the Department of the Environment, the Department of Economic Development, the National Trust and Moyle District Council. People ask whether there is a strategy for the area. According to that document there is. However, is that plan in operation today? What progress has been made on the implementation of the issues that that strategy identified?

Everything that I hear from some people who are involved in the NITB suggests that we do not want premature growth or to go off at a particular tangent and that we should slow down tourism development. That is the wrong approach. Northern Ireland, and my constituency, needs tourism development, and it should not be slowed down because there is no strategy. The reality is that there is a strategy. Can the Department report back on how it is being implemented? I accept that development must be part of a strategy, but that plan must come into operation sooner rather than later.

I hope that the Minister agrees that too much dilly-dallying has gone on. It is not enough to dilly-dally on these issues. Hard sweat must be spilt to deliver a strategy. I hope that the Minister agrees that a strategy must revolve around more than a cup of tea and a bun. It was put to me recently that a cup of tea and bun would send a tourist on his or her way. I hope that the tourist stays for much more than that.

6.45 pm

I hope that tourists stay in North Antrim and enjoy the hospitality that is on offer. The strategy should be considerably more than mere hit-or-miss visits by tourists. Visitors deserve an unforgettable tourism experience. If we do not provide that, we will be destined to repeat what a diarist and writer wrote about Northern Ireland tourism one hundred years ago, namely — and it was said of the Giant's Causeway — that it was

“worth seeing, but not worth going to see”.

I hope that we, and the people of our country and my constituency will be able to say that the Giant's Causeway is not only worth seeing but that it is worth going to see and worth going to see again and again because of the visitor experience. That has to be the mission statement, and I hope that the Minister can comment favourably on that.

I have a Northern Ireland Tourist Board visitor satisfaction survey from its final report in 2000. The Tourist Board has rightly identified many of the problem areas such as poor standards of service and overpriced food products. The Tourist Board also identified other issues, such as litter, that are not directly associated with it but which affect tourism and which must be addressed. Despite identifying those problems, the survey produces some interesting results. Some 69% of respondents said that they would return to Northern Ireland for a holiday. That is very encouraging, but we must address the

concerns. In a similar survey, the Republic of Ireland and Scotland recorded higher levels of customer satisfaction. We must work on increasing customer satisfaction in my constituency and across Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board's report identified the fact that the product is not perceived to be cost-competitive. Food in some areas can be expensive and disappointing. I must say, however, that if the Minister wants a list of good restaurants in North Antrim, I will be happy to provide him with one, whatever his tastes may be. We must improve the service and the experience that we provide for tourists and which they expect. Budget accommodation needs to be improved, and street cleanliness in many areas falls below visitor expectations. We need more tourist-centred destinations.

What have the Government done since the report was published to address the important issues that the Tourist Board identified? The report has addressed the problems; the Tourist Board knows what the problems are. However, what action plan has been put in place, and how has the plan progressed? There was a proposal in the report for an action plan.

The Giant's Causeway is the jewel in the crown, not just of North Antrim, but of Northern Ireland, or, indeed, these islands, with regard to tourism. It offers an exceptional opportunity for attracting tourists, and last year it had about 475,000 visitors. After the fire at the Causeway visitor centre, the Minister made a very impressive announcement, saying that the private sector should get involved, and that a new, bigger and better visitor centre should be built. I supported that announcement wholeheartedly. Moyle District Council took an initiative and produced a development brief. According to that brief, the location is now on the market for development as a visitor centre. As a result of that initiative, Northern Ireland stands on the threshold of a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to get the private sector to build, manage and run a state-of-the-art tourism centre. However, the private sector will be guided by the wishes of the local council. That is important, to ensure that the visitor experience does not simply satisfy the private sector but also that the project is guided by the public sector. I welcome that initiative.

If and when the site is sold, it will probably fetch in excess of £5 million. It is not just a matter of selling the site to the highest bidder; the best project must go on that site, to enhance not only North Antrim but also Northern Ireland plc. Local ratepayers would benefit from such a sale, and the Northern Ireland economy would see an advantage in it.

To create such jobs in this unemployment black spot would be remarkable. It would not only create seasonal employment, but long-term, year-round employment for many.

Now is the time to move full steam ahead on this project. We cannot waste another season waiting for it to happen; nor can we slow down, stand back and say that it is premature. We have to get on with the job.

In 1999, the last year for which I have figures, 433,745 people visited the Giant's Causeway. What an opportunity this — together with other proposals — provides for the development of tourism in Northern Ireland. With the right tourism experience in the area, we can draw those people back and, furthermore, it is not unrealistic to suggest that we can double that figure.

There is, however, no drive from the public sector or the Northern Ireland Tourist Board on those issues. I met with them recently, and they took the view that that development, and other associated developments, could be premature. That viewpoint is unfortunate, as we are already behind in development. Anyone putting money up — whether a private developer or a person in the public sector — would agree that development should be sustainable in the long term.

I hope that the Minister can assure the House that we cannot afford to wait any longer on the development of this project and that we must progress expeditiously. Northern Ireland must capitalise on its tourism potential.

It causes me some concern that the Northern Ireland Tourist Board has a vested interest in the Giant's Causeway. It has quite rightly supported the reinstatement and development of a train line from the Causeway to Bushmills. Many looked forward with excitement to the development of that train service, not only from the point of view of tourists, but also as it would offer locals employment. That project has not developed in the way that it should have. Years after the project was first announced, it has still to leave the railway shed. Where is the sustainability of that plan?

I recently looked at the Howarth report, which examines this issue. It set out the terms and aims of the project — to relocate the Shane's Castle railway to the area and also to link two of Northern Ireland's most famous visitor attractions, the Giant's Causeway and the Bushmills distillery. In fact, the project does neither. It links a location close to the Giant's Causeway to one on the outskirts of Bushmills. It would be necessary for a person to walk — or stagger, depending on where they have come from — back to the train, if the service were actually up and running.

Sadly, this development proposal has not got off the ground. I hope that we can receive the assurance that it will get off the ground. However, the reality is that the investment required for that project was excessive.

When it was first floated in 1994, the proposed development costs were £608,000. Initially, with investments and the public sector behind it, the proposed costs were approximately £1.552 million. Yet, if the project gets up

and running, it will create only three jobs. That is £500,000 per job. People will raise their eyebrows at that.

There has been an awful lot of Government investment in this project — £200,000 was given from the International Fund for Ireland; £480,000 from the Tourist Board; £150,000 from the peace and reconciliation fund; and about £150,000 from loans and overdrafts. Despite this, the project is still short almost £400,000.

It is hardly surprising that, when asked to provide the funding deficit needed for the project, the local council raised an eyebrow and said that it was “a bit rich” for it to have to meet such a shortfall. This project risks collapse, and we could have another Navan Fort on our hands. I hope that that does not happen.

Today I received from the Registry of Companies in Northern Ireland the certificate of registration for the mortgage relating to the Giant’s Causeway/Bushmills railway. The certificate indicates that if the mortgage is not paid when it becomes due, which is very soon, the Ulster Bank can seize the assets. That would be very good for the bank, but not for those involved, those who invested £480,000 of Tourist Board money, £200,000 of International Fund for Ireland money or £150,000 of peace and reconciliation fund money. This illustrates that the proposal was not well thought out. I hope that the Minister can indicate that he will take a good look at the proposal, implement it, and ensure that the train station is built, because it is essential for the locality.

Perhaps the Department needs to broaden its horizons by considering a service from Bushmills to Dunluce Castle or Portrush. There should not be merely a 10-minute ride from the Giant’s Causeway to the outskirts of Bushmills; there should be something more striking to tourists. Tourists will not come simply to see the railway station in its present state. However, when some of the 400,000 or more visitors come to the Causeway, they would use such a facility if it were to give them an experience that they could not forget.

I raise these issues because I care about the area, and I want tourism in the area to thrive.

Mr Speaker: Order. I know that the Member is not a particular fan of power sharing, but he has used up half of the time available. Therefore I ask him to bring his remarks to a close. The rest of the time needs to be shared between the Minister, who has to respond, and another Member who is keen to speak.

Mr Paisley Jnr: I was concluding my speech, Mr Speaker, but you wrecked my finale — I will have to start again. I appreciate that another Member and the Minister wish to speak.

I want the clear potential for tourism in the area to be fully achieved and the locality to develop as a result. The area’s industry needs to be diversified, and tourism offers us so many more job opportunities and so much

more potential than has been offered by other flagging industries that are associated with the locality. I commend this issue to the House.

Mr Leslie: I am grateful to Mr Paisley Jnr for bringing this matter to the House so that we have an opportunity to investigate these issues. I am also thankful to the Minister for coming along to give us the benefit of his responses.

The potential of North Antrim to attract more visitors is undisputed. Giant’s Causeway, the Bushmills distillery, the beaches of the north coast, the Glens of Antrim and the good selection of golf courses provide plenty of attractions for a range of visitors. I share Mr Paisley Jnr’s frustration that many visitors seem to stay with us for just a short time, often only a day. I trust that the Minister will have some ideas on how to extend visitors’ time spent in the area.

I have concerns, however, about the haphazard way in which we seem to be protecting and enhancing these natural assets. The planning policy applied along the north coast barely merits the term “policy” — it seems to consist of a series of ad hoc decisions. This serial “ad hocery” is leading to a degradation of that natural beauty. It is vital that we pull together a much more carefully thought out, long-term strategic approach that will protect the natural beauty of the coastline.

7.00 pm

It is perfectly possible to do that while addressing issues such as the need for more accommodation. I place that comment in the context of the need for rural diversification, particularly the need for farmers to find activities other than working the land, which I think will become a more marginal activity, especially in north Antrim, where the climate presents problems not necessarily experienced elsewhere.

We need not have any fears for our dairy industry on good land, but there are difficulties with some of the more marginal land. I have bombarded the Minister with letters on that subject and related subjects, and the Minister of the Environment has also heard from me quite frequently on these matters. All of my letters say the same thing essentially: there is a need for a holistic approach.

As regards the future of farming, we have to ask ourselves what assets farmers have and how best they can exploit them. They often have buildings in addition to land. In the Lake District — and quite widely in rural England where planning policies are very tight, particularly with regard to new building in open country — there is a great premium attached to the conversion of existing farm buildings. Stone buildings can easily be converted and extended in the same style as existing buildings in order to provide very attractive rural accommodation. However, this is more expensive than the cost of straightforward new build, and we have to

acknowledge that in any policy we develop. We have to enable such activity to command a premium that repays the extra costs involved. It is possible to create and preserve such a premium provided there are restrictive policies in other respects, and we should go down that route.

I am always concerned when I see farmers selling a plot to raise some cash, which they use invariably to address their own short-term deficits. In effect, they have simply turned capital into income, and I would very much prefer if they were encouraged and incentivised to look at providing themselves with an alternative income stream, perhaps through the provision of various types of holiday accommodation. There are a number of ways in which Government, working on a cross-departmental basis with a holistic approach, could encourage that.

I also hope that when the Minister and his Colleagues are looking at the overall strategic development of this area they will bend their minds to how they will handle the traffic flow if the Minister of Enterprise is successful in increasing the numbers of tourists. I am sure that Mr Paisley would agree with me that significant potential exists. The numbers of people visiting the Causeway Coast each year could be increased significantly, and we could encourage more of them to spend more time along the coastline and to visit the other features.

However, we are dealing with a narrow road, which runs along the coast, and there can be a particularly severe bottleneck at Bushmills. We should be thinking about how we might better manage that stream of traffic in the long term. I share Mr Paisley's frustration regarding the position of the tram terminus. It would be so much better to drive, or take the bus, to the top of the town of Bushmills, visit the distillery, and then mount the tram and ride to the Giant's Causeway. The return journey could be taken at leisure.

That would have the significant extra benefit of taking some traffic off the road between Bushmills and the Causeway. By not having located that facility at the top of the town — and there would undoubtedly be some difficulties in locating it there — you must therefore look at what can be done to enhance the potential for using the terminus at the foot of Bushmills. It could still perhaps be used as a preferred means of transporting people to the Causeway to reduce the strain on the narrow and restricted roads system that exists between those two locations.

We should consider the Glens of Antrim, particularly in the aftermath of foot-and-mouth disease. It would be wise to consult with people in the Lake District, where they have been far more successful hitherto than we have in encouraging people to use the walking facilities there. We do not have anything like the same number of rights of way and bridleways, although a substantial section of the Ulster Way goes through part of the Glens.

We have not addressed ourselves to the problem that while it is nice to walk 10 miles down the path, the trouble is that you must then walk 10 miles back. Other places have managed to address this problem quite well by having a shuttle bus service that will collect you from your destination and leave you back to where you parked your car. In New Zealand, a country I admire for the way in which it has achieved rural diversification, walkers' huts are provided where full overnight accommodation facilities are available for a fee. This encourages people to take long walks because they do not have to carry as many items with them as they would do if they were expecting to pitch a tent and carry their own gas cylinders.

I do not want to delve too deeply into this, but these points illustrate some imaginative ideas that we could adopt to make better use of our resources. While hikers are not necessarily the biggest-spending visitors, it is surprising nonetheless how much some of them can spend along the way, especially if the right facilities are available to encourage them to dip into their wallets.

Having put some ideas further to those mentioned by Mr Paisley Jnr to the Minister, I conclude. I trust that the Minister and others will look at a wide variety of matters that must be addressed to produce a successful long-term strategy to enhance the tourist potential of North Antrim.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Sir Reg Empey): I am indebted to the Members for their contributions. Several ideas have been floated by both Members who spoke. Officials will note those ideas. I do not intend to respond to every matter, but both Members have made some good suggestions, and these will be taken up.

I want to first deal with the broad-brush approach. North Antrim contains some of the most dramatic and sensitive environments in Northern Ireland. Not surprisingly, the area is one of our most popular visitor destinations because of the world heritage site of the Giant's Causeway. Given that visitors to the area not only benefit the local economy but also make an important contribution to the wider economy of Northern Ireland, it is essential that we take a long-term view of how the area is managed. We must ensure that the natural beauty is protected not only for its own sake but to ensure that future generations will benefit and that we will pass on to them an asset that we currently value and enjoy.

In the process we will help people and businesses to continue to derive economic benefit from visitors.

The development of the tourism industry in North Antrim, as elsewhere throughout Northern Ireland, has unfortunately been hindered in the past, largely as a result of the political unrest. It is not something that we should hide behind or ignore. We are confronted with it at the moment, and Members will know that the US Department of State recently issued a warning to its

citizens. We have a very debilitating CNN international image at this time of year.

I must put this in the context of investment decisions, not simply by the public sector but by the private sector. We are attempting to improve our infrastructure, because we understand that there are gaps and weaknesses. It is a chicken-and-egg situation: we need the private sector to come forward with proposals and bankers and other institutions to offer investment resources so that we can assess them and decide whether we can assist them or not. In many cases people find great difficulty in persuading commercial banks and others to back people in that way.

We saw an upsurge in tourism in 1995, and Mr Paisley was using that as a baseline for many of the comparators, but people who then stepped forward and invested on the back of that soon discovered that their optimism was ill-founded. It is that legacy that we are dealing with. It is a huge problem for the tourism sector.

We must look to the long term and build up our expectations and infrastructure. We also have to build up the training and capability of those who are going to work in the tourism sector. It can no longer be regarded as a Cinderella industry, something that you do if you cannot do anything else. We must get past that. I have had discussions with my Colleague, the Minister for Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment, and he also feels strongly about this issue. We are taking initiatives to try to ensure that the industry has a supply of people with the skills particular to this industry. Tourism is no longer something you work at if you cannot do anything else.

We must raise the standards, because people can go anywhere in the world today. They do not have to come here; they can get on a plane and go virtually anywhere in a few hours. We have to develop and play to our strengths, and our strengths are not two weeks in the sun. Our strengths are natural resource-based tourism and the natural beauty of the Province. They include the hospitality and the welcome that people receive; our heritage; our ability to develop golf and fishing; the natural resources of our gardens and large historic homes; hunting; shooting; and other activities. We have many strengths, and we must play to those strengths.

There are more players in this than the Tourist Board and my Department. Local authorities and regional tourism organisations, partly funded by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, also have a role to play. They bring together a partnership of local authorities — the industry itself with the Tourist Board resources put in. However, ultimately, it also requires a degree of self-help.

The Causeway Coast and Glens area account for approximately 30% of the visitors who come to Northern Ireland, and that area has vast potential. It is also a huge slice of the cake and market share.

I agree with the other Members that there is potential for that to grow even further, and not only in numbers, as numbers alone do not necessarily produce the revenue. There must be an increase in the value of the product.

7.15 pm

I agree that we have been losing out on day trips. Day trips are fine, but we know that many coach tours from the Republic call in and return home and spend the night in County Donegal or somewhere else. The currency differential makes some of our products uncompetitive; the Tourist Board has tried to overcome that, as has the industry, by doing pound-for-punt promotions. However, some coach operators have told me that they must wait until things settle down before they can sign up.

There is a need — and this comes under the regional development strategy with which Mr Paisley Jnr began his remarks — for destination facilities. I fully accept that. I recently met a developer who is proposing a very ambitious scheme in the area. The Member will know to whom I refer. That is the sort of product on which we must concentrate, because it is sympathetic to the area and, if developed properly, will not impinge unduly on the environment. It has the potential, if things work out, to be environmentally and financially sustainable. All these things, however, must be dealt with case by case. That sort of product can add value to an area without damaging its natural beauty and resources.

We come back time and time again to planning issues, and they are not dissimilar to those that we face in industrial development. I get the impression that our planning approach is more energetic than that of our competitors in the Republic, who seem to be able to get a more sympathetic hearing for their industries.

That leads me neatly to Members' reference to Invest Northern Ireland and the Industrial Development Bill. We treat tourism as an industry and as a business. That is why we propose transferring the grant-aiding ability of the Tourist Board to Invest Northern Ireland so that any business, tourism or any other kind of industry, can go to where one set of skills is located. We hope that this will offer an enhanced service to the industry. It was the unanimous view of the board, and of the industry, that this step be taken. We are acting quickly to ensure that it is in place as early as possible next year.

There have been many funding interventions in the area over the years from the Tourist Board and European programmes. They have contributed significantly and will continue to do so. The same applies to International Fund for Ireland assistance. As for the joined-up approach, my Colleagues in the Departments of Agriculture and Rural Development and Culture, Arts and Leisure have a significant role to play. I have communicated regularly with them on various issues.

The motor sports proposal was mentioned, and that is a matter for Mr McGimpsey. In view of recent unfortunate casualties, a purpose-built facility with built-in safety measures may be an attractive proposition.

Members talked about the Bushmills railway, for which a special trust has been established. We do not own it. The Tourist Board is in a grant-aiding role in this instance. The project is at a very advanced stage, and we have allocated money to it, as have others. As with so many major infrastructure projects, the cost tends to run away from us. I have noted what both Members have said on this matter, and the Tourist Board will reflect on those points to see if there is any advice we can offer the trust that hopes to bring this project to fruition. Clearly there is some way to go yet on the financing of it, albeit substantial sums of money have been earmarked.

There is also the matter of getting the Glens back in business. There is no doubt that that area has suffered badly. The Member who brought this debate forward put it forward at the height of the foot-and-mouth disease crisis, and he knows that my Department is currently administering the compensation facility to assist people.

We made special measures in the terms of reference to take account of the small-business people who may not be paying a business rate but yet have suffered. We decided that the way around that was to look at the domestic rate position of those people and to try to ensure that, if they were registered with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, they would be included in the scheme even if they were not paying a business rate. Many of them have experienced not simply a drop in business but an elimination of their business. That is extremely difficult for them to cope with, particularly at a time of year when the cash flow is at the minimum and they are perhaps investing in repairs and maintenance. The timing of events could not have been worse.

With regard to the North West 200, the Member knows that I fought the battle on that as best I could. I fully realised the extent to which the business in the area would suffer if it were cancelled. Unfortunately it was not possible to prevail over the advice from the veterinary experts, and we had to bow to the inevitable. However, we did our best to assist the local authority in the north-west when it came forward with a project to try to replace some of the business, and we were very happy to support that project.

I am acutely aware of the unemployment situation in the Moyle area, and I have visited the area on a number of occasions. One of the things that we are currently looking at — and Members will know this — is the ferry project. I am pleased to report that we are at a very advanced stage with the market testing of that. There does appear to be interest. The Scotland Office is looking at things at the present time, and we hope to be able to get some steer in the next few weeks as to whether we can attract operators at a rate of assistance that we believe to

be reasonable. If we get through that stage, much will then depend on how we split the thing between the Scottish side and the Northern Ireland side. That, of course, is a separate issue that we would have to deal with as we go forward, but it is very important.

On the question of the visitor experience, I agree entirely that the satisfaction rating is good but could be a lot better — I fully accept that. That depends on a mixture of training and of ensuring that the people who invest believe that they have got a potentially profitable investment. That brings me back again to the chicken-and-egg situation I referred to with the question of political stability, and so on. If we did not have that problem, we would be much further advanced in developing an industry which would compare very well with the Lake District or anywhere else.

I believe, particularly with regard to the North Antrim area, that the assets and the potential are there. I have no doubt about that, and I have supported the concept of what I call “a string of pearls” — looking forward from the Campbeltown side right over into North Antrim and across into Limavady, and even into County Donegal with the various projects that are planned there. You could see how under the right circumstances you would have a very attractive product for the entire north-eastern area.

The north-east and surrounding areas spread beyond the parliamentary constituency. Nevertheless, the regional tourism organisation in that area is very active in developing its own strategy. Our role, of course, is not confined to developing strategy for the local area. That is the job of the local authorities in conjunction with the industry through the regional training organisation. We support them, but that has to be in the wider context of the strategy for Northern Ireland as a whole. It is beginning to clarify itself.

As we move forward, we begin to identify the type of product that we can develop. Enormous potential rests there. The potential to expand the tourist industry is greater than that in any other industry in Northern Ireland. The industry is operating at about one third of its capacity. I cannot think of any other industry where the potential for growth, job creation and wealth creation is greater.

There is a great deal at stake. We will have to work closely with the tourist industry. We will have to work to stabilise the political situation because that is one of the major problems. There is also the continuous currency difficulty to deal with. There is no doubt that continental holidays have become much more attractive or that Northern Ireland is up against stiff competition from the Republic of Ireland.

I assure Members that the points that they have made in the debate will be considered by the Tourist Board. If Members feel that any points require attention by letter, I will be pleased to follow those up in due course.

Adjourned at 7.27 pm

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Wednesday 4 July 2001

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

DEPARTMENT FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING BILL

Final Stage

The Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Dr Farren): I beg to move

That the Department for Employment and Learning Bill (NIA 12/00) do now pass.

Members are familiar with the purpose of the Bill and the reasons behind it, therefore I do not propose to rehearse those reasons in any detail.

The effect of the Bill is to afford my Department a shorter and more practical title that continues to represent its key business areas. The Committee for Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment and I agree that the title 'Department for Employment and Learning' meets all of those criteria. I have assured Members that the costs of implementing the change are not significant.

As we approach the end of the current session, I would like to record my thanks to the Committee for Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment. This is possibly the last time that I will refer to them with that lengthy and cumbersome title. I thank the Committee and its staff for their work throughout what has been a busy and challenging year, during which we found ourselves on a steep learning curve. I trust that under our new title the working relationship that we have established with the Committee will continue and be enhanced.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Dr Birnie): I am glad to rise for what I hope, as the Minister said, will be the last time that I will be called the Chairperson of the Committee for Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment. The Committee supports the Bill. It will lead to a more appropriate title for the Department and one that will be easier to remember. At Further Consideration Stage, I said that the Committee considered a variety of names for the Department. We

are glad that the Minister took on board the recommendation to change the name to the Department for Employment and Learning, which can be shortened to DEL. We are heartened that the press has welcomed the new title for this important Department. The Committee welcomes the fact that the Bill will complete its Final Stage before the summer recess.

I acknowledge the work of the Minister and his officials in speedily progressing the matter to ensure that the Bill was completed in time. Simply changing the name of the Department will not create a job for anyone who is currently unemployed and will not put anyone on a training scheme. However, it is important that we get the matter right and clear the decks for future work. It is to be hoped that we can turn to that work as the Department for Employment and Learning.

Dr Farren: I acknowledge the compliments and the support of the Chairperson of the Committee.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Department for Employment and Learning Bill (NIA 12/00) do now pass.

PRODUCT LIABILITY (AMENDMENT) BILL

Final Stage

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):
I beg to move

That the Product Liability (Amendment) Bill (NIA 13/00) do now pass.

I will keep my remarks brief, not least because a Whip has asked me to do so.

The Bill has passed through the various Stages of scrutiny, and there is a consensus and understanding that it is necessary to give effect to a European obligation. Some Members made the point that on the face of it the Bill imposes a theoretical additional liability on farmers and others at an unfortunate time. The Agriculture and Rural Development Committee also registered that concern. The Bill will be of longer-term benefit to such groups, as it will represent a small but significant step in restoring public confidence in food safety. Consumer groups and producers have noted that and welcome the measure. There have been no reported difficulties for farming communities in other European countries that have this legislation in force.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Product Liability (Amendment) Bill (NIA 13/00) do now pass.

BUDGET (NO 2) BILL

Final Stage

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):
I beg to move

That the Budget (No 2) Bill (NIA 17/00) do now pass.

Mr Speaker: I remind Members that a vote on a Budget Bill requires cross-community support, and I will apply the usual established conventions.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That the Budget (No 2) Bill (NIA 17/00) do now pass.

CHILD PROTECTION

Ms Lewsley: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Ministers responsible for the protection of children, in view of the anomalies in the current vetting system, to take the necessary interim steps to improve the position on vetting those suitable to work with children.

The Assembly has given priority to child protection, and it is an issue that unites politicians from all parties. It is appropriate that the motion is being debated today, with the recent report released by Barnardo's on child prostitution and the targeting and grooming of young boys by paedophiles. It is widely accepted that we have unacceptably high levels of child abuse in Northern Ireland. That can be directly and indirectly related to the lack of investment, insufficient political direction during direct rule and poorly thought-out policy development that did not join up government.

One of the first pieces of legislation proposed by the Executive in September 2000 was the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults Bill, which will do much to strengthen the system of vetting people to ensure their suitability to work with children. That will no doubt follow on from the Protection of Children Act 2000 passed at Westminster and will fit into arrangements in the UK and Europe.

With the open movement of people in the EU, vetting is a local, national and international problem. One of the greatest challenges in our Act is to consider the issue on an all-Ireland basis, because the legislation will only work as part of an overall system to protect children in both parts of this island. However, the issue will be complex and has the potential to slow down developments here, while the pace of change with the Protection of Children Act in England is rapid.

For several years, others viewed the system of vetting in Northern Ireland as a good model with the then prevailing practice. The Martin Huston report in 1993 brought about several changes to the vetting system and considerable investment by the then Department of Health and Social Services in training and new guidance to ensure that vetting checks were carried out by a wide range of organisations, including those in the voluntary sector.

Many organisations and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety have invested heavily in systems designed to weed out those people who are unsuitable to work with children. However, the system requires more than an infrastructure to work; there is a real danger of getting lost in process and being unable to see the wood for the trees.

The most recent figures from the RUC for 1999-00 state that 788 sexual offences involving children were reported in Northern Ireland. In the previous year, the

figure was 1,037. For a variety of reasons many of the perpetrators will not be successfully prosecuted. That alone merits a separate debate in the House. Very few convictions will be noted on the criminal records system or names added to the sex offenders register. That underlines the importance of the Pre-Employment Consultancy Service (PECS), which operates outside the criminal justice system and which should detect those people who harm children but are not prosecuted.

I was astounded to note, from a written answer from the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, that only 16 individuals are currently listed on the PECS register, notwithstanding the apparently broad criteria for reporting to the Department and for inclusion on the PECS register. I am concerned about that.

10.45 am

We can have the best infrastructure for vetting those who work with children, but the system will fail if individuals are not reported and added to the PECS register.

That raises several issues. First, why are there so few individuals on the PECS register? What is the Department doing to remedy that in the lengthy period before the new legislation is passed?

Secondly, there is the issue of public confidence in a process that may not be as robust as it appears to the general public and members of those organisations who use PECS. There should not be an overreliance on PECS; it must be part of a wider, vigorous recruitment procedure.

Thirdly, with regard to the established Protection of Children Act list in England and Wales and the proposal for a criminal records bureau throughout the UK, we must have confidence in what is checked by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when vetting individuals. Is the list held by the Department of Education routinely checked? What is the position concerning people coming over from Scotland? Is the Protection of Children Act list checked against the Department of Education's list?

Since it will take time to pass new legislation and get the processes absolutely right, it is imperative that interim measures be put in place to address many of those issues. The vetting process should be examined, weaknesses and strengths should be identified and guidance should be reviewed to account for changing practice. The wider public and users of the PECS system must be informed about what it can and cannot do.

Those people who pose a risk to children know no borders and will exploit any loopholes and anomalies in the systems in the North and South of this island. That is one of the weakest aspects in the operation of the current system. It is more than a theoretical risk that unscrupulous individuals who appear on either list would seek to move across the border to the Republic of Ireland, where no such checks are carried out. We

urgently need effective cross-border arrangements put into the proposed protection of children and vulnerable adults legislation, and we should implement policies and protocols at this stage. Failure to do so exposes the Achilles heel of our vetting system.

Two issues must be addressed as soon as possible. In a reply to a question for oral answer, the Minister stated that it is not possible for organisations in the Irish Republic to access the PECS system of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. That is unacceptable, and given the movement among the population North and South, it seems perverse that we are not taking urgent steps to remedy the situation. It is possible for checks to be carried out through the Garda Síochána and the RUC on Northern-domiciled staff who work in the South. We should be working towards a similar system in relation to the PECS and List 99 information.

Several organisations in Northern Ireland employ staff from the Republic of Ireland. The Department of Health and Social Service's 1996 guidance on vetting in 'Making the Right Choice' highlights that there are no equivalent registers, such as PECS and List 99, in the Irish Republic. In practice, however, the Department's forms are used to obtain a police check, and it is often assumed by the organisation that staff from the Irish Republic are vetted to the same level as their Northern counterparts. The Departments must make clear to organisations what is and is not involved in a PECS check of staff from outside this jurisdiction.

My party welcomes the North/South child protection working group that has been established through the North/South Ministerial Council. Collaboration on the protection of children on both sides of the border is long overdue. However, we must recognise that respective Departments and their civil servants will not have all the answers or solutions, and neither may they be at fault with issues on the ground.

Many voluntary and non-governmental organisations have expertise in that field, and it is essential that they are involved as full partners in the debate. New equality legislation in section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 is designed to ensure a new partnership between Government and the voluntary sector. We must ensure that that partnership is demonstrated in dealing with such an important issue. Both Ministers should detail how they intend to augment the expertise of their civil servants.

Our children are entitled to the highest level of protection that society can offer. It is essential not only that we ensure that young people are properly protected, but that we defend their human rights and promote their right to equality. The Administration should demonstrate that the care and protection of young people in Northern Ireland is its highest priority. We must send those who prey on our children a clear signal that their evil ways will not be tolerated.

Offenders can change their name by deed poll. That matter is not in the remit of any of the Ministers here; it is the responsibility of the Secretary of State, and I have brought it up with him several times. What legal requirement is there for offenders to report such a change to the relevant authorities? That loophole has not been given adequate consideration and negates the effect of the PECS checks. The Secretary of State should address that issue without delay, enabling us to pull our child protection legislation together and provide effective measures to deal with the problem. I urge the Ministers who are responsible for PECS and List 99 to make a recommendation to the Secretary of State about that issue.

Mr Gibson: Our main difficulty is that suitability checks are not applied in a standard fashion throughout the Province. Also, there is no system that applies to workers coming in from Wales, England or Scotland, mainly because of the speed with which devolution has taken place. There are no quick verifiable checks in place. The Assembly should take that on board, and the Minister should try to establish a comprehensive system of suitability checking as quickly as possible.

There could be some operational difficulties for schools. Education and library boards have established a system of suitability checks for schools to use. However, those of us who are involved in community work will know that nowadays, many after-school activities take place in community centres, including after-school playgroups and work with children with learning difficulties. Many such activities are operated by community groups. That is where the expertise is lacking, and Ms Lewsley should have concentrated on that area.

People working in such circumstances should receive clear guidance. People with a perverse nature may be able to insinuate themselves into that new situation. Whereas they would previously have been detected by the Government institutions, they may now be able to take advantage of that opportunity. We must ensure that support for children goes further than is envisaged in the motion. There are agencies, not directly under the Minister's control but under the control of community or voluntary agencies, that deal with children almost from birth until they leave school and beyond. Such agencies must be given help with carrying out suitability checks.

I do not buy into Ms Lewsley's suggestion that all-Ireland institutions be established. A good deal of child abuse has taken place in all-Ireland-based institutions. We are all aware that personnel who have created difficulties in schools and institutions in the North of Ireland have been moved to the South of Ireland to camouflage their perversion. It is therefore essential that our Minister has direct responsibility for establishing suitability checks on individuals, whether they arrive from England, Scotland, Wales, elsewhere in Europe, or America. There must also be a code of conduct to examine not only those who have been prosecuted for

these offences, but individuals about whom there are personnel files that hold details suggesting that a degree of perversion has been detected. Often, people are moved on quietly to ensure discretion or to protect the good name of an institution. Sometimes people are protected quietly by a change in the institution in which they work. We are all too aware of examples of such incidents.

In general, I support the resolution, but I ask that the relevant Minister take direct responsibility, because he can establish quickly in his Department the necessary suitability checks and procedures. The onus is on us to establish codes of good practice to safeguard children. Those of us who do not have any expertise in that field should put codes of good practice in place in our community groups. Those should extend as equally to small rural playgroups as to organisations in conurbations where operations may already exist. We all share that responsibility. It is easy to focus on the main institutions such as schools, but we do not always consider smaller organisations such as voluntary and community groups, which provide day-to-day activities for the youth of our community.

Ms Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat. I thank Ms Lewsley for proposing the motion. It should be welcomed, because this is the last plenary session before the summer recess, and children's rights are at the top of the agenda again. Other Members have highlighted issues concerning the PECS system and List 99. However, as Ms Lewsley mentioned, we must take on board the fact that many Departments and Ministers have some form of responsibility for children. The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the Minister of Education, the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister and the Northern Ireland Office all have some responsibility for children, so it is not surprising that the legislation relating to the issue can be confusing. Until we have a Minister who has overarching responsibility for children, none of those Departments can take the lead to ensure that children's rights are paramount. The 'Our Duty to Care' document states that

"child protection is all our business, establishing good practice, taking the necessary steps to improve the vetting procedure minimises the potential for abuse and maximises the level of safety for our children."

The present vetting system, whether carried out by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety or the Department of Education, has its problems.

11.00 am

We must welcome the proposed protection of children and vulnerable adults Bill that is due in the next few months, as it will put the legislation on a statutory footing. We must protect children throughout the island. Every week, press and television reports tell us of someone being convicted in the South who moves North and vice versa. That problem must be tackled.

Allowing groups and agencies to check an all-Ireland register would help prevent unsuitable people from working with children. Many of those groups have voluntary workers, yet they have no way of accessing these lists.

We must review the vetting system, as most of those who offend against children are not convicted for various reasons. That is perhaps an issue for another day.

We are aware that the Departments and the social services keep a list of people whom they deem to be unsuitable. However, many groups find it hard to access that list, and we must examine ways of making it easier for them to do so. Groups must follow a procedure to gain access to the list. First, they must contact the childcare unit. Then they must give details of the constitution and structure of the group and names and addresses of their members and officer board. They must provide a job description, show how the applicant will have access to children and state why access is unavoidable. All of that must take place before they are allowed to access the list.

Sharing information is important in assessing whether children are at risk and in ensuring their safety. We must make those procedures easier so that organisations can access that information. Why do we create problems for groups and organisations that want to access information to ensure that the children in their organisations are safe?

I support the motion, and I agree with the mover that we must get this right. I welcome the proposed protection of children and vulnerable adults Bill. We must examine the North/South and all-Ireland child protection initiatives. Has that child protection work been stopped by the refusal of the First Minister, or the caretaker First Minister, to nominate Ministers? That must also be examined.

I pay tribute to the community and voluntary organisations that work in this sector. I also pay tribute to local councils, especially Lisburn Borough Council, for its work with the NSPCC in drawing up childcare policies. Groups, organisations and local councils have taken the lead and implemented the 'Our Duty to Care' booklet despite problems from the Departments. They have left the Departments behind in that matter. It is up to us to ensure that that legislation is put in place so that we can complement the good work of the community and voluntary sectors and local councils.

We must ensure that Ministers implement the relevant legislation and get rid of the red tape. We must make it easier for interested groups to access the list of those who have been deemed unsuitable to work with children so that we can ensure that children's rights and safety are paramount. I support the motion, and I thank Ms Lewsley for moving it today. Go raibh maith agat.

Mrs E Bell: I welcome today's debate for several reasons. I fervently believe that children are important; that is the bottom line. We must do everything in our

power to protect them and give them the quality of life that they are entitled to.

I support wholeheartedly the motion in the name of Ms Lewsley, whom I am pleased and proud to work with on the all-party children's committee. We will continue to work with the organisations mentioned by Sue Ramsey, to ensure that the vetting system will be amended. Voting for the motion will help that work. I congratulate the Members, including Patricia Lewsley, for their comprehensive speeches.

Statistics on abuse of children in Northern Ireland are horrifying, and I make no apology for stating them. The NSPCC and the Voluntary Development Agency provided the figures. In 1995, seventy children suffered the horrors of rape. In 1996, the figure was higher. The estimates for last year are that three children were raped and 12 were assaulted every week. Last year alone, over 900 sexual offences were recorded, and the rape figures were over 150 — the tip of an iceberg, Mr Speaker. We must do more to protect our children.

Ms Lewsley has already talked about the problems with the Protection of Children Act, List 1999 and the PECS register, and these must be addressed immediately and directly.

The realisation that something must be done has grown steadily over the years. A turning point for many people, certainly for those in my own constituency, was the tragic case of the abuse perpetrated by a senior teacher at Bangor Grammar School. Strangers rarely threaten our children — it is usually people they know, respect and trust. We must do everything possible to ensure that the people involved with our children are worthy of that trust. One of the ways in which we can do this is to educate the general public with correct information and provide access to advice and support.

Most children are abused by adults whom they know and trust. The reported cases of child abuse are just the tip of the iceberg of the cruelty, exploitation and neglect to which children in our society are subjected. Disabled children are more vulnerable to abuse. They are more dependant on intimate care and are sometimes less able to tell anyone or run away from abusive situations. Children fear the consequences of telling; if things are bad, perhaps they will get worse. Unfortunately, many children have become very good at hiding their unhappiness and distress. Another statistic, which I find horrifying, is that the majority of children whose names were placed on the child protection register in Northern Ireland in 1995 were between one and nine years of age.

Westminster passed the Protection of Children Act 1999, which allows for the establishment of a criminal records bureau and a list maintained by the Secretary of State to prevent abusers moving from one location to another to continue the horrific attacks on our children and society. I can only hope, as I am sure do all Members,

that the bureau is created and action plans are implemented as quickly as possible.

The NSPCC has supported the use of independent visitors for some time. The role of an independent visitor is to befriend, advise and have an independent, positive relationship with the child or young person. The NSPCC carried out research on young people in care who had access to an independent visitor. Key findings of 'Official Friends and Friendly Officials' were that independent visitors received high approval ratings from young people and played an important role in mediating or advising young people when problems arose. Young people commented on the value of the role. I would go along with the NSPCC in advocating reform of article 31 of the Children Order 1995 to read

"When an authority is looking after any child for more than 3 months and where not placed with its parents, the authority should take steps, in consultation with the child or young person, to appoint an Independent Visitor for him."

As became evident during the recent foot-and-mouth disease outbreak, Northern Ireland shares a border with another state, and it is all too easy for a perpetrator to move from the South to the North or vice versa. Such movement on either side usually masks an unsavoury past. I therefore wholeheartedly support the idea of an all-Ireland children's strategy. Mr Gibson, when he was outlining his argument against such a strategy, only illustrated that if we work together, we get things done.

The Probation Board for Northern Ireland works closely with the South, and that leads to effective action. Our aim is to establish an effective working partnership between the two countries and between Departments on this project, which concerns us all. A great benefit of the Assembly is that we can raise the issues that affect the people of Northern Ireland and work towards solutions.

What are the Ministers doing to increase the safety of our children, and how are they implementing the Protection of Children Act 1999? What measures are they taking in conjunction with their Southern counterparts to ensure the safety of all children on the island? The public must be given more direct access and practical information so that children are confident that there is broad support.

The most important reason for supporting the motion is to protect children, who are our most valuable resource. Let us make their childhood safe. We welcome the forthcoming protection of children and vulnerable adults Bill. The motion also gives us a chance to illustrate how the Assembly can make a difference to the lives of children and everyone in Northern Ireland. If we protect our children now, we will have a better society in the future.

We can make a difference for the better. There should be no loopholes. Our children should be protected effectively and practically, and I am confident that we can accomplish that. The consensus that was evident

today will continue: therefore it is with pleasure that I support the motion.

Mrs Carson: I support Patricia Lewsley's motion. There is dissatisfaction with the current system for vetting those who work with children. The protection of our children in any circumstance is most important. Anyone who comes into contact with children through employment or on a voluntary basis must be suitably vetted. We must encourage and promote the highest standards of child safety in all strands of our society, because no strand is immune from child abuse. We must learn from the lessons of the past and ensure that the future is safer for our children.

Who could forget the Waterhouse report, which catalogued a horrifying account of child abuse and the failure of a system designed to safeguard vulnerable children. Last year's report by Warwickshire County Council listed several initiatives, the adoption of which could be considered as an interim measure. These included introducing a whistle-blowing policy for staff to report matters of concern, and making it an offence to fail to report bad practice or misconduct. It also called for more inspection reports and safeguard checks to be carried out on all residential placements.

Any vetting procedure must be implemented in co-operation with all the recognised children's organisations and the RUC to give maximum protection to our children, who are the most vulnerable sector of our society. I ask the Ministers and the Departments concerned to take immediate suitable interim steps to improve the situation until there is a more extensive debate on the matter in the autumn.

Mrs Courtney: I support the motion, and I congratulate Ms Lewsley for proposing it at this critical time. Children are the most vulnerable people in our society and must be protected. At present there are insufficient places available to children who are in need of care.

Last week a headline in The 'Derry Journal' said "Review slams trust — Kids forced into unsafe homes". According to that newspaper report, children are being forced into residential homes that have insufficient resources. They are also placed in foster homes. However, there are also inadequate places available. We know what happened in Belfast when a 14-year-old slipped and fell because he was probably placed somewhere that initially seemed safe but was not.

11.15 am

In Foyle Trust, there have been inadequate placements of children in residential care. At times, children have been placed with parents or relatives who do not have the resources to look after them. A report from the Western Health and Social Services Board states that even when children are placed in care, staff at times were inadequately trained, inadequately supervised and

were experiencing unacceptable workload pressures. It stated that foster carers in the Western Health and Social Services Board area had not been offered training in the past five years and revealed that out-of-hours provision could no longer be guaranteed.

Shortly before I became a Member of the Assembly, I came as part of a deputation to the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, asking for more resources to be put into childcare. As yet, that has not really happened. The report is quite damning in that it says that the care is just not there, and any care that is available sometimes falls far short of what is required.

The staff are aware of the shortcomings, which they blame on lack of resources. For example, in north and west Belfast, funding, which Members would agree is inadequate, is 25% to 50% higher than in the Foyle Trust area. The report also reveals a serious lack of resources in every part of the family and childcare programmes.

As the Assembly is about to go into recess and as we are unsure about what is going to happen to it, it is important that the motion is passed today. Without it, children in our society will be unprotected. The Assembly will probably appoint a children's commissioner. It is necessary because children are our natural resource, and we have a responsibility to protect them. Without a children's commissioner there is no way that we can protect children in the future.

Ms McWilliams: It is important that we consider child protection and vetting systems under the motion today rather than under something as daft as Megan's Law. The difficulty is that when the media get their hands on a controversial and emotive issue such as this, they tend, with few exceptions, to approach it in the wrong way.

We do not want to drive these people underground. We want to get them registered and put under surveillance. This is one way of achieving that goal, though there are difficulties.

At present, these are only guidance protocols, and there will be several difficulties associated with them until they are put on a statutory footing. One difficulty is that employers are frightened, especially because the guidance is not statutory. There are implications for employers, and we must reassure them that it is better that we go down this road. The sooner the guidance is on a legislative footing, the better. I am pleased that the legislation will be passed to the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee, where we can go through it line by line.

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

The media should not hijack the issue. Most of the predatory abuse from individuals towards children and vulnerable adults — and it is predatory — is from people known to them. They are very clever people. Every day, during the research I carried out at the start

of the 1990s on abuse and domestic violence, I thought that I had heard the worst story and the most incredible ingenuity used by these individuals in targeting children and vulnerable adults.

We are always increasing our knowledge about how individuals abuse children, hence the point about the North/South connections. Those people, who are beginning to be detected or come under surveillance, and those who risk being suspended and who may end up on the PECs register, know to move elsewhere.

Where is that somewhere else on a small island such as this? It will probably be the Republic of Ireland. Unless they have been convicted in Northern Ireland, there is no way that they can be detected. They can move quite freely into organisations — which we now know they target — in order to reach vulnerable adults and children.

I have had a great deal of experience of accompanying individuals through the court system, but I now question whether I would do so again. However, I recommend that we pursue the criminal justice system, although having observed the process and having seen so many cases lost, I know it is very difficult to get a conviction for child abuse. That is why this matter is so important. These are not people with convictions. If they were, they would be on the police register. These are individuals against whom there have been allegations or who have served suspension in their previous employment. That there are only 18 people on the register tells its own story. There is a great deal of alarm about how to use it.

Let me give an example. Yesterday, representatives of an organisation called Lifestart came to see me, although on a different matter. The organisation works with children. It has family visitors who go into homes to advise parents on child development — it is a fantastic scheme. It has found that commencing literacy and numeracy training with children — especially those in disadvantaged and deprived communities — before they start school can bring them a long way in their development. Lifestart wrote to the unit in the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to request that their family visitors be vetted and was told that it did not have to do that.

The questions that have been asked in the document 'Making the Right Choice: A Guide to Using the Pre-employment Consultancy Service' are:

"Does the post involve one-to-one access?"

The answer in the case of these family visitors is "Yes".

"Is the post unsupervised or unaccompanied?"

"Yes."

"Is the situation isolated?"

If you were in a family home by yourself the answer would be "Yes".

"Is there recurring contact?"

If the family visitors were building up contact over time for continuity with those families and children, the answer would be “Yes”. Despite all of that, Lifestart was told that the vetting service does not apply to it.

What does the organisation do instead? It tells its family visitors that because it has been unable to carry out any vetting, every time a parent leaves the room, they must leave too so that they are not left with a child by themselves in case anything should happen. That is not the way to proceed. It would be much better if organisations such as Lifestart were able to go through the system of vetting all their family visitors, who could then get on with their work in a sensible fashion.

It could be a matter of resources. I was alarmed when I read in ‘Making the Right Choice’ that if organisations are applying simply to clear themselves, especially where there is an issue concerning disabled children, they should think again, unless they are able to answer all the questions. Then there is this incredible sentence in block type that says that if you have not answered these questions or taken yourself through these questions,

“requests for checks will be returned unanswered”.

That is a prohibitive statement to make in a guidance document. It would be useful if some reasons were given. That is where guidance falls down. It is only guidance; not legislation. However, the numbers speak for themselves, and there are concerns about the number of organisations that cannot complete the vetting process. They are working away while being able to answer those questions. People are going into homes, with one-to-one access that is unsupervised and unaccompanied, where the situation is isolated and where the contact is recurring.

Regardless of being able to answer “yes” to all of the questions, organisations are not able to have their workers vetted. It is a major issue, as is the issue of people moving from place to place once they have been detected.

We must begin an information and awareness exercise. The media have just not got the message. All the causes that are hyped up are about children who have been abused by strangers, which is an extreme but rare form of abuse. Most abuse of children and vulnerable adults comes from people whom they know, and that is why such people go into these organisations. They are clever enough to do that. We need an incredible education process among parents, and this guidance is the first rung on the ladder towards that.

It is to be hoped that we will take the opportunity to start that educational exercise when the legislation comes to the Floor. Until parents, neighbours and the extended family know how to protect children and with whom children are most vulnerable, we will not get it right. All we will be doing is picking up newspapers — and I could name them and shame them because of the hyped-up nonsense they print — and reading about some case that catches our attention for two weeks, while the majority of abuse goes undetected.

In the end, we must accept that we will only ever catch a minority of abusers — I know that from my experience in the courts with those who have come through the system. The majority of abusers will go undetected. However, we can start to prevent further abuse by the minority of abusers whom we have detected. We can move in that direction when the guidance is put on a statutory basis. I commend Patricia Lewsley for tabling the motion.

Mr Beggs: I register an interest in the debate. I am a voluntary youth worker, a Boys Brigade officer and a parent of three young children. There is a clear need to improve the current vetting system. As others have said, there are a small number of offenders on the register, and there have been several high-profile cases where abusers have moved across boundaries.

How effective are we in liaising with other UK regions, never mind other European countries? How can we deal with offenders who use new aliases? Is our current system robust enough to detect such people? In the education and sporting worlds, non-EU citizens can become involved in training children. This is not an all-Ireland issue; it is an all-children issue. It affects all adults who train children and care for them. It should not be used in a political fashion.

I recall the child protection training that I received as a Boys Brigade officer. It was the first time that responsibility for caring for children was explained to me. Realisation of the legal responsibility can be quite daunting and off-putting to young officers. However, many people choose to give voluntarily and freely of their time to help children.

It is important to ensure that there is an effective system, and that in informing volunteers and professionals about the system you explain that it protects adults as well as children. It is important that people continue to give freely of their time to assist children, because many vulnerable children come from families that are not as well structured as they should be. Such children coming into contact with the voluntary sector can meet adults who are able to show care and a degree of love and support for them. It is important that those societal attitudes continue.

11.30 am

Effective vetting is needed, but the vetting system must also deal with the issues sensitively. A balance must be achieved. The need for the system should be carefully explained to voluntary workers but without discouraging them. The explanation must be given in a way that youth workers understand that vetting is important for their own protection and the protection of children.

The post of children’s commissioner should be progressed as soon as possible. Cross-cutting is involved here, and someone has to take the lead. The establishment of

a children's commissioner will help Ministers and Departments to concentrate on the issue and ensure that effective measures are put in place as soon as possible.

Ms Lewsley: I thank the Members who have contributed to the debate. I am sorry that the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety cannot be here because of her work commitments.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister has sent me a letter, which I will read aloud when you have finished.

Ms Lewsley: I hope that she will reply to us in writing.

Members have stated that child protection is not the responsibility of any one Department; it is the responsibility of all Departments. I thank the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for his attendance at the start of the debate, given his responsibilities for sporting events and after-school activities.

In reply to Oliver Gibson, I did not suggest that an all-Ireland institution should be set up. My priority was to discuss the PECS register and List 99. The PECS register contains the names of people who have been reported to the Department by their employers because of their behaviour at work, where they have put children or adults with learning disabilities at risk, and the employers have indicated that they would be unsuitable for such work in the future.

People may be reported for all forms of abuse, including sexual abuse, violence and drug-related matters. The problem is that PECS cannot provide the information. The Department of Health maintains a similar register for England and Wales. However, at present it is not possible to check that list. I hope that the Minister will take up the issue and that the situation will be resolved in the near future.

There is also List 99, which is a UK-wide list drawn up by the Department for Education and Employment on people who are legally debarred from working in schools. Again, it is not possible to check that list. I hope that this is a temporary situation that will be resolved soon.

The main issue is that there are no equivalent registers in Scotland or the Republic of Ireland, and the Minister should address seriously that loophole. Members have repeatedly mentioned that better communication and co-ordination between organisations is needed. This is not a regional or a national issue; it is an international issue. As Roy Beggs said, it is a children's issue.

Unless there is co-ordination and communication across all countries, terrible paedophiles will continue to prey on vulnerable children.

Parents should be given more information on how to teach their children to react in difficult situations. The Education Committee has discussed the instructions being produced by the Department. The NSPCC has

produced information, but it is not being delivered in schools, because it is about teaching children what is right and wrong. The aim is not to make children aware of what is acceptable for adults to do or not do to them; they need to be taught that it is wrong for anyone, whether they know them or not, to do certain things.

I thank everyone involved in the voluntary community sector and non-governmental organisations who work tirelessly in this field — an area that is often underfunded and under tremendous pressure. If it were not for their dedication and commitment to sexual abuse victims, some of the loopholes and gaps that exist would be much wider.

I proposed the motion so that Members would be made more aware of the issue. This is only the beginning; it is hoped that when the legislation comes before the House, many more issues will be addressed.

Eileen Bell is correct in stating that children are our most precious resource; they are our future. If we cannot protect them when they are at their most vulnerable, what kind of future can we hope they will have?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister is not present. She has written to me to say that she is in the United States attending to urgent health matters, and she makes her apologies. However, she will study Hansard to read what has been expressed today, and I trust that she will respond in writing to those Members who raised questions.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls on the Ministers responsible for the protection of children, in view of the anomalies in the current vetting system, to take the necessary interim steps to improve the position on vetting those suitable to work with children.

CHILDREN'S HOSPICE

Mr Paisley Jnr: I beg to move

That this Assembly takes note of the ongoing dispute surrounding the future of the children's hospice and calls for an early resolution of the issues.

The children's hospice ought to be a focus of public concern because of the tragedy concerning the issues involved and the unnecessary nature of the dispute that has blown up over the past months. It would be remiss of the Assembly if, before it rises for the summer recess, it did not comment on the matter, which has been reported on in the newspapers, on radio and television, and has been the subject of investigation.

Members have a responsibility to comment on the matter and to tell those responsible for the children's hospice that it is important that they resolve the issues and focus on the central mission of the children's hospice, which is to deliver a caring service for children who are terminally ill.

Members must be concerned about the wrangling that has taken place, and which has damaged the credibility of the children's hospice. That wrangling has sapped the morale of many who for years have been quietly engaged in supporting the children's hospice, raising funds and delivering a mission statement that will ultimately deliver a service for children with needs.

I hope that the debate will help those people with responsibility to focus their minds on expediting a solution to the crisis that has developed over some time.

There are four key issues. First, there has been a lack of management accountability concerning the children's hospice. That must concern us, because this is a large charity, which impacts on many families. There must be accountability.

Secondly, management issues have taken the place of the mission of the children's hospice.

Thirdly, there has been a lack of transparency in the financial dealings of the children's hospice, especially regarding the appointment and employment of the new chief executive. There were some questions asked about that matter at a members' meeting in April, but no answers have been given yet. There must be financial transparency in order that people can have confidence in a charitable organisation that so many people wish to support. Many people are asking "Why this person?" "What are the terms and conditions?" "Does his appointment fly in the face of what we have come to know as equality legislation in Northern Ireland?"

Fourthly, there has been a total lack of integrity in the council's dealings with its former director, Mr Tom Hill. That goes to the nub of what we are debating. Lack of integrity, regardless of the reason, challenges the credibility of the organisation and its work.

The saga has more twists and turns than a corkscrew. This morning, the 'News Letter' put it quite vividly when it said that the story has more twists than a television soap opera. Soap opera scriptwriters would have some job delivering a saga with so many turns. However, this is not a farce: it is a serious matter, and it has become a tragedy for Northern Ireland. That is why it is important that we debate the issue and encourage those involved to resolve the problems.

At the extraordinary general meeting of hospice members in April, several issues were identified. First, there was the issue of financial transparency, which I briefly touched on in my opening comments. The relationship of donors to the children's hospice was raised, as was the chief executive's financial remuneration.

Many people will have raised their eyebrows when they read in this morning's 'News Letter' that according to what was said at the April meeting, the new chief executive, when appointed as the director of a charity, was earning approximately £6,000 per month. Many people will be astounded at that figure, considering that the appointment does not appear to meet any of the criteria that we have come to expect under equality legislation for the appointment of individuals to such important posts.

I do not want to make this into a personal issue concerning the chief executive, but the matter deserves to be addressed and resolved. The people who have given money to the organisation need to know who is being paid, how much is being paid and why certain amounts are being paid. That is crucial. It would be foolhardy of the Assembly not to know such facts, just as it would be foolhardy for the membership of the children's hospice not to know what is really going on.

Also identified in April was the serious matter that the membership had no confidence in the board and called for it to step down. The vote of no confidence has not been recognised; it has been virtually ignored. When you have a board that treats its membership with contempt, you will have more rancour in the organisation.

11.45 am

Who has permitted the running sore of the employment of the charity director, Mr Tom Hill, to become such a contentious issue? In the 'News Letter' this morning, a spokesperson for the children's hospice said that

"anything which reduces the ability of the organisation to deliver its core services is not in the best interests of those who need them most."

I agree wholeheartedly with that statement. The issue of the employment of Mr Tom Hill and the way he has been treated is reducing the credibility and the ability of the organisation. It is essential that those in charge of the hospice face that issue and stop running away. They need to identify the crisis and endeavour to resolve it expeditiously.

There is also the issue of management incompetence. The day after Mr Hill was sacked, I received a telephone call from a distraught constituent who told me that her office had received a fax from the solicitors acting for the chief executive and the council of the children's hospice. The fax detailed a plan to sack an individual, and she wanted to get that document to me. The six-page legal document drawn up by solicitors acting for the council was delivered to me. It outlined a timetable and an efficient method for setting this person up for dismissal. When that was revealed, there was absolutely no apology for that plan of campaign. There has been a failure to recognise that management overstepped the mark.

The document shows that Mr Hill was to be treated in an unfair fashion. He was to be isolated from other directors — how can a director do his job if he is isolated from his colleagues? A firewall was to be established on all personnel matters, in order to restrict the work of this director. How could you work under those circumstances? The document also said that the council should contemplate denying Mr Hill the right to attend council meetings, to which he had to report, and recommended making him unrecognisable as a director of the agency.

A man of integrity lost his job through workings that have a patina of legality, outlining how he should be isolated while ignoring his well-deserved public appreciation and support. When there is that level of incompetence — or, should I say, “scheming”, which is worse — people should realise that perhaps the decision taken in April by the membership to call on the board to stand down, to create a clean slate, to allow a fresh start and to focus on the mission of the children's hospice delivering a service for dying children who have real needs was the right one. The membership was right to call for the board to stand down and to allow us to focus on the real issue — the management of terminally ill children.

However, instead of dealing with the type of children's hospice that Northern Ireland needs or welcoming the establishment of a first-class service, the pressure on the public and on public representatives is to discuss, read and hear about the management style of a board and a council. There is a major deficiency in that management style, and that must be addressed.

During the course of the election, the Member for South Antrim, Mr Jim Wilson, rightly called for a public inquiry into the matter. I support that call. In the debate, on the motion put down by Ms Lewsley, the issue of a children's commissioner was raised. If such a commissioner is ever appointed, he or she should have a retrospective look at the matter, because it affects children who are in great need and who have very little time to address that need.

The motion will, I hope, speed up the investigation, because to date every supposed internal check and balance

on the accountability of the board — or lack thereof — has failed. An independent inquiry will address that.

The management style should never have been an issue for the public. The delivery of a first-class service — the care of terminally ill youngsters — should be the key issue. That is what saddens most people who have had any dealing with this. They realise that the real issue has been forgotten in the subterfuge and jealous wrangling that have become the public debate on the children's hospice.

The credibility of the children's hospice is on the block today, and those in charge of it have several options. I hope that they will take the first one; that they will adhere to the decision made in April and stand down. Waiting until September or October will only result in a bigger problem. Action is required immediately.

In closing, I pay tribute to Tom Hill for his tireless and thankless efforts to do something tangible for those in greatest need. The tragedy today is the way that his effort has been rewarded — or not. He did not seek recognition, but for him to be jettisoned because of professional or personal jealousy that ultimately challenges the credibility of the children's hospice, is the real tragedy.

So much has been achieved: over £5 million has been raised, a site has been delivered at a peppercorn purchase price by Newtonabbey Borough Council and the largest grant to any UK hospice has been received. The prospect of a state-of-the-art hospice is in front of us. So much more is at stake — the caring service for children in dire need. Yet all those things, which we should really be debating and encouraging, have been lost because of the management failure of the children's hospice. I hope that, in some small way, the Assembly is able to influence those people and encourage them to resolve the problem now and to focus on the real mission of the children's hospice.

Mr J Wilson: I support the motion. The Northern Ireland Hospice is a major contributor to Northern Ireland's healthcare portfolio. It was founded 18 years ago with little money, two staff and an enormous vision. Today it is a multi-million pound organisation providing in-patient care at Somerton House, specialist nurses working with adults throughout most of Northern Ireland, an at-home service and a Province-wide children's service.

We are, of course, looking forward to the opening of the Northern Ireland children's hospice in September, but it is regrettable that the final stages of that fantastic initiative have been tainted by the management council's treatment of a member of staff directly linked with the project. I remember when Tom Hill came to my parish church. I remember his vision, his passion and, especially, his cry for help.

In recent months, we have all read and listened to media reports of the sorry affair. Shrouded in mystery

enforced by the council, the public has been left in a total state of amazement as to what really happened to result in such a mess. There is no doubt that Tom Hill has suffered a great deal from the confused and bizarre handling of his case.

He has made an enormous contribution to the realisation of the vision to create Northern Ireland's first children's hospice. Now, for reasons known only to, perhaps, very few, he is no longer part of that vision. Is it not time for the management council to come clean? Is it not time for the council to consider its position? In any other walk of life, a confidence slump such as has happened here would bring about resignation or sacking.

The hospice is suffering financially as a result of the ongoing dispute. Some supporters are reluctant to contribute until the issues are resolved. That, coupled with the impact of foot-and-mouth disease on a major fund-raiser for the hospice, has had a devastating effect.

We must remember that, while all this is going on, patients are still being cared for. Medical and nursing staff are still providing the best possible care. Families continue to receive support at the most critical time in their lives. Confidence must be restored to enable the staff to get on with their work, for volunteers once again to feel proud to be associated with one of Northern Ireland's great success stories and for fund-raisers and the public to rediscover their enthusiasm and generosity.

This is a very difficult time. It is not a time to identify winners or losers. It must not be a time when patients are at risk of being the losers. No matter what, the patients and their families should always be at the top of the agenda, as should the doctors, the nurses and the caring staff.

The management dispute with Tom Hill is regrettable, but it is to be hoped that the laws of the land will deal with that in a correct and appropriate way. The Member for North Antrim, Mr Paisley Jnr, brought to our attention some disquieting information about what could be described as the "questionable planning" of Tom Hill's departure. I am sure that we will return to that issue.

This whole issue has identified a much bigger problem, which is that the Northern Ireland Hospice has outgrown the system of governance put in place 18 years ago. The day-to-day running of the hospice is under review at the moment, with a report due in October, but the bigger picture needs the same treatment.

Mr Speaker, I heard your explanation of the Minister's absence, but nevertheless I am disappointed that she is not here. Mr Paisley Jnr referred to my recent request for a public inquiry, which the Minister dismissed. At the time I called it a "cop-out", and I believe that the Minister did cop out. I am unhappy that she is not here today, but in her absence I recommend that she commission a team, representing a cross-section of industry, commerce and health, to examine the current articles of association

of the hospice, that she appoint an independent chairperson, and that that team be charged with carrying out a thorough review of the overall management of the hospice, the role of the council and — very importantly — its method of selection.

I also recommend that the Minister of Health Social Services and Public Safety review urgently her Department's financial contribution to the Northern Ireland Hospice. Currently, that sits at 17% of its running costs, compared to 30% in England and Wales, 50% in Scotland and, in many cases, 100% in the Republic of Ireland. Every £2 provided by the Department of Health secures over ten pounds' worth of palliative care. Is the Minister not morally obliged to pay the proper price for specialist palliative care services, which have been identified as essential components of the Department's provision responsibilities?

These positive moves would do much to restore confidence in an organisation that has always enjoyed massive support from the public in Northern Ireland. It must continue to receive that support.

12.00

It was right to have the debate. It is right that Members should contribute to it. It is right to be concerned about very sick children. It is wrong to have had a very public row about sick children. I support the motion.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I trust that the Minister will read Hansard in respect of the child protection motion that preceded this, and I hope that she will also study what has been said in the Chamber today.

I have received some information regarding Mr Hill's taking his case to an industrial tribunal. While I do not want to curb Members unnecessarily, they must appreciate that if that turns out to be the case, it is conceivable that there could be a sub judice problem. I am just mentioning that. I will not give a ruling on it.

Mrs Courtney: I support the motion. The Northern Ireland children's hospice will be the first facility for children with terminal diseases and their families and friends. Today, around 50 children are dying from life-limiting illnesses. The children's hospice that will be built in Newtownabbey is based on the Northern Ireland Hospice's reputation for caring professionalism and excellent facilities. In my council area of Derry, the Foyle Hospice is recognised as being part of the fabric of the city, and the advent of the children's hospice in Belfast is seen as extending the service offered both by it and by the Northern Ireland Hospice.

The death of a child is probably the saddest loss that can be experienced. The mission of the children's hospice will be to care for children with life-limiting diseases from all over Northern Ireland. It will provide help, advice and support for their families. Any child under

19 years of age will be eligible for care, and, as with all hospice services, there will be no charge to the family.

It is significant that, following a competition involving 3,500 schoolchildren, the hospice will be named Horizon House. My understanding is that there will be facilities to provide often lengthy respite care for 10 children, and also to provide for shorter admissions. Parents and families can be accommodated in family rooms if they wish, and parents and their children will be encouraged to treat the hospice as a home from home.

Facilities such as this should not have been allowed to become the focus of a public wrangle. The situation must be resolved quickly so that the families of children with terminal illnesses will at least have the consolation of knowing that their lives and those of their children will be made bearable and that pain will be eased, if not eliminated.

I do not intend to take sides, but I agree that the dispute must be resolved quickly. We cannot allow the issue to drift — it is too serious. I support the motion.

Rev Dr William McCrea: I support the motion and thank my Colleague for bringing it before the House. I deeply regret that it had to be placed on the agenda. No one will want to glory in the fact that such a motion has had to be brought before the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The future of the Northern Ireland children's hospice must not be unnecessarily compromised by the continuing turmoil that has surrounded the events of recent months, and every measure must be taken to secure an effective resolution to the current difficulties.

I am a strong supporter of the valuable work that the Northern Ireland Hospice and its excellent staff have done and continue to do.

However, the facts surrounding this case are disturbing. During my time as Member of Parliament for South Antrim, I was inundated with calls from constituents expressing their deep concern about the saga of the children's hospice. The issues detracted from the excellent news of the opening of a hospice to care for the terminally ill.

The public and emotive situation of the Northern Ireland children's hospice is unacceptable, not only to the people of south Antrim, Newtownabbey and the area where the hospice is, but to thousands of people across the Province. Ardent fund-raisers do not come only from the south Antrim area. People across the Province have reached out their hands to the organisation in the past. When it was needed, the public was happy to give its hard-earned money to something that it believed in — something that gave support to many families. The current situation is causing untold distress and uncertainty. A mass petition has been delivered to hospice headquarters at Somerton Road, but confusion still reigns. Surely that is totally unacceptable.

At the annual general meeting in April, 97% of those present supported a vote of no confidence in the hospice management committee. There could not be a clearer indication that all is not well. Many founding families confirm that they would not use the children's service due to this distrust of the hospice council. A further meeting was requested, but no date for that was notified within the 21 days allowed.

Even now, the council remains undecided on whether Tom Hill will be permitted to appeal against his termination as administrative director. What sort of signal does that send out, not only to the local community, but to the community at large? The negativity and controversy flies in the face of the positive work that has brought the project so close to fruition. The realisation of the children's hospice project at the O'Neill Road site will bring much relief to over 900 life-limited children in Northern Ireland, providing an invaluable resource for both children and their families.

The Northern Ireland Hospice has always prided itself on the quality of its patient care and goodwill — I have commended it for that. Unfortunately, the events of past months have darkened the horizon. The emotional distress that has been caused to many families must be dispelled lest the Northern Ireland children's hospice continue to suffer unnecessarily. The sickening saga could be resolved properly and speedily. Those who are involved in the decision-making process would do well to remember why the children's hospice is named Horizon House. An important lesson can be learned from the child whose privilege it was to name the site.

When asked why she had selected the name "Horizon House", Nicole Crawford replied that when the clouds go away, there is a bright horizon. It is a horizon that should bring new hope to the many families in Northern Ireland who will benefit from using the very special service.

The motion allows us to highlight the causes of the controversy. We should bear in mind that a new horizon, and the hope that accompanies it, can be achieved only through honesty, decency and integrity in dealing with the situation. Those qualities have been lacking in dealings with Tom Hill.

An organisation is always bigger than the individual. Mr Hill recognises that those issues are bigger than he. We must dig deep into the heart of a matter that has brought Tom Hill's name to the fore.

I, and those from the South Antrim constituency who know him well, believe him to be a gentleman who has worked with great honesty, integrity and decency on behalf of the Northern Ireland Hospice for many years. He is a person of vision; he is caring and understanding to those families going through critical times and whose children are in most need of love and attention.

Why would any organisation plan to discredit Mr Hill and remove him from his position?

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: Does my hon Friend not find the solicitor's document outlining a plan of attack upon an individual and an attempt to have him removed — and it can be nothing less than that — outrageous? Anyone who put his hand to devising that can no longer have the support of any right-thinking person.

Rev Dr William McCrea: I thank my hon Friend for his intervention, and I concur with his remarks. I ask myself "What was Tom Hill's crime?"

When I was a Member of Parliament for South Antrim I received delegations from Mr and Mrs Lynn. I can name them because they appeared on the 'Spotlight' television programme. They had a child who was diagnosed with terminal illness and who has since died. They were distraught when they came to see me in Ballyclare, because four different people representing the Northern Ireland Hospice council had, they believed, lied to them — in writing and face to face.

We are told that Tom Hill was sacked primarily because of an alleged conversation in the home of Mr and Mrs Lynn. In spite of repeated assurances that the matter was dropped in July 2000, when the Lynns raised the matter in the 'Spotlight' programme, they were told that it had been properly and appropriately dealt with.

12.15 pm

The council refused to show the report on the alleged conversation in the Lynns' home. When the Lynns requested a reply, they received none to their communication or correspondence and no reply to their phone calls. When I spoke to the Lynns, they told me that they had received what they perceived to be a threatening solicitor's letter on behalf of the hospice nursing manager less than two months after Jonathan's death. That shows the care and sensitivity of those handling the situation. A grieving, broken-hearted family that needed care and attention as never before seemed to be getting deeper and deeper into a pit. When they tried to get evidence and information, they were not only denied it, but they were refused even the courtesy of a reply.

On their behalf, I contacted the Northern Ireland Hospice. I received a cop-out — hardly surprising, of course, when I heard what Mr and Mrs Lynn said. I wanted a meeting to get to the bottom of this for Mr and Mrs Lynn. That meeting has never taken place — it was never agreed to. I believe that Mr McComiskey was going on holiday. It is only natural for people to go on holiday, but somebody must have been there to deal with matters in his absence. The meeting could have taken place when he came back; but it never has.

This has been a despicable and disgraceful way of handling people whose hearts are broken. They were told that there was no reason to believe that the alleged

conversation was part of Mr Hill's saga, only to read that it was at the heart of Mr Hill's sacking — lies and deceit. The truth is that the public and those paying money to the hospice no longer have confidence in the Northern Ireland Hospice's council. Its members have offered to resign; their resignation should be activated immediately.

I want to draw one final consideration to Members' attention. It will be some months before those places are filled after the resignations. There is a belief that gerrymandering is afoot. It is believed that council members have obtained several hundred membership forms. Postponing the extraordinary general meeting until a later date could give those resigning a better chance of being reinstated by receiving sufficient proxy votes to ensure re-election.

The whole saga stinks. It is breaking the hearts of many hard-working people who have supported the hospice over the years — people who love the hospice and who want to support it in future. Anyone who believes that the facts can be buried forever must think again. It is necessary to have an open, independent inquiry into the saga. The truth must be told.

Mr J Kelly: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion, which concerns a vexing matter. Central to it are the children and their families who are suffering because of the ongoing personality disputes in the children's hospice. That diminishes the positive work and dedication of the professional and voluntary staff of the children's hospice. It is sad that internal problems have been brought into the public arena in such an unseemly way, because that can only deeply affect the children and families who use the children's hospice.

You are right, a Leas Cheann Comhairle, to point out that a tribunal is ongoing and to remind us to be careful when discussing the personalities involved in the dispute. The debate ought not to be about personalities, but about the care of the young children, the vulnerable of our society. Anyone who has been to a hospice where adults are dying appreciates the trauma that is involved, and how much greater that trauma is when young children are dying. Our aim should be to attempt to resolve the issues at the centre of the unseemly controversy by any necessary means.

Around £1 million of public funding was allocated to the children's hospice, and there is no legislation to regulate voluntary organisations in this part of Ireland. Relevant legislation should be urgently introduced, because we are powerless to intervene in a dispute with a voluntary organisation. At the moment, we can only highlight the central issue — the children and their families who are suffering. I ask those involved to disregard the personalities and potentially egotistic behaviour involved, to put aside their public posturing and to work through the circumstances surrounding the unseemly, hurtful public

debate about suffering children with an independent adjudicator.

I support the motion, because it gives us an opportunity to speak about the matter in public. We have an obligation and a duty to the children and their families to ensure that this personality issue is not allowed to diminish the focus on the real suffering of people at this time.

Mr Ford: I will start by emphasising the word “tragedy”, which was how Ian Paisley Jnr and Jim Wilson described the situation. We should regard the matter in that light. I am concerned about references to the concept of a public inquiry. Public inquiries might be good at apportioning blame, but I am not sure that we should be seeking to do that. We should seek to be a bit more neutral, and I would prefer the phraseology that is used in the resolution, which refers to seeking “an early resolution” of the difficulties.”

The tragedy is that so many people of goodwill started off working together and seeking to promote the needs of life-limited children, but have ended up torn asunder, whether as a result of personality clashes or management differences, in the widest term.

That is leading to a tragedy for the potential clients of the service that the children's hospice should be providing. We have heard plenty about what has happened in the past. Some Members have perhaps been a little unwise to say as much as they have. We should state the need for the difficulties to be resolved, rather than seek to apportion blame in any way.

There are a vast number of charities in Northern Ireland, as there are across the UK. The time has run out for some of them, and they no longer exist in anything more than name. Some are very small and have difficulties because they principally operate on the basis of the goodwill of volunteers. Some of those we see as charities here are actually branches of national organisations that have firm management structures in place and are run in a truly professional way.

Without wishing to apportion blame, some groups of charities in Northern Ireland have the potential for problems. Those charities, which started out as a small number of people operating on the basis of goodwill with limited funding, have become major local bodies. They were started up with enthusiasm, energy and commitment to a cause — the true meaning of charity. They have grown over the years; they have been given public funds, have attracted outside funding and, in some cases, overseas funding.

Those small groups of volunteers are now trying to run what is, in effect, a major business — employing staff, providing services, et cetera. In many cases the skills that that requires are different from the skills which people brought in at the beginning, such as the enthusiasm to

get a body started. Those who find themselves in positions of much greater responsibility than they expected may have run into difficulties inadvertently. They have run into difficulties nevertheless, and problems arise because of it. For that reason, we need a body akin to the Charity Commissioners specifically for Northern Ireland.

Mr Kelly was wrong to say that there is no legal control, but he was right to say that the Assembly has no control over the actions of a voluntary organisation. The control over charities in Northern Ireland is a minimalist one conveyed by Inland Revenue registration on purely financial matters. That is clearly inadequate to deal with the problems highlighted in the hospice, or which may arise in other major regional charities. We do not need a financial audit after problems have arisen. We need a body equivalent to the Charity Commissioners across the water; indeed, in some senses we need to go beyond that. We need a body that would participate in promoting good practice, could help to resolve difficulties and would ensure that this important sector of Northern Ireland society runs to the interests of its clients and is not riven with difficulties like those faced by the hospice.

I want to see that resolution. I support the motion, but I urge caution in apportioning blame or in seeking a public inquiry, as that might merely add to the anguish that is being experienced.

Ms Morrice: It is not necessarily appropriate to take sides in this affair. Authorities are already in place to deal with this. We agree with the motion in the respect that it is calling for an early resolution of the issues. The only side that we should take is that of the children who are terminally ill, their families and those who have worked tirelessly to support them. Along with my Colleague, Mr Ford, my only suggestion is that consideration should be given to appointing a charities commission specific to Northern Ireland to deal with this type of issue.

12.30 pm

Mr Dallat: I rise to support the motion as it is stated in the Order Paper. I do not intend to go beyond that.

The row about the children's hospice must be resolved. It has gone on too long and has caused untold anxiety to the public, especially to those who matter most — the children and parents who will use the hospice. When the problem is finally resolved, there should be a detailed inquiry into how it got so far out of hand and could not be resolved without a damaging public fracas that did no one any good, not least the sick children who benefit from the hospice.

Charities are voluntary, but that does not reduce the need to abide by established codes of conduct, follow clearly defined procedures and have in place appeals procedures which are fair, fast, efficient and conclusive. On this occasion, the Assembly can do nothing more than take note of the dispute. It is not helpful to take

sides, as that may entrench positions and exacerbate the problem. Nevertheless, much can be learned. For example, should a similar row break out in another charity, surely it would be of enormous benefit if mechanisms were in place to intervene to stop that dispute getting out of control. I am pleased that other Members have already suggested something similar.

The voluntary sector, and in particular the charitable bodies, play a critical role in providing a holistic and comprehensive service to those in need. The present incumbents in those charities have rights, but they also have responsibilities to ensure that the image and functions of those charities are not damaged by unnecessary adverse publicity.

As I have said, I am not taking sides in the dispute. That is not the way forward. However, I hope that the matter is resolved sooner rather than later, as that would be in the interests of those who matter most — the children. I support the call for a report — not necessarily a public inquiry — and a debate on its findings. Never again should such a worthy cause be thrust into the public gaze in such a distressing way. Those involved in the hospice movement deserve better; and those who use the service most definitely deserve better.

Now that the matter is before the Assembly, we should appeal to the public not to curtail its support for the hospice movement but to redouble its generosity. We should urge them to become members of the hospice movement and by doing so fulfil one of the most basic needs of mankind — looking after the sick and dying.

I stress that I am not taking sides, nor does the motion require that. I hope that the tribunal referred to earlier will not be compromised by contributions made in the debate.

Finishing on a lighter note — and sometimes we need one — surely if we in the Chamber can agree on the issue, the hospice movement, which is made up of people with a common cause of looking after the needs of very sick children, can resolve its differences. I know that it is not as simple as that. However, I am convinced that no one in this dispute had any evil intentions; nor did they set out to damage the hospice movement. However, that it is what has happened, and it must be resolved by legislation and procedure that will prevent it from happening again.

Mr Paisley Jnr: This has been a worthwhile debate. I came to the House with a heavy heart in the knowledge that we would have to discuss the tragic happenings surrounding the management of the children's hospice and how it has taken the limelight from the real issue — the mission of the hospice.

I welcome the serious contributions from those supporting the motion. I do not want to anticipate the House's unanimous support, although I would welcome that. The management of the children's hospice is a

tangled mess, but this debate ends on a positive note. The House calls on those who have responsibility to take responsibility and resolve the problems. Surely that is what this debate has been about. We should not have had to debate it in a public arena, but we would have been remiss in our duty had we not shown our interest.

I welcome the comments of many Members, and I shall refer to them briefly. Jim Wilson said that the hospice offers a fantastic opportunity, and I agree with him. Everyone can say a hearty “hear, hear” to that. We want a state-of-the-art facility for people in real need.

There is, however, a slump in confidence in how this has been managed, and the debate has focused on that. It was addressed competently by most Members who spoke. The debate issues a challenge to those in charge of the children's hospice: who runs the hospice, and how should it be managed in future? I hope that that challenge is met, because it is clear that there must be a clearing of the decks. The previous management style has not worked. If it had worked, we would not be debating it today. That is the reality. Let us clear the decks and allow a new, more professional management team to organise the affairs of this very noble charity.

I welcome Mrs Courtney's comments and those of my Colleague, Mr McCrea. They echoed similar sentiments, which rightly focused on the real victims — the children and their needs and on the urgent, immediate, centred, even selfish, support that these youngsters require. I hope that we can leave this debate behind and focus on the real issues, just as we should encourage the hospice management to resolve its problems so that it too can focus wholeheartedly on those issues.

Mr McCrea said that the heart of the issue was the sacking of the director. When I first read about the matter, the term “gross misconduct” struck my eye. That phrase can send out the wrong message if people do not know what it means. Mud thrown in this society sticks. One finds out, however, that the “misconduct” appears to have been an innocent conversation. This conversation was between a husband and wife who have been involved with the idea of the children's hospice before there ever was one and who have been involved all their professional lives in caring for terminally ill children. That such “misconduct” is used against the director is a sad reflection, not on the director, but on those who work against him.

The House ought to express its resentment at how that has been used by those in charge of the tangled mess. No one has disputed what I said at the beginning of the debate — that there are four key issues: the general lack of accountability of the hospice; the management issues that have taken the focus off the mission statement; the lack of financial transparency; and the lack of integrity in dealing with an employee. These have not been disputed; I

welcome that and believe that the House supports those issues.

I also believe the words of the PR agent for the children's hospice, who in today's 'News Letter' said that anything that reduces the ability of the organisation to deliver its core services is not in the best interests of those who need them. If the management style reduces the ability to deliver the core services of the children's hospice, the person who made that statement should present it to her bosses this morning and say to them "It is your style that is reducing the ability of our organisation". The House should support that call. The matter must be resolved expeditiously. It is not good enough to wait until the autumn. It has to be resolved, and resolved now.

Mr Kelly, the Sinn Féin Member for Mid Ulster, was wrong to tell the House that we are powerless to do anything about this. We certainly are not. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety is not powerless; it could have held an inquiry. If it had held an inquiry when one was first asked for, or even if it had had the imagination to pre-empt those calls by holding an inquiry when the issue raised its head some 18 months ago, we might not be in this situation today. We are not powerless; let us not pretend that we have no responsibility here. As public representatives, of course we have a responsibility.

Let us remember that the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has to account to the taxpayer for how much of its money it has allocated to this project and why. We do have power on this issue. We should not forget that, and we should not let those in charge of the issue forget it. The Minister could help, and the Department could investigate the issue and look at the series of problems.

Mr Ford agreed with Mr Jim Wilson and me that this whole saga has been a tragedy and that it could be

resolved by those people who are currently in charge of it. I have gone further than that: ministerial or departmental direction or advice to the management could have changed the structures rapidly to stop the situation getting out of control.

I say to Mr Ford and Ms Morrice that there comes a time in the affairs of man when we cannot sit on the fence, when we have to stand up and be counted on an issue. There comes a time when we have to say, not that we are taking sides on an issue, but that we are taking the side of what is right for children. We have a choice between what is patently right and the actions that have been taken, which have been blatantly wrong.

The House is not playing the blame game today. We are quite deliberately highlighting our interest in the issue and warning those people who have the responsibility to get on with the job to sort this mess out or else we will have the power, and the duty, to step in.

I therefore commend the motion to the House and repeat my earlier tribute to the work and the tenacity of Tom Hill in the face of the unacceptable pressures on him. I hope that the House will, in some way, send out a signal today to all those involved, telling them to hurry up and resolve this terrible, tasteless dispute that we have had to sample over the last few months. I commend the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly takes note of the ongoing dispute surrounding the future of the children's hospice and calls for an early resolution of the issues.

Adjourned at 12.44 pm.

Committee Stage Records

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE FOR ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Wednesday 16 May 2001

PRODUCT LIABILITY (AMENDMENT) BILL

Members present:

Mr P Doherty (Chairperson)
Mr Neeson (Deputy Chairperson)
Mrs Courtney
Mr McClarty
Dr McDonnell
Dr O'Hagan
Mr Wells

Also in attendance:

Mr P Johnston Assembly legal adviser

Mr Wells: Many people are starting little diversification schemes. My father is a farmer, and he has a policy that covers him if his tractor hits someone, or if one of animals escapes. That is fine; no extra cost is incurred. However, a small farmer has to take out a policy specifically for that. Farmers need the Bill like a hole in the head. We can do nothing about the situation, and, unfortunately, people will be caught. People will happily go about their business oblivious to the legislation until one of them is caught because they are uninsured. People can face ruination if that happens. The fine is not the issue — the other person probably has legal aid and will go through the courts and ruin the person he is against. You say that there have not been any such cases, which I accept. However, it is a certainty that there will be more litigious cases in Northern Ireland in five years than there currently are. That is the trend — everyone is now suing for everything. That is a blow for people starting out. It involves more paperwork and hassle, which is the last thing that people need. We can do nothing about that — we are stuck with it, and we have to rubber-stamp it.

Mr Neeson: We must take on board the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee's comments. It said that the industry must be informed of the changes that are coming about. We realise that we are implementing something that we will have to implement anyway.

The Chairperson: We have had the informal discussion, and we will now formally proceed through the Bill. The

Assembly's legal adviser, Mr Johnston, is present in case we are stuck on any point or need any queries answered.

We have already heard evidence from the officials of the Office of Law Reform and the Department of Finance and Personnel on the Product Liability (Amendment) Bill. Several questions were put on concerns that members had about the Bill's effects.

The purpose of the meeting is to carry out a clause-by-clause scrutiny of the Bill, and members will have the opportunity to raise any concerns, suggestions or amendments. Members should read the relevant clauses and paragraphs in the Bill along with the related commentary in the Explanatory and Financial Memorandum. The Bill has three clauses. Each clause and any subsection will need to be considered in turn. The Committee will have two options: to agree that the Committee is content with the clause as drafted, or to agree that the Committee recommend to the Assembly that a clause be amended. The primary purpose of the Bill is to implement European Directive 1999/34, which extends product liability to primary agricultural products and game.

Clause 1 (Product liability: repeal of exclusion for game and agricultural produce)

The Chairperson: Clause 1 is explained on page 3 of the Explanatory and Financial Memorandum.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clause 2 (Power to modify enactments in consequence of modification of product liability Directive)

The Chairperson: Clause 2 will permit any future changes to the original Directive to be effected by the more straightforward process of secondary legislation. That is also explained on page 3 of the Explanatory and Financial Memorandum.

Clause 2 agreed to.

Clause 3 (Short title)

Clause 3 agreed to.

The Chairperson: The Committee should read the responses from the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development and the Committee for Finance and Personnel.

Does the Committee agree to include the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development's recommendation in the report on the Bill?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: The report must be given a Second Reading.

Does the Committee also agree that the oral evidence from the Office of Law Reform and the written submission for the Committee of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Committee for Finance and Personnel be included in the overall report?

Members indicated assent

Resolved:

Report given its Second Reading and ordered to be printed.

That the Report be the Third Report of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

Question put and agreed to.

**NORTHERN IRELAND
ASSEMBLY**

**COMMITTEE FOR
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

Thursday 6 September 2001

**SOCIAL SECURITY
FRAUD BILL
(NIA 16/00)**

Members present:

Mr Cobain (Chairperson)
Ms Gildernew (Deputy Chairperson)
Sir John Gorman
Mr Hamilton
Mr M Robinson
Mr Tierney
Mr S Wilson

Witnesses:

Mr J O'Neill)
Ms D Roy) Department for Social Development
Mr D McCurry)
Ms S Lowe)

The Chairperson: Welcome.

Clause 1 (Additional powers to obtain information)

Mr S Wilson: Mr Chairman, perhaps I might draw your attention to the list of people in subsection (2) from whom we may seek information. It says that the officer will not exercise that right unless he has “reasonable grounds” for believing that the person to whom it relates is personally committed and so on. Are those “reasonable grounds” detailed anywhere?

Mr J O'Neill: “Reasonable” depends on the circumstances in each case. The code of practice which we are proposing is at the back of the book which you have examined already. However, it is not the final version — we cannot publish the final version for consultation until the Bill has passed through the Assembly. It is difficult to define “reasonable” since there would have to be evidence in front of the officers to suggest first that fraud was occurring and that there were suspicious circumstances. That could be evidence from observations by the Department’s own staff or those of the agency — evidence of fraud committed previously and the suspicion that fraud was continuing. It is up to the officer concerned to make the assessment in each case as to whether grounds are reasonable.

Mr McCurry: Perhaps I could come in here. Subject to the passage of the legislation, we expect to have a small team of specially trained officers who will sift through all requests for information. In trying to determine whether it is reasonable to pursue a case and seek information, they will ask themselves questions such as what aroused suspicion, whether there is a case to answer and whether they can get the information from some other source in a less intrusive manner. While it is impossible to legislate for every eventuality, the code of practice which will go out for consultation when the legislation is passed and the training and guidelines to be issued to staff will provide further detail.

Mr Tierney: Previously the Committee expressed concern that some people were investigated and found to be innocent but not even aware that information about them was being sought. A phone call or a letter to the Department may lead to a person’s being investigated. Who judges that? Who decides whether a phone call or a letter is sufficient evidence that a person should be investigated?

I ask this to protect departmental staff. I may query how you investigate a person. Perhaps there is not enough information to justify an investigation; perhaps a member of your staff wanted to find out about their neighbour, for instance. If a check is carried out on someone, they have the right to know and be reassured that everything is all right.

Mr McCurry: I work for the Social Security Agency. All allegations of fraud must be investigated to some degree, and they are sifted through a process which addresses some of your questions. The Social Security Agency will have a small team of authorised officers trained to ensure that the safeguards you mentioned are enforced. There will be management checks and audit trails in all the agency’s work. All our work will be recorded through management checks. Customers may also ask for information.

Some information will not be released, but there will be an audit trail and management checks, and special training will be given to the authorised officers. The agency will not automatically use those powers in the first instance. It will examine alternative — perhaps less intrusive — ways of obtaining the information which will help it investigate the allegation.

Mr Tierney: I am not satisfied, for it is an intrusion. Officials have admitted to us that people have been investigated in the past and found to be innocent. You are telling the Committee that that will happen in the future, with people not even knowing they have been investigated, and that does not sound right. However, if you asked me to suggest another way to do it, I admit I should not be able to give you an answer.

The Chairperson: The only safeguard is that the Department should investigate people only when there is a bona fide case.

Mr Tierney: That is not the case. At the last meeting officials told the Committee they must investigate a case on receipt of a phone call or letter. Over the years I have talked to members of your staff who have told me that some of the cases are reported by jealous neighbours or someone who has been involved in a relationship break-up. The girl might report the fellow or vice versa — such things happen. Therefore, because someone is spiteful to you, or you have a jealous neighbour, you are open to this type of investigation, despite the fact that you are totally innocent.

Mr McCurry: Our staff will not automatically go to banks or building societies because of one piece of information; all the evidence will be gathered. Certain information concerning customers and their details is already held on benefit computer systems. We shall try to bring together all the information and make a judgement about whether we must ask a bank, building society or other financial institution to obtain the details.

Mr Tierney: Finally, could you give me an example of a lesser case than that which you would investigate? Before you would do so, the evidence would have to go beyond a certain point. I am asking a question to which I already have an answer — not the same answer you are giving now. If a letter were sent or a phone call made, would you proceed with the matter? At what stage would you say “no”?

Mr J O'Neill: If there is an allegation — be it in the form of an anonymous letter or not — that someone is claiming benefit fraudulently, it would have to be examined on the basis of its credibility, usefulness and source. If the source were in some way related to the person concerned, it would be treated as one piece of evidence rather than as the basis of a decision to seek information from a bank. Other collaborating evidence of some suspicion would be needed. Not every social security officer has the power to go to the bank. It would be limited to a certain number, and the evidence would have to go from a local social security office to such people before they could decide whether they wanted to go to the bank.

Mr S Wilson: The “reasonable grounds” you are talking about would be that you receive a complaint or an allegation. You examine it with regard to what your own resources will tell you. For example, if someone says that Sammy Wilson is “doing the double”, you find out from your own offices whether he is signing on regularly and so on. If there is suspicion at that stage, is it only then that you would have “reasonable grounds” to investigate bank accounts or whatever?

Mr J O'Neill: You would examine whether someone were saying they were not working and look for evidence from bank accounts of regular payments of similar amounts coming in each month. You would then assume that the income was from a certain source — that is evidence.

There must be logical, sound reasons ascertained by a person in the Social Security Agency before he can investigate a bank account. It is not simply a case of an officer in a local office receiving a letter and on that basis investigating a bank account.

Mr S Wilson: The first port of call is therefore not the bank but your own office?

Mr J O'Neill: If there is an allegation about someone who has already had a conviction for fraud, you will have reason to suspect something may be happening. You then consult your own evidence, and ultimately you might go to the bank or building society.

Ms Gildernew: I am very concerned about the measures proposed in the Bill. Many people relying on benefits have been almost criminalised in their attempts to claim; they find it difficult to access benefits to which they are entitled. Like other Members, I have had a number of complaints. We are always hearing about a lack of take-up of benefits. People are put off at every stage from claiming that to which they are entitled. The whole system makes it difficult for those entitled to benefits to access them. The measures for investigating fraud are draconian, and that worries me. It seems that much more effort is put into investigating fraud than getting people the benefits to which they are entitled. There might be less fraud if the system were easier to access and people were treated properly.

I have had a quick look through the Bill. The Committee must do a great deal of work to ensure the Bill does not impinge on people's human rights and privacy. It has already gone too far.

The Chairperson: We must deal with the Bill clause by clause; otherwise we shall never get through it. I assume that it has all been proofed?

Mr J O'Neill: Yes. It has been proofed on human rights grounds. We have sought the appropriate legal advice for these circumstances, and the Minister has made a statement that, in his view, it complies with the European Convention on Human Rights.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 2 (Electronic access to information)

Ms Gildernew: Please record that I am not content with clause 2. I feel it goes too far regarding access to people's details.

Mr Tierney: I was not happy with the response to Sammy Wilson's question; the “reasonable grounds” did not convince me.

The Chairperson: We do not want to prolong the proceedings. We are dealing with social security fraud, and we shall have to deal with certain issues as a Committee. People will have to be given sufficient powers of investigation to reduce fraud in the system so that the

money can be spent elsewhere. It is not easy, but we have responsibilities on this Committee as well.

Mr Tierney: I must respond to your remarks. Allowing them to pass would imply we were not against social security fraud; we are against it. It is a concern, and we know it must be tackled. However, that must be done in the proper way. For instance, people will be investigated without their even knowing it. However, I am totally opposed to fraud.

The Chairperson: Is this about the sharing of information between the Housing Executive and the Department for Social Development?

Mr J O'Neill: It is more to do with electronic access to information, so that rather than obtain the information in writing we can do so electronically where it is available — particularly credit references, which are mostly supplied electronically.

Question put, That the Committee is content with the clause.

The Committee divided: Ayes 4, Noes 2.

AYES

Fred Cobain, Mark Robinson, Tom Hamilton, Sammy Wilson

NOES

Michelle Gildernew, John Tierney

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause 3 (Code of practice about use of information powers)

Mr S Wilson: At what stage will we be told the actual code of practice?

The Chairperson: After we have completed work on the Bill. We cannot discuss the code until the legislation goes through.

Mr J O'Neill: We have given you the draft code, but it will not be formally available to the public or anyone else until after the Bill has passed.

The Chairperson: We cannot discuss it until the legislation has gone through, though we have the draft.

Mr S Wilson: The clause is just giving them the power.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, *put and agreed to.*

Clause 4 (Arrangements for payments in respect of information)

Ms Gildernew: I should like clarification on the matter. The clause allows the Department to make payments for information obtained from credit reference agencies and telecommunications providers. I have

heard that the Department has been considering the use of information from supermarket value cards to check the amount of money a person spends and decide whether they have been fraudulent.

Mr McCurry: That is the first I have heard of it. If it is not in the legislation, we shall not be able to enquire of those types of organisations; that much is clear.

Ms Gildernew: Will it go into the legislation that you will be able to enquire of Tesco?

Mr McCurry: No. The code of practice will be clear about the types of organisations of which we can enquire, for example banks and building societies. The list it will set out will not include supermarkets.

Ms Gildernew: I still feel that banks and building societies should not pass on information concerning people's bank accounts.

Question put, That the Committee is content with the clause.

The Committee divided: Ayes 5, Noes 1.

AYES

Fred Cobain, Tom Hamilton, Mark Robinson, John Tierney, Sammy Wilson

NOES

Michelle Gildernew

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause 5 (Supply of information)

Mr S Wilson: What is the significance of replacing the word "prescribed" by "specified in directions given by the Department"?

Mr J O'Neill: "Prescribed" means prescribed by regulations, so each time we wish to change any of the arrangements, we must do so by means of amending the set of regulations before the Committee. Under the proposed change it will be under directions given by the Department, which are not in the form of Statutory Rules. They would therefore not be subject to the same lengthy process of change. It is quicker for it to be done by amendment rather than Statutory Rule.

Mr S Wilson: Give me an example. What could now be changed by the direction of the Department rather than having to introduce a Statutory Rule? Would there be any scrutiny of the changes the Department decided?

Mr J O'Neill: The regulations cover the manner and form in which the information is to be supplied. All we should be doing is changing the manner and form in which the information is to be supplied rather than the information itself. If we want information to come electronically from the Executive rather than in writing, it is laborious for it to be done by a Statutory Rule each

time we change the method. It is therefore a direction made by the Department rather than a Statutory Rule.

Mr S Wilson: So it does not change the substance of the information you receive but the method.

Mr McCurry: You asked for an example. The type of information we currently receive includes the numbers of benefit claims determined and their outcome, information relating to overpayments and underpayments, methods of payment of housing benefit and information on anti-fraud activity generally. We already have processes in place to obtain that type of information on housing benefit. For example, we have electronic data transfer between income support, jobseeker's allowance claims and housing benefit so that, if someone makes a successful claim for income support, the housing benefit award can be granted automatically. It also lets our staff communicate more quickly with their counterparts in the Housing Executive to ensure that payments of both benefits are made promptly and ended simultaneously if a person returns to work.

Mr S Wilson: I want to be clear about the matter. Are you saying that the methods of transferring such information might change over the years and that it is to avoid having to change Statutory Rules? Why not just include them all and say that you can do it by a, b, c, d and e? If it is so inconsequential — the way that you have described it, it sounds innocuous — why not just have all those things prescribed so that everything is covered? The worrying thing is agreeing to something which leaves a fair amount of discretion to the Department without its having to come back. It may not matter, but it only creates suspicion when there are changes allowed which do not require public scrutiny or even public notification.

Mr J O'Neill: The regulations are about the method of transfer; they are not about what is being transferred. Previously, electronic data transfer was not possible, so it was not included in the regulations. When it became possible we had to include it. At present, a further development in data transfer would have to be provided for by an amendment to the Statutory Rule. In future, the provision would allow us to issue a direction to the Housing Executive stating that data transfer should be carried out by the new means, and we should not have to amend the Statutory Rule. This is similar to what is happening in Great Britain on the transfer of information between the housing authorities and the Benefits Agency.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clauses 6 to 12 agreed to.

Clause 13 (Delegation of functions)

Ms Gildernew: Can I clarify whether clause 13 takes into account cases where the Department or local office has mistakenly made an overpayment?

Mr S Wilson: It appears from the notes that it does. According to the clause, can you demand money back if I have not notified you that I have been overpaid, even though I might argue that I was not aware I had been paid an extra £10? Where the error is on the part of the Department, people who are on benefit and do not have a great deal of money may have received the payment in good faith. It is difficult to prove someone was aware of the mistake. The overpayment would have to be recouped from an already low level of income.

The explanatory note states:

“it appears to the Department or those authorities that: the making of the overpayment was attributable to an act or omission on the part of that person.”

It later says something about the part of the Department. Are you saying that you can recoup payment on those grounds?

Mr McCurry: The question of recoupment or recovery of an overpayment is a separate issue outside that of fraud per se. In all cases the decision would be taken by someone who works for the agency or for the Housing Executive if it concerns housing benefit. They would take account of the circumstances Mr Wilson outlined and make a judgement based on the circumstances of the case as to whether they should ask for recovery or recoupment. The circumstances that led to overpayment, including whether a mistake was made by either Department, would be taken into account before a decision were made. The individual customer will be notified if he or she is asked to pay the money, and the decision will be subject to appeal.

Those arrangements are normal in relation to overpayment and not peculiar to fraud. However, fraud cases also lead to overpayment of benefits that must be recovered.

Mr J O'Neill: The clause does not affect the rules relating to overpayment. If there is an overpayment in housing benefit and another benefit, it allows the Social Security Agency and the Housing Executive to operate jointly. It does not alter the law regarding overpayment of benefits. Instead it allows co-operation when there is a question of two different benefits.

Ms Gildernew: I take your point, but it says that this will mean two interviews and two sets of papers for the claimant. If an overpayment has been made accidentally by the Department and a person is dragged in for an interview, the word “offence” relating to overpayment in the explanatory memorandum implies that the person is guilty of something.

Mr J O'Neill: It is to do with fraud. There must be grounds for instituting proceedings against someone relating to an offence. In a case of offences relating to income support and housing benefit, it would allow the Housing Executive and the Social Security Agency to co-operate in imposing a penalty.

The Chairperson: An overpayment in itself is not fraud.

Mr J O'Neill: No, but this is only applicable in a case with fraud relating to two benefits. We are considering imposing an administrative penalty rather than prosecution. It deals with housing benefit, which is administered by the Housing Executive, and all the other benefits administered by the Social Security Agency. At present there is a separate administrative

penalty for each. Under this provision the Housing Executive and the Social Security Agency could co-operate.

Mr McCurry: The point is that, in such circumstances, the fraud would already have been proven.

Clauses 14 to 18 agreed to.

Schedule agreed to.

Written Answers

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 11 May 2001

Written Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Children's Commissioner: Interdepartmental Working Group

Ms Ramsey asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to advise if the community and voluntary sectors will be represented on the Interdepartmental Working Group for a Children's Commissioner.

(AQW 2633/00)

Reply: The interdepartmental group comprises senior officials from all NI Departments, plus colleagues from the Northern Ireland Office, and the Northern Ireland Court Service.

We recognise the valuable part that the community and voluntary sectors can play and they will be given every opportunity to make their views known. To facilitate this, we have established a Non Governmental Organisations' Forum to advise the interdepartmental group, which includes representatives from the community and voluntary sector.

Visit to Washington DC

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail (a) the costs of the recent visit by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to Washington DC, (b) those officials who accompanied them, (c) the reason why they accompanied them and (d) the costs associated with their visit. (AQW 2689/00)

Reply: The total costs associated with the visit by the First Minister, Deputy First Minister and supporting officials to Washington in March amount to just under £42,000 including car hire, accommodation and air fares. Within this figure, the costs of air fares and accommodation for accompanying officials amounts to £29,000.

The First Minister was accompanied by his Private Secretary and Principal Information Officer. The Deputy First Minister was accompanied by his Principal Private Secretary, Principal Information Officer and a Special Adviser. In addition, both Ministers were accompanied by a senior official from the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.

All officials provided support to Ministers during a range of meetings and engagements including with senior members of the US administration.

Liaison With the Department for Education and Employment

Mr Ford asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail any discussions with the Children's Unit within the Department for Education and Employment regarding its remit in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 2707/00)

Reply: The Children's Unit was established within the Department of Education and Employment in November 2000 to look at how best to improve service provision for children and young people and to work closely with the voluntary, statutory, and community sectors to develop a forward strategy.

It has no remit in Northern Ireland as these matters fall within the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Executive. However, officials have been in contact with counterparts in the Unit and will liaise with them to exchange information and best practice in relation to the development of a Children's Strategy in Northern Ireland.

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Fisheries Issues

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail all meetings she and her officials have had with Ministers of the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly and the Irish Government relative to the Fishing Industry in the last twelve months.

(AQW 2566/00)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers): [*holding answer 3 May 2001*]: I have met Mr Fahey TD on several occasions in the last year, namely 5 July 2000, 10 November 2000 and 6 April 2001. At meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council, on the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights sector. I also had dinner with Mr Fahey on 7 December which included discussion on fisheries issues. I met with Ms Brankin MSP in the pre meeting to the Fisheries Council on 13

March and at the Fisheries Council in Brussels on 14 December. I have not met with my Welsh counterpart to discuss fisheries issues.

Fishing Vessel 'Tie-up' Scheme

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail any discussions she has had with a Minister of the Scottish Parliament regarding the fishing vessel 'tie-up' scheme. (AQW 2617/00)

Ms Rodgers: Prior to and in the margins of the December 2000 Fisheries Council I had discussions with other Fisheries Ministers including the Scottish Minister on a range of issues including the impact of the stock recovery programmes and the associated issue of not paying compensation for reductions in fishing opportunities created as a result of stock recovery programmes or reductions in quota.

Fishing Vessel 'Tie-up' Scheme

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she has made representation to the Minister of Finance and Personnel to acquire additional resources for the fishing vessel 'tie up' scheme. (AQW 2618/00)

Ms Rodgers: I have made no representations to the Minister for Finance and Personnel for additional resources for a fishing vessel 'tie up' scheme. As I clarified to the Assembly during the recent fisheries debate on 27 March, I have no proposals to introduce such a scheme as it is not my policy to compensate fishermen for reductions in fishing opportunities as a result of stock recovery programmes or quota reductions.

Outgoers Mark 2

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (a) how much money will be made available to pig farmers in Northern Ireland under the Pig Outgoers Scheme mark 2, and (b) if farmers will receive guidance in relation to the likely compensation figure involved. (AQW 2657/00)

Ms Rodgers: There is no regional breakdown of the provision made available for Outgoers Mark 2. There is a UK scheme which operates on a competitive basis. The amount that ultimately will be paid to producers in Northern Ireland is entirely dependent on their success in the bidding process.

You will be aware that Outgoers Mark 2 closed to applications on 20 April. My officials were unable to provide specific guidance on the level of compensation producers should seek since this scheme, as with the first part of Outgoers, was based on competitive tendering.

We did stress the competitive element in all discussions with applicants. However, it was for applicants to decide themselves what maximum level of bid they considered would (a) provide a level of compensation (acceptable to them) for staying out of pig production; and (b) succeed in the bidding competition. My officials were not in a position to advise producers as to the level at which they should pitch their tenders.

Cost of Disinfection Procedures

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the cost to the Department of disinfectant procedures at (a) the Northern Ireland ports and (b) at the border with the Republic of Ireland. (AQW 2685/00)

Ms Rodgers: The information in the form you request is not readily available because the cost of disinfection procedures is not itemised separately from the myriad of other FMD costs incurred by the Department. There is no obvious or easy method of disaggregating the individual disinfection costs.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Risk Assessment

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she will publish a risk assessment report on the spread of foot-and-mouth disease on the sheep flock, cattle herd and pig herd in Northern Ireland. (AQW 2686/00)

Ms Rodgers: DARD is currently undertaking a serological survey on the extent of foot-and-mouth disease sheep in Northern Ireland. Some 10,000 samples are being taken per day. Advice will be issued once results have been assessed.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Compensation

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (a) the amount of compensation paid to farmers following the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease (b) the number of (i) cattle (ii) sheep (iii) pigs (iv) and other animals for which compensation was paid and (c) the amount of compensation paid in respect of each category of animal. (AQW 2693/00)

Ms Rodgers: At 1st May 2001 the total amount of compensation paid to farmers following the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease is £1,275,774. The number of animals compensated for by species is (i) cattle 409 (ii) sheep 9,150 (iii) pigs 992 and (iv) goats 3. The amount of compensation paid to date by species is (i) cattle £240,235 (ii) sheep £979,584 (iii) pigs £55,830 (iv) goats £125.

Disinfection Facilities: Lifford/Strabane

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to confirm that there were no officials available on the Lifford/Strabane border crossing over the Easter week-end and that vehicles coming from the Republic of Ireland to Northern Ireland were not disinfected. (AQW 2720/00)

Ms Rodgers: The approach we adopt endeavours to balance risk and response, and apply measures where the threat is highest.

The threat of transmission of FMD to Northern Ireland is predominantly from GB and the focus of our cleaning and disinfection work is therefore at ports and airports. A second but much lower risk of transmission is from the ROI where so far there has only been one outbreak. We reacted to that development by manning roads on the Armagh/Louth border and providing disinfection facilities. The situation is kept under daily review and, in line with the balanced risk/response approach, I will ensure that appropriate new or enhanced precautions are put in place if and when any new threat emerges.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Compensation

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps she is taking to ensure that compensation is paid solely in respect of those livestock that were present on holdings where foot- and-mouth disease has been diagnosed. (AQW 2721/00)

Ms Rodgers: Compensation is only payable for animals present on a holding and where it is considered that their slaughter is necessary to prevent the spread of foot-and- mouth disease. All such animals are valued by a DARD valuation officer, or independent valuer, and compensation is only paid on confirmation of slaughter. Procedures dictate that compensation cannot be paid for animals not present at the time of valuation.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Compensation

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (a) the total number of animals culled in Northern Ireland as a result of foot- and-mouth disease (b) the breakdown of the numbers of each type of animal culled (c) the total amount of compensation paid as a result of the cull and (d) the number of claimants who have received compensation. (AQW 2732/00)

Ms Rodgers: Some 45,724 animals have been culled to date consisting of 4,253 cattle, 37,880 sheep, 3,588 pigs and 3 goats. Compensation amounting to £1,275,774 has been paid to 108 producers in respect of 10,554 animals. Final cull and compensation figures will not be available until the disease is eradicated from Northern Ireland.

Number of People Employed in Agriculture

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of people employed directly in agriculture at the latest date for which figures are available. (AQW 2793/00)

Ms Rodgers: In the June 2000 Agricultural and Horticultural Census, the number of persons employed in farm work at the Census date was 57,823. These include full and part-time farmers, their spouses and other workers, paid and unpaid.

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) use information from the June Agricultural Census to estimate the numbers of self-employed persons and employees in agriculture on a basis consistent with statistics for other sectors; their estimate for 2000 is 35,403. This figure excludes part-time farmers, who are deemed to be recorded elsewhere, and the spouses of the principal farmers.

Using both definitions, the numbers employed each year between 1991 and 2000 are shown in the attached table, together with the annual percentage changes.

NUMBERS OF PERSONS EMPLOYED ON NORTHERN IRELAND FARMS, JUNE 1991-2000

Year	Persons working on farms ¹	DETI employment in agriculture ²		
	Persons	% change over previous year	Persons	% change over previous year
1991	63,596	-1.8	42,379	-2.6
1992	62,939	-1.0	42,052	-0.8
1993	62,992	+0.1	41,130	-2.2
1994	63,135	+0.2	40,463	-1.6
1995	62,953	-0.3	39,809	-1.6
1996	62,494	-0.7	38,480	-3.3
1997	61,877	-1.0	38,048	-1.1
1998	61,096	-1.3	37,724	-0.9
1999	59,251	-3.0	36,144	-4.2
2000	57,823	-2.4	35,403	-2.1

Source: June Agricultural and Horticultural Censuses.

Notes: 1. Includes full-and part-time farmers, spouses, other full-time, part-time and casual workers, paid and unpaid.

2. Excludes part-time farmers and the spouses of the principal farmers.

Veterinary Surgeons

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of veterinary surgeons employed by her Department in the last three years. (AQW 2794/00)

Ms Rodgers: The following details the number of Veterinary Surgeons employed by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development:

April 99	April 00	April 01
150	156	163

In addition the Department would from time to time call upon the services of Panel Veterinary Surgeons. Although 17 Veterinary Surgeons are currently on the Panel they are generally used infrequently.

The Department also calls upon the services of Private Veterinary Practitioners, mainly for tuberculosis testing. There are currently 93 approved veterinary practices. There are also 78 practices approved for Export Certification duties.

Number of People Employed in Agriculture

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (a) the estimated number of people employed in agriculture in each of the past ten years and (b) what the percentage change was in each year. (AQW 2836/00)

Ms Rodgers: In the June 2000 Agricultural and Horticultural Census, the number of persons employed in farm work at the Census date was 57,823. These include full and part-time farmers, their spouses and other workers, paid and unpaid.

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) uses information from the June Agricultural Census to estimate the numbers of self-employed persons and employees in agriculture on a basis consistent with statistics for other sectors; this estimate for 2000 is 35,403. This figure excludes part-time farmers, who are deemed to be recorded elsewhere, and the spouses of the principal farmers.

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Source: June Agricultural and Horticultural Censuses.

Notes: 1. Includes full-and part-time farmers, spouses, other full-time, part-time and casual workers, paid and unpaid.

2. Excludes part-time farmers and the spouses of the principal farmers.

Castlederg Area Based Strategy

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 2522/00, to confirm (a) when the two projects will be subject to evaluation and (b) the pre-determined criteria to be used.

(AQW 2841/00)

Ms Rodgers:

- The two projects are subject to evaluation by the Department on the basis outlined within the respective letters of offer issued to the project promoters. This evaluation of performance against targets will be carried out on an ongoing basis, initially against specific targets for each project and subsequently as part of the overall evaluation of the Castlederg Area Based Strategy. The evaluation process for specific projects funded under the Area Based Strategy is expected to be completed by December 2001 with the evaluation of the overall Strategy anticipated by Summer 2002.
- The indicators against which the performance of these two projects will be measured are contained within the respective letters of offer and are detailed below:

Garvagh Community Hall – Fixtures & fittings

- to create community cohesion within the area;
- to provide a range of community services, training and education programmes, youth and elderly facilities, and activity programmes for women and young people;
- to improve the environmental appearance of the area by renovating a previously derelict building;
- to create one full time job in the facility, as well as offering employment opportunities through training and employment initiatives;
- the completion of the facility within the timescale and resources identified;

- the production of project performance information, detailing financial and non financial information including employment, user numbers and cashflows.

MourneDerg Partnership- IT suite

- to provide a quality facility for use by the local community within the MourneDerg area, which will be used for facilitating the development of new skills through the delivery of computer training courses;
- to encourage the development of human resource skills within the area, with 120 people successfully completing computer skills training courses;
- to create 3 part time tutor posts;
- to provide a suite of 10 computers and 4 printers;
- to provide internet access for the trainees;
- to seek to encourage participation in training by young people and women to enhance employment skills;

In turn, these performance indicators contribute towards the overall objectives of the Castlederg Area Based Strategy.

CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Public Libraries: IT Investment

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the funds allocated during the last three years to the five education and library boards for investment in information technology, including the internet, in public libraries. (AQW 2652/00)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McGimpsey): The Department funds the Public Library Service at 100% through the Education and Library Boards. Investment in information technology is a matter for each Education and Library Board.

Public Access to Information and Services

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure 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 2662/00)

Mr McGimpsey: My Department is committed to effective communication with the public. It recognises, however, that there is a risk that some sections of the public will not enjoy equality of opportunity in accessing information provided by my Department. There are three particular risk areas:

- people with sensory and learning disabilities may have particular difficulties with information in print;

- members of minority ethnic groups, whose first language is not English, may have difficulties with information provided only in English;
- some local newspapers are read predominantly by members of only one of the major religious-political groups (ie Protestants/Unionists or Catholics/Nationalists).

In disseminating information through the local press, my Department does ensure that press statements and public advertisements are carried by all three Belfast daily newspapers. Where press statements of public advertisements are aimed at a particular area within Northern Ireland, the Department ensures that the information is disseminated through at least two local newspapers circulating in that area, ensuring that the information is accessible to both main political-religious sections of the community.

My Department has given commitments in its Equality Scheme on equality of opportunity in accessing information without prejudice to any rights to information in the current Code of Practice on Open Government or in the new Freedom of Information legislation.

My Department intends that all of its services are fully accessible to all parts of the community and will assess its arrangements for providing information in large print, audio cassette, signed video cassette and various language formats.

The assessment will take account of the statutory requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; the likely demand for information in such formats across its main policy areas; resource implications; and, in particular, the recommendations of current cross-departmental groups. These include the Promoting Social Inclusion (PSI) working groups on minority ethnic people and on access to information and the Steering Group on the Council of Europe Charter on Regional or Minority Languages. The assessment will make recommendations on how public access to information can be better ensured by improving arrangements for providing information in different formats and languages. My Department will consult on these recommendations and will implement them appropriately.

In locating its offices, intended to be open to the public my Department will seek to secure that no section of the community is deterred from visiting, for whatever reason. All public offices will maintain a welcoming and harmonious environment and the Department will adhere to the relevant provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

Sports Council for NI: Grants Awarded to GAA and IFA

Mr Carrick asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail those grants awarded by the Sports

Council for Northern Ireland in each of the past 10 financial years, for which figures are available, to (a) The Gaelic Athletic Association and (b) Association Football. (AQW 2683/00)

Mr McGimpsey: The information is included in the tables below. The Lottery was introduced in 1994/95 and funding from this source did not become available until 1995/96.

Year	Gaelic Athletic Association		Association Football	
	Exchequer £	Lottery £	Exchequer £	Lottery £
1990/01	23,089	-	23,817	-
1991/92	22,463	-	20,556	-
1992/93	29,627	-	20,346	-
1993/94	24,285	-	34,897	-
1994/95	18,489	Nil	15,148	Nil
1995/96	35,166	167,075	37,044	22,400
1996/97	32,090	Nil	60,115	Nil
1997/98	44,346	Nil	47,719	Nil
1998/99	20,267	511,938	36,851	50,300
1999/00	44,813	Nil	52,285	15,000
2000/01	22,122	25,000	67,800	119,186

PRONI: Curatorial Staff

Mrs Nelis asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to explain why, when the recent review of curatorial grade F and E work identifies the need for 11 additional curatorial staff to be appointed, the Management of PRONI continues to refuse to offer the posts to those grade E staff who formerly held similar posts in 1996.

(AQW 2690/00)

Mr McGimpsey: In my response to AQW1695 dated 19 February I indicated to you that PRONI's senior management team was considering a number of recommendations contained in various organisational and efficiency reports. The Management Team has now decided on the recommendations which it proposes to accept and is in the process of implementing them.

In particular PRONI has accepted the findings of the review of curatorial F and E work in relation to grading. These include the identification and description of three levels of archival work. Based on descriptions of these levels the review team concluded, and PRONI accepts, that the bulk of work which needs to be done lies at grade F level and below.

In these circumstances it would not be appropriate for PRONI to employ higher graded (and higher paid) curatorial grade E staff for an indefinite period to carry out work at the lower curatorial F level. To accept this

proposition would leave the Department open to criticism and possible censure on a number of fronts:-

- it would run counter to grading standards and principles which underpin pay arrangements across the NICS;
- it would be inefficient and would not provide good value for money for the taxpayer;
- it would set a precedent which could give rise to claims under equal pay legislation from, for example, staff at grade F level who would be carrying out the same tasks for less pay.

Subject to the availability of finance, and to agreement on changes to the recruitment and progression processes, PRONI wishes to recruit up to 12 staff at curatorial F level and 1 at curatorial E level. The latter case may well provide an opportunity for the staff formerly graded as curatorial E to apply for an appointment in PRONI.

British Association for Shooting and Conservation

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether the Sports Council for Northern Ireland recognises the British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC) as a body to represent shooting interests in Northern Ireland. (AQW 2697/00)

Mr McGimpsey: The Sports Council recognises BASC as a bona fide representative body of shooting interests in Northern Ireland but not as a Governing Body for Competitive Shooting disciplines. The BASC are not affiliated to the International Governing Bodies for shooting disciplines which organise Olympic/World championships.

Shooting Rights for Lough Erne

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to consider awarding long-term shooting rights for Lough Erne rather than the current three-year renewal system and when could the new process commence.

(AQW 2752/00)

Mr McGimpsey: With devolution, ownership of the public shooting rights on Lough Erne transferred to my Department from the former Department of Agriculture. As you may be aware, that Department (through the Rivers Agency), at the request of Lough Erne Wildfowling Council in conjunction with the British Association for Shooting and Conservation, entered into a licence arrangement effectively allowing them management control of these sporting rights for an initial trial period of three years commencing 1 September 1998.

My Department has inherited and honoured that licence which is due to be reviewed at the end of its three-year tenure. You have my assurance that your request will be considered when formulating our future policy for the management of these Lough Erne shooting rights.

EDUCATION

Special Educational Needs and Disability: Legislation

Mr McGrady asked the Minister of Education to outline when he will bring forward legislation which will reflect special educational needs and disability; and to make a statement. (AQW 2619/00)

The Minister of Education (Mr M McGuinness): I am pleased to confirm that my Department has begun work on the preparation of legislation for Northern Ireland equivalent to that contained in the Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill currently making its way through Westminster.

This legislation will impinge upon the functions of my Department and that of the Department of Higher and Further Education Training and Employment. Dr Séan Farren Minister of that Department and I have agreed joint sponsorship of this legislation. It is our aim to introduce this legislation in the next Assembly Session.

Consultation Document: Common Funding Formula

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Education to confirm if the consultation document on a Common Funding Formula for Grant-Aided Schools is available in Irish and if so, (a) how much did it cost to produce in Irish; and (b) was the contract for translating it into Irish put out for tender and if so, who was the successful bidder or if not, what process was used to award the contract. (AQW 2668/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The Consultation Document on a Common Funding Formula for Grant-Aided Schools and the Response Form were published on 5 April 2001 and will be available in Irish to meet the needs of Irish-medium schools and units.

Because of the size of these documents, the normal translation service was not able to undertake the work so a single tender action was initiated with another of the recommended translators to translate both documents into Irish at a cost of £5,473.50. The document is being reproduced by the internal facility within the Department.

NEELB: Capital Funding

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Education to detail what funding he has made available to the NEELB in each financial year since 1998 for the improvement of school buildings and to list the school buildings that have benefited from any such funding. (AQW 2730/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Capital funding made available to the NEELB in each financial year since 1998 is as follows:-

1998/99	1999/00	2000/01
£8.686m	£5.884m*	£8.577m*

* Excludes £1.290m and £0.9m respectively for furniture and equipment reclassified as recurrent in line with new accounting policies.

The school buildings that benefited from this funding are attached.

1998/99

CONTROLLED NURSERY SCHOOLS

Ballyclare	Mossley
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CONTROLLED PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Abbots Cross	Damhead	Loanends
Ballycastle	Doagh	Macosquin
Ballycraigy	Eden (Ballymoney)	Magherafelt
Ballykeel	Eden (Carrickfergus)	Mossgrove
Ballymoney	Fourtowns	Oakfield
Ballysally	Garryduff	Olderfleet
Broughshane	Glengormley	Portstewart
Buick Memorial	Gracehill	Rathenraw
Camphill	Groggan	Templepatrick
Carhill	Harpur's Hill	Tildarg
Carnaghts	Harryville	Whiteabbey
Carnalridge	Hollybank	Whitehead
Castleroe	Killowen	
Creavery	Kilrea	

CONTROLLED SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Ballee Community High	Cullybackey High	Newtownabbey Community HS
Ballycastle High	Glengormley High	Parkhall College
Ballyclare Secondary	Larne High	Randalstown High
Carrickfergus College	Maghera High	
Coleraine Girls' Secondary	Magherafelt High	

CONTROLLED GRAMMAR

Antrim Grammar	Cambridge House Boys'	Carrickfergus Grammar
Ballyclare High	Cambridge House Girls'	Coleraine High

SPECIAL SCHOOLS

Beechgrove	Loughan	Rosstulla
Downshire	Riverside	
Dunfane	Roddensvale	

SCHOOL MEALS ACCOMMODATION

Larne & Inver Primary	St Olcan's High	Toome Primary
St Nicholas' Primary		

1999/2000

CONTROLLED NURSERY SCHOOLS

Dunclug	Mossley
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CONTROLLED PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Antrim	D H Christie Memorial	Kilrea
Ballyclare	Damhead	Larne & Inver
Ballykeel	Dunseverick	Magherafelt
Ballymena	Earlview	Moorfields
Ballymoney	Eden (Ballymoney)	Mossgrove
Ballytober	Eden (Carrickfergus)	Moyle
Broughshane	Fourtowns	Oakfield
Bushvalley	Garryduff	Portstewart
Camphill	Glengormley	Springfarm
Carnaghts	Gracehill	The Irish Society's
Carnalbanagh	Groggan	The Thompson
Carnalridge	Harpur's Hill	Whiteabbey
Castledawson	Harryville	Whitehouse
Castleroe	Hollybank	Woodburn

CONTROLLED SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Ballee Community High	Dunclug College	Massereene Comm. College
Ballycastle High	Dunluce	Monkstown Comm. School
Ballyclare Secondary	Glengormley High	Newtownabbey Community HS
Carrickfergus College	Maghera High	Parkhall College
Cullybackey High	Magherafelt High	

CONTROLLED GRAMMAR

Antrim Grammar	Cambridge House Boys'
Ballyclare High	Coleraine High

SPECIAL SCHOOLS

Jordanstown	Riverside	Sandelford
Dunfane	Rosstulla	

SCHOOL MEALS ACCOMMODATION

Cross Roads Primary	St MacNissi's PS, Tannaghmore	Toome Primary
St Anthony's Primary	Larne & Inver Primary	

2000/01

CONTROLLED NURSERY SCHOOLS

Ballyclare	Dunclug	Monkstown
Ballymena	Magherafelt	Steeple

CONTROLLED PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Antrim	Eden (Ballymoney)	Moyle
Ballycastle	Eden (Carrickfergus)	Parkhall
Ballyclare	Glengormley	Portrush
Ballysally	Gorran	Portstewart
Ballymena	Gracehill	Randalstown Central
Buick Memorial	Greenisland	Silverstream
Bushvalley	Harpur's Hill	Springfarm
Cairncastle	Harryville	The Irish Society's
Camphill	Hollybank	Toreagh
Carnmoney	Kilmoyle	Upper Ballyboley
Carnaghts	Kilrea	Victoria
Carnalbanagh	Kilross	Whiteabbey
Carrickfergus Central	King's Park	Whitehead
Damhead	Knockloughrim	Whitehouse
D H Christie Memorial	Larne & Inver	William Pinkerton
Dunamuggy	Linn	Woodlawn
Dunseverick	Mallusk	

CONTROLLED SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Ballymoney High	Downshire	Magherafelt High
Carrickfergus College	Glengormley High	Massereene Comm. College
Coleraine Boys' Secondary	Larne High	Monkstown Comm. School
Cullybackey High	Maghera High	

CONTROLLED GRAMMAR

Ballyclare High	Carrickfergus Grammar
Cambridge House Boys'	Coleraine High

SPECIAL SCHOOLS

Dunfane	Roddensvale	Thornfield
Loughan	Rosstulla	
Riverside	Sandleford	

SCHOOL MEALS ACCOMMODATION

Bushmills Primary	St Anthony's Primary	St Joseph's PS, Crumlin
Carniny Primary	St Brigid's PS, Ballymoney	St MacNissi's PS, Tannaghmore

Pre-school Places

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Education to detail the progress made towards the provision of pre-school places for all. (AQW 2733/00)

Mr M McGuinness: In 1997 there were funded places for 45% of all children in their final pre-school year. As a result of my Department's Pre-School Education Expansion Programme, that figure has risen to 75% this academic year (2000/01), and is expected to exceed 85% in 2001/02. The aim of the programme is to have places for all children in their final pre-school year whose parents wish it by March 2003.

Radon Gas Concentration in Schools

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister of Education whether he is aware of the number of grant aided schools in Northern Ireland which have radon levels of over 400 Becquerels. (AQW 2754/00)

Mr M McGuinness: I am aware of only one school at present where radon gas concentrations exceed 400 becquerels per cubic metre. The school is taking advice from the Health and Safety Executive as to what further action is necessary.

Radon Gas: School Surveys

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister of Education to detail his plans to survey schools for radon gas. (AQW 2755/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The North-Eastern, South-Eastern and Southern Education and Library Boards have all carried out tests for radon gas in schools in their areas and the Western Board is planning to undertake similar tests. There are no plans to survey schools in the Belfast Board area because of the low radon levels in the geographical area.

North/South Special Education Co-ordinating Group

Ms Morrice asked the Minister of Education to explain why Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) professionals have been excluded from the North South Task Force that is deliberating on the infrastructure needed for helping children with autism. (AQW 2759/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The North-South Special Education Co-ordinating Group is limited to officials from the respective Education Departments. An Inter-Board Task Group has been established in the North to advise my Department on training and other matters relating to education provision for autistic children. For manageability reasons, this Group was kept small, but it is engaging with a range of individuals and organisations

with an interest in the education of autistic children. A representative of the Group has already met with a parents' group supporting the Applied Behaviour Analysis approach and one professional in this area.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: School Closures

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of primary and non-primary schools that have been affected by closure on account of foot-and-mouth disease. (AQW 2763/00)

Mr M McGuinness: One primary school was closed for two days and one non-primary school was closed

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Advice to Parents

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Education what advice is being given to parents in the rural community on whether children should be withheld from school on account of the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease. (AQW 2764/00)

Mr M McGuinness: On the advice of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Department of Education issued general guidance to all schools on 2 March 2001 indicating that it would not be necessary for schools to close and that, subject to local circumstances, schools would be expected to remain open.

Education and Library Boards and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools provided further advice in relation to children who had recent close contact with livestock and attend schools in a designated infected area.

This guidance provided that such pupils should keep away from school and:

- can return to school when 7 days have elapsed since their last contact with livestock provided the livestock concerned has not been identified as having the foot and mouth virus;
- should not return to school if their lifestyle involves ongoing contact with livestock.

Concordat With the Department of Education and Employment

Mr G Kelly asked the Minister of Education to outline when he expects to publish the bilateral concordat between his Department and the Department for Education and Employment. (AQW 2930/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The Secretary of State for Education and Employment and I have today agreed the text of the Concordat between the Department of Education and Employment and the Department of Education. Copies of the Concordat have been placed in the Assembly Library.

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Joint Energy Council

Mr McGrady asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline when he will establish a Joint Energy Council to serve the interests of gas and electricity consumers; and to make a statement. (AQW 2676/00)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Sir Reg Empey): My Department circulated a paper to interested parties in early March seeking views on the main options for the reform of the existing gas and electricity consumer representation arrangements. Most responses have now been received and these are currently being analysed. I plan to announce my preferred option before the summer recess. Changes to the existing arrangements will require primary legislation.

Lintrend Textiles Limited/Lintrend Lamont Limited: Grants Paid

Mr O'Connor asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail what grants have been paid to Lintrend Textiles Limited and Lintrend Lamont Limited since 1989 and for what purpose. (AQW 2691/00)

Sir Reg Empey: Lintrend Textiles (NI) Limited first approached LEDU in 1989 with a view to acquiring assistance to develop the company. A number of meetings took place with LEDU and the company was requested to provide more details - only limited information was forthcoming and as a result no assistance was offered to the company.

Lintrend Lamont Limited received no LEDU assistance.

IDB has no record of any grant payments to either Lintrend Textiles and Lintrend Lamont Ltd.

Regional Research, Development and Innovation Strategy

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline progress to date in the creation of a Regional Research, Development and Innovation Strategy. (AQO 1420/00)

Sir Reg Empey: A Working Group, comprised of senior officials from NI Departments, has been reconvened to carry forward the work of preparing a Regional Research, Development and Innovation Strategy. The Group is in the process of commissioning consultants to assist with the drafting of this Strategy; an important element of which will be a consultation exercise with the key interest groups.

North West 200: Cancellation

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the estimated loss in visitors and finance to the North West as a result of the cancellation of the North West 200 motorcycle event. (AQO 1399/00)

Sir Reg Empey: I am pleased that a good proportion of accommodation bookings made in the North West for the period of the event have not been cancelled. I hope that the alternative 'North West Fest', organised by Coleraine Borough Council, will minimise loss of revenue to the area.

North/South Tourism Company

Mr Neeson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to confirm if the North/South Tourism Company has started its work to promote Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland as an island destination in the North American market. (AQO 1398/00)

Sir Reg Empey: The company is currently developing major proposals for marketing and promotional activities in key international markets including North America. It is intended that these will be in place for the 2002 tourist season.

Questar/Bord Gais: Gas Pipeline Licence

Mrs Courtney asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the current position of the application by Questar/Bord Gais for a gas pipeline licence and when an announcement is likely to be made. (AQO 1411/00)

Sir Reg Empey: Gas Licences are issued by the Director General of Gas for Northern Ireland. I understand that the application by Questar/Bord Gais is currently the subject of negotiations between the companies and the Director General. It is not possible to say when the negotiations will be completed and an announcement made.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Effect on Business and Tourism in the South Down Area

Mr McGrady asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to give his assessment of the impact of foot-and-mouth disease on business and tourist establishments in the South Down area. (AQO 1365/00)

Sir Reg Empey: The foot-and-mouth outbreak has had a significant effect on many businesses particularly those involved or associated with the agricultural and tourism sectors. My Department has been specifically monitoring the effects on the tourism and food processing sectors of industry. The Executive has set up a taskforce led by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First

Minister involving my and other Departments to monitor the wider economic 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.

As announced previously, I have made £1million of Government funding available to the Northern Ireland Tourist Board to implement an integrated tourism recovery plan. This is aimed to restore tourism business throughout Northern Ireland. I am aware that the Kingdoms of Down Regional Tourism Organisation (covering North Down, Ards, Lisburn and Down District Council areas) has availed of funding under the NITB recovery package. Marketing assistance will also be available, indirectly, to tourism businesses in the South Down area via additional funding provided to accommodation sectoral groups.

Redundancies

Mr M Robinson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail how many people have been made redundant in Northern Ireland in both public and private sectors since 1998. (AQO 1407/00)

Sir Reg Empey: Robust estimates of redundancies split by public/private sector are not available. However, over the period from January 1998 to March 2001 there have been 15,489 confirmed redundancies in Northern Ireland jointly in the public and private sectors.

New TSN: Funding Formulae

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to provide details of those reviews which he has undertaken or is undertaking this year to build New TSN into funding formulae. (AQO 1410/00)

Sir Reg Empey: As part of ongoing financial monitoring procedures, DETI identifies the New TSN implications of each policy or programme and this information is considered during the planning and allocating of resources. A consultant was recently appointed by OFMDFM to assist departments in further refining their method of identifying New TSN impact.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Impact on Businesses

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to give his assessment of the impact of foot-and-mouth disease on businesses; and to make a statement. (AQO 1384/00)

Sir Reg Empey: The foot-and-mouth outbreak has had a significant effect on many businesses particularly those involved or associated with the agricultural and tourism sectors. My Department has been specifically monitoring the effects on the tourism and food processing

sectors of industry. The Executive has set up a taskforce led by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister involving my and other Departments to monitor the wider economic 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.

Cross Border Business Park: Strabane/Lifford

Mr McMenamin asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to consider setting up a cross border business park on the Strabane/Lifford border in conjunction with the New Single Economic Agency and the Industrial Development Authority; and to make a statement.

(AQO 1401/00)

Sir Reg Empey: IDB and IDA officials are co-operating in a number of ventures under the Invest North West Initiative aimed at attracting further investment to Strabane, Derry, Limavady and Donegal. There are no plans currently for a cross-border business park at Strabane/Lifford. However IDB is committed to providing 20000 sq ft of new business space in Strabane.

Tourism: Promoting Agricultural Produce

Mr Bradley asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if he will undertake to avail of the opportunities that exist in Tourism promotional literature and advertising to promote the quality of Northern Ireland agricultural produce. (AQO 1392/00)

Sir Reg Empey: I have asked IDB and LEDU to draw up an enhanced programme of marketing support for the food processing sector. This will be co-ordinated with the promotional activities of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board to ensure maximum effectiveness.

ENVIRONMENT

Roadworthiness of Cars Sold at Auction

Ms Morrice asked the Minister of the Environment to introduce legislation to ensure that all cars for sale at auction, including those 'sold as seen', have passed basic mechanical checks to ensure they are safe and roadworthy before leaving the auction premises. (AQW 2706/00)

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Foster): Article 83 of the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 makes it an offence, subject to a maximum fine of £5000, for a person, to sell, offer to sell or supply a motor vehicle or trailer in an unroadworthy condition.

Case law has established that, for cars sold through auction, this liability does not pass to the auctioneer, on

the grounds that the auctioneer seeks offers to buy rather than making offers to sell. I have asked my officials to seek legal advice on whether, in these circumstances, Article 83 liability remains with the owner who puts the car up for auction. I will write to the Member when this advice has been received.

It should also be borne in mind that it is the responsibility of motorists to ensure that vehicles being driven on public roads comply with the requirements of the Motor Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999; and, if a vehicle is four years old or more, that it has a valid MOT certificate. Prospective buyers at auctions should therefore satisfy themselves about the roadworthiness of vehicles before purchase, including examination by a qualified engineer.

Noise Disturbance: 'The Sly Fox', Moy, Co. Tyrone

Mrs Carson asked the Minister of the Environment what account he took of the effect of noise disturbance to local residents when considering the application for an extension to 'The Sly Fox', Moy, Co Tyrone.
(AQW 2710/00)

Mr Foster: My Department consulted with the Environmental Health Department of Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council, which indicated that it had no objection in principle to the proposed extension.

My Department also took account of the nature of the proposal and its location, and concluded that the proposed extension to an existing licensed premise within a mixed-use area in a village centre location was an acceptable proposal.

While increasing the size of the premises creates potential for a larger number of patrons my Department cannot assume that this factor alone will necessarily result in an unacceptable increase in noise and disturbance.

The district council has the power to take action if noise nuisance occurs.

Visual Amenity: 'The Sly Fox', Moy, Co. Tyrone

Mrs Carson asked the Minister of the Environment what account he took of the effect on visual amenity when considering the application for an extension to 'The Sly Fox', Moy, Co Tyrone.
(AQW 2712/00)

Mr Foster: Policy CON 5 of the Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland was the relevant policy context at the time of the determination in 1998. The Department judged that this 2-storey rear extension to an existing 3-storey property was acceptable, as it did not make an undue impact on the scale or proportions of the existing property. In addition, the setting of the existing building,

together with the character and appearance of adjoining properties, was not prejudiced.

The original building is a listed building and a separate application for listed building consent was required and Historic Monuments and Buildings Branch was consulted. After some minor, mainly internal, alterations were carried out to the original submission, Historic Monuments and Buildings Branch confirmed that it had no objection to the scheme and was satisfied with its visual appearance.

General Planning Policies for Licensed Premises in Villages

Mrs Carson asked the Minister of the Environment when he will introduce policy guidelines for extensions or alterations to licensed premises in villages; and to make a statement.
(AQW 2713/00)

Mr Foster: General planning policies for development in towns and villages including extensions or alterations to licensed premises are set out in 'The Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland'. Land use and design issues are covered in Des 2, Des 8 and SP 18. Planning Policy Statement 3 'Roads Considerations' advises on all traffic matters. Supplementary planning guidance is contained within the 'Development Control Advice Note No. 7-Public Houses.'

Planning Service assesses the impact of such proposals through the planning application process with reference to these policies. Such applications are usually referred to the Environmental Health Department of the District Council for advice and comments especially on amenity matters.

As Planning Service considers the existing general policies and guidance to be adequate, the Department has no proposals to revise present policy, or to introduce new policy guidelines regarding extension or alterations to licensed premises.

Water Quality: Sampling Process

Mr J Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment to list the rivers and lakes in Northern Ireland that are monitored for water quality and detail the regularity of the sampling process.
(AQW 2745/00)

Mr Foster: I am pleased to say that in 2000, following a review, the extent of the river network monitored by the Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) of my Department was more than doubled from 280 sites to 600 sites. This will enable some 5200 km of rivers to be classified biologically and some 4200 km to be classified chemically.

I am arranging for a full list of the sites in rivers and lakes which comprise the routine chemical and biological monitoring network to be sent to the Member. This list

also shows the frequency of sampling at each site during 2000. Information on water quality at these sites is available on the EHS web site (www.ehsni.gov.uk).

The rationale for the EHS monitoring strategy and objectives for the monitoring network are to be published in a short report which will be made available on the EHS web site by June this year.

EC Consultation Paper, SEC (2001) 517

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of the Environment to give his assessment of how the executive will respond to a European Commission consultation paper, of 27 March 2001, SEC (2001) 517, setting out the Commission services' initial views on the challenges and opportunities of sustainable development. (AQW 2750/00)

Mr Foster: Responsibility for responding to European Commission proposals, including the consultation paper for an EU Sustainable Development Strategy, rests with the UK government.

I understand that the consultation paper is broadly in line with the UK Government's Strategy on sustainable development, which was published in 1999. This set out four objectives to be met at the same time:

- social progress which recognises the needs of everyone;
- effective protection of the environment;
- prudent use of natural resources; and
- maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment.

These objectives are reflected in the Programme for Government. The Executive intends to consult on proposals for a Sustainable Development Strategy for Northern Ireland later in the year. The Commission's views will be taken into account as part of that process.

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

The Children's Fund: Allocation of Funds

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (a) the criteria used for the allocation of funds from the Children's Fund, (b) was this criteria subject to an Equality Impact Assessment and (c) was it formulated in consultation with the voluntary and community sector. (AQW 2708/00)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):

- (a) The criteria for the allocation of funds from the Children's Fund are:-
- that the proposal will provide direct support for children in need or young people at risk;

- where possible, that the proposal involves co-ordinated actions across Departments;
- where feasible, that the proposal complements existing actions by Departments or by non-governmental bodies; and
- where the proposal covers assistance for third parties, that there is a comprehensive management agreement available for the resources.

(b) The policy of establishing Executive Programme Funds, including the Children's Fund, was included in the draft Programme for Government, which was submitted to an Equality Impact Assessment and widespread consultation.

(c) The consultation process, which ran from 24 October until 15 January, involved a large number of non-governmental organisations. Responses were received from 120 organisations including many of the main children's organisations in Northern Ireland. In advance of Budget statement, I met with a delegation from the Children's Fund Lobby Group to hear their views on the concept of the Children's Fund and I understand that Mr Haughey and Mr Nesbitt had a meeting to discuss its operation. The representations that were made by children's and other non-governmental organisations were taken into account in finalising the detailed criteria and management arrangements for the Children's Fund. The detailed arrangements for the distribution of the funds to the voluntary and community sector are currently being developed. There will be full consultation with the voluntary and community sector on these and they will be subject to an equality impact assessment.

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Public Access to Information and Services

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety 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 2663/00)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms de Brún): Section 8 of my Department's Equality Scheme sets out commitments on public access to information and services.

Steps taken this year to ensure public access to information include:

- face to face meetings, focus groups and public meetings with relevant groups to disseminate information and obtain views;
- convening of conferences with relevant groups;
- placing of relevant documents and consultation papers on the Department's Internet website;
- making available consultation documents in a range of accessible formats;
- making available the views expressed in consultation and produced summaries of key documents.

Actions planned this year include:

- assessing our arrangements for providing information as set out in the Department's Equality Scheme, and to consult widely on the findings and recommendations prior to implementation;
- disseminating findings arising from equality impact assessments and other public consultation exercises using a variety of accessible formats and methods;
- workshops on best practice and the production of guidelines for staff on public consultation.

Leagann Mír 8 de Scéim Chomhionannais mo Roinne gealltanais amach ar theacht an phobail ar eolas agus ar sheirbhísi.

I measc na mbeart a rinneadh i mbliana le cinntiú go dtagann an pobal ar eolas tá:

- cruinnithe aghaidh ar aghaidh, cruinnithe fócasghrúpa agus poiblí le grúpaí feiliúnacha chun eolas a scaipeadh agus chun tuairimí a fháil;
- tionól comhdhálacha le grúpaí feiliúnacha;
- cur cáipéisí feiliúnacha agus páipéir chomhairlithe ar líonláithreán Idirlín na Roinne;
- cur ar fáil cáipéisí comhairlithe i réimse leaganacha infhaighte;
- cur ar fáil na dtuairimí curtha in iúl sa phróiseas comhairlithe agus achoimrí ar eochaircháipéisí foilsithe.

I measc na mbeart pleanáilte i mbliana tá:

- Measúnú ar ár socruithe chun eolas a chur ar fáil, mar atá leagtha amach i Scéim Chomhionannais na Roinne, agus dul i gcomhairle fhorleathan ar na bearta agus ar na moltaí sula gcuirtear i bhfeidhm iad;
- scaipeadh na mbeart a thagann ó mheasúnuithe na héifeachta ó chomhionannas agus ó chleachtaí comhairlithe poiblí eile, ag úsáid leaganacha agus modhanna infhaighte éagsúla;
- ceardlanna ar an chleachtadh is fearr agus foilsiú treoirilínte don fhoireann ar chomhairliú poiblí.

Use of Private Hire Taxi Companies

Ms Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the amount of monies paid to private hire taxi companies by Trust Board area for each of the last four financial years for which figures are available. (AQW 2674/00)

Ms de Brún: The information required for the years 1996-2000 is as follows:

Trust	1997-1998	1998-1999	1999-2000	2000-2001
Altnagelvin	£3,084	£7,286	£7,809	£9,877
Armagh & Dungannon	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Belfast City Hospital	£158,502	£168,596	£155,674	£92,632
Causeway	£19,737	£22,557	£29,506	£42,356
Craigavon & Banbridge Community	£65,955	£73,248	£94,267	£124,599
Craigavon Area Hospitals	N/A	N/A	£132.80	£172.20
Down Lisburn	£149,063.70	£236,794.55	£253,618.07	£313,841.07
Foyle	£119,312	£134,043	£141,887	£150,200
Greenpark	£7,264.56	£5,731.42	£3,657.58	£7,153.45
Homefirst	£205,546	£197,065	£222,596	£240,996
Mater Hospital	£3,864.87	£8,264.29	£7,079.88	£10,404.72
Newry & Mourne	£87,545	£87,541	£111,609	£116,091
Ambulance Service	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
North & West Belfast	£103,011	£146,087	£140,814	£166,030
Royal Group of Hospitals	£10,608.60	£16,094.87	£14,366.86	£21,681.57
South & East Belfast	£71,262	£99,430	£150,358	£181,820
Sperrin Lakeland	£112,417*	£119,619*	£91,962	£156,619
Ulster Community & Hospitals	£79,384	£36,672	£44,005	£55,020
United Hospitals	N/A	£66,095	£64,396	£73,129

N/A = Not available

*estimated

Mar a leanas, seo an t-eolas a iarradh do na blianta 1996-2000:

IONTAOB HAS	1997-1998	1998-1999	1999-2000	2000-2001
Alt na nGealbhán	£3,084	£7,286	£7,809	£9,877
Ard Mhacha & Dún Geanainn	N/F	N/F	N/F	N/F
Otharlann Chathrach Bhéal Feirste	£158,502	£168,596	£155,674	£92,632
An Clochán	£19,737	£22,557	£29,506	£42,356
Pobal Craigavon & Droichead na Banna	£65,955	£73,248	£94,267	£124,599
Otharlanna Ceantair Craigavon	N/F	N/F	£132.80	£172.20
An Dún/Lios na gCearrbhach	£149,063.70	£236,794.55	£253,618.07	£313,841.07
An Feabhal	£119,312	£134,043	£141,887	£150,200
An Pháirc Ghlas	£7,264.56	£5,731.42	£3,657.58	£7,153.45
Homefirst	£205,546	£197,065	£222,596	£240,996
Otharlann an Mater	£3,864.87	£8,264.29	£7,079.88	£10,404.72
An tÚr agus An Mhúirn	£87,545	£87,541	£111,609	£116,091
Seirbhís Otharcharr	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
Béal Feirste Thuaidh & Thiar	£103,011	£146,087	£140,814	£166,030
Grúpa Ríoga na nOspidéal	£10,608.60	£16,094.87	£14,366.86	£21,681.57
Béal Feirste Theas & Thoir	£71,262	£99,430	£150,358	£181,820
Speirín Tír na Lochanna	£112,417*	£119,619*	£91,962	£156,619
Pobal Uladh & Ospidéal	£79,384	£36,672	£44,005	£55,020
Otharlanna Aontaithe	N/F	£66,095	£64,396	£73,129

N/F Níltear ar Fáil

*meastar

Use of Private Hire Taxis

Ms Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the criteria for the use of private hire taxis by Trust Boards. (AQW 2675/00)

Ms de Brún: A Regional Transport Manual for the HPSS was produced and issued by Department in June 1998. In relation to the use of taxis it states clearly that their use should be strictly controlled in order to minimise costs. Trusts have to ensure that when taxis are used to support fleet operation for regular or *ad hoc* work, that there are proper management protocols and monitoring arrangements in place.

Trusts must have mechanisms in place to ensure relevant Directors are notified of expenditure on taxis. Also taxi services obtained from commercial taxi companies are subject to a process of tender through Regional Supplies Services.

D'fhoilsigh agus chuir an Roinn Lámhleabhar Réigiúnach Iompar amach do na SSSP i Mí Mheithimh 1998. Maidir le húsáid tacsaithe, cuireann sé in iúl go soiléir gur chóir dá n-úsáid bheith stiúrtha go docht le costais a híoslaghú. Ní mór d'Iontaobhais cinntiú go bhfuil proctacail bhainistíochta chearta agus socruithe monatóireachta i bhfeidhm nuair a úsáidtear tacsaithe d'obair rialta nó anois agus arís le tacú leis an scuaidrín tacsaithe.

Ba chóir d'Iontaobhais meicníochtaí a chur i bhfeidhm le cinntiú go gcuirtear an caiteachas ar thacsaithe in iúl do na Stiúrthóirí cuí. Tá seirbhísí tacsáí a fhaightear ó chomhlachtaí tráchtála tacsáí faoi réir próiseas tairisceana trí Sheirbhísí Réigiúnacha Soláthair fosta.

Treatment of Cancer: Epothilone

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if she intends to approve the use of the drug 'Epothilone' for the treatment of cancer. (AQW 2678/00)

Ms de Brún: Epothilones are a new class of potential anti-tumour compounds which are at a very early stage of pre-clinical development. They are not recommended for the treatment of patients at present, although it is anticipated that these drugs will go into early clinical development in the near future.

Is sórt cumasc ionchasach nua frithshiada iad eapatealóin atá ag céim an-luath d'fhorbairt réamhchliniciúil. Ní mholtar do chóireáil othar iad faoi láthair, cé go bhfuiltear ag súil go ndéanfar forbairt réamhchliniciúil luath ar na drugaí seo ar ball.

Electro Convulsive Therapy (ECT)

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) the number of patients that received Electro Convulsive Therapy (ECT) treatment during the years 1999 and 2000 (b) the success rate of the

treatment and (c) the number of patients who suffered side effects as a result of ECT treatment.

(AQW 2679/00)

Ms de Brún:

- (a) In 1999, 736 patients received ECT treatment in local hospitals. The figure for 2000 was 645.
- (b) This information is not collected.
- (c) This information is not collected.
- (a) In 1999, fuair 736 othar cóireáil TLB in otharlanna áitiúla. 645 ba ea an figiúr don bhliain 2000.
- (b) Ní chruinnítear an t-eolas seo.
- (c) Ní chruinnítear an t-eolas seo.

European Funding for Day Care Facilities

Mr McGrady asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to give her assessment of the role of European Funding in the provision of day care facilities and other resources to those individuals with learning disabilities.

(AQW 2682/00)

Ms de Brún: European funding has enabled Health and Social Services Trusts, in partnership with the voluntary sector, to promote a diversity of vocational and non-vocational training schemes for people with a learning disability, resulting in an overall increase in available day care places.

Chuir maoiniú Eorpach ar chumas Iontaobhas Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta, i gcomhar leis an eamail dheonach, scéimeanna oiliúna gairmiúla agus neamhghairmiúla éagsúla a chur chun cinn do dhaoine le míchumas foghlama ar tháinig méadú san iomlán sna háiteanna cúraim lae ar fáil astu.

Cost of Imported Meat Inspection

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline who is responsible for the cost of inspection of imported meat from (a) the European Union and (b) other countries; and to make a statement.

(AQW 2687/00)

Ms de Brún: I am advised by the Food Standards Agency that where meat from other Member States arrives in licensed meat premises here checks are carried out by Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) Veterinary staff covering both the public and animal health aspects. DARD costs are recovered from the industry as part of the general meat inspection charge. Where meat is imported directly from another Member State to a premises under the supervision of a District Council, the Council is responsible for the checks and also recovers costs from the industry.

Checks on meat imported from third-world countries are carried out jointly by DARD and District Council Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) at the local Border Inspection Post and fees are levied for the animal health and public health checks carried out.

Mhol an Ghníomhaireacht um Chaighdeán Bhia dom gur chóir go ndéanadh foireann Tréidliachta na Roinne Talmhaíochta agus Forbairt Tuaithe (RTFT) seiceáil ar fheoil a thagann go háitribh chéadúnaithe fheola anseo ó Bhallstáit eile, ag cumhdach gnéithe sláinte poiblí agus ainmhithe araon. Faightear costais RTFT ar ais ón tionscal mar chuid den táille cigireachta ginearálta ar fheoil. Áit a n-iompórtáiltear feoil go díreach ó Bhallstát eile go háitreabh faoi mhaoirseacht Comhairle Ceantair, tá an Chomhairle freagrach as an seiceáil agus as fáil ar ais na gcostas ón tionscal fosta.

Déanann RTFT agus Oifigigh Thimpeallachta Sláinte Chomhairle Ceantair (OTS) comhsheiceáil ar fheoil iompórtáilte ó Thríú Tír ag Ionad Teorann Áitiúil Cigireachta agus gearrtar táillí ar an chomhsheiceáil shláinte poiblí agus shláinte ainmhithe a dhéantar.

Services Available for Haemophiliacs

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in respect of haemophiliacs, to detail (a) what services are available (b) what steps she is taking to improve the level of service and (c) the timescale and cost of such improvements.

(AQW 2692/00)

Ms de Brún: The Haemophiliacs Centre at the Royal Hospital provides specialist comprehensive care for adults and children with bleeding and thrombotic conditions. The service includes specialist nursing and medical management for the diagnosis and treatment of bleeding and thrombotic disorders, laboratory services and a genetic service for the investigation and diagnosis of haemophilia carriers. Counselling for patients and their families, social worker access, dental and full medical services are also available, as well as home therapy and prophylactic programmes.

As regards improvements to the service, a new draft service specification has been produced and is under consideration in the Department of Health in Great Britain. My Department will be monitoring developments there.

Soláthraíonn an tIonad Haemaifiliach ag an Otharlann Ríoga cúram sainsiúil cuimsitheach do dhaoine fásta agus do pháistí le riochtaí fola agus trombótacha. Leis an tseirbhís, tá bainistíocht shainsiúil bhanaltrachta agus mhíochaine d'fháthmheas agus do chóireáil neamhord fola agus trombótach, seirbhísí saotharlainne agus seirbhís ghéiniteach d'fhiosrú agus d'fháthmheas iompróirí haemaifilia. Tá comhairle do thuismitheoirí agus dá dteaghlaigh, teacht ar oibrí sóisialta, agus seirbhísí

iomlána fiacloireachta agus míochaine ar fáil fosta, chomh maith le teiripe baile agus cláir phróifíolactacha.

Maidir le feabhsuithe sa tseirbhís, rinneadh dréacht nua bunriachtanas seirbhíse agus tá machnamh á dhéanamh air sa Roinn Sláinte ar an Bhreatain Mhór. Beidh an Roinn s'agamsa ag coinneáil súile ar chastaí nua thall ansin.

Protecting Haemophiliacs

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of people with haemophilia who received blood products which have been traced to a donor who died from variant CJD and (b) what steps she is taking to (i) provide counselling for those affected and (ii) protect haemophiliacs against future exposure. (AQW 2696/00)

Ms de Brún: The number of patients with haemophilia who received blood products now traced to a plasma donor since diagnosed with vCJD is six (2 adults and 4 children).

All the patients, and parents of the children, were informed personally, at the earliest opportunity, in the most appropriate manner felt suitable to the different individuals.

The best available means of protecting haemophiliacs against further risk is to provide them with recombinant products. These are not derived from human blood. At present recombinant products are provided for all haemophiliac children under 16 and any new patients who have not previously received Plasma-derived Factor VIII. My Department is working with Boards to bring about a situation, as soon as possible, in which all haemophilia patients will receive only recombinant products.

Seisear is ea líon na n-othar le haemaifíla a fuair táirgí fola a bhfuil a lorg anois curtha siar go deontóir plasma fáthmheasta le CJDa ó shin (2 duine fásta agus 4 páiste).

Cuireadh in iúl do na hothair uile, agus do thuismitheoirí uile na bpáistí go pearsanta, ag an deis ba luaithe, agus sa dóigh cheart a síleadh cóir de réir na ndaoine éagsúla.

Is í an dóigh is fearr le haemaifílaigh a chosaint óna thuilleadh baol ná táirgí athchuingreacha a sholáthar dóibh. Ní thagann siad seo ó fhuil daonna. Faoi láthair, soláthraítear táirgí athchuingreacha do gach uile páiste haemaifíliach faoi bhun 16 agus d'othair nua ar bith nach bhfuair Fachtóir VIII Plasma-dhíorthach roimhe sin. Tá an Roinn s'agamsa ag obair le Boird leis na tosca a dhéanamh a luaithe agus is féidir ar dhóigh nach bhfaighidh gach uile othar haemaifíliach ach táirgí athchuingreacha amháin.

Occupational Therapy: Ards Borough Council Area

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline her plans to increase the number of occupational therapists in the Ards Borough council area. (AQW 2698/00)

Ms de Brún: Health and Social Services Boards and Trusts are responsible for ensuring that occupational therapy provision is adequate to meet the assessed needs of the population.

The Ulster Community and Hospitals HSS Trust is in the process of establishing a new senior occupational therapy post for community services. The Trust also has plans to further increase the occupational therapy workforce in line with the Trust's share of the new monies made available this year.

Boird agus Iontaobhais Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta atá freagrach as cinntiú go bhfuil an teiripe saothair a sholáthraítear sásúil le riar ar riachtanais mheasúnaithe an phobail.

Tá Iontaobhas SSS Phobal agus Otharlanna Uladh i mbun post sinsearach nua teiripe saothair a chruthú do na seirbhísí pobail. Níl sé ar intinn ag an Iontaobhas an mheitheal oibre teiripe saothair a mhéadú a thuilleadh de réir sciar an Iontaobhais de na hairgid nua a cuireadh ar fáil i mbliana.

Occupational Therapists: EHSSB

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of occupational therapists employed by the EHSSB and, of these, how many are based in the Ards Borough Council area. (AQW 2700/00)

Ms de Brún: At present there are 96.13 whole-time equivalent community occupational therapists employed by the EHSSB. It is not possible to identify separately those staff based in the Ards Borough Council area.

Faoi láthair, tá 96.13 teiripí saothair pobail choibhéis ama iomláin fostaíthe ag an BSSO. Ní féidir an fhoireann sin atá suite i gceantar Chomhairle na hAirde a aithint ina nduine agus ina nduine.

Occupational Therapy: Waiting List Ards Borough Council Area

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail how many people are awaiting visits from occupational therapists in the Ards Borough Council area. (AQW 2701/00)

Ms de Brún: Currently there are 490 people on the waiting list for occupational therapy services in the Ards Council area.

Faoi láthair, tá 490 duine ar an liosta feithimh do sheirbhísí teiripe saothair i gceantar Chomhairle na hAirde.

General Practitioner Appointments

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of General

Practitioners who were appointed in the financial year 2000-2001 and how many of these were (a) part time and (b) full time. (AQW 2729/00)

Ms de Brún: There were 40 General Practitioners admitted to the Medical List in the financial year 2000-2001. Of this number, 27 work part time and 13 work full time.

Cuireadh 40 Gnáthdhochtúir ar an Liosta Míochaine sa bhliain airgeadais 2000-2001. Den líon seo, oibríonn 27 go páirtaimseartha agus 13 go lánaimseartha.

Air Ambulance

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 2366/00, to detail the estimated flying time for an air ambulance based in Glasgow to (a) the closest location within Northern Ireland and (b) the furthestmost location within Northern Ireland. (AQW 2734/00)

Ms de Brún: The estimated flying time by air ambulance from Glasgow to Ballycastle ranges from approximately 40-60 minutes and from Glasgow to Belleek from 60-90 minutes, depending on the type of aircraft used and the prevailing weather conditions.

Tá an t-am eitile le haerortharr ó Ghlaschú go Baile an Chaisleáin measta sa réimse ó thart faoi 40 go 60 nóiméad, agus ó Ghlaschú go Béal Leice sa réimse ó 60 go 90 nóiméad, ag brath ar an sórt eitleáin a úsáidtear agus ar staid na haimsire.

Speech and Language Therapy

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 1744/00 and her letter dated 7 August 2000, to detail (a) the outcome of the meeting which was to take place in early March this year (b) if a decision has been taken to increase the number of speech and language therapy student places and (c) if a decision will be taken in time to increase the student intake by October 2001. (AQW 2737/00)

Ms de Brún: The current shortage of speech and language therapists was discussed at a meeting between the Department and the School of Health Science, University of Ulster Jordanstown on 6 March 2001. The Department advised of the need for an increase in the number of training places for Speech and Language Therapy students and the University considered the scope to respond to the increased need.

It is anticipated that the Speech and Language Therapy student intake may require to be increased by 10 and it is agreed that this increase in student places can be achieved with effect from October 2001. The final increase in number will be dependent on resources being available to support this additional training.

Pléadh easpa teiripithe labhartha agus teanga ag cruinniú idir an Roinn agus Scoil Eolas Sláinte, Ollscoil Uladh Baile Mhic Iordáin ar 6 Márta 2001. Thug an Roinn le fios an gá le méadú i líon na n-áiteanna do mhic léinn Teiripe Labhartha agus Teanga agus mheas an Ollscoil a h-ábaltacht chun seo a fhreagairt.

Glactar gur dócha go mbeidh méadú le glacadh isteach mac léinn teiripe labhartha agus teanga le 10 áit agus aontaíodh gur féidir seo a chur i gcrích faoi Dheireadh Fómhair 2001. Tá méadú san uimhir a ghlacfar isteach ag brath ar chur ar fáil acmhainní chun tacú leis an oiliúint.

Nicotine Replacement Therapy

Mr Berry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what structures are in place for implementing advice on support to the primary care teams in relation to Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT). (AQW 2739/00)

Ms de Brún: In December last year, my Department issued guidance about developing and extending action within the Health and Personal Social Services to help people stop smoking as part of a wider initiative to tackle tobacco dependence. The guidance included advice on both the prescribing and use of Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) as part of a range of smoking cessation interventions.

Each Health and Social Services Board has been asked to provide regular monitoring information on the development of cessation services and this will include data on the provision of NRT.

I Mí na Nollag anuraidh, d'eisigh an Roinn s'agamsa treoir ar fhorbairt agus fhairsingiú birt taobh istigh de na Seirbhísí Sláinte agus Sóisialta Pearsanta chun cuidiú le daoine stop a chur le caitheamh tobac mar chuid de scéim níos fairsinge chun dul i ngleic leis an spleáchas ar tobac. Mar aon leis an treoir, bhí comhairle ar idir ordú agus úsáid Teiripe Mhalartú Nicítín (TMN) mar chuid de réimse idirghabhálacha le haghaidh éirí as tobac.

Iarradh ar gach Bord Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta eolas rialta monatóireachta a chur ar fáil ar fhorbairt na seirbhísí éirí as tobac agus mar aon leis seo, beidh sonraí ar sholáthar TMN.

Proposed National Institute of Clinical Excellence Guidelines

Mr Berry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail her plans to adopt the proposed National Institute of Clinical Excellence Guidelines from England. (AQW 2740/00)

Ms de Brún: I have recently published the consultation document "Best Practice – Best Care" which sets out proposals for setting standards, strengthening accountability

for the services delivered and improving monitoring and regulation in the HPSS.

The proposals for setting standards identifies the possibility for exploring linkages with other standard setting bodies, for example the National Institute for Clinical Excellence.

The document issued for consultation on 11th April 2001. The deadline for responses is 18th July 2001. I will wish to take account of the views expressed during the consultation exercise before taking any final decisions on the best arrangements for improving the quality of services here.

Ar na mallaibh, d'fhoilsigh mé an cháipéis chomhairlithe "Sárchleachtadh – Sárchúram" a leagann moltaí amach chun caighdeán a leagan síos, freagracht as na seirbhísí a sholáthraítear a neartú, agus chun monatóireacht agus rialachán sna SSSP a fheabhsú.

Aithníonn na moltaí le haghaidh leagan síos caighdeán an fhéidearthacht le naisc le forais eile a leagann caighdeán síos a scrúdú, mar shampla an Institiúid Náisiúnta um Fheabhas Chliniciúil.

Eisíodh an cháipéis do chomhairliú ar an 11ú Aibreán 2001. Is é an spriocdháta d'fhreagraí an 18ú Iúil 2001. Is mian liom na tuairimí a chuirfeadh in iúl le linn an chleachtaidh chomhairlithe a chur san áireamh sula ndéanfaidh mé bearta deireanacha ar bith ar na socrúithe is fearr chun cáilíocht na seirbhísí anseo a fheabhsú.

Strategy for Reducing Alcohol Related Harm

Mrs Carson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what progress she is making in implementing the departmental document 'Strategy for Reducing Alcohol Related Harm'; and to make a statement. (AQW 2744/00)

Ms de Brún: I have recently appointed a regional Drug Strategy Co-ordinator, supported by a dedicated team within my Department, to take responsibility for steering the implementation both of the Drug Strategy and of the Strategy for Reducing Alcohol Related Harm.

To ensure coherent and consistent delivery of the aims of the Strategy priority has been given to establishing appropriate implementation structures. I am pleased that good progress has already been made and I hope to be in a position to make a further statement about this shortly. I expect work towards all the Alcohol Strategy targets to progress rapidly as soon as the implementation structures are in place.

Cheap mé Comhordaitheoir Réigiúnach Straitéise Drugaí ar na mallaibh, tacaithe ag foireann dhíograiseach taobh istigh den Roinn s'agamsa, le bheith freagrach as maoirseacht chur i gcrích na Straitéise Drugaí agus na Straitéise do Laghdú sa Dochar Bainteach le hAlcól araon.

Le comhlíonadh leanúnach seasta aidhmeanna na Straitéise a chinntiú, tugadh tosaíocht do bhunú struchtúr cuí cur i gcrích. Tá áthas orm go ndearnadh dul chun cinn maith cheana féin agus tá súil agam go mbeidh mé i riocht ráiteas breise a dhéanamh faoi seo ar ball. Tá mé ag súil go ndéanfar obair le dul chun cinn na spriocanna Straitéise Alcóil a bhaint amach go gasta, a luaithe agus atá na struchtúir chur i gcrích i bhfeidhm.

Haemophilia Patients: Plasma Clotting Factor Products

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of (a) haemophilia patients currently being treated with plasma derived clotting factor products (b) patients being treated with recombinant factor products and (c) adults and children in each of the above categories. (AQW 2753/00)

Ms de Brún: Currently there are 105 adults and 48 children registered with haemophilia A here, some of whom do not require treatment. Of these, 31 adults receive plasma-derived therapy. Fifty-four adults receive recombinant factor products. Thirty children with haemophilia A are on factor replacement therapy, and all children receive recombinant therapy.

There are seven adults and three children with haemophilia B. Only two adults have severe enough disease to need regular treatment, and receive recombinant therapy. All the children receive recombinant therapy.

Faoi láthair, tá 105 duine fásta agus 48 páiste cláraithe le haemaifíla A anseo, roinnt díobh nach bhfuil cóireáil de dhíth orthu. De na daoine seo, faigheann 31 duine fásta teiripe plasma-dhíorthach. Faigheann 54 duine fásta táirgí athchuingreacha fachtóra. Tá 30 páiste le haemaifíla A ar theiripe malartú fachtóra agus faigheann na páistí uile teiripe athchuingreach.

Tá 7 duine fásta agus 3 páiste ann le haemaifíla B. Níl ach 2 duine fásta le galar géar go leor le cóireáil rialta a bheith de dhíth orthu, agus a fhaigheann teiripe athchuingreach. Faigheann na páistí uile teiripe athchuingreach.

HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

North/South Co-operation

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment if he is pursuing any elements of his work on a North/South basis and to outline what level of contact has there been with colleagues in the Republic of Ireland. (AQO 1390/00)

The Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Dr Farren): There are a number of issues which fall to my Department and which are the subject of North/South co-operation requiring regular contact with colleagues in the South, at ministerial and official, level. These contacts and co-operation include issues such as higher education research, vocational education and training, mutual recognition of vocational qualifications, tourism training, joint overseas recruitment, and European funding issues. I also have attended meetings of the North South Ministerial Council Sector Bodies on Trade and Development and on Tourism.

Cross-Border University

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to explore the viability of establishing a university across two or more sites on both sides of the border and if he will seek European funding for this initiative. (AQO 1376/00)

Dr Farren: There are no plans to explore the viability of establishing a university on both sides of the border.

NI Hotel and Catering College/University of Ulster, Jordanstown: Merger

Mr Neeson asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment if he has any plans to transfer the Department of Catering at The University of Ulster at Jordanstown to the Northern Ireland Hotel and Catering College, Portrush. (AQO 1383/00)

Dr Farren: The Governing Body of the Northern Ireland Hotel and Catering College has submitted to the Department a proposal to merge with the University of Ulster. The Department is presently considering this proposal.

Tourism Sector: Short Term Training Initiatives

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment if he will be undertaking any short term training initiatives to assist the tourism sector in overcoming recent difficulties. (AQO 1393/00)

Dr Farren: My officials are currently working with industry representatives and colleagues from CERT, the body with responsibility for tourism in the Republic of Ireland, to develop a range of initiatives to meet the needs of industry, in particular the needs of businesses and SMEs. I will keep Members informed of these developments over the next four to six weeks.

Allocation of Additional Places

Mrs Courtney asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to outline on what

basis will the 1,000 extra higher education places be allocated and if he anticipates that there will be an increase in university places in the northwest region.

(AQO 1387/00)

Dr Farren: Decisions have not yet been taken on the allocation of the additional places.

New Deal

Mr Fee asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment what steps he has taken to review the success or otherwise of New Deal; and to make a statement. (AQO 1419/00)

Dr Farren: My Department is undertaking an extensive programme of evaluations to investigate the effect of New Deal. Some initial findings have already been made public. They suggest that participants' perceptions of New Deal are generally positive. A number of changes have already been made to New Deal provision as a result of the evaluations.

A detailed overview of the evaluations and a summary of key findings to date were published in my Department's Labour Market Bulletins No13 and No14, which are available in the Assembly Library. In addition copies of the final reports of a survey of leavers from the New Deal for 18-24 Year Olds and a qualitative study of Key New Deal Players are also available in the Library.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Improvements: A8 Belfast/Larne Road

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (a) how he intends to spend the money allocated from Executive funds for the A8 Larne/Belfast road, namely, £0.8 million during 2001-02, £1.2 million during 2002-03 and £2.3 million during 2003-04, (b) if the short fall for the announced project will be met by departmental funds during the period 2001-04; and if he will ensure that junctions with a poor road safety record along this route will be upgraded as a matter of priority.

(AQW 2622/00)

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Campbell): As I indicated in my answer to your Written Assembly Question (AQW 2084/00) on 12 March 2001, the package of proposed improvements to the A8 Belfast to Larne road comprises discrete schemes (No. 3) and the statutory procedures for each scheme are being progressed separately so that any difficulty in one does not affect the others. On completion of the statutory procedures (including the acquisition of the necessary land), the schemes will be considered for progression into the Major Works Construction Programme.

Until the respective statutory procedures for each scheme are completed, Roads Service is not in a position to programme the schemes within the Construction Programme or to advise how the Executive Programme Funds for the A8 will be spent.

You will be aware that, despite the additional Executive Programme Funds, there still remains a funding deficit if all the schemes within the Major Works Preparation Pool are to be completed as quickly as would be desirable. Whether the shortfall for the A8 improvements will be met by Departmental funds during 2001/04 will depend on the availability of such funds at that time.

The timing of the improvements to the Millbrook and Antiville junctions will be dependent on the completion of the statutory procedures for that scheme and the availability of funds at that time.

Public Transport: West Tyrone

Mr Gibson asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his plans to improve public transport in West Tyrone. (AQW 2642/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Rural Transport Fund continues to support improvements to public transport in West Tyrone. The Fund is subsidising services on four new rural routes operated by Ulsterbus in the West Tyrone area and grant aid has been provided to Ulsterbus for the purchase of a new fully accessible midi-bus, based in Omagh.

The Fund is also supporting improvements to public transport information. A new Information Kiosk will be sited in Newtown Stewart and 15 new bus stops have been located throughout the area at such locations as the Folk Park, the History Park, Beragh, Sixmilecross, Carrickmore, Castlederg, Drumquin, Fintona, Dromore, Greencastle, Newtown Stewart and Mountfield.

Furthermore, my Department will be handing over a second fully accessible minibus for use by the Strabane District Rural Transport Partnership.

Public transport services in all rural areas, including West Tyrone, will be considered during the development of the 10-year Regional Transportation Strategy.

Public Access to Information

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister for Regional Development 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 2661/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department, in accordance with commitments outlined in its Equality Scheme (approved

by the Equality Commission on 15 February 2001), has completed an audit of current provision of information and services in formats accessible to Section 75 groups.

The Equality Scheme for the Department for Regional Development contains a commitment to the highest level of inclusivity in the provision of its information and services. Accordingly, the Department is actively participating in cross-departmental consultation with Section 75 groups on the provision of accessible formats.

Road Improvement: A50 Banbridge to Castlewellsan Road

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the schemes which he has sanctioned to improve the A50 Road between Banbridge and Castlewellsan.

(AQW 2680/00)

Mr Campbell: In addition to on-going structural maintenance and resurfacing works, my Department's Roads Service plans to carry out the following minor road improvement schemes on the A50 Banbridge to Castlewellsan road during 2001/02:-

- Stage 2 improvements at the Flough Road junction;
- corner improvements at the district council boundary on the Bann Road, Castlewellsan;
- Stage 2 corner improvements at Castlewellsan Road, Banbridge, west of Corbet; and
- improvements at U4325 Gargarry Road junction.

This is in addition to the extensive works already carried out over the last 5 years on this route.

Street Lighting: Derrytrasna and Aghagallon

Dr O'Hagan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail what plans there are for investment in street lighting in the Craigavon Borough Council wards of Derrytrasna and Aghagallon and at what locations that money is to be invested. (AQW 2702/00)

Mr Campbell: I should point out that the following information relates to the locally known areas of Derrytrasna and Aghagallon which may not coincide precisely with the Council wards.

My Department's Roads Service has no specific street lighting schemes planned for Derrytrasna and Aghagallon other than to provide street lighting at new housing developments.

In the last five years, Roads Service has spent approximately £26K and £20K respectively on the provision or improvement of street lighting facilities at the following locations in the Derrytrasna and Aghagallon areas:

Derrytrasna

- Island Hill Manor;

- Raughlan Meadows;
- Ballynerry North Road;
- Derrytrasna Road/Ballynerry North Road Junction;
- Ardmore Road;
- Pier Rampart.

Aghagallon

- Lagan Close;
- Beechgrove Avenue;
- Colane Manor;
- Loughview;
- Ferngrove area;
- Bayview Park.

Street Lighting: Derrytrasna and Aghagallon

Dr O'Hagan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail how much has been spent in the last five years on street lighting in the Craigavon Borough Council wards of Derrytrasna and Aghagallon and in what locations it has been invested. (AQW 2703/00)

Mr Campbell: I should point out that the following information relates to the locally known areas of Derrytrasna and Aghagallon which may not coincide precisely with the Council wards.

My Department's Roads Service has no specific street lighting schemes planned for Derrytrasna and Aghagallon other than to provide street lighting at new housing developments.

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- Ardmore Road;
- Pier Rampart.

Aghagallon

- Lagan Close;
- Beechgrove Avenue;
- Colane Manor;
- Loughview;
- Ferngrove area;
- Bayview Park.

Road Maintenance: Derrytrasna and Aghagallon

Dr O'Hagan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail what plans there are for investment on the rural roads in the Craigavon Borough Council wards of Derrytrasna and Aghagallon and at what locations that money is to be invested. (AQW 2704/00)

Mr Campbell: I should explain that details of expenditure on road maintenance are not readily available on a ward basis. My Department's Roads Service, however, is currently in the process of formulating a programme of road maintenance and improvement works to be undertaken within the Craigavon Borough Council area during the current financial year. A report detailing the proposed programme will be formally presented by the Divisional Roads Manager to the Council on 18 June 2001. Copies of the report will be issued to Council members in advance of the meeting and I have arranged for a copy to be forwarded to you at that time. While the report will not identify and group work on a ward basis, it will provide details of single substantial works on specific roads. As regards past expenditure, I can advise that specific improvement works to the value of £555K and £98K were spent on roads in the Derrytrasna and Aghagallon areas respectively during the last five years. This expenditure was incurred at the following locations:

Derrytrasna

- road realignment at Kiln Road;
- traffic calming at Derrymacash;
- traffic signals at Lough Road/Kiln Road;
- sightline improvements at junction of cycle track and Annaloiste Road; and
- bridge strengthening works at Derrymacash motorway bridge (cost approximately £375K).

Aghagallon

- road realignment at Bell's Row railway crossing, Lurgan;
- sightline improvements at Cornakinnegar Road;
- traffic calming in Aghagallon; and
- new footway in Aghagallon.

I should point out that the above information relates to locally known areas of Derrytrasna and Aghagallon which may not coincide precisely with the Council wards.

Road Maintenance: Derrytrasna and Aghagallon

Dr O'Hagan asked the Minister for Regional Development to provide a breakdown of the money spent on rural roads in the Craigavon Borough Council wards of

Aghagallon and Derrytrasna and at what locations the money was invested in the last five years.

(AQW 2705/00)

Mr Campbell: I should explain that details of expenditure on road maintenance are not readily available on a ward basis. My Department's Roads Service, however, is currently in the process of formulating a programme of road maintenance and improvement works to be undertaken within the Craigavon Borough Council area during the current financial year. A report detailing the proposed programme will be formally presented by the Divisional Roads Manager to the Council on 18 June 2001. Copies of the report will be issued to Council members in advance of the meeting and I have arranged for a copy to be forwarded to you at that time. While the report will not identify and group work on a ward basis, it will provide details of single substantial works on specific roads. As regards past expenditure, I can advise that specific improvement works to the value of £555K and £98K were spent on roads in the Derrytrasna and Aghagallon areas respectively during the last five years. This expenditure was incurred at the following locations:

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Aghagallon

- road realignment at Bell's Row railway crossing, Lurgan;
- sightline improvements at Cornakinnegar Road;
- traffic calming in Aghagallon; and
- new footway in Aghagallon.

I should point out that the above information relates to locally known areas of Derrytrasna and Aghagallon which may not coincide precisely with the Council wards.

'The Sly Fox' Moy, Co. Tyrone: Planning Application

Mrs Carson asked the Minister for Regional Development what account he took of parking facilities when considering the application for an extension to 'The Sly Fox', Moy, Co Tyrone and is he satisfied that road safety has not been compromised due to the increase in vehicular and pedestrian traffic in the area.

(AQW 2709/00)

Mr Campbell: As these are matters for my Department's Roads Service, questions AQW 2709/00 and AQW2711/00 have been passed to me for a reply.

When assessing the planning application for the proposed extension for 'The Sly Fox' in Moy, Co Tyrone, Roads Service considered that:

- adequate parking is available in the vicinity of the premises - this includes the Diamond, Killyman Street and Charlemont Street;
- the proposal would not add to the morning or afternoon traffic peaks in the town as licensed premises generally attract most of their business in the evenings, after normal business hours;
- existing servicing from Killyman Street is unlikely to be greatly intensified due to the extension of the premises;
- a town centre public bar such as this is likely to attract a considerable number of customers on foot; and
- pedestrians approaching these premises from any direction are able to use public footways.

Considering all of the above and, given that the premises are within the 30 mph speed limit, I am satisfied that road safety has not been compromised as a result of the planning approval.

'The Sly Fox' Moy, Co. Tyrone: Planning Application

Mrs Carson asked the Minister for Regional Development what account he took of the impact on traffic when considering the application for an extension to 'The Sly Fox', Moy, Co Tyrone.

(AQW 2711/00)

Mr Campbell: As these are matters for my Department's Roads Service, questions AQW 2709/00 and AQW2711/00 have been passed to me for a reply.

When assessing the planning application for the proposed extension for 'The Sly Fox' in Moy, Co Tyrone, Roads Service considered that:

- adequate parking is available in the vicinity of the premises - this includes the Diamond, Killyman Street and Charlemont Street;
- the proposal would not add to the morning or afternoon traffic peaks in the town as licensed premises generally attract most of their business in the evenings, after normal business hours;
- existing servicing from Killyman Street is unlikely to be greatly intensified due to the extension of the premises;
- a town centre public bar such as this is likely to attract a considerable number of customers on foot; and
- pedestrians approaching these premises from any direction are able to use public footways.

Considering all of the above and, given that the premises are within the 30 mph speed limit, I am satisfied that road safety has not been compromised as a result of the planning approval.

Cycle Lanes and/or Cycle Routes

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail any monitoring that has taken place on the usage of existing cycle lanes and/or cycle routes.

(AQW 2715/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service has initiated the monitoring of the use of cycle lanes and cycle routes in Northern Ireland by establishing its Cycle Usage Survey. The Survey uses automatic cycle counters to record the number of bicycles that pass 31 fixed positions located throughout Northern Ireland. The results of the Survey will be used to monitor progress towards achieving the Northern Ireland Cycling Strategy targets to:

- double the number of trips by cycle (based on 2000 figures) by the end of 2005; and
- quadruple the number of trips by cycle (based on 2000 figures) by the end of 2015.

The data collected during 2000 by the Survey is currently being collated and validated and will be available in early summer. I will arrange for a copy of the Survey Report to be sent to the Assembly Library.

Revenue from Parking Fees

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (a) the amount of revenue received from parking fees in Kilkeel, Newcastle, Downpatrick and Ballynahinch for the years 1999 and 2000 and (b) the administration costs incurred in collecting these payments.

(AQW 2719/00)

Mr Campbell: Whilst my Department's Roads Service operates a number of car parks in Kilkeel and Newcastle, none is subject to charging.

The table below shows the amount of revenue received from car parking fees in the towns of Downpatrick and Ballynahinch and the administration costs incurred in collecting those fees for the years 1999/2000 and 2000/01:

Town	Year	Revenue	Admin. Costs
Downpatrick	1999/00	£55,682	£34,781
Downpatrick	2000/01	£64,641	£35,051
Ballynahinch	1999/00	£28,781	£23,614
Ballynahinch	2000/01	£32,642	£22,231

I should make it clear that the administration costs included in the above table are the costs paid by Roads Service to its contractor for manning the car parks (where necessary) and for collecting the fees. These costs do not include maintenance and repair, rates or capital charges.

Mossley West Railway Station

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of park & ride places which have been made available at Mossley West Railway Station and to indicate when the station will become available for commuter use. (AQW 2725/00)

Mr Campbell: Translink has advised that it plans to provide initially around 80 park and ride spaces at Mossley West railway station. There is scope for the provision of further spaces although this will be subject to passenger demand and the availability of resources. The station will become available for commuter use once safe pedestrian access to it has been provided and the outstanding planning consideration resolved. Translink's preferred solution to the access problem is currently being given further consideration by Roads Service. Translink officials are optimistic that there will soon be a prompt resolution to the issue.

Mossley West Railway Station: Vandalism

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the costs involved in re-instating Mossley West Railway Station after recent vandalism attacks. (AQW 2726/00)

Mr Campbell: Translink has advised that it estimates the costs involved in repair work to the Mossley West railway station after recent vandalism attacks to be between £5,000 and £7,000. Translink is currently considering the installation of CCTV in order to deter any future vandalism.

Mossley West Railway Station

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the costs involved in the construction of the railway station at Mossley West in Newtownabbey. (AQW 2727/00)

Mr Campbell: Translink has advised that the construction cost of the Mossley West railway station is estimated at £815,000. There may be additional costs incurred in order to provide safe pedestrian access to the station.

Traffic Calming: East Antrim

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (a) what proportion of the £1.8m set aside during

this financial year for traffic calming will be spent in the constituency of East Antrim and (b) the locations and cost of each planned traffic calming scheme. (AQW 2735/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service has not programmed any traffic calming schemes in the constituency of East Antrim during the current financial year. A number of sites within the constituency are, however, currently being assessed by Roads Service for possible inclusion in future traffic calming programmes.

Additional funding for traffic calming in this year has enabled the Roads Service to bring forward some schemes that would otherwise not have been completed. The advancement of these schemes has enabled Fernagh Estate (between Doagh Road and Station Road) in Newtownabbey to become a priority traffic calming scheme for 2002/03.

Mossley West Railway Station

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the consultation he has undertaken with his Ministerial colleagues in an attempt to alleviate the current problems regarding the opening of Mossley West Railway Station. (AQW 2741/00)

Mr Campbell: As there is no disagreement between my Department and any other Department in relation to the pedestrian access problem that is delaying the opening of Mossley West railway station, I have not consulted any other Minister about the problem. This is an operational issue for Translink to resolve. Translink are currently engaged in discussions with Roads Service about how best to provide pedestrian access and I understand that they are optimistic that there will soon be a resolution to the issue.

Mossley West Railway Station

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the funding required to construct a footbridge at Mossley West Railway Station; and to make a statement. (AQW 2742/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the cost of providing an independent footbridge at the proposed Mossley West railway halt would be approximately £150K.

Bus Station Facilities: Strabane

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development whether there are plans to provide purpose built bus station facilities in Strabane. (AQW 2748/00)

Mr Campbell: Translink has advised that there are currently no plans to provide purpose built bus station facilities in Strabane.

Rail Freight

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his plans to encourage the transfer of freight traffic from road to rail. (AQW 2751/00)

Mr Campbell: Due to the size of Northern Ireland, the relatively short distance to its ports and the relatively small railway network there are limited opportunities for the economic use of rail freight in Northern Ireland. Even within the context of both NI and RoI there are likely to be limited opportunities to encourage a transfer of freight from road to rail. The contribution that the rail network can make to the movement of freight will be considered in the context of the overall Regional Transportation Strategy. In the meantime, Northern Ireland Railways will keep under review the potential for enhancing the rail freight aspect of their business, including the encouragement of freight traffic to rail from road.

Road Accidents Statistics

Mr Maskey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of (a) fatal and (b) non-fatal accidents that have occurred across each divisional headquarters area in each of the last five years. (AQW 2816/00)

Mr Campbell: The provision of information in relation to road accidents is a matter for the Northern Ireland Office.

Road Accidents Statistics

Mr Maskey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of (a) fatal and (b) non-fatal accidents that have occurred across each parliamentary constituency in each of the last five years for which figures are available. (AQW 2817/00)

Mr Campbell: The provision of information in relation to road accidents is a matter for the Northern Ireland Office.

Major Road Projects: New TSN

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline how he has taken account of New TSN in the prioritisation of road projects. (AQW 2828/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service is currently assessing potential major works schemes for possible inclusion in its 10-year Forward Planning Schedule. The assessments are on the basis of the five key criteria of integration, safety, economy, environment and accessibility in accordance with the Department's Northern Ireland Transport Policy Statement, 'Moving Forward', published in November 1998. The process takes into consideration the objectives of the Department's

New Targeting Social Need policy, primarily under the accessibility criterion. Consultants, appointed in December 1999, have reviewed the assessment methodology used by Roads Service and have confirmed that it provides a practical means of addressing New Targeting Social Need policy considerations.

Road Accidents Statistics: Mullahead Road, Tandragee

Mr Berry asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of reported accidents on the Mullahead Road, Tandragee in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. (AQW 2831/00)

Mr Campbell: The provision of information in relation to road accidents is a matter for the Northern Ireland Office.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Social Housing: West Tyrone

Mr Gibson asked the Minister for Social Development to give his assessment of the need for additional social housing in West Tyrone. (AQW 2654/00)

The Minister for Social Development (Mr Morrow): District Housing Plans, to be published in June, will provide comprehensive information on the need for social housing in West Tyrone.

This will identify Strabane town as the main area of need. A scheme of 41 units is due to complete within the next 2 months. An additional scheme of 26 units is due to start in August 2001, and a scheme of 12 units (flats) is programmed for later in the year.

In other towns schemes are planned as follows:

Sion Mills:

A scheme for 18 dwellings started April 2001.

Castlederg:

A scheme for 10 units is programmed for 2003/04.

Ardstraw:

The Rural Housing Association has a scheme of 6 units programmed for later this year.

Clady:

A small scheme is programmed for 2002/03 for 8 units.

NIHE: Empty Homes Strategy

Mr Gibson asked the Minister for Social Development to detail his plans to develop further the empty homes strategy; and to make a statement. (AQW 2655/00)

Mr Morrow: The Housing Executive has been commissioned to develop an empty homes strategy and proposes the following:

- i. targeting renovation grants to areas where there are clear difficulties with long-term vacant residential stock;
- ii. providing advice and support, outlining the legal powers available to it and proposing options for bringing property back into use;
- iii. examining the feasibility of setting up a dedicated 'empty property hotline' to provide advice to owners of empty properties of the letting/sale opportunities available to them;
- iv. supporting and participating in inter-agency partnerships in order to address the wider social and economic issues that may influence the matter;
- v. continuing to work closely with the Rates Collection Agency and maintaining up to date databases on empty homes across Northern Ireland;
- vi. in its own estates, continuing with a range of initiatives most of which involve Estate Based Strategies and Neighbourhood Renewal. In areas where demand is low considering selective or radical demolition to halt the spiral of decline and provide a better balance between the supply and demand for social housing.

In addition, the proposed Housing Bill will provide for the introduction of a shorthold tenancy, to be managed by the housing associations. This is designed to allow vacant properties to be let for short periods where owners are reluctant to let for longer terms.

The existence of empty property can be symptomatic of an underlying and complex interaction of wider social problems, including urban and rural decay, unemployment, crime and vandalism, anti-social behaviour etc. Solutions, therefore, are not just about good housing management, but require more complex strategies and inter-agency initiatives.

Public Access to Information

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister for Social Development 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 2660/00)

Mr Morrow: The commitments in the Department's Equality Scheme are monitored on an ongoing basis to enable the Department to report in its annual review of progress to the Equality Commission the extent to which it has complied with its obligations.

To ensure public access to information and services the Department has developed strong relationships with the Voluntary and Community Sector extending across all of its key business areas. Indeed, the importance that the Department attaches to working in partnership with the public permeates its policy-making and operational responsibilities. This is clearly demonstrated through its wide ranging consultations in developing its Equality Scheme, New Targeting Social Need (New TSN) Action Plan, the Housing Executive's Community Involvement Framework and work on its proposed new Urban Regeneration Strategy.

The Social Security Agency (SSA) provides its services (including information, advice and assistance) to the public through a network of local Social Security Offices situated in all the major towns and cities in Northern Ireland. Specific telephone services are available through a Benefit Enquiry Line for people with disabilities and carers. In addition, the Agency provides information through a comprehensive range of leaflets (including a customer charter pack), by direct advertising of its services through the media, and where appropriate by the specific targeting of potential benefit recipients with information.

The SSA and the CSA interact with a wide range of Voluntary and Community Sector organisations through formal and informal arrangements. Within the SSA this occurs at Chief Executive, Management Board, regional, district and local levels. Within the CSA, it happens for example through customer consultation panels and feedback from voluntary groups. Such interactions provide opportunities to inform and consult with external organisations on strategic policy issues, to develop better understanding of the organisations' views and needs, to work together to address the needs of mutual customers, including front line day-to-day progression of cases.

The Department as well as its two Agencies (the SSA and the CSA) has developed websites where a range of information is available for customers. For example, my Department's website contains information about the Department and on publications and press releases, the SSA website has information on the range of social security benefits available and details of the customer complaints procedure. The CSA website gives examples of the most frequently asked questions and also provides a range of information about customer service.

In addition, to evaluate the robustness of its procedures, during the last year, the SSA completed a full review of Customer Services. It also consulted on the specific needs of a number of vulnerable groups such as disabled people, elderly people, people with literacy problems, people in isolated areas, people affected by the troubles, and minority ethnic people, and targeted assistance to pensioners under the Minimum Income Guarantee.

In terms of the steps to be taken this year my Department is fully committed to ensuring that the Equality

Duty permeates all aspects of its work and this includes public access to information and services. The Department is currently at various stages on a number of equality impact assessments. Most relevant in this context are firstly the assessment of the 'Child Support NI Field Operations Organisational Structure and Access to Services' which has just completed its consultation stage.

Secondly, the SSA has just commenced a period of consultation on the equality impact assessment of the "provision of relevant, accurate and timely information and advice". The results of this will help the Agency ensure that information is reaching, and available to all existing and potential customers. Finally the equality impact assessment on NICS Departments' strategies (including the Department for Social Development strategy) relating to the Compact with the Voluntary and Community Sector, will be issued in June and once screening of the measures in the proposed Housing Bill is complete it too may lead to a further equality impact assessment.

All of these equality impact assessments and associated consultations will provide an opportunity for representatives of the Section 75 groups and the community at large to become involved in policy making and provide feedback on access to and the delivery of my Department's services.

In relation to New Targeting Social need (New TSN) the SSA is developing a rolling programme of action plans to improve the delivery of social security services for a range of groups and in doing so is looking at ways of using existing community and rural groups and facilities as a means of communicating more effectively.

The SSA will also be carrying out a series of focus groups to identify the broad needs of welfare customers in the future and during 2001 the CSA will develop a proactive programme with the Voluntary Sector to communicate information on the Child Support Reforms.

My Department is also involved in two other major pieces of work co-ordinated by OFMDFM. As part of the Promoting Social Inclusion (PSI) initiative OFMDFM are tasked with examining how the provision of better services from Government Departments might be used to tackle social exclusion. As a first step they have issued a questionnaire to this and other NICS Departments to collate what is currently happening on the communication front. OFMDFM are also taking forward work on behalf of all Departments in relation to access to information through the provision in alternative formats such as Braille, large print, audiocassette, signed video cassette and minority ethnic language formats.

In line with policy on openness and making information more accessible my Department will shortly publish its Corporate Plan for 2001-2004 and Public Service Agreement which takes account of the Programme for Government and which sets out my Department's

programme over the next year and beyond. This will be circulated widely, including all of the groups on the Department's Section 75 consultee list and all MLAs. The CSA and the SSA have already published their annual business plans.

Although my Department's Equality Scheme has only recently been approved by the Equality Commission on 15 March 2001, we have been implementing the arrangements contained in the draft Scheme since it was originally sent to the Equality Commission on 30 June 2000. Aside from the measures mentioned earlier my Department is committed to ensure that systems are in place to make information available in accessible formats in a timely fashion and to consult with individuals and representatives of affected groups by a range of methods suited to making information available and consultation meaningful.

Social Security Benefits

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Social Development to give details of any plans he has for an awareness campaign to publicise the range of Social Security Benefits available and the qualifying criteria for each benefit. (AQW 2669/00)

Mr Morrow: Publicity campaigns to signal the arrival of new benefits and to increase awareness of existing benefits are regularly undertaken. Information on the qualifying conditions for all Social Security Benefits are contained in the leaflet "Your Guide to our services" which is available from all Social Security Offices, and the Benefit Shop located in Castle Court.

Disability Living Allowance: Queries By Elected Representatives

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the actual or estimated number of queries made by elected representatives, on behalf of claimants, to Disability Living Allowance Branch in each of the last five years. (AQW 2670/00)

Mr Morrow: The Social Security Agency does not hold actual figures for the number of queries made by elected representatives, on behalf of customers, to Disability Living Allowance Branch for each of the last five years. However a manual count shows that 420 enquiries were received in the calendar year 2000.

Disability Living Allowance: Enquiry Service

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the measures being taken to improve the enquiry service for elected representatives at Disability Living Allowance Branch. (AQW 2671/00)

Mr Morrow: Disability Living Allowance Branch provide a direct contact number for MLAs and MPs,

this number is manned during office hours and an after hours voice mail service is also provided. Staff in this section has been doubled in the last 6 months to help with enquiries.

Housing Executive: Tenant Purchases

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (a) the number of applications made by tenants to the Housing Executive to purchase their homes and (b) the number of houses sold to tenants in the District Council areas of Newry and Mourne, Banbridge and Down for the years 1998, 1999 and 2000.

(AQW 2677/00)

Mr Morrow: The table below shows the information requested by financial year 1 April to 31 March. It should be noted that most applications result in houses sold, but not necessarily in the year in which the application was made.

	Newry and Mourne		Banbridge		Down	
	Applications	Sold	Applications	Sold	Applications	Sold
1998/1999	529	340	262	137	270	108
1999/2000	696	269	249	134	421	141
2000/2001	413	328	168	106	319	191
Total	1638	973	679	377	1010	440

NIHE: Complaints Re Sub-standard Work:

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of complaints from tenants regarding sub-standard work carried out by contractors employed by the Housing Executive in the District Council areas of Banbridge, Newry and Mourne and Down for the years 1998, 1999 and 2000. (AQW 2681/00)

Mr Morrow: This information is not readily available in the format requested. However, during the period 1998 to 2000 there were 8 "Less Than Satisfactory" reports relating to improvement contracts and 17 similar reports relating to response maintenance, in the District Council areas of Banbridge, Newry and Mourne and Down. These reports were provided by Project Contract Supervisors on the basis of information received.

NIHE Consultants

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development whether it is the intention of the NIHE to retain its framework of 21 consultants and to detail the cost to

NIHE, since November 1996, of this consultative arrangement. (AQW 2717/00)

Mr Morrow: The Housing Executive is currently reviewing its requirements for consultant support, both in terms of numbers and services.

The fees for Framework Consultants based on tendered rates and on commissions awarded since November 1996 up to 30 April 2001 totalled £11,062,000. The fees include all travel and subsistence but exclude minor fees associated with consultation.

NIHE: Parking Spaces

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development to confirm that the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has no obligation to provide car parking facilities outside Housing Executive properties and to detail the steps he is taking to address this situation.

(AQW 2724/00)

Mr Morrow: I can confirm that the Housing Executive has no obligation to provide car parking spaces outside its properties.

However, the Executive, in consultation with residents, reviews the need for car parking when an estate is due for improvement. In such cases additional parking spaces may be provided either in-curtilage or in communal groupings, depending on the layout of the estate. Where appropriate in new build social housing, provision is now made for car parking facilities.

Child Support Agency: Complaints

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of complaints made against decisions of the Child Support Agency in the year 2000.

(AQW 2728/00)

Mr Morrow: The Northern Ireland Child Support Agency received a total of 1,646 complaints against decisions made during the year 2000.

The total included 1,466 requests to revise a decision and 180 applications to appeal a decision.

Belfast Regeneration Office: Festival Funding

Mr S Wilson asked the Minister for Social Development if the Belfast Regeneration team has finished its review of festival funding and will he lodge a copy of the final report in the Assembly Library. (AQW 2743/00)

Mr Morrow: The Belfast Regeneration Office has completed the evaluation of its funding of festival activities. A copy of the evaluation report will be lodged in the Assembly Library.

Warm Homes Scheme

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development to (a) confirm the start date for the Warm Homes Scheme announced on 27 March 2001 and (b) ensure that all pensioners qualify for this scheme including those who do not qualify for (i) income support benefit or (ii) rate relief. (AQW 2747/00)

Mr Morrow: It is proposed that the installation of physical measures, ie insulation and central heating systems under the Warm Homes scheme will commence on 1 July 2001.

Only pensioners aged 60 or over and in receipt of Income Support, Rate Rebate, Housing Benefit or Income Based Jobseekers Allowance will be able to qualify for the scheme. I recognise that there will be some pensioners who are not on benefit but may be deserving of assistance. This is a difficult issue; whatever the cut off point, there will always be those who just miss out. With fuel poverty being linked to income, I believe that the receipt of benefits is the fairest method of establishing those who are most at risk. However, my Department, in liaison with the Energy Saving Trust, has recently set up a new Fuel Poverty Partnership Forum, consisting of key personnel from the public, private and voluntary sectors. Members have been tasked with, inter alia, developing a voluntary scheme to help hardship cases, which do not meet the Warm Homes criteria. It will take time for the Forum to address the issue, develop appropriate qualifying criteria and secure the necessary funding. I have asked to be kept informed of progress and for situation reports to be provided at appropriate intervals.

NIHE: Performance Indicators

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail, within the Housing Executive's key performance indicators, (a) those areas where deviation from planned performance has been identified and (b) the corrective action that has been initiated in each case.

(AQW 2749/00)

Mr Morrow: In the year 2000/01 the Housing Executive reported a satisfactory performance in 56 of its 59 key performance indicators (KPI). Performance deviated from that planned in only three main areas –

Business Plan Objective 3 – To facilitate housing choice by promoting sustainable home ownership and a diverse well managed private rented sector.

The processing of house sales applications (KPI 3.1.1. – Issue offers to 95% of all eligible tenants applying to buy their homes within 10 weeks of application) fell short of target (54% for the year). At the end of the year, however, the performance for the month of March was 77%. Subsequent to the amalgamation of different house sales areas in the NIHE's Land and Property Division,

and a large increase in the number of applications from tenants to purchase their homes, a backlog of applications had built up. This has now been cleared and the NIHE expect to meet their KPI, this year.

Business Plan Objective 4 – To deliver a high quality housing service in accord with the Government's principles of "Best Value".

KPI 4.1.2 The challenging targets for dealing with complaints (Deal with complaints in an effective and efficient manner. Normally complaints to be dealt with at Stage1 – 10 days; Stage2 – 10 days) were not met. However, it is pleasing to note the improvement on the year from 58% of complaints being answered within the time in 1999/00, to this year when 70% of complaints were dealt with on target. A new computer system has been tendered for and this should aid the NIHE's performance

KPI 4.2.1 Ensure that total arrears at 31 March 2001 do not increase beyond the figure at 31 March 2000. The gross level of arrears rose during the year (119%) of target. This rise is largely attributable to a data matching exercise where considerable overpayments of Housing Benefit were identified. The level of arrears excluding the effect of these overpayments is an increase of 1.85% for the year. The Housing Executive has established a Review Group to evaluate its arrears policy and monitoring procedures. The Housing Executive is focussing on debt prevention and a debt counselling service is now available to tenants. Existing guidelines concerning voluntary agreements for repaying arrears have also been reviewed and procedures leading to repossession in cases where tenants have the means but refuse to voluntarily repay or have otherwise failed to meet their rent obligations, have been speeded up.

Provision of Smoke Detectors

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development if he will make it his policy to install smoke detectors in all Housing Executive Dwellings and to make a statement. (AQW 2756/00)

Mr Morrow: This is an operational matter for the Housing Executive. It is not practical or feasible to install battery-operated smoke detectors in every situation. There are maintenance issues, siting difficulties and public liability responsibilities. However, the Executive installs mains powered smoke detectors, with battery back up, in the following circumstances: -

- in all new build (including housing associations);
- in all programmed improvement schemes and in maintenance schemes, where there is significant work to electrical circuits;
- in all flats and maisonettes (programme completed);
- where a powered stairlift or vertical lift is installed;

- where a change of heating is carried out for a person with special needs; and
- in dwellings designed and built for the elderly (programme under way).

NIHE Property: Provision of Dual Heating Systems

Mr McGrady asked the Minister for Social Development to ensure that the heating system policy in Housing Executive properties is changed to permit tenants to have a dual system; and to make a statement.

(AQW 2757/00)

Mr Morrow: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. Its current fuel heating policy is to provide natural gas heating within the gas supply area and oil outside the gas supply area.

It is not Housing Executive policy to provide or permit the installation of a dual heating system because of the potential dangers inherent in such a system.

NIHE: Housing Sales Policy for the Elderly

Mr McGrady asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the discussions he has had with the Housing Executive to remove the restriction placed on the over 60s concerning their inability to purchase two bed housing executive properties in which they reside; and to make a statement. (AQW 2758/00)

Mr Morrow: I have not had any such discussions, but my officials regularly discuss the house sales policy with Housing Executive officials and apprise them of policy issues and concerns arising, for example, from correspondence and other approaches by public representatives. The Housing Executive is carrying out a comprehensive review of the house sales scheme, including the restriction on sales of certain properties to the elderly. The outcome of the review is expected later in the year, at which time I will consider any proposals for change.

'Phase 3' Programme: Monkstown Estate

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development what action will be taken to ensure that the improvements to 'Phase 3' dwellings in the Monkstown Estate, Newtownabbey, will be completed by the original proposed date. (AQW 2766/00)

Mr Morrow: This is an operational matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. The contractor who had been awarded Phase 3 of the Housing Executive programme for Monkstown Estate, Newtownabbey had to be released from his contract at the end of April 2001. The work still required will now have to be re-tendered but it is anticipated that the new contract will start in the

Autumn of 2001. Completion of the dwellings will depend on the contract duration which will be agreed between the Housing Executive and the new contractor.

Alcohol By-laws

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister for Social Development to outline his plans to strengthen the existing legislation on alcohol by-laws to include (a) the seizure and disposal of alcohol from young people and other offenders and (b) the introduction of a fixed penalty system to help alleviate this major problem.

(AQW 2770/00)

Mr Morrow: The legislation under which the byelaws are made is contained in the Local Government Act (NI) 1972 which is the responsibility of the Department of the Environment and, consequently is outside of my remit. However, responsibility for the general policy on, and confirmation of, drinking in public byelaws rests with my Department and recent evidence presented to me suggests some dissatisfaction with the present operation of these. I have, therefore, asked my officials to commence an examination of this issue to ascertain what improvements, if any, are possible and the matters you raised relating to seizure and the introduction of a fixed penalty system will feature in that examination. However, in view of other ongoing commitments, this examination cannot get under way until later this year.

You may also be interested to know that, under the Confiscation of Alcohol (Young Persons) Act 1997, the police already have the power to confiscate alcohol held by, or for the use of, persons under the age of 18 in a public place.

Housing Executive: Privatisation

Mr O'Connor asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has any plans to privatise any functions currently carried out by the Housing Executive.

(AQO 1371/00)

Mr Morrow: I have no such plans, however I will continually look at innovative ways to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Housing Executive and to ensure best value in the provision of services to the public.

Sunday On-course Betting

Mr Bradley asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the proposed timetable for the introduction of Sunday on-course betting at Down Royal and Downpatrick Racecourses.

(AQO 1391/00)

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 at present to bring forward proposals to amend the gambling legislation to allow Sunday on-course betting. A timetable is, therefore, not available.

Housing Executive Allocation System

Mrs Nelis asked the Minister for Social Development to assess how the current Housing Executive allocation system addresses the needs of (a) those on long term waiting lists and (b) those seeking housing transfer due to illness or age.

(AQO 1370/00)

Mr Morrow: Generally, a tenancy is offered to the applicant with the highest points. The length of time spent on the waiting list depends on the number of points that an applicant has and the number of lettings becoming available in their area of choice. Length of time on the waiting list is a factor in the pointing system, attracting an award of up to a maximum of 10 points.

The housing needs of transfer applicants is assessed in the same way as applicants for new tenancies. Illness or age as such, are not factors within the selection scheme, but rather, the effects of a tenant's current accommodation on their health and social well-being.

Meetings with Community Groups and Delegations

Dr O'Hagan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (a) the number of community groups and delegations he has met to discuss their concerns at the level of funding in the community sector (b) those groups he has met (c) those groups he has declined to meet and (d) specify the reasons for having declined such meetings.

(AQO 1372/00)

Mr Morrow: As Minister for the Department for Social Development I receive many requests for meetings from a wide range of individuals and organisations. These include community groups and delegations whose particular concern is the level of funding in the community sector. I have met with 4 and declined meetings with 7 such community groups. I consider each request for a meeting on its merits and within the demands of my wider programme of responsibilities.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Rural Poverty

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister for Social Development to outline what he is doing to deal with rural poverty as a result of foot-and-mouth disease.

(AQO 1400/00)

Mr Morrow: I fully understand the dreadful impact the foot-and-mouth disease is having on rural areas. I was pleased to announce, at the very outset, measures to help the farming community and I established a taskforce within my Department to ensure that all possible steps were taken to support the drive against the disease. To ensure that they are aware of their social security benefit entitlement the Social Security Agency held discussions with the representatives of the farming community, distributed an information leaflet for them and published main contact points in all its offices to deal with their enquiries. Anyone living on a farm is not required to sign on or visit local offices until further notice. The Housing Executive also took steps to inform people claiming Housing Benefit. I am also pleased that many staff from my Department have volunteered to help out as appropriate in the operational measures taken against the disease.

Housing Executive Estates: Refurbishment

Mr M Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the steps he is taking to minimise inconvenience and disruption to home owners during planned refurbishment on Housing Executive estates.

(AQO 1408/00)

Mr Morrow: When contracts are carried out in the vicinity of private owners, the Housing Executive makes every effort, through the contract and in the consultation process with the people involved, to ensure that disruption to the private owners is minimised. Contract documentation requires that the contractor takes all reasonable precautions to prevent damage to adjoining properties; he must also seek permission for the erection of items such as scaffolding and to make good any subsequent damage. The contractor is also required to notify private owners not less than one week before starting on site. A Project Manager is appointed by the Housing Executive to ensure the terms and conditions of the Contract are delivered.

Public Sector Housing: Applications

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the latest numbers of applicants for public sector housing in each category and to make a statement on his proposals for public sector accommodation.

(AQO 1417/00)

Mr Morrow: At March 2001, the waiting list for Housing Executive and housing association tenancies comprised 21,682 applicants for new tenancies and 11,839 existing tenants wishing transfers. The waiting list is not categorised. Applicants are awarded points on a cumulative basis for factors such as current home conditions or security of tenure, however, I can confirm that of the 21,682 applicants for new tenancies, 2,823 are statutorily homeless

(including 215 applicants awarded Intimidation points). In the current year it is planned to build 1,200 units of new social housing accommodation and it is anticipated that there will be around 10,000 re-lets of existing accommodation.

Housing Executive: Community Safety

Mr Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development to outline any progress the Housing Executive has made in respect of the proposed 'community safety' programme.

(AQO 1406/00)

Mr Morrow: In November last, the Housing Executive set up an Anti-Social Behaviour Unit, to develop a strategic approach to the issue of community safety on an inter-agency basis.

Current actions include delivering a programme of inter-agency training, appointing neighbourhood wardens to many of the problematic estates, liaising with Councils and the Police in setting up Community Safety Boards and developing mediation skills for staff in conjunction with the NI Mediation Network.

Housing Executive: Replacement Grants

Mr M Murphy asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the criteria for obtaining replacement grants and how long does it take to process such an application.

(AQO 1403/00)

Mr Morrow: The Housing Executive can consider Replacement Grant for any isolated, unfit dwelling in a rural area, where the dwelling is not capable of being renovated on technical grounds, or where replacement is considered to be the most cost effective solution. The grant is available to owner-occupier applicants who have lived in the house for two years prior to the date of application. It is also available for applicants who propose to acquire an unfit house, so long as they can satisfy statutory conditions, which are, that they meet the Housing Executive's urgent housing need criteria and have strong social and economic ties to the area.

There can be significant variations in the time taken to process replacement grant applications. The Housing Executive's target is that an inspection will be carried out within 20 weeks from the receipt of the enquiry and this is achieved in 99% of grant cases.

From inspection of the property to the issue of the Schedule of Works the target is 12 weeks which is achieved in 80% of grant cases. On submission of all the necessary documentation from the grant applicant to the issue of the grant approval the target is 26 weeks which is achieved in 94% of grant cases.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 18 May 2001

Written Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Foot-and-mouth Disease: Compensation

Dr Birnie asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to give its assessment of the applicability to Northern Ireland of the financial relief measures currently being considered by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Rural Task Force in England. (AQW 2474/00)

Reply: The Executive has been involved in the Rural Taskforce in England, and is closely monitoring developments in GB to ensure that Northern Ireland benefits from any UK-wide initiatives.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel has made a technical assessment of the financial measures being considered in GB and made recommendations to Executive colleagues. On the basis of those recommendations the Executive approved a scheme to defer the payment of rate bills, for up to three months, for those businesses experiencing financial hardship as a result of Foot and Mouth Disease.

The Executive has also established an inter-Departmental taskforce to examine the impact of Foot and Mouth Disease on the wider Northern Ireland economy and examine practical measures which might be implemented to address the negative impact of the disease.

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has paid compensation to farmers who have lost their livestock due to foot and mouth. To date, this amounts to £1.89 million.

Non-Governmental Forum For Children's Organisations

Ms Ramsey asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to explain what the relationship

will be between the Forum for Children's Organisations and the Interdepartmental Working Group to establish a Children's Commissioner. (AQW 2632/00)

Reply: The Non-Governmental Forum for Children's Organisations was established on 3 April as an informal mechanism to provide advice and expertise to the Interdepartmental group chaired by Ministers Haughey and Nesbitt.

In particular, the Forum has been asked:

- To provide advice to the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister on the role and remit of a Children's Commissioner for Northern Ireland.
- To provide advice to the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister on the components of a children's strategy for Northern Ireland.
- To represent the views of children's organisations throughout Northern Ireland.
- To act as a conduit of information both to and from the wider children's sector in Northern Ireland.
- To comment on any draft proposals produced by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister and/or Interdepartmental Steering Group in relation to the strategy or Commissioner.
- To conduct research/prepare papers for the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister/ Interdepartmental Steering Group.
- To identify and comment on research which has already been carried out in relation to children in Northern Ireland.
- To advise on appropriate mechanisms for consulting with children and young people.

The work of the Forum will assist the Executive, through the Inter-Departmental Working Group, to develop and shape the Children's Strategy and the establishment of the office of a Children's Commissioner.

Non-Governmental Forum for Children's Organisations

Ms Ramsey asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail, in relation to the Forum For Children's Organisations Group, (a) the terms of reference for this group, (b) who will be appointed to this group, and (c) when the first meeting will take place. (AQW 2634/00)

Reply: The Non-Governmental Forum of Children's Organisations was established on 3 April 2001 as an informal mechanism to provide advice to Ministers to aid the development of the Executive's Children's Strategy.

It has not been formally constituted or given any formal authority. However, Terms of Reference were provided to aid the focus and direction of the work to be undertaken.

The Terms of Reference are as follows:

- To provide advice to the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister on the role and remit of a Children's Commissioner for Northern Ireland.
- To provide advice to the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister on the components of a children's strategy for Northern Ireland.
- To represent the views of children's organisations throughout Northern Ireland.
- To act as a conduit of information both to and from the wider children's sector in Northern Ireland.
- To comment on any draft proposals produced by the Office of the First Minister and/or Interdepartmental Steering Group in relation to the strategy or Commissioner.
- To conduct research/prepare papers for the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister/ Interdepartmental Steering Group.
- To identify and comment on research which has already been carried out in relation to children in Northern Ireland.
- To advise on appropriate mechanisms for consulting with children and young people.

Participation in the Forum is on a voluntary basis. The following have been invited, as representatives of a wide variety of organisations representing the interests of children, to become members of the Forum:

Ms Paddy Kelly	Director Children's Law Centre
Ms Mary Cunningham	Director Child Care (NI)
Mr Colin Reid	Policy Advisor, NSPCC
Ms Lynda Wilson	Director, Barnardos
Ms Sheri Chamberlain	Programme Director, Save the Children
Ms Pip Jaffa	Director, Parents Advice Centre
Ms Valerie McGuffin	Director, Homestart
Ms Daphne Johnston	Assistant Director, NI Pre-school Playgroup Association
Ms Koulla Yiasouma	Director, Include Youth
Ms Maureen Scott	Royal College of Nursing
Ms Caroline Mills	Information & Campaigns Officer, Playboard
Mr Ross McCrea	Senior Policy Adviser, First Key NI
Ms Margaret Dunlea	Director of Employment and Training, Disability Action
Mr Patrick Yu	Executive Director, NI Council for Ethnic Minorities
Mr Harry Barry	Director, VOYPIC
Ms Mo Sykes	Director, NI Youth Forum

The first meeting of the Forum took place on 4 May.

Emergency Planning

Mr Beggs asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to co-operate with the Scottish Executive to ensure a co-ordinated emergency response to assist ferries, fishing and merchant vessels or other emergencies that may occur in neighbouring regions.

(AQW 2736/00)

Reply: The Central Emergency Planning Unit of the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister maintains close liaison with the Scottish Executive on issues of emergency planning policy and practice, through attendance at formal liaison meetings, informal visits and exchange of delegates at meetings and courses.

The specific arrangements for response to maritime emergencies are the responsibility of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency of the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and thus are outside the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Administration.

However, a large number of Northern Ireland Public Services, including the emergency services and the Central Emergency Planning Unit have good working relationships with the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, both informally and through the Northern Ireland Marine Safety Committees chaired by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency.

Activities promoted by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency have included the involvement of both the Northern Ireland and Scottish organisations in training and exercises.

The Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister is committed to maintaining and developing links with the Scottish Executive on emergency planning issues of mutual importance.

Senior Citizens: Equitable Treatment

Mr Shannon asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to establish an inter-departmental group to ensure that senior citizens receive equitable treatment under the equality legislation. (AQW 2906/00)

Reply: The EU Framework Directive of 27 November 2000 lays down a general basis for equal treatment on a number of grounds, including age. In order to implement the Directive it will be necessary to bring forward new legislation to prohibit discrimination in employment on the grounds of age. We plan to introduce that legislation in the Single Equality Bill which will also harmonise, as far as practicable, existing anti-discrimination law. The scope of the Single Equality Bill is currently the subject of consultation. One of the areas on which views are sought is whether protection from age discrimination should be extended beyond employment.

There are no plans at present to establish an inter-departmental group.

Foot-and-mouth Disease: Consequential Compensation

Mr Armstrong asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister whether it has consulted with other Regional Assemblies in respect of foot-and-mouth disease and if it is in a position to formulate a financial package to assist all businesses in Northern Ireland.

(AQO 1488/00)

Reply: An important aspect in the co-ordination of a response to this crisis has been consultation with colleagues in the other devolved administrations.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development has had a number of meetings with the other UK Agriculture Ministers in recent weeks. Sir Reg Empey has met with the other UK Tourism Ministers to discuss the impact of the crisis on tourism.

Officials from our Department attend the Whitehall Rural Taskforce to keep abreast of developments on wider economic issues in Great Britain and ensure that Northern Ireland benefits from any national schemes. The Executive also established its own inter-Departmental taskforce, led by the Economic Policy Unit, to examine the impact of Foot and Mouth on the Northern Ireland economy.

In terms of financial assistance, a number of UK-wide measures providing assistance to affected businesses have been in place for some weeks and are available to Northern Ireland businesses. Sir Reg Empey announced a £1 million tourism recovery strategy on 5 April, and the Executive is developing a grant scheme in lieu of rate relief. We hope to announce details of this soon.

NSMC: Mobility Study

Ms Hanna asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to report what progress has been made on the Mobility Study approved at the last North/South Ministerial Council Plenary meeting.

(AQO 1477/00)

Reply: I refer the member to the written answer we gave to AQO 1357/00.

Public Consultation Conferences on Obstacles to Mobility between North and South are planned for 16 May in Carrickmacross and 29 May in Omagh. The conferences have been advertised in the Press.

The consultation process will be open and fully participative.

It is anticipated that the consultants will present their final report to the Steering Group in mid-June.

Staff Training: Equality Obligations

Mr Byrne asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to indicate what steps it is taking to train its staff on those statutory duties outlined under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

(AQO 1475/00)

Reply: The Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister's Equality Scheme commits the Department to ensuring that all staff receive a programme of relevant communication and training on Section 75 obligations.

To that end Section 75 awareness seminars were delivered to our staff from December 2000 through to mid February 2001. These seminars covered the historical background to the legislation, its aims, who is affected by it, the role of the Equality Commission, the structure of the Department's Equality Scheme, the criteria for screening policies and the objective of equality impact assessments. More awareness seminars are planned. The Department will ensure through its induction programme that all new staff are made aware of their equality obligations.

In addition, over the coming months, officials directly involved in carrying out equality impact assessment of policies will receive more focused training based on the practical guidance published by the Equality Commission on 26 April 2001. There will also be training for staff directly involved with consultation exercises.

Lessons of Peace I: Complying With Equality Considerations

Mr Beggs asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister if it is aware of the contents of the recent document, Lessons of Peace I produced by Proteus, and to confirm that the European Peace and Reconciliation funding has been distributed taking into consideration equality considerations outlined under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

(AQO 1486/00)

Reply: The "Lessons of PEACE I" document reports on the impact of projects funded by PROTEUS under the Employment Sub-programme of the EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (PEACE I). At the mid-term review of the Programme the general principle was established that every effort should be made and every assistance given to ensure that all sectors of the population participate fully in the Programme. A full assessment of the impact of the Programme will begin before the end of the current financial year, which will include the extent to which the implementing bodies complied with this principle, in line with the equality considerations outlined under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act.

Civic Forum: Cost

Mr Berry asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail the total cost of establishing and running the Civic Forum to date.

(AQO 1444/00)

Reply: The cost of establishing the Civic Forum was almost £75,000. This includes the cost of filling the post of Chairperson and the costs of the “sectors” that nominated the Forum’s members.

The running costs of the Forum since its establishment in October 2000 until 31 March 2001 have been £145,000.

Civic Forum: Progress

Mr Hilditch asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail the progress of the Civic Forum to date. (AQO 1455/00)

Reply: The Civic Forum has been making steady progress since it was established in October 2000. It now has structures and procedures in place to enable it operate effectively. The Forum has met in plenary session on 4 occasions. Much of the work of the Forum is, however, carried out behind the scenes in its business committees and project groups.

The Civic Forum produced a comprehensive response to the draft Programme for Government which was taken into account in finalising the programme. The Civic Forum is currently researching and developing contributions on the three key areas; Life Long Learning, Combating Poverty and Building an Inclusive Society. At the end of this month the Civic Forum will make a substantive submission as part of the “Investing for Health” consultation round.

NSMC: Meetings

Mr Bradley asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to state the number and nature of meetings held under the North/South Ministerial Council since its inception. (AQO 1478/00)

Reply: Since December 1999, a total of 30 meetings have taken place under the auspices of the North South Ministerial Council, of which 28 have been sectoral meetings and 2 plenary meetings.

North/South Consultative Forum

Ms McWilliams asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to confirm if the report on the North/South Consultative Forum has been completed; and to make a statement. (AQO 1423/00)

Reply: The study on the North/South Consultative Forum has not yet been completed. A Working Group has been established to take the study forward. Consultants have been appointed to produce a report for the working group. Progress on the study will be reported to the next plenary meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council following which we shall make a further statement to the Assembly.

NSMC Secretariat and Implementation Bodies

Mr Fee asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to report what progress has been made on staff and accommodation developments at NSMC Secretariat and Implementation Bodies. (AQO 1474/00)

Reply: Progress on staff and accommodation in respect of the NSMC Secretariat and the 6 Implementation Bodies is set out below.

Implementation Bodies

1. Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB)

SEUPB has – a directly-recruited Chief Executive Officer (CEO); 17 staff on secondment from Departments, North and South; an accountant employed from an outside company; and 8 from the recent takeover of the Northern Ireland Partnership Board (NIPB)

The SEUPB has 3 premises with the headquarters based in Belfast.

The Belfast headquarters is temporarily housed in Commercial Union House - it is hoped to move to new leased premises at the Gasworks during the summer.

The Omagh regional office is housed in temporary accommodation but is moving to new premises at 13 Kevlin Road, Omagh, which will be officially opened on 23 May 2001.

The Monaghan regional office (EU House, Monaghan) is leased. The lease has expired and is currently being reviewed.

2. Waterways Ireland

Waterways Ireland has 50 Professional Technical and Administrative staff and 200 Industrial Staff of whom 22 are based in headquarters in Enniskillen. The remainder are based at the three Regional Offices and on operational duties throughout the waterways network.

The agreed final staff complement is 381 and a recruitment campaign will take place over the next 12-15 months.

Waterways Ireland has 70 offices, depots, stores and yards throughout Ireland, including headquarters located in interim accommodation at Darling Street & Belmore Street, Enniskillen. The three interim regional offices are at Scariff, Co Clare, Carrick-on-Shannon, Co Leitrim and Dublin.

Waterways Ireland is about to issue a detailed developers’ brief following a public tender procedure for permanent headquarters in Enniskillen. This will provide accommodation for 70 staff.

Waterways Ireland are seeking planning permission for a permanent office in Scariff and has plans to acquire permanent offices in Dublin and Carrick on Shannon.

3. Food Standards Promotion Board (FSPB)

The FSPB has 7 full-time staff, three of whom are seconded from the Food Safety Authority of Ireland, and 4 others on short-term contracts. The Body has approval for a staff complement of 30.

The Body is also assisted on a part-time basis (one day per week on average) by a Scientific Adviser based at QUB/Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, in Belfast.

Accommodation in Dublin is sub-let at Abbey Court Lower Abbey St, Dublin 1. The Cork Headquarters (7 Eastgate Avenue, Eastgate, Little Island, Co Cork) will be available from the end of May.

4. Foyle, Carlingford & Irish Lights Commission

(I) Loughs Agency

The Loughs Agency has 38 staff at present, consisting of 34 permanent, 2 on secondment and 2 university placements. Four posts are vacant. The Agency is in the process of recruiting 20 temporary River Watchers for the summer (16 for Headquarters and 4 for Carlingford).

The new Loughs Agency Headquarters at Prehen (22 Victoria Road, Londonderry) has been operational since July 2000. The Agency also has a temporary regional office at Old Quay Lane, Carlingford, Co Louth, and arrangements are in place to secure permanent accommodation.

(II) Lights Agency

Lights functions have not yet transferred from the Commissioners of Irish Lights.

5. Language

(I) Irish Language Agency- Foras na Gaeilge

The Board occupies two premises in Dublin. The premises at 7 Merrion Square, Dublin 2, are owned by the Office of Public Works and leased to Foras na Gaeilge.

The premises at Fredrick Court, 24-27 Fredrick Street, Dublin 1, are occupied under an informal arrangement with the Department of Education and Science and no rent is payable.

At present there are 35 staff with 10 posts vacant.

(II) Ulster-Scots Agency - Tha Boord o Ulster Scotch

The Body currently has 6 staff consisting of 2 seconded staff, 1 Public Relations consultant, and three temporary staff supplied by an outside recruitment agency. There are plans to recruit a further administrative officer.

The Ulster-Scots Agency currently has leased offices in Franklin House, 10-12 Brunswick Street, Belfast, and is considering the establishment of an office in East Donegal.

6. Trade & Business Development Body (InterTrade Ireland)

The Body currently has 23 staff consisting of 11 staff directly employed and an additional 11 staff seconded from Departments, North and South, and the private sector (Northern Ireland). In addition, one member of staff has been supplied by an Agency.

A recruitment exercise for Executive and Administrative grades is underway and it is hoped to appoint 12 staff during the summer.

There will be further recruitment until InterTradeIreland reaches its projected complement of 42 staff.

InterTradeIreland currently occupies temporary accommodation at the Old Gasworks Business Park, Newry. The property is rented.

In August 2001 it will move to a new headquarters on the same business park which is being completed at present. This property will be leased.

NSMC Secretariat

The staffing complement for the NSMC Secretariat is 29. There are 27 staff at present consisting of 15 Northern Ireland civil servants and 12 Irish Government civil servants. There are currently two vacancies on the Irish Government side.

The Secretariat is jointly led by Joint Secretaries (North) and (South), assisted by Deputy Joint Secretaries (North) and (South).

The Secretariat currently occupies temporary leased accommodation in the Queen's University campus in Armagh. It is intended that the Secretariat will relocate to permanent accommodation in Armagh within the next five years.

Community Relations Council: Membership

Mr Shannon asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister what steps it is taking to ensure that evangelical protestants are included on the board of the Community Relations Council. (AQO 1462/00)

Reply: Applications to fill vacancies on the Community Relations Council are invited through public advertisement in accordance with the procedures promulgated by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. The Articles of Association of the Council state that it should endeavour to achieve and maintain a membership which at all times taken together is generally capable of commanding respect and approval across the community. It is fully open to all members of the community, including evangelical protestants, to apply for and be appointed to membership of the Community Relations Council.

Children's Forum

Mr Close asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister what non-governmental

organisations are being invited to join the Children's Forum. (AQO 1452/00)

Reply: On 3 April 2001 Ministers Haughey and Nesbitt announced the establishment of a Forum of non-governmental organisations to provide input on the Executive's plans to appoint a Commissioner For Children in Northern Ireland and the development of a children's strategy. The following organisations are represented on the Forum:

- Barnados
- Child Care (Northern Ireland)
- Children's Law Centre
- Disability Action
- First Key Northern Ireland
- Homestart
- Include Youth
- Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities
- Northern Ireland Pre-school Playgroups Association
- Northern Ireland Youth Forum
- NSPCC
- Parents Advice Centre
- Playboard
- Royal College of Nursing
- Save the Children
- Voice of Young People in Care

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Ewe Prices

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to explain the pricing system whereby, within the ewe trade, a Northern Ireland Meat plant pays 70p per Kg and a Leicestershire firm offers 70-75p per lb whilst both supplying the same wholesaler.

(AQW 2718/00)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers): The level of prices paid to sheep producers is a commercial matter. Nevertheless I would be concerned if there was evidence of producers in Northern Ireland being treated unfairly.

It is difficult to comment meaningfully on the prices you quoted. The main difficulty is that there is no formal reporting system for ewe prices.

The 70p per kg you quoted for prices paid in Northern Ireland is in line with the prices in the weekly bulletin issued by the Livestock and Meat Commission. That price is considerably lower than the prices which were

reported prior to the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak. This fall may have been due to the closure of export markets especially as more than 50% of NI ewes were exported live to the Republic of Ireland.

Regarding ewe prices in Great Britain my officials have liaised with the authorities there but have been unable to obtain any reliable data. In the circumstances I am unable to confirm or deny that there is a major price difference between NI and GB.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Police Liaison

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of (a) RUC officers and (b) former RUC officers who are operating from DARD headquarters to assist in the eradication of foot-and-mouth disease. (AQW 2761/00)

Ms Rodgers: The Chief Constable has provided sufficient police liaison at DARD headquarters to meet the needs of the current foot and mouth disease situation. The precise numbers deployed at any time are a matter for the Chief Constable.

DARD's Veterinary Service also has available to it officers involved in the enforcement of legislation. In the current Foot and Mouth Disease emergency these have been supplemented by four additional members of staff, recruited on a temporary basis to provide support to the Department staff in investigations surrounding Foot and Mouth Disease. It is not our policy to comment on the former career history of any member of staff.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Guidelines for Election Canvassing

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail her plans to issue specific guidelines on foot-and-mouth disease to candidates campaigning in rural areas in any forthcoming election. (AQW 2786/00)

Ms Rodgers: My officials have written to the Chief Electoral Officer drawing his attention to the current Executive guidelines in relation to the Foot & Mouth outbreak. As a result the Chief Electoral Officer will be sending to all candidates a copy of the current guidelines and will draw attention to the importance of candidates and their canvass teams avoiding any contact with farm animals and staying off farms, including farmhouses. If the guidance is followed, the Election campaign will carry no risk to the successful outcome of the current fight against Foot and Mouth disease.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Compensation

Mr Leslie asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (a) highest and lowest amounts of

compensation paid per ewe culled as part of the foot-and-mouth precautions for breeding ewes of the following breeds: blackface, grey face (also known as crossbred), suffolk cross, cheviot, texel cross, (b) the amount of compensation paid for lambs at foot of above ewes; and (c) the amount of compensation added in lieu of lambs unborn at time of cull. (AQW 2803/00)

Ms Rodgers: The compensation details as recorded on valuation papers do not, in the majority of cases, provide the breed of sheep. The categories generally recorded are rams, sheep, ewe, sheep with lambs and lambs. I regret therefore that compensation details apportioned by breed are not available and consequently compensation paid in respect of lambs at foot for the breeds requested is similarly unavailable. In respect of compensation in lieu of unborn lambs, compensation figures are not available as valuations do not separately identify any element for unborn lambs.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Emergency Phone Line

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to confirm (a) the number of telephone calls received by the 24 hour emergency phone line for the foot-and-mouth outbreak and (b) where the unauthorised movements of livestock have taken place.

(AQW 2811/00)

Ms Rodgers: Up to 7 May 2001, the 24 hour emergency foot and mouth disease phone line has taken 413 phone calls concerning unauthorised movements of livestock. The calls have concerned movements throughout all parts of Northern Ireland.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Illegal Movement of Livestock

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to confirm that there are sufficient personnel to investigate the illegal movement of livestock.

(AQW 2815/00)

Ms Rodgers: The confirmation of two further outbreaks of Foot and Mouth Disease in Ardboe and Cushendall and the subsequent flow of information on illegal movements, resulted in the Department needing to increase its investigative capacity. This was met through the transfer of existing staff and the recruitment of four additional members of staff to the Veterinary Service enforcement team. The immediate investigation needs of the Department in relation to the illegal movement of livestock are being met but the Department will keep this under review should the situation change.

Agrimonetary Compensation

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail her plans to ensure prompt payment

for claims made under the Agrimonetary Compensation Scheme. (AQW 2919/00)

Ms Rodgers: Agrimonetary compensation is currently available and will be paid in accordance with European Commission requirements as follows:

Transitional compensation for cuts in direct payments as at 1 January 1999. The third tranche of the three year package is worth about £2.1 million to beef producers and £0.38 million to sheep farmers in Northern Ireland. The beef element is scheduled for payment in November and December 2001. The sheep payments were issued in April 2001.

Definitive agrimonetary compensation due to the strength of sterling during 1999. The first tranche of the three year package will pay a total of £4 million to beef producers by June 2001. The second tranche is worth in the region of £2.9 million to the beef sector and over £1 million for sheep. The compensation will be paid on Beef Special Premium, Suckler Cow Premium and Extensification Payment claims in November and December 2001. The sheep element issued in April 2001.

Definitive agrimonetary compensation due to the strength of sterling during 2000. This compensation is in two elements, one relating to the beef and dairy sectors for reductions in support prices, and one to sheep and beef producers for cuts in the sterling value of direct payments. The market support element for beef is worth about £9 million and will be received by applicants under the Extensification Payment scheme in July 2001 and by Beef Special Premium and Suckler Cow Premium claimants by mid June 2001. The dairy element is being issued by the Intervention Board on a UK-wide basis in two stages in April and May 2001. The direct support package represents a total of about £2 million for beef, payable to Beef Special Premium and Suckler Cow Premium applicants in December 2001 and on Extensification Payments in May 2002. Payments of £0.34 million will be received by sheep farmers by early June 2001.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Animal Burial Sites

Mr J Wilson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail whether she has considered or is currently considering Nutts Corner as a possible site for the burial of animals in the event of a mass cull being required as a precautionary measure against further outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease. (AQW 2966/00)

Ms Rodgers: I can confirm that I am not considering nor have I considered this or any other specific site for the stated purpose.

CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Reducing Public Bodies or Quangos

Mrs Carson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the action he intends to take to reduce the number of public bodies or quangos under the control of his Department. (AQW 2823/00)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McGimpsey): As you will be aware the Executive has committed in the Programme for Government to carrying out a review of public administration. Any work on reviewing quangos and NDPBs within my Department's remit will be taken forward in the context of that wider review.

At present the Executive is considering the scope, nature, terms of reference and timing of that review and it would be premature for me to initiate a widescale review of all the bodies for which my Department has responsibility pending agreement on the way forward on the service-wide review.

Host Town Programme

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to give his assessment of the "Host Town Programme" for the Special Olympics to be held in 2003 and to indicate which towns have volunteered to participate. (AQW 2832/00)

Mr McGimpsey: The "Host Town Programme" for the Special Olympics World Summer Games in 2003 is, in my view, one of the most important elements of the Games. It encourages local communities to provide meaningful support to people with learning disabilities and enables them to make a significant contribution towards the staging of the Games. I also believe that the "Host Town Programme" gives communities in Northern Ireland an excellent opportunity to come together to work towards a common goal.

The Programme, which was launched officially in Northern Ireland on 30 April, is actually the responsibility of the Special Olympics World Summer Games Organising Committee. While I would encourage as many towns as possible in Northern Ireland to volunteer to take part, it is really a matter for individual towns and cities to decide whether they wish to do so.

Special Olympics in 2003

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail his plans to contribute to the staging of the Special Olympics in Ireland in 2003. (AQW 2833/00)

Mr McGimpsey: I refer to your Assembly Question AQW2833 which was tabled for written answer, namely:-

To ask the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail his plans to contribute to the staging of the Special Olympics in Ireland in 2003.

As you may be aware, responsibility for the organisation and staging of the Special Olympics in Ireland in 2003 rests with the Special Olympics World Summer Games Organising Committee. This includes both planning and applications for assistance, financial or otherwise, that may be required for the Games. To date, my Department has not received any formal request from the Organising Committee for a contribution towards the staging of the Games.

Attracting Major Sporting Events to NI

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline those major sporting events he is actively encouraging to consider Northern Ireland as a host country. (AQW 2844/00)

Mr McGimpsey: The Northern Ireland Events Company, which is funded by my Department, is currently working with other statutory bodies, including the Sports Council, to develop a 3-5 year plan involving some 30 World and European Sporting, Cultural and Artistic events. Details of major events coming to Northern Ireland will be publicised in due course.

Special Olympics Host Town Programme

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail what assistance is available to those local authorities wishing to participate in the 'Host Town Programme' for the Special Olympics in 2003. (AQW 2927/00)

Mr McGimpsey: The Bank of Ireland is the lead sponsor for the Special Olympics Host Town Programme. Any local branch of the Bank will be happy to provide advice and guidance to those wishing to participate in the Programme.

EDUCATION

Reducing Public Bodies or Quangos

Mrs Carson asked the Minister of Education to detail the action he intends to take to reduce the number of public bodies or quangos under the control of his Department. (AQW 2824/00)

The Minister of Education (Mr M McGuinness): Administrative arrangements within the education sector will be examined as part of the proposed wider Review of Public Administration.

School Funding: North Antrim

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Education to detail how much direct grant assistance was received by each school in the constituency of North Antrim for 2000-01 financial year. (AQW 2837/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The information requested is not recorded by constituency. Details of the amount of recurrent funding received by each school in the 2000-01 financial year are not yet available. When available, information will be set out in Local Management of Schools Outturn Statements published by Education and Library Boards (in respect of controlled and maintained schools) and the Department of Education (in respect of Voluntary Grammar and Grant Maintained Integrated Schools).

Capital Funding: North Antrim Schools

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Education to detail the amount of capital funding made available to schools in the constituency of North Antrim for 2000-01 financial year. (AQW 2838/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Capital funding made available to schools in the North Antrim constituency in 2000-01 amounted to £2.288 million.

Common Funding Formula: Dalriada School, Ballymoney

Mr Leslie asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to "A Common Funding Formula for Grant- Aided Schools" (pages 135 and 151, calculations of the impact of high and low ASB on VGS non-denominational

schools), to detail the figures used in the formula for Dalriada School, Ballymoney. (AQW 2861/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The table below details the figures used in the proposed common funding formula for Dalriada School, Ballymoney:

Factor	Figures used in Formula Calculation
Age Weighted Pupil Units	137.33 Prep Pupils @ 0.32 = 43.95
	639.33 Year 8 - 12 Pupils @1.675 = 1070.88
	184.08 Year 13 - 14 Pupils @ 2.25 = 414.19
Premises	8331 sq. metres
	961pupils
TSN - Social Deprivation	25 pupils
TSN - Special Educational Need	Level 1 - zero pupils
	Level 2 - zero pupils
	Level 3 - 1 pupil
	Level 4 - 63 pupils
	Level 5 - 176 pupils
Sports Factor	Band 3 for Post Primary Schools
English as an additional language	2 Pupils

Primary School Budgets: Teachers' Salaries

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail the percentage of each primary school budget, in the constituency of East Antrim, that is allocated to meet the costs of teachers' salaries. (AQW 2878/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The budget allocated to individual schools is unhypothecated and thus a school may decide for itself how much, or how little, to spend on teachers' salaries.

The latest year for which figures are available is 1999-2000. In that year the percentages of each primary school budget, in the constituency of East Antrim, spent on teachers' salaries were:-

School Ref	School Name	Total Delegated	Teaching Costs			
		Budget 1999/2000	Permanent		Temporary	
		£	£	%	£	%
3010470	Carnal Banagh PS	84,897	69,191	81.5	£2,284	2.7
3010486	Larne and Inver PS	372,859	279,196	74.9	£17,860	4.8
3010519	Camrrough PS	78,937	70,262	89.0	£2,090	2.6
2010553	Carrickfergus Model PS	538,877	421,186	78.2	£29,727	5.5
3010646	Olderfleet PS	289,456	222,207	76.8	£12,607	4.4
3010696	Woodburn PS	263,696	165,697	62.8	£23,801	9.0
3010760	Mullaghduh PS	109,999	62,595	56.9	£27,059	24.6
3010785	Eden PS	298,185	235,583	79.0	£12,103	4.1

School Ref	School Name	Total Delegated	Teaching Costs			
		Budget 1999/2000	Permanent		Temporary	
		£	£	%	£	%
3010802	Ballynure PS	203,785	156,160	76.6	£7,308	3.6
3010803	Ballypriormore PS	97,919	94,795	96.8	£1,180	1.2
3010808	Glynn PS	129,653	104,448	80.6	£614	0.5
3010809	Ballycarry PS	263,082	193,281	73.5	£14,688	5.6
3010817	Greenisland PS	558,552	430,975	77.2	£16,928	3.0
3010841	Carrickfergus Central PS	405,851	346,487	85.4	£7,787	1.9
3010846	Whiteabbey PS	527,546	376,241	71.3	£51,030	9.7
3010850	Upper Ballyboley PS	128,669	106,301	82.6	£2,769	2.2
3010860	Sunnylands PS	415,049	269,728	65.0	£52,406	12.6
3010870	Moyle PS	625,112	448,713	71.8	£28,702	4.6
3010874	Whitehead PS	495,073	406,369	82.1	£11,629	2.3
3010880	King's Park PS	573,187	453,685	79.2	£44,772	7.8
3010883	Linn PS	494,109	365,377	73.9	£40,490	8.2
3013327	Glenarm PS	87,313	78,907	90.4	£2,995	3.4
3013330	Victoria PS	733,948	563,587	76.8	£52,647	7.2
3013332	Toreagh PS	128,004	100,508	78.5	£245	0.2
3016005	Silverstream PS	187,989	128,453	68.3	£16,971	9.0
3016010	Antiville PS	207,134	163,481	78.9	£5,468	2.6
3016038	Hollybank PS	390,643	350,143	89.6	£21,074	5.4
3016225	Woodlawn PS	454,025	376,544	82.9	£16,283	3.6
3016257	Oakfield PS	587,765	484,841	82.5	£17,152	2.9
3016269	Cairncastle PS	114,877	89,727	78.1	£4,428	3.9
3030899	Seaview PS	259,877	221,573	85.3	£18,162	7.0
3030900	St Anthony's PS	147,301	114,013	77.4	£504	0.3
3033317	St John's PS	373,418	295,865	79.2	£12,502	3.3
3036093	Lourdes PS	288,295	225,491	78.2	£8,113	2.8
3036100	St James PS	97,950	74,092	75.6	£5,431	5.5
3036563	St Nicholas's PS	330,517	250,928	75.9	£8,286	2.5
3036575	St Macnissi's PS	365,550	262,502	71.8	£27,128	7.4
3040451	Kilcoan PS	109,591	67,043	61.2	£19,244	17.6
3066561	Corran Integrated PS	265,434	212,567	80.1	£32,866	12.4
3066568	Acorn Integrated PS	353,531	244,146	69.1	£29,082	8.2

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Hotels Used by IDB in Co Antrim

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to list the hotels in the County Antrim area used by the IDB in the last 18 months for (a) functions (b) business meetings and (c) overnight stays and detail the total cost to the Department. (AQW 2760/00)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Sir Reg Empey): The information requested is provided within the table attached.

HOTELS USED BY IDB IN CO ANTRIM IN PERIOD 1/11/99-30/4/01

Name of Hotel	Function	Business Meeting	Overnight Stay	Cost £ (Includes VAT)
Aldergrove Airport Hotel		2	1	£525.15
Bushmills Inn	7	2	2	£3,456.10

Name of Hotel	Function	Business Meeting	Overnight Stay	Cost £ (Includes VAT)
Dunadry Hotel	1	3	1	£7,861.35
Glenavna Hotel	2			£72.75
Highways Hotel		1	1	£1,073.67
Hilton Templepatrick	3	9	4	£10,590.48
Templeton	2	1	1	£278.25
Totals	15	18	10	£23,857.75

Hauliers: Financial Help

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail what financial help is being made available to hauliers in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 2762/00)

Sir Reg Empey: The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has no initiatives or programmes that offer financial help to hauliers in Northern Ireland.

I understand that while the Department of Environment has no powers to provide direct financial assistance, the UK Government's Powershift Programme, which provides financial assistance towards the additional costs of purchase or conversion of vehicles using cleaner fuels, extends to Northern Ireland.

Average Incomes

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to give his assessment of the change in average incomes among (a) men and (b) women in Northern Ireland since 1997.

(AQW 2820/00)

Sir Reg Empey: The average gross weekly earnings of full-time adult employees whose pay was unaffected by absence for each year since 1997 are as follows:

	Average Gross Weekly Earnings – 1997-2000	
	Male Adult	Female Adult
1997	£335.90	£265.20
1998	£367.70	£277.60
1999	£376.80	£295.10
2000	£393.30	£307.30
Increase 1997-2000	17.1%	15.9%

Source: New Earnings Survey (NES); DETI

ENVIRONMENT

Planning Applications: A2 Seapark and Silverstream Banks

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of planning applications referred to the management board in relation to applications adjacent to the A2 between Seapark and Silverstream Banks in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 2849/00)

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Foster): There are no figures available for 1991, 1992 and 1993. In the subsequent years, the figures are as follows:-

Year	Applications
1994	1
1995	4
1996	1
1997	2
1998	3
1999	5
2000	0
2001	0

Planning Applications: A2 Seapark and Silverstream Banks

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of planning applications submitted for land adjacent to the A2 between Seapark and Silverstream Banks in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 2850/00)

Mr Foster: The number of applications submitted is as follows:-

Year	Applications
1991	9
1992	10
1993	5
1994	10
1995	12
1996	7
1997	10
1998	10
1999	13
2000	10
2001	4

Planning Applications: A2 Seapark and Silverstream Banks

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (a) the number of planning applications approved and (b) the number of planning applications refused in respect of land adjacent to the A2 between Seapark and Silverstream Banks in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 2851/00)

Mr Foster: The number of applications approved and refused is as follows:-

Year	Approved	Refused	
1991	8	0	(1 withdrawn)
1992	8	2	
1993	4	1	
1994	10	0	
1995	9	1	(2 withdrawn)
1996	5	2	
1997	8	1	(1 withdrawn)
1998	8	2	
1999	10	1	(1 withdrawn) (1 current)
2000	6	3	(1 current)
2001	0	0	(4 current)

Planning Applications: A2 Seapark and Silverstream Banks

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the cost of planning application referrals in respect of land adjacent to the A2 between Seapark and Silverstream Banks in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 2852/00)

Mr Foster: Details relating to costs of Planning Board Referrals are not held by my Department.

Promoting Carrickfergus Castle

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the reasons why the Environment and Heritage Service does not contribute financially to enable the Antrim Causeway Coast and Glens Tourist Consortium to promote Carrick Castle in their literature.

(AQW 2853/00)

Mr Foster: While the Environment and Heritage Service of my Department has in the past allowed images of its properties, including Carrickfergus Castle, to be used in the promotional literature of regional tourism organisations, it has not been felt appropriate to contribute financially, through membership, to their promotional activities.

However, EHS is currently preparing a marketing strategy which will be completed during this financial year.

EHS will be considering the opportunities for using the literature of the Antrim Causeway Coast and Glens Tourism Consortium to promote Carrickfergus Castle in developing the marketing strategy.

Reducing Public Bodies/Quangos

Mrs Carson asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the action he intends to take to reduce the number of public bodies or quangos under the control of his Department.

(AQW 2867/00)

Mr Foster: The future of the NI Review Body (Driver, Operator and Vehicle Licensing) is currently being assessed and no conclusion has yet been reached on whether or not it should be retained.

Other than that there are no plans to abolish any of the public bodies under the sponsorship of my Department, although their responsibilities and functions could feature, along with those of other public service authorities, in any major review of public administration in Northern Ireland. This is a commitment in the Programme for Government and the remit of such a review has still to be determined by the NI Executive.

Northern Ireland Coastal Forum

Mrs Carson asked the Minister of the Environment to outline his plans to establish a Northern Ireland Coastal Forum, similar to the Lough Neagh and Lower Bann Advisory Committees, and in partnership with interested organisations.

(AQW 2870/00)

Mr Foster: I refer the Member to my reply to Written Question 2666/00, as set out in the Official Report for 4 May 2001.

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 for the coastal area.

Historic Monuments/Listed Buildings

Mr Fee asked the Minister of the Environment to detail on how many occasions (a) a listed building has been de-listed pending development (b) a listed monument has been de-listed pending development and (c) listed buildings or monuments have been demolished without permission in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available.

(AQW 2880/00)

Mr Foster: No listed buildings have been de-listed in order to permit development to take place. The Department does not, however, hold information on whether de-listing has in practice been followed by development.

Historic monuments are scheduled, rather than listed, under the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (NI) Order 1995. No monument has been de-scheduled pending development.

Information on listed buildings demolished without approval is available only from 1995/96. Thirteen listed buildings have been demolished since then, as follows:

Year	No. of Listed Buildings Demolished
1995/96	1
1996/97	1
1997/98	5
1998/99	5
1999/00	1
2000/01	0

Planning (NI) Order 1991: Draft Amendment Bill

Mr Berry asked the Minister of the Environment to confirm when the proposed Draft Amendment Bill for the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 will be published. (AQO 1445/00)

Mr Foster: While the precise timetable has yet to be finalised, I expect the Bill to be introduced during the next Session of the Assembly, but not before Spring 2002.

The precise timetable will depend on the scope and complexity of the draft Bill and on the resources which my Department is able to allocate to work on it in light of other existing and emerging priorities. I have recently allocated some extra resource to this.

Areas of Special Scientific Interest: Proposed Legislation

Mr Ford asked the Minister of the Environment to indicate the timescale within which he plans to introduce legislation following the consultation on Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs). (AQO 1450/00)

Mr Foster: In March this year I published a consultation paper entitled 'Partners in Protection'. This seeks views on possible changes to the existing legislation for the protection and management of Areas of Special Scientific Interest.

In the light of the current foot and mouth outbreak, I have extended the deadline for comments on the document from 31 May until 30 June 2001. I hope that this will be helpful to groups who wish to respond but have been finding it difficult to arrange meetings.

When I have considered the comments arising from that consultation, I will decide what changes, if any, should be made to the legislation. Depending on the comments

received, I would hope to be in a position to come to conclusions by the Autumn.

Thereafter, the timing of the introduction of any amending legislation will depend on the nature and extent of the changes proposed; on approval of the policy proposals by the Executive Committee; on securing a place in the Executive Committee's legislative programme; and on any further public consultation that may be required.

Planning Legislation: Equality Issues

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment to consider amending planning legislation to give equality to both applicant and objector. (AQO 1456/00)

Mr Foster: There are well-established procedures within the planning process through which third party objectors can submit representations and objections. All submissions received are fully examined by the Department in its consideration of planning applications and all decisions reached are taken purely on the planning merits of each case. The Department believes that this process is fair and equitable to both applicants and third parties. However, my Department will continue to monitor and review its procedures in this area.

Planning Service: Review of Policy

Mr Poots asked the Minister of the Environment if the Planning Service is considering a review of policy in responding to detailed correspondence from objectors. (AQO 1432/00)

Mr Foster: In light of the increase in correspondence received from objectors, and the limited resources available within the Planning Service, it is not possible to provide a detailed reply in all cases.

It is, however, my Department's policy to acknowledge all objections raised in respect of planning applications. We also try to provide responses to specific questions raised as part of an objection.

Road Accident Fatalities

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of road accident fatalities in each of the last five years. (AQO 1473/00)

Mr Foster: During the period 1996 to 2000 the number of deaths as a result of road traffic collisions was as follows:

1996	142 fatalities
1997	144 fatalities

1998	160 fatalities
1999	141 fatalities
2000	171 fatalities

This represents a substantial reduction on the numbers killed compared with 25 years ago. In the 1970s on average more than 300 people were killed on our roads annually. Despite this welcome reduction, I remain committed to reducing further the still unacceptable number of casualties on our roads. Earlier this month I launched a consultation document on a new Road Safety Strategy for the next decade. A key issue in this is the level at which a challenging but realistic long-term target for reducing road deaths and serious injuries should be set.

Road Safety: Use Of Headlights

Mr McHugh asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has any plans to improve road safety by encouraging road users to drive with headlights on during low light conditions or heavy rain. (AQO 1484/00)

Mr Foster: As set out in Rule 201 of the Highway Code for Northern Ireland, it is a legal requirement for drivers and riders to use headlights when visibility is seriously reduced - generally when one cannot see for more than 100 metres.

Rule 69 of the Highway Code also advises motorcyclists that using dipped headlights, even in good daylight, may make them more conspicuous.

I would urge drivers and riders to pay heed to these provisions of the Highway Code, which I believe embody the necessary practical advice and guidance.

Enforcement of road traffic law, including the legal requirements on the use of headlights, is, of course, a matter for the RUC.

Classified Documentation: Disposal

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of the Environment to detail his policy on the disposal of classified documentation. (AQO 1470/00)

Mr Foster: My Department adheres to the general policy as set out in the Public Record Office's Guide to Records Management. This requires a first review to be carried out when records are ten years old. PRONI monitors the process to ensure that nothing of potential long-term historical or research value is destroyed. Unless a Disposal Schedule specifically sanctions destruction, no records can be destroyed without such monitoring taking place.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Environmental Impact

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister of the Environment to confirm that, in respect of the foot-and-mouth outbreak, all incineration and burial sites do not contravene environmental guidelines. (AQO 1490/00)

Mr Foster: I have provided advice to the Executive Committee on the environmental impacts associated with the various options available for the disposal of animal carcasses. The Executive Committee has taken this advice into account in determining its policy for the management of the Foot and Mouth crisis.

The Environment and Heritage Service of my Department has also provided guidance to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development on the siting of pyres and burial sites in order to protect surface and groundwaters in the vicinity of sites.

Statutory responsibility for controlling air pollution arising from the burning of animal carcasses in pyres rests with District Councils. My officials have, however, been fully consulted about guidance issued recently by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to District Councils on minimising risks to public health from carcass disposal. They are content that the guidance is consistent with the need to protect the environment.

I will continue to ensure that environmental considerations are highlighted as policy on the management of the outbreak develops.

Retrospective Planning Applications

Ms Armitage asked the Minister of the Environment if he has any plans to change the law regarding retrospective planning applications. (AQO 1442/00)

Mr Foster: Article 29 of The Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 makes provision for the submission of planning applications for the purpose of retaining development already carried out.

This power to submit retrospective planning applications exists to enable the regularising of development commenced without planning permission, providing it is acceptable in planning terms.

While Planning Service does not encourage unauthorised development, the commencement of development before obtaining planning consent is not an offence.

Where unauthorised development is acceptable from a planning viewpoint, it is in both the public and private interest to have appropriate procedures to enable it to be brought within planning control.

I have no plans to change the legislation at present.

Unauthorised Landfill: Hannahstown Area

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the steps he intends to take to deal with the problem of rubbish tipping in the Hannahstown area.

(AQO 1465/00)

Mr Foster: Unauthorised landfill is an ongoing problem in this general area. In the case of 51 Glenside Road it has been established that unauthorised materials are being dumped and the approved landfill area has been exceeded. Warning letters issued on 11 April 2001 to the operator and the landowners on whose land the unauthorised infilling is taking place, indicating that the site should be tidied and restored within 56 days.

A site inspection will be carried out at the end of this period to establish if the required work has been carried out and to determine if the planning condition requiring the provision of a wheelwash on site has been implemented.

My Department will continue to monitor the situation and take whatever further action is necessary to ensure restoration of the site.

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Public Sector: Alternative Funding

Mr McGrady asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail what action he proposes to take to identify alternative sources of funding to meet the needs of the public sector.

(AQW 2769/00)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan): As I announced on 15 March 2001, a new high-level Working Group is to be established to look into alternative sources of funding from the private sector to address the shortfall of investment in the public sector infrastructure in Northern Ireland.

The Working Group will oversee the commitment given in the Programme for Government to review, by March 2002, the opportunities for the use of Public Private Partnerships in all major public service areas.

Suicide Statistics

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to confirm the incidence of suicide per 100,000 of the population in each of the last three years.

(AQW 2774/00)

Mr Durkan: I can confirm that the incidence of suicide per 100,000 of the population in each of the last 3 years is: 7.5 (1998), 7.2 (1999) and 9.6. I have used the projected population for last year, as the 2000 mid-year estimate will not be available until July 2001.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Impact on Economy

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline what discussions he has undertaken with the Executive on the impact of foot-and-mouth disease on the Northern Ireland economy.

(AQW 2819/00)

Mr Durkan: The Executive recognises the adverse impact which foot and mouth disease has had on certain businesses in Northern Ireland and has discussed the issue on a number of occasions.

An OFMDFM led taskforce is monitoring the wider economic consequences of Foot and Mouth Disease and is considering what practical measures might be feasible and appropriate to support those sectors affected by the outbreak, taking account of local circumstances. This group links into the Rural Taskforce set up in Great Britain and will ensure that Northern Ireland benefits from any national initiatives.

The Executive has 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 as the GB Hardship Scheme and with a similar effect.

All these facts have been reflected in Executive Information Service press releases, Answers to Assembly Questions and my contribution to the Assembly debate on 1 May.

Budget Implications for Business and Trade Unions

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail when he last met representatives of business and trade unions to discuss the implications of the Budget for Northern Ireland.

(AQW 2822/00)

Mr Durkan: I have met representatives of business and Trade Unions on a number of occasions by request but these have not included a meeting dedicated specifically to the implications of the Budget for Northern Ireland. Business and Trade Union representatives are on DFP's consultation list and were of course invited to the Equality Conference on the Budget held 22/23 November.

Reducing Public Bodies or Quangos

Mrs Carson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the action he intends to take to reduce the number of public bodies or quangos under the control of his Department.

(AQW 2827/00)

Mr Durkan: The Department of Finance and Personnel does not have responsibility for any executive non-

departmental public bodies but does sponsor the following two advisory bodies:-

- the Law Reform Advisory Committee
- the NI Buildings Regulations Advisory Committee

The appointment of the Lay Observer is also the responsibility of the Department.

I do not plan to reduce the number of DFP public bodies at this time.

Gross Domestic Product

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (a) the Northern Ireland Gross Domestic Product for the last ten financial years and (b) the comparative figures for the rest of the UK. (AQW 2847/00)

Mr Durkan: National and regional estimates of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) are produced on a calendar year basis. The following tables detail the estimates for Northern Ireland and the other regions of the UK for each of the calendar years 1989 to 1999. Tables 1 and 1a show total GDP estimates while tables 2 and 2a detail GDP per head estimates and tables 3 and 3a express GDP per head as an index (UK=100).

TABLE 1 GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT AT CURRENT BASIC PRICES BY REGION (£ MILLION)

	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales	England								
				North East	North West	Yorkshire & the Humber	East Midlands	West Midlands	East	London	South East	South West
1989	9 329	38 448	19 007	17 156	49 365	34 848	30 439	37 956	45 885	68 907	66 979	34 118
1990	10 013	42 458	20 376	18 271	53 260	37 863	32 708	41 344	49 652	74 933	73 254	37 160
1991	10 890	45 103	21 533	19 365	55 775	39 872	34 131	42 716	50 968	78 641	75 730	38 584
1992	11 611	47 183	22 129	20 383	57 803	40 977	35 368	44 610	53 852	82 409	78 939	40 507
1993	12 437	49 302	23 191	21 480	60 664	42 952	37 124	46 859	55 928	86 574	83 817	42 529
1994	13 344	52 273	24 463	22 074	63 938	44 752	39 023	49 577	59 824	91 118	88 936	44 607
1995	14 297	55 667	25 989	22 975	66 007	47 108	40 976	52 407	62 416	93 843	93 319	47 385
1996	14 936	57 338	27 017	23 755	68 937	50 043	44 184	54 851	66 484	99 490	100 614	50 128
1997 ^p	15 952	58 650	28 010	24 202	72 414	53 182	47 261	57 783	72 698	108 559	108 276	53 580
1998 ^p	16 501	62 153	29 541	25 294	75 275	55 457	49 413	61 130	77 962	118 499	116 024	56 064
1999 ^p	17 003	64 050	30 689	25 875	77 562	57 554	50 906	63 495	81 793	122 816	121 956	58 151

^p Provisional

TABLE 1A GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT AT CURRENT BASIC PRICES (£ MILLION)

	Northern Ireland	United Kingdom *	United Kingdom* less Northern Ireland
1989	9 329	452 437	443 108
1990	10 013	491 291	481 278
1991	10 890	513 308	502 418
1992	11 611	535 772	524 161
1993	12 437	562 857	550 420
1994	13 344	593 931	580 587
1995	14 297	622 389	608 092
1996	14 936	657 775	642 839
1997 ^p	15 952	700 567	684 615
1998 ^p	16 501	743 314	726 813
1999 ^p	17 003	771 849	754 846

^p Provisional * United Kingdom less extra-region (an element of the national accounts which cannot be attributed to a specific region)

TABLE 2 GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT AT CURRENT BASIC PRICES BY REGION (£ PER HEAD)

	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales	England								
				North East	North West	Yorkshire & the Humber	East Midlands	West Midlands	East	London	South East	South West
1989	5 893	7 544	6 624	6 614	7 199	7 042	7 621	7 242	9 012	10 135	8 805	7 297
1990	6 300	8 321	7 080	7 033	7 757	7 630	8 149	7 875	9 711	10 935	9 586	7 917
1991	6 787	8 814	7 450	7 433	8 096	8 002	8 464	8 108	9 913	11 422	9 866	8 183
1992	7 163	9 217	7 632	7 811	8 380	8 195	8 722	8 450	10 415	11 930	10 242	8 547
1993	7 610	9 614	7 978	8 216	8 783	8 563	9 102	8 855	10 772	12 494	10 834	8 927
1994	8 114	10 168	8 393	8 441	9 248	8 901	9 519	9 352	11 467	13 088	11 441	9 311
1995	8 654	10 818	8 900	8 796	9 547	9 354	9 944	9 869	11 889	13 406	11 918	9 828
1996	8 964	11 162	9 240	9 111	9 980	9 927	10 673	10 309	12 582	14 107	12 761	10 351
1997 ^P	9 507	11 429	9 562	9 301	10 494	10 541	11 371	10 845	13 657	15 266	13 634	11 008
1998 ^P	9 754	12 117	10 063	9 741	10 909	10 983	11 848	11 455	14 530	16 532	14 510	11 447
1999 ^P	10 050	12 512	10 449	10 024	11 273	11 404	12 146	11 900	15 094	16 859	15 098	11 782

^P Provisional

TABLE 2A GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT AT CURRENT BASIC PRICES (£ PER HEAD)

	Northern Ireland	United Kingdom *	United Kingdom* less Northern Ireland
1989	5 893	7 888	7 945
1990	6 300	8 535	8 598
1991	6 787	8 880	8 940
1992	7 163	9 236	9 296
1993	7 610	9 671	9 731
1994	8 114	10 170	10 230
1995	8 654	10 619	10 676
1996	8 964	11 185	11 250
1997 ^P	9 507	11 871	11 940
1998 ^P	9 754	12 548	12 630
1999 ^P	10 050	12 972	13 058

^P Provisional * United Kingdom less extra-region (an element of the national accounts which cannot be attributed to a specific region)

TABLE 3 GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT AT CURRENT BASIC PRICES BY REGION (PER HEAD: INDICES)

UK LESS EXTRA-REGIO=100

	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales	England								
				North East	North West	Yorkshire & the Humber	East Midlands	West Midlands	East	London	South East	South West
1989	74.7	95.6	84.0	83.9	91.3	89.3	96.6	91.8	114.2	128.5	111.6	92.5
1990	73.8	97.5	83.0	82.4	90.9	89.4	95.5	92.3	113.8	128.1	112.3	92.8
1991	76.4	99.3	83.9	83.7	91.2	90.1	95.3	91.3	111.6	128.6	111.1	92.2
1992	77.6	99.8	82.6	84.6	90.7	88.7	94.4	91.5	112.8	129.2	110.9	92.5
1993	78.7	99.4	82.5	85.0	90.8	88.5	94.1	91.6	111.4	129.2	112.0	92.3
1994	79.8	100.0	82.5	83.0	90.9	87.5	93.6	92.0	112.8	128.7	112.5	91.6
1995	81.5	101.9	83.8	82.8	89.9	88.1	93.6	92.9	112.0	126.2	112.2	92.6
1996	80.1	99.8	82.6	81.5	89.2	88.8	95.4	92.2	112.5	126.1	114.1	92.5
1997 ^P	80.1	96.3	80.6	78.4	88.4	88.8	95.8	91.4	115.0	128.6	114.9	92.7
1998 ^P	77.7	96.6	80.2	77.6	86.9	87.5	94.4	91.3	115.8	131.7	115.6	91.2
1999 ^P	77.5	96.5	80.5	77.3	86.9	87.9	93.6	91.7	116.4	130.0	116.4	90.8

^P Provisional

TABLE 3A GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT AT CURRENT BASIC PRICES (PER HEAD: INDICES)

	Northern Ireland	United Kingdom less extra-regio
1989	74.7	100.0
1990	73.8	100.0
1991	76.4	100.0
1992	77.6	100.0
1993	78.7	100.0
1994	79.8	100.0
1995	81.5	100.0
1996	80.1	100.0
1997 ^P	80.1	100.0
1998 ^P	77.7	100.0
1999 ^P	77.5	100.0

^P Provisional

Children's Fund: Consultation

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (a) what consultation has taken place between his Department and the community and voluntary sector regarding the operation of the Children's Fund (b) what advice was offered by the sector and (c) how much of this advice has been accepted by his Department.

(AQW 2848/00)

Mr Durkan:

- (a) The policy of establishing Executive Programme Funds, including the Children's Fund, was included in the draft Programme for Government, which was subject to widespread consultation. During that process responses were received from 120 organisations including many of the main children's organisations in Northern Ireland. In addition to the formal consultation, I met with a delegation from the Children's Fund Lobby Group to hear their views on the concept of the Children's Fund and I understand that Mr Haughey and Mr Nesbitt had a similar meeting to discuss its operation. DFP and EPU officials have also met more recently with the Lobby Group. The detailed arrangements for the distribution and management of the funds to the voluntary and community sector are currently being developed and there will be full consultation with the voluntary and community sector about these.
- (b) The sector has put forward broad proposals in relation to the Children's Fund, including their views on the principles which should underline the operation of the Fund, who the Fund should target and the criteria for selection.
- (c) The representations that have been made by children's and other non-governmental organisations have been taken into account in finalising the detailed criteria and management arrangements for the first tranche

of allocations from the Children's Fund. They are also being used to inform the preparation of the more detailed arrangements for the remaining tranches. There will be full consultation on these arrangements once they are available.

Aggregate Levy

Mr Close asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to confirm when he last made representations to the Chancellor of the Exchequer regarding Aggregate Tax; and to make a statement.

(AQW 2854/00)

Mr Durkan: The First Minister and Deputy First Minister raised the issue of the aggregate levy on behalf of the Executive at a meeting with the Chancellor on 24 January. They subsequently provided a detailed exposition of the case for a Northern Ireland exemption from the tax in early March. Discussions with Treasury are continuing at official level with a view to seeking an appropriate derogation.

Maternity Units

Ms Ramsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, following the announcement, on 2 May 2001, by the Secretary of State for Health of £100 million boost for maternity units in England, whether he has had any discussions with the Chancellor of the Exchequer to obtain additional money for maternity services.

(AQW 2969/00)

Mr Durkan: The £100 million provision for maternity units, recently announced by the Secretary of State for Health is an allocation out of the resources already provided for by the Chancellor in the 2000 Spending Review. There will be no additional money coming to Northern Ireland Block via the application of the Barnett formula as a consequence of this announcement and I have no plans to raise the matters with the Chancellor. Within the resources available to us we are committed in the Programme for Government to meeting the needs of all mothers giving birth and to ensuring the safety of mothers and babies.

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Private Hire Taxi Companies

Ms Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the value of contracts awarded to private hire taxi companies by Trust Board area for each of the last four financial years for which figures are available.

(AQW 2673/00)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms de Brún): *[holding answer 9 May 2001]:* Regional Supplies Service of the Central Services Agency arrange contracts for private hire taxi companies for Trusts in the Eastern Board, Western Board and Northern Board areas and one Trust in the Southern Board area i.e. the Armagh and Dungannon Trust. The other trusts in the Southern Board Area arrange their own contracts. The details available are set out in the tables below:

EASTERN BOARD TRUSTS

The total award value of the contract for all Eastern Board Trusts is estimated at approx. £1.5 million per annum. Listed below are the selected Taxi contractors for the period 1 October 1996 – 31 March 1999.

Trust	Selected Taxi Contractor
Mater Hospital Trust	Enterprise Taxis
South and East Belfast HSS Trust	Enterprise Taxis
Royal Group of Hospitals Trust	Able Taxis
Down Lisburn Trust	Circular Taxis
	Lisburn Central Taxis
Ulster Community and Hospital Trust	Quarry Cabs
	Andersons Taxis
North & West Belfast HSS Trust	VIP Taxis
Belfast City Hospital Trust	Enterprise
Greenpark Healthcare Trust	Enterprise

The total award value of the contract for all Eastern Board Trusts is estimated at approx. £1.5 million per annum. Listed below are the selected Taxi contractors for the period 1 April 1999 – 31 March 2001.

Trust	Selected Taxi Contractor
Mater Hospital Trust	Carecabs
	Enterprise Taxis
South and East Belfast HSS Trust	Carecabs
	1st Class Taxis
	Enterprise Taxis
	David Bell
	Abjet
Royal Group of Hospitals Trust	Carecabs
	Enterprise Taxis
Down Lisburn Trust	Downpatrick Taxis
	Circular Taxis
	Lisburn Central Taxis
	Abjet
Ulster Community and Hospital Trust	Brown's Wheelchair Accessible Transport
	Abjet
	A&G Taxis
	Quarry Cabs
	Atlas Taxis
North & West Belfast HSS Trust	Citycabs
Belfast City Hospital Trust	Valuecabs
	Abjet
Greenpark Healthcare Trust	MTS
	Abjet

WESTERN BOARD TRUSTS

The total estimated award value of the contract for all Western Board Trusts for 1999/2000 is £400,000 per annum.

Trust	Selected Taxi Contractor
Foyle	Maybrook Taxis
	Roe Cabs
Altnagelvin	Maybrook Taxis
Sperrin Lakeland	McGread
	Urgent Taxis
	Eurocabs
	Grab-a-cab
	Frank Hagan
	Ato B Cabs
	JP Gallagher

NORTHERN BOARD TRUSTS

The total estimated award value of the contract for all Northern Board Trusts is £240,000 per annum. Listed below are the taxi contractors for the period 1 July 1998 – 30 October 2000

Trust	Selected Taxi Contractor
Homefirst	Antrim Area Taxis
	Heron Taxis
	Mahoods Taxis
	Scotts Taxis
	Dots Taxis
	Bradley Taxis
	Buicks Taxis and Minibus Service
	DM Taxis
United Hospitals	Antrim Area Taxis
	Heron Taxis
	Mahoods Taxis
	Scotts Taxis
	Dots Taxis
	Bradley Taxis
	Buicks Taxis and Minibus Service
	DM Taxis
Causeway	N/A

N/A – Information not available

The total estimated award value of the contract for all Northern Board Trusts is £240,000 per annum. Listed below are the taxi contractors from the 1 November 2000

Trust	Selected Taxi Contractor
Homefirst	Antrim Area Taxis
	Heron Taxis
	Mahoods Taxis
	Alan Francey
	DM Taxis
	Eurocoach
	N Taxis
	Phone a taxi
	Glenone Taxis
	ScottsTaxis

United Hospitals	Antrim Area Taxis
	Heron Taxis
	Mahoods Taxis
	Alan Francey
	DM Taxis
	Eurocoach
	N Taxis
	Phone a taxi
	Glenone Taxis
Causeway	ScottsTaxis
	Andy Brown Taxis *

*Since March/April 2001.

SOUTHERN BOARD TRUSTS

Armagh and Dungannon Trust estimated award value in 1996 was £70,000 per annum. The estimated award value for the imminent tender is £100,000.

Craigavon Area Hospital Group Trust does not have a contract for private hire taxi companies.

Craigavon and Banbridge Trust had a contract with private taxi hire companies. The contract had no stated value and was on a needs basis and was with 6 companies. The contract has just elapsed and is up for renewal.

Newry and Mourne Trust contract is awarded on a cost per mile basis.

Southern Board Trusts	
Trust	Selected Taxi Contractor
Armagh and Dungannon	Eurocoach
Craigavon and Area Hospital Group	No contract
Craigavon and Banbridge Trust	6 companies details not supplied
Newry and Mourne	Details not supplied

Socraíonn Seirbhís Soláthar Reigiúnda den LárGhníomhaireacht Seirbhísí conarthaí do chomhlachtaí príobháideacha d'Iontaobhais i mBord an Oirthir, Bord an Iarthair agus Bord an Tuaiscirt agus d'Iontaobhas amháin i mBord an Deiscirt .i. Iontaobhas SSS Ard Mhacha & Dhún Geanainn. Socraíonn na hiontaobhais eile i gCeantar Bord an Deiscirt a gconarthaí féin. Tá na sonraí atá ar fáil leagtha amach sna táblaí thíos:

IONTAOBHAIS BHORD AN OIRTHIR

Meastar gur fiú £1.5 milliún an bhliain luach iomlán an chonartha do gach Iontaobhas Bhord an Oirthir. Liostaithe thíos atá na conraitheoirí tacsáí roghnaithe don tréimhse 1 Deireadh Fómhair 1996 – 31 Márta 1999

Iontaobhas	Conraitheoir Tacsáí Roghnaithe
Iontaobhas Otharlann an Mater	Enterprise Taxis
Iontaobhas Bhéal Feirste Theas & Thoir	Enterprise Taxis
Iontaobhas Ghrúpa Ríoga na nOtharlann	Able Taxis
Iontaobhas an Dúin/Lios na gCearrbhach	Circular Taxis
	Lisburn Central Taxis
Iontaobhas Phobal & Otharlann Uladh	Quarry Cabs
	Andersons Taxis
Iontaobhas SSS Bhéal Feirste Thuaidh & Thiar	VIP Taxis
Iontaobhas Otharlann Chathair Bhéal Feirste	Enterprise
Iontaobhas na Páirce Glaise	Enterprise

Meastar gur fiú £1.5 milliún an bhliain luach iomlán an chonartha do gach Iontaobhas Bhord an Oirthir. Liostaithe thíos atá na conraitheoirí tacsáí roghnaithe don tréimhse 1 Aibreán 1999 – 31 Márta 1999

Iontaobhas	Conraitheoir Tacsáí Roghnaithe
Iontaobhas Otharlann an Mater	Carecabs
	Enterprise Taxis
Iontaobhas SSS Bhéal Feirste Theas & Thoir	Carecabs
	1st Class Taxis
	Enterprise Taxis
	David Bell
	Abjet
Iontaobhas Ghrúpa Ríoga na nOtharlann	Carecabs
	Enterprise Taxis
Iontaobhas an Dúin/Lios na gCearrbhach	Downpatrick Taxis
	Circular Taxis
	Lisburn Central Taxis
	Abjet
Iontaobhas Phobal & Otharlann Uladh	Brown's Wheelchair Accessible Transport
	Abjet
	A&G Taxis
	Quarry Cabs
	Atlas Taxis
Iontaobhas SSS Bhéal Feirste Thuaidh & Thiar	Citycabs
Iontaobhas Otharlann Chathair Bhéal Feirste	Valuecabs
	Abjet
Iontaobhas na Páirce Glaise	MTS
	Abjet

IONTAOBHAIS BHORD AN IARTHAIR

Meastar gur fiú £400,00 an bhliain don bhliain 1999/2000 luach iomlán an chonartha do gach Iontaobhas Bhord an Iarthair	
Iontaobhas	Conraitheoir Tascaí Roghnaithe
An Feabhal	Maybrook Taxis
	Roe Cabs
Alt na nGealbhan	Maybrook Taxis
Speirín Tír na Lochanna	McGread
	Urgent Taxis
	Eurocabs
	Grab-a-cab
	Frank Hagan
	Ato B Cabs
	JP Gallagher

IONTAOBHAIS BHORD AN TUAISCIRT

Meastar gur fiú £240,00 an bhliain luach iomlán an chonartha do gach Iontaobhas Bhord an Tuaiscirt. Liostaithe thíos atá na conraitheoirí tascaí don tréimhse 1 Iúil 1998 – 30 Deireadh Fómhair 2000	
Iontaobhas	Conraitheoir Tascaí Roghnaithe
Homefirst	Antrim Area Taxis
	Heron Taxis
	Mahoods Taxis
	Scotts Taxis
	Dots Taxis
	Bradley Taxis
	Buicks Taxis and Minibus Service
	DM Taxis
Otharlanna Aontaithe	Antrim Area Taxis
	Heron Taxis
	Mahoods Taxis
	Scotts Taxis
	Dots Taxis
	Bradley Taxis
	Buicks Taxis and Minibus Service
	DM Taxis
An Clochán	N/F

N/F – Níl an t-eolas ar fáil

Meastar gur fiú £240,00 an bhliain luach iomlán an chonartha do gach Iontaobhas Bhord an Tuaiscirt. Liostaithe thíos atá na conraitheoirí tascaí ó 1 Samhain 2000	
Iontaobhas	Conraitheoir Tascaí Roghnaithe
Homefirst	Antrim Area Taxis
	Heron Taxis
	Mahoods Taxis
	Alan Francey
	DM Taxis
	Eurocoach
	N Taxis
	Phone a taxi
	Glenone Taxis
	ScottsTaxis

Otharlanna Aontaithe	Antrim Area Taxis
	Heron Taxis
	Mahoods Taxis
	Alan Francey
	DM Taxis
	Eurocoach
	N Taxis
	Phone a taxi
	Glenone Taxis
	ScottsTaxis
An Clochán	Andy Brown Taxis *

*Ó Mhárta/Aibreán 2001.

IONTAOBHAS BHORD AN DEISCIRT

Meastar gurbh fhiú luach iomlán an chonartha ag Iontaobhas Ard Mhacha & Dhún Geanainn £70,000 an bhliain i 1996. Meastar gur fiú an tairiscint atá ar tí a tharlú £100,000.

Níl conradh le haghaidh fruilionradh príobháideach comhlachtaí tascaí ag Iontaobhas Grúpa Otharlann Ceantair Craigavon.

Bhí conradh ag Iontaobhas Phobal Craigavon & Dhroichead na Banna le comhlachtaí tascaí le fruilionradh príobháideach. Níl luach ar leith leis an chonradh agus bhí sé ar bhonn riachtanais agus bhí sé le 6 comhlacht. Tá deireadh i ndiaidh teacht ar an chonradh agus tá sé réidh le hathnuachan.

Bronntar conradh Iontaobhas an Iúir & Mhúirn bunaithe ar chostas an mhíle.

Iontaobhas Bhord an Deiscirt	
Iontaobhas	Conraitheoir Tascaí Roghnaithe
Ard Mhacha & Dún Geanainn	Eurocoach
Grúpa Otharlann Ceantair Craigavon	Gan chonradh
Iontaobhas Craigavon & Dhroichead na Banna	Níl sonraí 6 comhlacht soláthraithe
An tIúr & Múrn	Níl sonraí soláthraithe

Haemophilia: Diagnosis

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) the number of haemophiliacs who were wrongly diagnosed as having hepatitis C in the last 10 years and (b) what hepatology services and counselling were made available to them.

(AQW 2695/00)

Ms de Brún: [holding answer 9 May 2001]: As a result of an internal audit of the Hepatitis C Virus laboratory test at the Royal Group of Hospitals in Autumn 1999, an intermittent problem on the performance of the test was discovered. Following the audit, re-tests were carried out and 11 patients, all with haemophilia, who had earlier tested negative, were found to have been wrongly diagnosed.

Haemophilia patients with a liver disorder may avail of the services of the Consultant Hepatologist at the request of the Haematologist. All patients with haemophilia are counselled intensely at the time of their diagnosis (for haemophilia) and are made aware that counselling services continue to be available as required. On this occasion the eleven patients were each sent a letter asking them to attend the clinic. Nine were seen by the Consultant Haematologist at subsequent clinics and two did not attend, even following a further letter. None of these patients needed to have their treatment regimes altered following the revised diagnosis.

Mar thoradh ar iniúchadh inmheánach an scrúdaithe saotharlainne Vireas Heipitítis C ag Grúpa Ríoga na nOtharlann i bhFómhair 2001, fionnadh fadhb uaineach le déanamh an scrúdaithe. I ndiaidh an iniúchta, athrinneadh scrúduithe agus fuarthas amach gur fáthmheasadh 11 othar, agus iad uile le haemaifíla, go mícheart, ar dhiúltach toradh an scrúdaithe a rinneadh orthu níba luaithe.

Is féidir le hothair haemaifíla le neamhord ae seirbhísí an Heipiteolaí Chomhairligh a úsáid ar iarratas an Haemaiteolaí. Tugtar comhairle go dian do gach uile othar le haemaifíla ag am a bhfáthmheasa (do haemaifíla) agus cuirtear in iúl dóibh go leanfar ar aghaidh seirbhísí comhairle a chur ar fáil de réir mar atá siad de dhíth. An t-am seo, seoladh litir chuig na 11 othar ag iarraidh orthu freastal ar an chlinic. Chuaigh naonúr chuig an Haemaiteolaí Comhairleach ag clínicí ina dhiaidh sin agus níor fhreastail beirt, fiú i ndiaidh litreach eile. Ní raibh gá do na hothair seo a réimeanna cóireála a athrú i ndiaidh an fháthmheasa athscrúdaithe.

Hepatitis C: Incorrect Diagnosis

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) the number of people who were wrongly diagnosed as having hepatitis C in the last five years (b) the level of information and advice offered to them and (c) what steps she is taking to prevent any recurrence. (AQW 2714/00)

Ms de Brún: [holding answer 9 May 2001]:

- As explained in the answer to AQW 2695/00, a total of 11 people, all patients with haemophilia, were incorrectly diagnosed as not having Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) Infection in the Autumn of 1999.
- Following re-testing which showed that they were positive, each was sent a letter and nine of them were seen at subsequent clinics by the Consultant Haematologist.
- Since the test problem was identified at the Royal Group of Hospitals, HCV specimens for testing have been sent to laboratories in Edinburgh and Birmingham. The proposed re-introduction of the HCV test to Belfast will be accompanied by the use

of an automated extraction protocol to address the earlier problem.

- Mar a míníodh sa fhreagra ar AQW 2695/00, fáthmheasadh 11 duine, ar othar le haemaifíla iad, go mícheart gan Ionfhabhtú Vireas Heipitítis C (VHC) a bheith orthu i bhFómhair 1999.
- I ndiaidh an athscrúdaithe a thaispeáin go raibh siad dearfach, seoladh litir chuig gach duine agus chuaigh naonúr díobh chuig an Haemaiteolaí Comhairleach ag clínicí ina dhiaidh sin.
- Ó aithníodh an fhadhb leis an scrúdú ag Grúpa Ríoga na nOtharlann, seoladh eiseamail VHC chuig saotharlanna i nDún Éideann agus i mBeirmingham le dul faoi scrúdú. Mar aon le hatabhairt isteach an scrúdaithe VHC go Béal Feirste molta, beidh úsáid phrótacail uathoibrithe tarraingthe le dul i gceann na faidhbe níba luaithe.

Trust Board Chief Executives: Travel Expenses and Subsistence Allowances

Mr Adams asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the amount of travel expenses and subsistence allowances claimed by Trust Board Chief Executives, for the financial year 2000-01 by Trust Board area. (AQW 2765/00)

Ms de Brún: The information requested is shown in the table below.

Board Area	2000/01 £
EHSSB	
Belfast City Hospital	2,195.36
Down Lisburn	329.77
Green Park	9,041.00
Mater Infirmorum Hospital	865.00
North and West Belfast	9,273.00
South and East Belfast	5,298.93
Royal Group of Hospitals	3,320.39
Ulster Community & Hospitals	12,716.33
Totals	43,039.78
NHSSB	
Causeway	567.45
Homefirst Community	328.30
United Hospitals	729.80
Totals	1,625.55
SHSSB	
Armagh and Dungannon	NIL
Craigavon and Banbridge Community	2,742.41
Craigavon Area Hospital	200.00
Newry and Mourne	2,999.78
Totals	5,942.19

Board Area	2000/01 £
WHSSB	
Altnagelvin Hospitals	1,205.00
Foyle	1,956.34
Sperrin Lakeland	2,150.72
Totals	5,312.06
N I Ambulance Service	6,835.06

Taispeántar an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos.

Ceantar An Bhoird	2000/01 £
BSSSO	
Otharlann Cathrach Bhéal Feirste	2,195.36
An Dún/Lios na gCearrbhach	329.77
Páirc Ghlas	9,041.00
Otharlann an Mater	865.00
Béal Feirste Thuaidh & Thiar	9,273.00
Béal Feirste Theas & Thoir	5,298.93
Grúpa Ríoga na nOspidéal	3,320.39
Pobal Uladh & Ospidéal	12,716.33
Iomlán	43,039.78
BSSST	
An Clochán	567.45
Pobal Homefirst	328.30
Otharlanna Aontaithe	729.80
Iomlán	1,625.55
BSSSD	
Ard Mhacha & Dún Geanainn	NIL
Pobal Craigavon & Droichead na Banna	2,742.41
Otharlann Ceantair Craigavon	200.00
An tIúr & Mhúirn	2,999.78
Iomlán	5,942.19
BSSSI	
Otharlanna Alt na nGealbhán	1,205.00
An Feabhal	1,956.34
Speirín Tír na Lochanna	2,150.72
Iomlán	5,312.06
Seirbhís Otharcharr Thuaisceart Éireann	6,835.06

Co-operating to Safeguard Children

Ms McWilliams asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline (a) the current position in relation to the guidance Co-operating to Protect Children (b) will it be issued for consultation and, if so, when, and (c) will it be subject to Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. (AQW 2767/00)

Ms de Brún: The latest guidance now entitled 'Co-operating to Safeguard Children' is at final draft stage.

Extensive consultation with those involved in child protection has already been carried out. The first draft was issued widely for consultation to Boards, Trusts, representatives of professionals involved in child protection, voluntary organisations and other departments 18 months ago. Since then, consultation has continued with the four Area Child Protection Committees (ACPCs), which comprise voluntary and statutory agencies, until broad agreement was reached. The guidance is in fact addressed to the ACPCs and the final draft is currently with them for comment.

In relation to Section 75, the Department intends to issue the draft for consultation on equality issues in June.

Tá an treoir is déanaí, anois dar teideal 'Ag Comhoibriú le Páistí a Choinneáil Slán', ag an chéim dheireanach dréachta.

Rinneadh comhairliú leathan cheana féin leo siúd i mbun cosaint páistí. Seoladh an chéad dréacht do chomhairliú go forleathan chuig Boird, Iontaobhais, ionadaithe gairmithe i mbun cosaint páistí, eagraíochtaí deonacha agus chuig ranna eile 18 mí ó shin. Ó shin, lean an comhairliú ar aghaidh leis na ceithre Choiste Ceantair Chosaint Páistí (CCCPanna), a bhfuil gníomhaireachtaí deonacha agus reachtúla orthu, go dtí gur thángthas ar chomhaontú leathan. Is amhlaidh atá an treoir dírithe ar na CCCPanna agus tá an dréacht deireanach acu faoi láthair dá gcuid moltaí.

Maidir le Mír 75, tá sé ar intinn ag an Roinn an dréacht a fhoilsiú do chomhairliú ar cheisteanna comhionannais i Meitheamh.

Tonsillectomy/Adenoidectomy Operations

Ms McWilliams asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of tonsillectomy and adenoidectomy operations that have taken place for each of the following months: November 2000, December 2000, January 2001, February 2001 and March 2001. (AQW 2768/00)

Ms de Brún: This information is detailed in the table below.

OPERATIONS CARRIED OUT

	Tonsillectomy	Adenoidectomy
November 2000	328	29
December 2000	163	27
January 2001	233	34
February 2001	46	7
March 2001	9	3

Mionléirítear an t-eolas seo sa tábla thíos.

OBRÁIDÍ DÉANTA

	Céislíneachtóime	Adanóideachtóime
Samhain 2000	328	29
Nollaig 2000	163	27
Eanáir 2001	233	34
Feabhra 2001	46	7
Márta 2001	9	3

Ulster Hospital: Development Plan

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm (a) that a strategic development plan has been lodged by the Ulster Hospital Trust and (b) when a decision will be made by her regarding this plan. (AQW 2772/00)

Ms de Brún: I can confirm that the Ulster Community and Hospitals HSS Trust has submitted a Strategic Development Plan for the Ulster Hospital. My Department is finalising its assessment of the Plan and when this has been completed I will consider the options available and announce my decision on the proposals as soon as possible.

Tig liom a dhearbhu gur chuir Iontaobhas SSS Phobal Uladh agus Otharlann Plean Straitéiseach Forbartha isteach d'Otharlann Uladh. Tá an Roinn s'agamsa ag cur na dlaoi mullaigh ar a measúnú ar an Phlean agus nuair atá seo déanta déanfaidh mé machnamh ar na roghanna a bheidh ar fáil agus fógróidh mé mo chinneadh a luaithe agus is féidir.

Incidences of Serious Diseases

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm the incidence, per 100,000 of the population, of (a) diabetes (b) asthma (c) cancer (d) heart disease (e) stroke and (f) poisoning in each of the last three years. (AQW 2773/00)

Ms de Brún: The information is not available in the form requested.

Níl an t-eolas ar fáil san fhoirm a iarradh é.

Ulster Hospital: Medical Equipment

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if, pursuant to AQW 1679/00, she will confirm (a) that the Ulster Hospital has received the £1.48 million for the replacement of critical items of medical equipment and (b) how this relates to the general redevelopment plan for the Ulster Hospital. (AQW 2775/00)

Ms de Brún: I can confirm that my Department approved capital funding of £1.48 million for replacement of critical items of medical equipment at the Ulster

Hospital. The Trust was advised on 27 January 2001 that this additional funding was being made available immediately and that procurement could proceed.

Replacement of this equipment is the first phase in the Strategic Development Plan for the Ulster Hospital which has been submitted to my Department for approval.

Tig liom a dhearbhu gur cheadaigh an Roinn s'agamsa maoiniú caipitil £1.48 milliún do mhalartú ábhar fíorthábhachtach de threalamh míochaine ag Otharlann Uladh. Moladh don Iontaobhas ar an 27 Eanáir 2001 go raibh an maoiniú breise á chur ar fáil láithreach agus gurbh fhéidir leis an soláthar dul ar aghaidh.

Is é malartú an trealamh seo an chéad chéim sa Phlean Straitéiseach Forbartha d'Otharlann Uladh a cuireadh isteach chuig an Roinn s'agamsa.

Ulster Hospital: Strategic Development Plan

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm that £2 million was allocated to her Department, as outlined in Page 150 of the Programme for Government, to finalise and begin implementation of a strategic development plan to modernise the Ulster Hospital and to detail (a) how this money has been spent and (b) if any of this money will be given to the Ulster Hospital to cover its costs. (AQW 2779/00)

Ms de Brún: I can confirm that my Department has identified £2 million for strategic redevelopment of the Ulster Hospital, in line with the Programme for Government.

The Ulster Community and Hospitals HSS Trust has submitted a Strategic Development Plan for the Ulster Hospital. My Department is finalising its assessment of the Plan. When this has been completed I will consider the options available and announce my decision on the proposals as soon as possible. The funding will be applied to the implementation of these proposals.

Tig liom a dhearbhu gur chuir an Roinn s'agamsa £2 milliún i leataobh d'athchóiriú straitéiseach Otharlainne Uladh, de réir Clár um Rialtas.

Chuir Iontaobhas SSS Phobal Uladh agus Otharlann Plean Straitéiseach Forbartha d'Otharlann Uladh isteach. Tá an Roinn s'agamsa ag cur na dlaoi mullaigh ar a measúnú ar an Phlean. Nuair a bheas seo déanta déanfaidh mé machnamh ar na roghanna a bheas ar fáil agus fógróidh mé mo chinneadh ar na moltaí a luaithe agus is féidir. Bainfidh an maoiniú le cur i gcrích na moltaí seo.

Ulster Hospital Redevelopment Programme

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to explain (a) the difference

in the figures set out in Executive Programme Funds, as outlined in correspondence of 12 March 2001 to the Chairperson of the Health, Social Services and Public Safety, relating to the Ulster Hospital and those set out by the Minister of Finance and Personnel on 2 March 2001 and (b) which programme she is following. (AQW 2780/00)

Ms de Brún: The correspondence of 12 March was from one of my officials and, on my behalf, sought the HSSPS Committee's views on the bids my Department intended to make for Executive Programme Funds. The Committee considered these bids at its meeting on 20 March.

In the event, the Executive did not meet my Department's bids in full. The table below shows the bids made to the Infrastructure/Capital Renewal Fund for the first phase of the Ulster Hospital Redevelopment Programme for the years 2001/02 to 2003/04 and the final allocation announced by Mr Durkan on 2 April. The balance of the total cost of the proposed first phase is £12 million and, in the absence of any further additional allocation, will come from my Department's capital budget.

	2001/02 £m	2002/03 £m	2003/04 £m	Total £m
Bid	1.0	11.0	10.0	22.0
Executive Allocation	0.5	3.0	6.5	10.0

Duine de mo chuid oifigeach a rinne an comhfhreagras ar an 12 Márta agus ar mo shon, d'iarr sé ar thuairimí an Choiste SSSSP ar na tairiscintí a bhí sé ar intinn ag an Roinn s'agamsa a dhéanamh ar Chistí Chlár an Fheidhmeannais. Rinne an Coiste machnamh ar na tairiscintí seo ag cruinniú ar an 20 Márta.

Cibé ar bith, níor sheas an Feidhmeannas tairiscintí mo Roinne ina n-iomlán. Léiríonn an tábla thíos na tairiscintí déanta ar an Chiste Athnuachana Bonneagair/Caipitil don chéad chéim de Chlár Athchóirithe Otharlainne Uladh do na blianta 2001/02 go 2003/04 agus an dáileadh deireanach a d'fhógair an tUasal Mac Dhuarcáin ar an 2 Aibreán. £12 milliún is ea fuilleach chostas iomlán na chéad chéime molta, agus gan tuilleadh dáilte ar bith eile, gheobhfhar an t-airgead eile ó bhuiséad caipitil mo Roinne.

	2001/02 £m	2002/03 £m	2003/04 £m	Iomlán £m
Tairiscint	1.0	11.0	10.0	22.0
Dáileadh an Fheidhmeannais	0.5	3.0	6.5	10.0

Ulster Hospital: Strategic Development Plan

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to the £42 million Health Services boost announced on 4 April 2001, to confirm (a) an allocation of £10 million for the Ulster

Hospital (b) if the Ulster Hospital has been officially advised in writing of this allocation (c) how the £22 million allocated in Executive Programme Funds will be spent and (d) if these monies are part of the Strategic Development Plan for the Ulster Hospital. (AQW 2781/00)

Ms de Brún: My Department submitted a bid to the Executive Programme Funds for £22 million over the next three years to take forward much needed development at the Ulster Hospital site. In the event only £10 million was allocated in respect of this bid; the amounts being £0.5 million this year, £3 million next year and £6.5 million in 2003/04.

My Department is finalising its assessment of the Strategic Development Plan for the Ulster Hospital submitted by the Ulster Community and Hospitals HSS Trust. When that has been completed I will consider the options available and announce my decision on the proposals as soon as possible. The application of the funding will be considered in the light of the costs and timetable for the individual schemes which make up the redevelopment programme. My Department will then write formally to the Trust confirming the capital provision.

Chuir mo Roinn tairiscint £22 mhilliún faoi bhráid chlárchiste an Choiste Feidhmiúcháin thar na trí bliana seo chugainn le forbairt ar shuíomh an Ospidéil Uladh a chur ar aghaidh — forbairt a bhfuil géarghá léi. Ach níor leithroinneadh ach £10 milliún maidir leis an tairiscint seo; £0.5 mhilliún i mbliana, trí mhilliún don bhliain seo chugainn agus £6.5 mhilliún i 2003-04.

Tá an Roinn s'agamsa ag cur na dlaoi mullaigh ar a measúnú ar an Phlean Straitéiseach Forbartha d'Otharlann Uladh a chuir Iontaobhas SSS Phobal Uladh agus Otharlann isteach. Nuair a bheas seo déanta déanfaidh mé machnamh ar na roghanna a bheas ar fáil agus fógróidh mé mo chinneadh ar na moltaí a luaithe agus is féidir. Déanfar machnamh ar dháileadh an mhaoinithe ag cur san áireamh na gcostas agus an chlár ama do na scéimeanna indibhidiúla a chomhdhéanann an clár athchóirithe. Ansin, scríobhfaidh an Roinn s'agamsa chuig an Iontaobhas go foirmiúil ag cinntiú cur ar fáil an chaipitil.

Special Educational Needs

Mrs Carson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps she is taking to address the lack of provision of services, which include Speech and Language, Occupational and Physiotherapy, as recommended by Senior Clinical Medical Officers or Consultant Community Paediatricians for pupils of special schools in the Southern Health and Social Services Board Area. (AQW 2782/00)

Ms de Brún: My Department has established a joint working group with officials from the Department of Education to consider the support required by children with special educational needs and how this can best be

provided. Meanwhile, the provision of therapeutic services for children in the Southern Board area is a matter for the Board in conjunction with local Trusts.

Bhunaigh an Roinn s'agamsa chomhghrúpa oibre le hoifigigh ón Roinn Oideachais le machnamh a dhéanamh ar an tacaíocht atá de dhíth ar pháistí le riachtanais speisialta oideachais agus ar an dóigh is fearr léi seo a sholáthar. Idir an dá linn, is ceist don Bhord in éineacht le hIontaobhais áitiúla é soláthar seirbhísí teiripeacha do pháistí i gceantar Bhord an Deiscirt.

Bowel Cancer

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the steps she is taking to address the increase in those diagnosed with bowel cancer. (AQW 2790/00)

Ms de Brún: Virtually all patients with bowel cancer are now assessed and managed by multidisciplinary specialist teams for gastrointestinal cancer at the Cancer Centre in Belfast and at the Cancer Units in Altnagelvin, Craigavon, Antrim and the Ulster Hospital. Standard guidelines have been commissioned for all General Practitioners on the identification of potentially sinister symptoms and the need for urgent referral for investigation. By the end of 2002, such referrals should be seen within a maximum of two weeks - subject to the availability of the necessary specialist staff and equipment. Research is also currently under way about the possible role of screening as a way of preventing bowel cancer.

Measúnaíonn agus láimhseálann sainfhoirne ildhisciplíneacha chóir a bheith gach uile othar le hailse inne d'aile ghastra-stéigeach ag an Ionad Ailse i mBéal Feirste agus ag na hIonaid Ailse in Alt na nGealbhán, i gCraigavon, Aontroim agus in Otharlann Uladh. Coimisiúnaíodh treoirínte caighdeánacha do gach uile Gnáthdhochtúir ar aithint airíonna urchóideacha ionchasacha agus ar an ghá d'atreorú práinneach le haghaidh fiosraithe. Faoi dheireadh 2002, ba chóir do na daoine sin atreoraithe dul chuig dochtúir laistigh de dhá seachtaine ar a uasmhéad - faoi réir infhaighteacht na sainfhoirne agus an tsaintrealaimh atá riachtanach. Tá taighde á dhéanamh faoi láthair ar ról féideartha an scagtha mar dhóigh le hailse inne a chosc.

Colorectal Cancer

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of people diagnosed with bowel cancer, by Health Board area, in each of the last three years for which figures are available. (AQW 2791/00)

Ms de Brún: Information on the numbers of people diagnosed with colorectal cancer is available for the

calendar years 1994 to 1996 and is detailed in the table below.

	1994	1995	1996
EHSSB	403	444	439
NHSSB	260	225	237
SHSSB	138	168	145
WHSSB	123	138	136

Tá eolas ar líon na ndaoine fáthmheasta le hailse colaidriseacháin do na blianta 1994 go 1996 ar fáil agus mionléirítear sa tábla thíos é.

	1994	1995	1996
BSSSO	403	444	439
BSSST	260	225	237
BSSSD	138	168	145
BSSSI	123	138	136

Health Technical Memorandum No 84: Compliance

Mr Berry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail, by board area, the number of statutory residential nursing homes that are complying with the Health Technical Memorandum No 84.

(AQW 2813/00)

Ms de Brún: There are no statutory nursing homes here. The attached table provides details of statutory homes providing residential care and the numbers of these that comply with the Health Technical Memorandum No 84.

ADULTS

Health and Social Services Board	No. of Statutory Residential Homes	No. Complying with HTM 84
Eastern	35	28+
Northern	18	3
Southern	39	38
Western	8	0*

+ Eastern HSS Board anticipate that the remaining 7 facilities will be compliant by the end of the current financial year

* All statutory homes in the Western HSS Board area are regarded as 80-90% compliant with HTM 84. Plans are in place to ensure that all 8 facilities are 100% compliant by the end of the current financial year.

CHILDREN

Health and Social Services Board	No. of Statutory Residential Homes	No. complying with HTM 84
Eastern	14	13+

Health and Social Services Board	No. of Statutory Residential Homes	No. complying with HTM 84
Northern	5	1
Southern	4	4
Western	4	4*

+ Eastern HSS Board anticipate full compliance by the end of the financial year

* Western HSSB indicate that 3 facilities are currently 80-90% compliant with HTM 84 standards and anticipate that they will become 100% compliant by the end of the financial year. The remaining facility is currently 60-70% compliant and plans are in place to increase the degree of compliance in the current year.

Níl tithe reachtúla banaltrachta ar bith anseo. Tugann an tábla atá faoi iamh sonraí ar thithe reachtúla ag soláthar cúraim chónaithe agus ar an mhéid díobh siúd a ghéillíonn do Mheamram Teicniúil Sláinte Uimhir 84.

DAOINE FÁSTA

Bord Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta	Méid na dTithe Reachtúla Cónaithe	Méid géilliúil do MTS 84
An tOirthear	35	28+
An Tuaisceart	18	3
An Deisceart	39	38
An tIarthar	8	0*

+ Measann Bord SSS an Oirthir go mbeidh na 7 áis eile géilliúil faoi dheireadh na bliana reatha airgeadais.

* Féachtar ar thithe reachtúla uile i mBord SSS an Iarthair mar 80-90% géilliúil do MTS 84. Tá pleananna i bhfeidhm le cinntiú go mbeidh na 8 áis uile 100% géilliúil faoi dheireadh na bliana reatha airgeadais.

PÁISTÍ

Bord Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta	Méid na dTithe Reachtúla Cónaithe	Méid géilliúil do MTS 84
An tOirthear	14	13+
An Tuaisceart	5	1
An Deisceart	4	4
An tIarthar	4	4*

+ Measann Bord SSS an Oirthir go mbeidh siad géilliúil go hiomlán faoi dheireadh na bliana airgeadais.

* Tugann BSSS an Iarthair le fios go bhfuil 3 áis 80-90% géilliúil faoi láthair do chaighdeán MTS 84 agus measann siad go mbeidh siad 100% géilliúil faoi dheireadh na bliana airgeadais. Tá an áis eile 60-70% géilliúil agus tá pleananna i bhfeidhm le méid na géilliúla a mhéadú sa bhliain reatha.

Reduction in Public Bodies or Quangos

Mrs Carson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the action she intends to take to reduce the number of public bodies or quangos under the control of her Department. (AQW 2825/00)

Ms de Brún: The Executive is currently considering the scope, nature, terms of reference and timing of the Review of Public Administration referred to in the

Programme for Government. This Review encompasses all DHSSPS public bodies and any changes to those bodies will be made with reference to the terms of the Review.

Tá an Feidhmeannas ag déanamh machnaimh faoi láthair ar scoip, saghas, théarmaí tagartha agus ar uainiú an Athbhreithnithe ar Riarachán Poiblí, a ndéantar tagairt dó i gClár um Rialtas. Clúdaíonn an tAthbhreithniú seo forais phoiblí uile na RSSSSP agus déanfar athruithe ar na forais siúd ag déanamh tagartha do théarmaí an Athbhreithnithe.

Ministerial Group on Drugs: Representations Received

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to the Executive Committee's Drug Strategy, to detail those bodies, groups or individuals (a) from whom submissions or representations have been sought (b) from whom submissions or representations have been received by the Ministerial group on drugs. (AQW 2840/00)

Ms de Brún: The Ministerial Group on Drugs receives regular written reports from the Central Co-ordinating Group for Action Against Drugs, which comprises representatives from the Departments represented on the Ministerial Group as well as from the Prison Service, RUC, Customs and Excise, the Health Promotion Agency and the Drug Co-ordination Teams.

The Central Co-ordinating Group for Action Against Drugs has also submitted specific papers on the pending review of the Drug Co-ordination Teams and on proposed structures for implementing the Drug Strategy and the Strategy for Reducing Alcohol Related Harm. At the request of the Ministerial Group, papers on issues such as the projects funded in support of the Drug Strategy, treatment and related services, and a criminal justice perspective on the drug situation here have been submitted by the relevant Departments.

Arrangements are being made for Keith Hellawell, the UK Anti Drugs Co-ordinator to meet with the Ministerial Group in the near future and I have reported to the Group on drugs-related meetings that have taken place between my officials and their counterparts in the rest of Ireland, as well as in England, Scotland and Wales.

Faigheann an Grúpa Aireachta ar Dhrugaí tuairiscí rialta scríofa ón Lár-Ghrúpa Comhordaithe ar Bhearta in éadan Drugaí, a bhfuil ionadaithe ó Ranna, ón tSeirbhís Phríosúin, RUC, Chustam agus Mál, ón Ghníomhaireacht um Chur Chun Cinn Sláinte, ón Choiste ar Mhí-úsáid Drugaí agus ó Fhoirne Comhordaithe Drugaí air.

Chuir an Lár-Ghrúpa Comhordaithe ar Bhearta in éadan Drugaí páipéir ar leith isteach fosta ar athbhreithniú na bhFoirne Comhordaithe Drugaí atá le teacht agus ar struchtúir molta do chur i bhfeidhm na Straitéise Drugaí agus na Straitéise le haghaidh Laghdaithe sa Dochar

Bainteach le hAlcól. Ar iarratas an Ghrúpa Aireachta, chuir na Ranna cuí páipéir isteach ar cheisteanna amhail na scéimeanna maoinithe i dtacaíocht na Straitéise Drugaí, cóireáil agus seirbhísí bainteach léi, agus dearcadh cirt choiriúil ar an riocht drugaí anseo.

Táthar ag socrú cruinniú idir Keith Hellawell, an comhordaitheoir frithdhrugaí sa RA agus an grúpa aireachta ar ball agus thuairiscigh mé don ghrúpa ar chruinnithe druga-bhainteacha a bhí ann idir mo chuid feidhmeannach agus a gcomhghleacaithe sa chuid eile d'Éirinn, chomh maith leo siúd i Sasana, Albain agus sa Bhreatain Bheag.

The Children Order Advisory Committee Report

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) when the next report on the Children's Order by the Children's Order Advisory Committee will be published and (b) what steps are being taken in conjunction with the Court Service to ensure that this document is published annually.

(AQW 2845/00)

Ms de Brún: The Children Order Advisory Committee has indicated that its next report will be available by August this year and it will cover the period from January 1998 to December 2000. As regards publishing an annual report, this matter has been raised with the Committee and it will be discussed at the next Committee meeting.

Chuir an Coiste Comhairleach ar an Ord Páistí in iúl go mbeadh a chéad tuairisc eile ar fáil faoi Lúnasa i mbliana agus cumhdóidh sí an tréimhse ó Eanáir 1998 go Nollaig 2000. Maidir le foilsiú tuairisce bliantúla áfach, tarraingíodh an cheist seo anuas leis an Choiste agus pléifear ag an chéad chruinniú eile den Choiste í.

HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

Modern Apprenticeship: Engineering

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail progress in the production of a framework for Northern Ireland towards a "Modern Apprenticeship in Engineering".

(AQW 2784/00)

The Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Dr Farren): Five engineering Modern Apprenticeship frameworks have been developed in Northern Ireland since 1997 in consultation with the industry. The titles are Engineering Production, Technical Services, Electrical/Electronic Services, Engineering Maintenance and Electricity Distribution and Transmission Engineering. No further frameworks have been requested by the industry.

Graduate Apprenticeships

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail any discussions he has had with industry and third-level Institutions with regard to graduate apprenticeships.

(AQW 2785/00)

Dr Farren: The Department has monitored closely the development of pilot graduate apprenticeships in Great Britain. The evaluation of these pilots suggest that Graduate Apprenticeships have considerable potential. Good practice to emerge from these first round of projects has been identified and is being used to draw up the criteria for the future development of GA frameworks. Based on the evaluation of the projects in Great Britain, the Department will be consulting with sectoral training organisations and third level colleges to assess possible interest in the introduction of a similar scheme in Northern Ireland.

Walsh Visa Programme

Ms E Bell asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to confirm the current position of the Walsh Visa Programme; and to make a statement.

(AQW 2818/00)

Dr Farren: Following the review of the start up phase, the Programme has recommenced with the aim of helping 130 young people into jobs in the USA by November 2001. Following 8 weeks pre-departure training, the first group of 30 young people departed on 1 May to Boston and Pittsburgh.

Reducing Public Bodies or Quangos

Mrs Carson asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail the action he intends to take to reduce the number of public bodies or quangos under the control of his Department.

(AQW 2869/00)

Dr Farren: I have been carrying out a review of advisory bodies and I shall be writing shortly to the Assembly Committee with my emerging conclusions.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Minor Roads: Investment

Mr M Murphy asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his policy to increase investment in the minor road network; and to make a statement.

(AQW 2771/00)

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Campbell): It is clear that the levels of expenditure on

Northern Ireland's roads over recent years have been inadequate to maintain properly or improve the existing road network. I will therefore be considering, as part of the work currently underway to develop a 10-year Regional Transportation Strategy (RTS) for Northern Ireland, the scale of the infrastructural investment required on roads, including minor roads. The RTS will consider ways of increasing investment in transportation infrastructure and also how any additional money might best be spent. I hope to be in a position to consult the Regional Development Committee in Autumn this year about the draft RTS.

Until such times as the RTS is in place, I will continue to press for additional funds for the road network at all opportunities.

Removal of Flags: Strabane

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQO 278/99, to seek advice from the RUC and ascertain local business support for the removal of flags from street lighting standards in Strabane town centre. (AQW 2776/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service has advised me that the flags on street lighting columns in Strabane town centre are not a danger to road users and, at present, it has no plans to remove them. Roads Service is not aware of any strong local support to have the flags removed and, in line with the response given by my predecessor, Mr Peter Robinson, to AQO 278/99, it does not feel it is appropriate in this instance to seek the advice of the RUC about removing the flags. The problem of flag flying is prevalent throughout Northern Ireland and Roads Service does not have the resources to enable it to be pro-active in measuring the extent of local support for the removal of flags from its property. In this context there is a need for general consensus across the political spectrum before a programme to remove flags or other emblems can be initiated.

Traffic Speed: Mullahead Road, Tandragee

Mr Berry asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his plans to reduce the speed of traffic on the Mullahead Road, Tandragee. (AQW 2777/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service, in consultation with the RUC, take into account a number of factors when considering if there is a need to introduce a speed restriction on a road. These include the density and type of development along the road, the nature of the road, pedestrian and cycle usage, the history of recorded personal injury road accidents and the current speed of traffic.

I understand that Mullahead Road is a rural, relatively lightly trafficked route with no development in depth. It is little used by pedestrians and cyclists. When these factors

are considered, together with the accident history, Mullahead Road falls well short of the criteria associated with the provision of a 30 or 40 mph speed limit.

Roads Service has therefore no plans to introduce a speed restriction on the road. I would, however, refer you to my answer to your Oral Assembly Question (AQO 1424/00) which I gave yesterday.

Roads Service: Adoption of Lagmore Avenue, Dunmurry

Ms Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail when Lagmore Avenue, Dunmurry, will be adopted by Road Service. (AQW 2801/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service has advised me that Lagmore Avenue has been constructed in phases as a distributor road for housing development and that:

- the section of road from its junction with Stewartstown Road to the Glenfearna Park development is adopted;
- the section from the Glenfearna Park development to the Glendowan development is expected to be adopted following the completion by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) of some outstanding work. This work, which has been agreed with Roads Service, is programmed for completion in early summer;
- the section between the Glendowan development and the Tealing development is currently showing signs of structural failure and the NIHE proposes to carry out remedial works during the autumn period. Subject to completion of this work and a 12 month maintenance period, this section of road will also be adopted by Roads Service;
- and a further short section will be adopted when the next housing development currently under construction is satisfactorily completed and maintained for a 12 month period.

Traffic Calming: Funding Allocated

Ms Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development how much money has been allocated over the last 5 years to traffic calming schemes across each divisional headquarters area. (AQW 2804/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service allocates money for traffic calming schemes to its Divisions as part of their overall minor works allocation. The overall minor works allocation is apportioned taking into account the lengths of urban and rural roads, the number of accidents and the population in each Division.

Individual traffic calming schemes are assessed taking into account such factors as the accident history, the volume and speed of traffic and the local environment of the area or street being considered. The overall programme

of traffic calming schemes is co-ordinated by Roads Service Headquarters.

As you may know, on 10 April 2001, I announced that the overall funds available this year have been increased to £1.8 million.

The tables below show the Roads Service expenditure on traffic calming schemes on a divisional basis during each of the last five years (the tables reflect the reorganisation of Roads Service which took effect from 1 April 1999):

Years	Eastern £K	Northern £K	Southern £K	Western £K	Totals £K
2000/2001	413	283	336	212	1,244
1999/2000	371	249	200	284	1,104

Years	Ballymena £K	Belfast £K	Colerain £K	Craigavon £K	Downpatrick £K	Omagh £K	Totals £K
1998/ 1999	230	266	180	68	151	197	1,092
1997/ 1998	148	493	119	101	208	143	1,212
1996/ 1997	74	88	133	56	140	98	589

Traffic Calming: Criteria

Ms Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline what criteria he uses when allocating money to traffic calming schemes across each divisional headquarters area. (AQW 2805/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service allocates money for traffic calming schemes to its divisions as part of their overall minor works allocation. The overall minor works allocation is apportioned taking into account the lengths of urban and rural roads, the number of accidents and the population in each division.

Individual traffic calming schemes are assessed taking into account such factors as the accident history, the volume and speed of traffic and the local environment of the area or street being considered. The overall programme of traffic calming schemes is co-ordinated by Roads Service Headquarters.

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1996/ 1997	74	88	133	56	140	98	589

Private Street (Construction) Regulations 2001 - Street Lighting

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development whether, as a result of the introduction of the Private Street (Construction) Regulations 2001, he intends to use the savings accrued to upgrade inadequate or non-existent street lighting in other areas. (AQW 2810/00)

Mr Campbell: The Private Streets (Construction) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 which came into operation on 1 May 2001, place responsibility on developers to provide street lighting in new developments determined as part of the planning process after that date. My Department's Roads Service is, however, still responsible for the provision of street lighting facilities in new developments that were determined prior to 1 May 2001. Since a grant of full planning permission is valid for 5 years, the savings arising from this legislation could take some time to be fully realised.

While I will be seeking to retain any eventual savings within my Department's budget, it is not possible to indicate at this time how such savings might ultimately be used. For example, the impact of both the Climate Change Levy and the increase in NIE energy charges within the last year has resulted in an unavoidable increase in street lighting maintenance charges of approximately £1 million. Unless additional funding is made available, this increase will have to be met from the existing Departmental budget.

Private Street (Construction) Regulations 2001 - Street Lighting

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to explain how the new Private Street (Construction) Regulations 2001 will address the issue of the provision

of street lighting when a series of single homes are constructed by individual builders over a period of time.
(AQW 2812/00)

Mr Campbell: The Private Streets (Construction) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2001, which came into operation on 1 May 2001 places responsibility on developers to provide street lighting in new developments determined as part of the planning process after that date.

Any such street, determined after 1 May 2001, will be subject to the provision of a bond to cover the cost of the construction of the street and necessary services, including street lighting. The developer taking out the bond will be responsible for providing street lighting, even if individual builders construct some or all of the dwellings.

Traffic Calming: A27

Mr Berry asked the Minister for Regional Development when he intends to introduce traffic calming measures on the A27.
(AQW 2814/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service has no plans to introduce further traffic calming measures along the A27 Portadown to Newry road at this time.

Traffic calming measures are considered to be most beneficial and safe when used in urban residential areas which are governed by a 30 mph speed limit. The A27 is mainly rural in nature with little or no development along its length and, with the exception of the villages of Tandragee and Poyntzpass which have been previously treated with traffic calming measures, is subject to a 60 mph speed limit.

Roads Service officials will, however, continue to work closely with the RUC Traffic Branch to improve road safety along this route by the introduction of traffic or other road improvement measures where appropriate.

Road Service: Road Adoption

Mr M Murphy asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail when the Slievenagarragh, Yellow Road, Hilltown will be adopted by Road Service.
(AQW 2829/00)

Mr Campbell: In the case of private streets that have been determined through the planning process (as is the case with the developments referred to in the two questions), it is the responsibility of developers to bring the roads and sewers up to the required standards for adoption by my Department. When roads and sewers are constructed to the required standards, they are adopted after they have been satisfactorily maintained for a 12-month period.

My Department's Roads Service has advised me that the development at Slievenagarragh, Yellow Road, Hilltown is being constructed in 2 phases:

- 90% of the roads in Phase I are kerbed and stoned and the developer has assured Roads Service that the basecourse bitmac will be laid this week; and
- the roads in Phase II are currently being constructed.

As regards the development at Carquillan, Main Street, Hilltown, it is being constructed in 3 phases:

- the roads in Phase I are laid in basecourse bitmac; and
- the roads in phases II and III are laid out in stone. The developer has advised Roads Service that base-course bitmac will be laid by October 2001.

At this stage, therefore, Roads Service is not in a position to advise when the roads in the above developments will be adopted but they will be continuing to urge the developers to complete their works as quickly as possible.

Road Service: Road Adoption

Mr M Murphy asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail when Corquillan, Main Street, Hilltown, Newry will be adopted by Road Service.
(AQW 2830/00)

Mr Campbell: In the case of private streets that have been determined through the planning process (as is the case with the developments referred to in the two questions), it is the responsibility of developers to bring the roads and sewers up to the required standards for adoption by my Department. When roads and sewers are constructed to the required standards, they are adopted after they have been satisfactorily maintained for a 12-month period.

My Department's Roads Service has advised me that the development at Slievenagarragh, Yellow Road, Hilltown is being constructed in 2 phases:

- 90% of the roads in Phase I are kerbed and stoned and the developer has assured Roads Service that the basecourse bitmac will be laid this week; and
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As regards the development at Carquillan, Main Street, Hilltown, it is being constructed in 3 phases:

- the roads in Phase I are laid in basecourse bitmac; and
- the roads in phases II and III are laid out in stone. The developer has advised Roads Service that base-course bitmac will be laid by October 2001.

At this stage, therefore, Roads Service is not in a position to advise when the roads in the above developments will be adopted but they will be continuing to urge the developers to complete their works as quickly as possible.

Unadopted Sewers: North Antrim

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of households in North Antrim that have unadopted main sewers.

(AQW 2839/00)

Mr Campbell: The procedures for the adoption of sewers are contained in Article 17 of The Water and Sewerage Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1973. Water Service and the developer normally enter into a formal agreement, which requires the developer to construct the sewers to a specified standard. On satisfactory completion of the work, Water Service adopts the sewers and they become part of the public sewerage network.

Most housing developers do not seek formal adoption of sewers until the housing development is substantially complete. In the interim, maintenance of unadopted sewers remain the responsibility of the developer.

In the North Antrim area, there are currently some 170 housing developments under construction. Water Service estimates that approximately 2,000 occupied dwellings in these developments drain to unadopted sewers. These sewers will be adopted in due course, subject to them having been constructed to the specified standards.

Traffic Schemes: A2 Shore Road

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development whether an assessment has been made to establish if the new traffic schemes in the Shore Road/Station Road area of Newtownabbey have addressed the underlying traffic management problems of residents and commuters using the A2.

(AQW 2877/00)

Mr Campbell: The traffic management scheme recently completed by my Department's Roads Service at the Shore Road/Station Road junction sought to:

- facilitate the safe movement of pedestrians by providing a signal controlled crossing at Station Road;
- reduce the delays for citybound traffic on the A2 Shore Road during the morning peak period by the introduction of part-time traffic lights on the roundabout; and
- improve bus journey times by providing bus priority measures on Station Road.

Since the scheme was completed, the performance of the junction has been closely monitored and necessary adjustments have been made to the timings of the signals. Roads Service has advised me that its objectives (listed above) have been met. In particular, there has been a marked improvement in traffic flows from Carrickfergus during the morning peak period.

Public Transport: East Antrim

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his current capital expenditure plans to upgrade public transport provision in the constituency of East Antrim.

(AQO 1485/00)

Mr Campbell: I expect, within the next few months, to receive detailed proposals from Northern Ireland Railways to up-grade the railway line between Whiteabbey and Whitehead. Work has started to completely refurbish the railway station at Carrickfergus, at a cost of £800,000.

By the end of June, Translink expect to open new park and ride facilities at Whitehead railway station. The company is also seeking to purchase land to provide park and ride spaces at Trooperslane railway halt. New parking spaces have been provided recently at Greenisland railway halt.

A new Ulsterbus service will be started soon between the Carrickfergus area and Antrim Hospital, with support from the Rural Transport Fund. The Fund will continue to support the Larne to Coleraine, "Antrim Coaster" bus service during the winter months.

New Traffic System: Whiteabbey

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to give his assessment of the new traffic arrangements introduced at the junction of the A2 and Station Road, Whiteabbey.

(AQO 1454/00)

Mr Campbell: In undertaking the new traffic management scheme at the junction of Station Road with the A2 Shore Road, Whiteabbey, my Department's Roads Service sought to:

- (a) facilitate the safe movement of pedestrians by providing a signal controlled crossing at Station Road;
- (b) reduce delays on the A2 Shore Road during the morning peak period by the introduction of part-time traffic signals on the roundabout; and
- (c) provide bus priority on Station Road to improve bus journey times.

Roads Service is satisfied that these objectives have been met. However, Roads Service will continue to monitor closely the location and make any necessary adjustments to the traffic signals to ensure their optimum performance.

Speed Restrictions: Review

Ms E Bell asked the Minister for Regional Development to review speed restrictions on roads that have a history of serious road accidents; and to make a statement.

(AQO 1458/00)

Mr Campbell: I recognise that speed is a major contributor to the road traffic casualty figures in Northern Ireland.

I can assure you that my Department's Roads Service already takes into account the history of road accidents in drawing up its ongoing programmes of accident remedial works and traffic calming schemes. Through these programmes lower speed limits have been introduced on several stretches of rural road and in a number of residential areas in Northern Ireland.

Clearly the control of speed will be a crucial element in the fight against road casualties in the coming years. The Government has recently reviewed its speed management policy in Great Britain. In light of this I have initiated a comprehensive review of speed management policy on our roads which will explore how on a practical basis the application of speed limits can be used to bring about further reductions in casualties.

Coastal Erosion: A2 Newry to Kilkeel Road

Mr M Murphy asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the steps he is taking to prevent the coastal erosion of the A2 Newry to Kilkeel road.

(AQO 1434/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service has a duty to maintain roads and if a road is affected by coastal erosion, any defects identified are duly remedied. Several such repairs were carried out over the past six months on the A2 Newry to Kilkeel road which is retained by a sea wall over about 2 kilometres of its length. Roads Service is content that this sea wall is presently sound but will continue with its regular inspections and carry out any repairs required to ensure its structural integrity.

Road Safety: Mullahead Road, Tandragee

Mr Berry asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail what action is being taken to address the dangerous stretch of road on the Mullahead Road, Tandragee following a recent fatal accident.

(AQO 1424/00)

Mr Campbell: First, I would like to convey my condolences to the family circle of the young man who died so tragically as a result of the recent accident on Mullahead Road.

Following the accident, a joint inspection of the stretch of road in question was carried out by my Department's Roads Service and the RUC Traffic Branch to assess the scene and to identify any measures that may be considered appropriate. A meeting was also subsequently held with a local Councillor and residents to address their concerns.

As a result, Roads Service will shortly be erecting additional warning signs to give drivers further guidance

along this section of road. In the longer term, I have asked Roads Service to undertake a feasibility study to determine whether an improvement scheme is warranted.

Classified Documents: Disposal

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his policy on the disposal of classified documentation.

(AQO 1471/00)

Mr Campbell: 'A Guide to Records Management' issued by the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) states that a First Review should be carried out when records are ten years old. PRONI monitors records found by Departments to have no further administrative value, and thus ensures that nothing of potential long-term historical or research value is destroyed. Unless a Disposal Schedule specifically sanctions destruction, no records can be destroyed without such monitoring taking place.

Road Safety: Children

Ms Morrice asked the Minister for Regional Development what departmental or cross-departmental initiatives will he be undertaking to make it safer for children to walk, cycle, or use public transport to get to school.

(AQO 1441/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department has recently established a Northern Ireland School Travel Advisory Group made up of representatives from the Department of Education, the Education and Library Boards, the Health Promotion Agency, Translink, the Department of the Environment's Road Safety Education Unit, the Police, School Teachers, parent group representatives and my own Department's Roads Service.

Aided by this Group, Roads Service is on course to prepare draft plans for "Safer Routes to Schools" pilot projects during 2001-2002. These will support school-based initiatives designed to make it safer for children to walk, cycle or use public transport in their journeys to and from school.

Regional Development Strategy

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline how he has taken account of New TSN in the draft Regional Strategy.

(AQO 1476/00)

Mr Campbell: The draft Regional Development Strategy "Shaping Our Future" will provide a new development strategy for Northern Ireland up to 2025. The strategy seeks to achieve balances between urban and rural communities and the east and the west of the Region to provide equality of opportunity for all. It also provides a vital context within which major development decisions will be taken by individuals as well as public and private sector bodies. As a result the strategy places

great importance on integrated solutions which embrace all relevant policy areas, including New TSN.

The strategy has been drawn up in a manner consistent with the approach of New TSN. Consequently, the implementation of the strategy will include appropriate indicators to assess impact on accessibility to jobs, housing, transport, social amenities and a quality environment for those living in socially disadvantaged communities.

My Department will lead on the implementation of the strategy, but it is recognised that the delivery of key actions will fall to a range of NI Departments. Regional Planning Policy Statements will be prepared to translate the strategic guidance of the strategy into more detailed policy guidance on specific subjects, for example in the areas of housing and transportation.

Given the cross-cutting nature of the strategy it will be important to prepare a composite and comprehensive set of targets and indicators to measure performance across a number of areas, including New TSN. In the autumn I will be bringing forward a monitoring and evaluation framework for consideration by the Regional Development Committee.

Traffic Calming: Cookstown and Magherafelt

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he has any plans to introduce traffic calming measures in Cookstown and Magherafelt. (AQO 1489/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service has no plans at present to introduce traffic calming measures in either Cookstown or Magherafelt. Three traffic calming schemes are, however, programmed for completion in 2001/02 in the Magherafelt District Council area, ie in Draperstown, Swatragh and Tobermore.

Newry Railway Station

Mr Bradley asked the Minister for Regional Development if he will undertake to assist Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company in its ongoing efforts to develop Newry Railway Station. (AQO 1422/00)

Mr Campbell: Translink has advised that it is currently reviewing the situation in relation to the provision of a new railway station in Newry. I understand that a number of options are being considered and that Translink hopes to be in a position to make a decision shortly. In the meantime, my Department will await Translink's proposals on this matter.

Comber By-pass: Vesting Order

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to confirm that "Notices of Intention to Vest

Land" have been published in relation to the Comber by-pass. (AQO 1466/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service intends to publish the Notice of Intention to Make a Vesting Order for the Comber Bypass Stage 2 scheme during this week.

Drinking Water Quality

Mr Close asked the Minister for Regional Development whether Northern Ireland drinking water complies with regulatory requirements concerning the level of aluminium, iron and lead. (AQO 1468/00)

Mr Campbell: Drinking water quality in Northern Ireland is good with 98.2% of all tests carried out on samples taken at the customers' taps in 2000 complying with the standards contained in The Water Quality Regulations (NI) 1994. A total of 96% of samples comply with the regulatory standards for aluminium and iron, while almost 97% of samples comply with the regulatory standard for lead.

Full compliance with the regulatory standards cannot be achieved without a significant programme of investment in both water treatment works and the water distribution network. This is estimated to cost approximately £800 million over the next 10 years.

Disabled: Access to Public Transport

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister for Regional Development what measures he intends to take to improve access to public transport for the disabled; and to make a statement. (AQO 1472/00)

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 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 minibus 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.

Road Improvements: Eglish Junction

Ms Gildernew asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the plans for a roundabout at the Eglish junction on the A4 Ballygawley Road, and will it be brought forward in the five year plan. (AQO 1435/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service is currently examining possible options for improving Eglish Junction, including the provision of a single or double roundabout, and will shortly be appointing consultants to prepare an Environmental Statement for the scheme. The scheme also includes the provision of climbing lanes at Cabragh. It is hoped that the Environmental Statement will be published before the end of the year and, thereafter, the necessary planning and land acquisition procedures will be progressed.

As funding has been secured for this scheme from the Executive Programme Funds, I can assure you it will proceed to construction stage on the satisfactory completion of these statutory processes.

City of Derry Airport

Mrs Courtney asked the Minister for Regional Development if he has any plans to provide further funding to assist development at City of Derry airport. (AQO 1482/00)

Mr Campbell: Not at present. Certain conditions relating to the earlier offer of grant assistance on the airport runway extension project remain to be fulfilled. The Department is also aware that the future management of the airport is under review. These matters require to be resolved before any further consideration can be given to the provision of additional funding.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Unemployment Sub-office: Killyleagh

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development to consider the establishment of a part-time unemployment sub-office in Killyleagh to facilitate those unemployed in Shrigley and Killyleagh. (AQW 2787/00)

The Minister for Social Development (Mr Morrow):

There are no plans to open an unemployment sub-office in Killyleagh as the arrangements for Jobseekers in this area are consistent with those in place for all Jobseekers throughout Northern Ireland where there is no Social Security Office in the immediate locality. Any individual customer experiencing difficulties can contact Downpatrick Social Security Office.

Pensioners: Financial Assistance

Mr Gibson asked the Minister for Social Development to outline what changes have been made since 1997 to help pensioners on modest occupational pensions. (AQW 2795/00)

Mr Morrow: Pensioners on modest occupational pensions will have benefited from some or all of the measures introduced to help pensioners in general. These include the extra increases in basic state pension, increased tax allowances, the Minimum Income Guarantee, winter fuel payments and free TV licences for the over 75s.

As a result of tax and benefit measures introduced since 1997, pensioner households will, on average, be over £11 a week, or £580 a year, better off.

Pensioner Poverty

Mr Gibson asked the Minister for Social Development to outline what progress is being made to eradicate pensioner poverty. (AQW 2796/00)

Mr Morrow: A number of measures have been introduced to help the elderly, such as the Minimum Income Guarantee campaign and the Winter Fuel Payments scheme. These initiatives have resulted in an additional 4,000 pensioners receiving the Minimum Income Guarantee with an average extra payment of £23.00 per week. In the last financial year Winter Fuel Payments totalling £43m were paid to pensioners. Work will continue in this area to ensure pensioners claim and receive all the help they are entitled to.

Benefit Take-up

Mr Gibson asked the Minister for Social Development to outline what research he has commissioned to ascertain the reasons for the variations in take-up of targeted benefits. (AQW 2797/00)

Mr Morrow: There is at present insufficient information available on the overall level of benefit take-up to indicate what variations may be present or to permit research into the reasons for them. Accordingly, the focus of research at present is to establish overall levels of benefit take up. The Family Resources Survey, which is the major source of information on this subject for Great Britain,

will be undertaken in Northern Ireland from 2002-03 onwards, with a dress rehearsal in winter 2001-02.

Residential Care: Accommodation and Care Costs

Mr Gibson asked the Minister for Social Development to detail his plans to uprate the payments to residential homes to cover the cost of the care of residents.
(AQW 2798/00)

Mr Morrow: People living in residential care and nursing homes can get help through Income Support with their accommodation and care costs.

Normal Income Support, including a residential allowance towards accommodation costs, is available to people who entered care on or after April 1993 under the community care arrangements. Payments to the homes for care costs under these arrangements are the responsibility of Health and Social Services Boards and Trusts.

People who were living in care homes at 31 March 1993 and who continue to live there are entitled to special higher rates of Income Support under the preserved rights arrangements. This amount comprises the amount of the home fees or a set national limit, whichever is the lower, and an amount for personal expenses. All Income Support rates were increased from 9 April 2001 by 1.8% as part of the annual uprating of social security benefits.

Subject to the approval of the Assembly, I intend to increase Income Support preserved rights amounts by a further 1.9% from 2 July 2001, making a total increase of 3.7%. This above inflation increase will help address the shortfall between the fees charged and the weekly benefit limits of many preserved rights cases.

Social Fund

Mr Gibson asked the Minister for Social Development whether the Social Fund is operating in line with its original criteria; and to make a statement.
(AQW 2809/00)

Mr Morrow: The Social Fund was introduced specifically to help the poorest and most vulnerable people in society by providing help with intermittent expenses which are difficult to meet from regular income. The scheme continues to play an important role in the social security system by complementing the main income-related benefits.

The operation of the scheme has been regularly reviewed and major reforms have been introduced which have improved the scheme's effectiveness. We will continue to look at ways of improving the Social Fund to ensure that it provides a focused, efficient service which helps families and individuals in difficult circumstances

Child Benefit

Mr Gibson asked the Minister for Social Development to give his assessment on the take-up of child benefit since 1997.
(AQW 2834/00)

Mr Morrow: The take-up of child benefit is regarded as very high, since this is a universal benefit for children aged up to 16.

Reducing Public Bodies or Quangos

Mrs Carson asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the action he intends to take to reduce the number of public bodies or quangos under the control of his Department.
(AQW 2866/00)

Mr Morrow: The Child Support, Pensions and Social Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2000, contains measures to align the arrangements for Decision Making and Appeals in respect of Housing Benefit with those applying to other Social Security Benefits. The Act provides for a right of appeal from a relevant authority decision, to an appeal tribunal administered by the Appeals Service for Northern Ireland. Under the revised arrangements the Northern Ireland Housing Benefit Review Boards will be abolished with effect from 2 July 2001.

Benefits: Unclaimed or Underpaid

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has any plans to collate information on the amount of benefits unclaimed or underpaid so that an assessment can be made of how well the benefits system is working.
(AQW 2881/00)

Mr Morrow: At the present time, there are no estimates of the amount of benefit unclaimed. There are estimates of the level of erroneous underpayment where information already supplied by claimants would justify a higher level of payment, but no estimates of the levels of underpayment where claimants have not mentioned all relevant facts, or of the entitlement of non-claimants. The Family Resources Survey will commence in Northern Ireland in April 2002, with first results for 2002-3 available in late 2003, and this will allow estimates of the level of take-up (and hence of underpayment) to be produced. In the interim, the Department is seeking to establish indicative levels of take-up through re-analysis of existing survey sources.

Gap Funding: Applications

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (a) what actions he has put in place to assist groups in completing the necessary application

forms for Gap funding (b) how many applications have been made and (c) what is the turnaround timescale.

(AQW 2901/00)

Mr Morrow: All applicants for Gap Funding received initially an information pack from either the EU Special Programmes Body or the Department of Finance and Personnel together with their application forms. In response to mainly telephone requests my officials assisted many groups with general advice on completing the forms as well as providing specific advice on the most appropriate EU Programmes, Priorities and Measures under which they might apply for funding. In total my Department received 414 applications. It is expected that groups will be notified

of decisions on applications for funding under Measures assessed by my Department by the beginning of June.

Pre-paid Envelopes: Re-introduction

Mr Carrick asked the Minister for Social Development whether the Social Security Agency has any plans to re-introduce pre-paid envelopes. (AQW 2963/00)

Mr Morrow: I am pleased to announce that as part of the Social Security Agency's ongoing commitment to improve customer service, it has re-introduced pre-paid reply envelopes for its customers from April 2001.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 25 May 2001

Written Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Assistance for Businesses

Mr McGrady asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister what action the Executive has taken to provide assistance to Northern Ireland businesses which are experiencing hardship due to the foot-and-mouth crisis. (AQW 3055/00)

Reply: As an immediate response to the wider economic impact of the foot-and-mouth crisis, the Executive established an Economic Taskforce to keep abreast of developments in Great Britain, ensure that Northern Ireland benefited from any national initiatives, and consider what practical steps could be taken to assist Northern Ireland businesses, taking account of local circumstances.

The Executive have developed a co-ordinated strategy for providing support and assistance to those businesses worst affected by the crisis. This includes measures such as the deferment of rates, announced by the Minister of Finance and Personnel on 13 April, promotion of a rural stress helpline, advice and support on employment and associated training opportunities, and the launch of a £1 million tourism recovery strategy by the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

At its meeting on 17 May, the Executive approved a new "Help for Business" scheme, details of which will be made public on Monday 21 May. Businesses which can demonstrate that they are suffering financial hardship due to foot-and-mouth disease will be eligible to apply for a grant to cover their rates for the three-month period 1 March to 31 May 2001. Businesses, such as cattle marts, which were proscribed from operating from 1 March by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development will automatically be eligible for a grant to cover non-domestic rates for the period that the DARD restrictions are in

force. Provision has also been made to include small bed-and-breakfast establishments, which pay domestic rates. Assembly authority for expenditure under the scheme will be sought in the Main Estimates later this year.

A special unit has been established within the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to handle queries and process claims under the scheme. It will be operational from Monday 21 May, and will have a dedicated helpline number: 0845 6014135.

An information pamphlet has also been produced, outlining the different sources of advice and information for businesses experiencing difficulties. It will be made available through the network of Government offices, local authorities and trade associations such as the Small Business Federation, and Citizens' Advice Bureaux. Copies will also be circulated through the press. Details of the Help for Business scheme and the other information in the pamphlet will be published on a new website www.helpforbusinessni.gov.uk, which will be operational on Monday.

We believe this is a comprehensive package of measures which will provide tangible support to local businesses.

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Fishing Industry

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to her Press Release 146/01 of 29 March 2001, to (a) confirm that the £21 million announced for the fishing industry has been the subject of negotiation for nearly two years and (b) specify if the £5 million announced to fund a decommissioning scheme for fishing vessels is for one year only, or if it will be repeated in subsequent years. (AQW 2591/00)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers): *[holding answer 3 May 2001]:* Work on the fisheries measures contained in the Overall NI Programme for Building Sustainable Development initially commenced in 1998. Within this Programme 9.3 million euros (approx £6 million) has been earmarked for the adjustment of fishing effort. With the announced £5 million to fund a decommissioning scheme for fishing vessels, this leaves a residual amount for further decommissioning should this prove necessary.

Livestock Marketing Commission

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline what steps she is taking to increase the number of farmers on the board of the Livestock Marketing Commission. (AQW 2788/00)

Ms Rodgers: I am required by the Livestock Marketing Commission Act (NI) 1967 to have regard to the different interests in the industry when appointing any person to the Commission. Persons appointed do not represent any particular group but must be able to make a broad contribution across the range of the Livestock and Meat Commission's activities.

The commission currently has seven members, of whom two are producers. I am satisfied that there is an appropriate balance of interests and skills on the commission at present, and I have no plans to increase the level of producer representation. You may be interested to know that I am considering increasing the number of members of the commission, but that will require primary legislation. Should that happen, I will look again at the balance of representation, skills and gender.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Vaccination Programme

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the estimated cost to vaccinate the Northern Ireland livestock herd against foot-and-mouth disease. (AQW 2792/00)

Ms Rodgers: The extent of vaccination in Northern Ireland would be dependent on the vaccination programme adopted. At worst, all susceptible livestock herds/flocks in Northern Ireland would have to be vaccinated twice-yearly and the cost of this would amount to £4.3 million per annum.

Should vaccination be used to create a "fire-break" between infected and uninfected areas, it would be unlikely that twice-yearly vaccination would be utilised, as the vaccinated animals would be slaughtered within a short period. This would reduce the cost of such vaccination to approximately £2.3 million.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Insurance

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how does Government compensation take into account payments made by private insurance for foot-and-mouth disease. (AQW 2807/00)

Ms Rodgers: Compensation payable for animals slaughtered under foot-and-mouth disease legislation is determined on the basis of their market value prior to suspicion of disease. There is no legislative provision, or other requirement, necessitating the taking into account of any private insurance held by individual producers.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Insurance

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what estimate she has made of the

proportion of livestock farmers who have private insurance against foot-and-mouth disease.

(AQW 2808/00)

Ms Rodgers: I have made no formal estimate of the number of farmers who have private insurance against foot-and-mouth disease. However, I understand from anecdotal evidence that the numbers of farmers taking out such insurance are likely to be very low.

Public Bodies or Quangos: Reduction

Mrs Carson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the action she intends to take to reduce the number of public bodies or quangos under the control of her Department. (AQW 2826/00)

Ms Rodgers: I have no plans to reduce the number of public bodies, or quangos, for which my Department is responsible. However, the future role of non-departmental public bodies will be considered within the context of the proposed review of public administration, which was included in the Agenda for Government announced on 29 June 2000 and is an important action in the draft Programme for Government.

Horticulture Diversification

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail what assistance is available to enable horticulture diversification. (AQW 2864/00)

Ms Rodgers: My Department's professional horticultural staff provide assistance to people diversifying into horticulture through facilitating the production of development plans and the adoption of technology/systems into their businesses.

My Department also administers several schemes under which horticulture producers may apply for grant aid.

The EC Fresh Fruit and Vegetables Regime scheme (under EC Regulation 2200/96) aims to channel grants to producer organisations which are voluntary, legally constituted bodies of growers.

Non-capital support for the marketing of horticultural produce is provided under the Marketing Development Scheme.

Agricultural Imports: General Controls

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether general controls exist on agricultural imports within EU countries or can each sovereign state impose its own restrictions. (AQW 2865/00)

Ms Rodgers: My Department has a direct interest only in the animal and plant health aspects of agricultural imports. The regulatory framework governing these issues

is established at an EU level, and individual member states or regions have only very limited discretion in the implementation of this legislation. Consequently, differences between member states in this respect are minimal. Import issues relating to human health and customs tariffs fall to other Government Departments.

Quality of Livestock: Policy

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to give her assessment of the impact of Government policy on the quality of livestock production in Northern Ireland. (AQW 2884/00)

Ms Rodgers: I have become aware that in relation to certain aspects of quality of livestock the standards applying in Northern Ireland were lower than elsewhere in the UK. This is certainly the case with cattle and there have been allegations from the processing sector that Northern Ireland pigs are of poorer quality.

I regret that I can only comment on the position which pertained since I became Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development. I am not therefore in a position to comment on the impact of earlier Government policy on livestock quality. However I was concerned and have taken action to address real or perceived deficiencies.

In the pig sector I have arranged for an independent study to be carried out into allegations that pigs being produced in Northern Ireland are poorer quality than pigs in Great Britain. I expect the report on this study to be completed in the near future.

In the case of cattle there has been a fall in quality when measured in terms of conformation of carcasses. This was a matter of great concern to me and I was pleased to be able to obtain extra funding of £2 million per annum to support a beef quality initiative. Officials are liaising with industry and EU officials to identify proposals which will help to improve quality and be consistent with state aid rules.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Livestock Markets

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to give her assessment of the role of livestock markets on the spread of foot-and-mouth disease. (AQW 2885/00)

Ms Rodgers: It is widely acknowledged that livestock markets, by the nature of the business, pose a very significant risk in the spread of foot-and-mouth disease. The disease is one of the most infectious animal diseases and because livestock markets are areas where animals congregate in close proximity, the disease can spread easily and quickly within the market. Animals brought to the market will either move on to new owners or return to their original farm. Any infection brought to or

picked up at the market will be transmitted to other livestock on the destination farms. It is therefore easy to conceive how quickly the disease can spread given the many different farms that are the destinations for animals traded on any single market day.

It is for this very reason that markets have been banned from operating during the current outbreak.

Agricultural Imports: Regulations

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline what regulations on agricultural imports into Northern Ireland differ from those in other European countries. (AQW 2886/00)

Ms Rodgers: My Department has a direct interest only in the animal and plant health aspects of agricultural imports. The regulatory framework governing these issues is established at an EU level and individual member states or regions have only very limited discretion in the implementation of this legislation. Consequently, differences between member states in this respect are minimal. Import issues relating to human health and customs tariffs fall to other Government Departments.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Livestock Vaccination

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she has any plans to review her policy on vaccinations of livestock against foot-and-mouth disease. (AQW 2887/00)

Ms Rodgers: Vaccination is but one option in the fight against foot-and-mouth disease and I keep the need for this under review at all times. However, my policy to date has been to cull all animals on infected farms as soon as the disease being identified and to follow this up with culling of animals suspected of having been exposed to infection. Veterinary advice indicates that this coupled with movement restrictions is the most significant measure for eradicating the disease.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Livestock Movement Licences

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail what representations she has received on the process for awarding livestock movement licences. (AQW 2888/00)

Ms Rodgers: The licensing of movements of livestock has been, and continues to be, a pivotal element of the control and eradication of foot-and-mouth disease. The subject has therefore been a regular topic at meetings I have had with the Industry as a whole, and in meetings I have had with various sectors within the industry. Since

the start of the current foot-and-mouth disease crisis in February I have had 17 briefing meetings with a general industry-wide group and the subject of movement licences have been raised, as one of many subjects, at all of these meetings. I have had many more sectoral meetings and again, movement licences have featured amongst the topics discussed at most of these. I am not, however, in a position to be any more precise than that.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Compensation

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the total amount of compensation paid to date in respect of foot-and-mouth disease. (AQW 2902/00)

Ms Rodgers: The total compensation paid to date in respect of foot-and-mouth disease is £2,354,124.

Agriculture: Numbers Employed

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail, by constituency, the number employed directly and indirectly in the agricultural industry. (AQW 2970/00)

Ms Rodgers: The numbers employed directly in agriculture, as estimated from the June Agricultural Census, by constituency, are shown below. The numbers employed “indirectly” in the agricultural industry by constituency are not available.

PERSONS EMPLOYED ON FARMS, JUNE 2000

Constituency	Persons
Belfast East	24
Belfast North	31
Belfast South	21
Belfast West	17
East Antrim	902
East Londonderry	2,135
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	5,286
Foyle	786
Lagan Valley	1,688
Mid Ulster	3,709
Newry & Armagh	4,234
North Antrim	3,647
North Down	237
Strangford	1,507
South Antrim	3,812
South Down	1,587
Upper Bann	1,399
West Tyrone	4,381
Northern Ireland	35,403

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Veterinary Certification Costs

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to compensate farmers for the total cost of private veterinary bills in regard to the issue of movement permits. (AQW 2973/00)

Ms Rodgers: I am pleased to confirm that the arrangements for foot-and-mouth disease include provision for the costs of necessary veterinary certification associated with livestock movement to be met by my Department.

On 2 May 2001 I announced that because livestock movements that are permissible on animal welfare grounds are clearly dependent on veterinary certification to ensure there is no increase in the risk of spread of foot-and-mouth disease, my Department would pay the reasonable private veterinary costs. Arrangements for appropriate payments are already in hand. Any farmer who has paid veterinary fees for this work and has not been reimbursed should contact the local Divisional Veterinary Office.

Fishing Industry

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to give her assessment of the impact on Northern Ireland’s Fishing Industry of the European Commission’s prohibition of the use and keeping on board of fishing gear likely to catch stocks subject to a recovery plan when fisheries relating to these stocks have been closed because the quotas have been reached. (AQW 2979/00)

Ms Rodgers: The European Commission has not prohibited the use or keeping on board of fishing gear likely to induce catches of species of a stock or group of stocks where the quotas subject to a recovery plan have been exhausted. The European Commission have however recently issued a proposal to this effect which was discussed for the first time at an Internal Fisheries Group meeting held in Brussels on 10 May. At this meeting the UK entered a general scrutiny reservation.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to give her assessment of the operation of the Common Agricultural Policy and to detail (a) how it effects the Northern Ireland farming industry and (b) if she is considering an alternative scheme. (AQW 2999/00)

Ms Rodgers: The Common Agricultural Policy influences, directly or indirectly, many facets of agricultural production in Northern Ireland (as elsewhere in the EU). Its most direct effects are in the heavily supported beef, dairy, sheep and arable sectors which, of course, together

account for the vast bulk of the Northern Ireland agricultural industry. Last year, direct support payments to Northern Ireland farmers totalled just under £200 million, with perhaps a further £100 million accruing from indirect, market support.

I am not considering an alternative scheme.

CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Soccer Strategy Advisory Panel

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to give his assessment of the contribution of the fifteen members of the Soccer Strategy Committee; and to make a statement. (AQW 2890/00)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McGimpsey): The Soccer Strategy Advisory Panel, which I established last October, is currently made up of 16 members, plus an observer from the Sports Council. A list of members is attached. Sammy McIlroy was a member but resigned in February due to professional commitments.

The panel has devoted a substantial amount of time and commitment to the soccer strategy process. For example:

to date the main panel has met on six occasions. Two sub-groups were established early on – one to focus on arrangements for the conference workshop in February, and the other to consider best practice elsewhere. Members of the best practice elsewhere group also took part in visits to Dublin, Paris and Scotland, as well as meeting representatives of the Norwegian Football Association during their visit to Belfast.

Some panel members attended all of the five public meetings held at different venues around the Province during January.

Panel members also gave up most of a weekend to be in attendance at the three-day conference workshop in Newcastle in February.

Since February, members of the advisory panel, have been, and continue to be involved in groups taking forward projects on a range of issues as follow-up action to the conference, and further meetings of the full panel are likely to be required in order to finalise their report.

To date two members of the panel – Martin O'Neill and Iain Dowie – have been unable to participate because of the level of their professional commitments. It is hoped that both will have an opportunity to contribute at some stage in the future and they have continued to receive copies of all papers and reports.

Given the level of time the panel has devoted to this process, and bearing in mind that this is on a voluntary basis, I consider that the panel has made an excellent

contribution to date and I look forward to receiving their report.

[You will be aware that I made a statement to this effect in my contribution to the debate on soccer in Northern Ireland in the Assembly on 21 May.]

Irish Rugby Football Union: All Ireland League

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to give his assessment of the Rugby Union All Ireland League structure. (AQW 2891/00)

Mr McGimpsey: The structure of the league is a matter for the governing body of the sport (Irish Rugby Football Union). However, I understand that the benefits from the All Ireland League structure provides local players with enhanced development opportunities through competition that could not otherwise be gained and offers players greater prospects of provincial and international recognition. On the other hand, the new league structure and the emerging professionalism within the game has created financial pressures at club level but the Irish Rugby Football Union is keeping the matter under review.

Nationwide Irish Cup Final

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to give his assessment of arrangements for the Nationwide Irish Cup Final (a) prior to the event and (b) the day of the event; and to make a statement. (AQW 2928/00)

Mr McGimpsey: This is a matter for the IFA. Following consultation between the IFA and the Health and Safety Department of Belfast City Council a total of 13,400 tickets were allocated. Just over 13,000 spectators attended.

The match passed without major incident and I understand all involved in the arrangements were satisfied that the cup final was a success.

Northern Ireland Events Company

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to give his assessment of the work of the Northern Ireland Events Company and to detail the events organised for 2001. (AQW 2929/00)

Mr McGimpsey: An independent evaluation of the Northern Ireland Events Company gave a very positive assessment of the Company's first three years work. The report concluded that NIEC had contributed £1.6 million to support 10 events, which had in turn, attracted 20-25,000 visitors to Northern Ireland, and generated £12 million toward the economy. For example the Senior British Open Golf Championship in July 2000 attracted 200,000,000 viewers worldwide. On the basis of

the report and proposals which the company board put to me, I have endorsed its continued existence and asked that it develop a longer term future events strategy. This process is under way at present.

I am enclosing a list of the events which the company has supported or offered to support during 2001, plus a small number being considered.

Lottery Funding: GAA and Association Football

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 2683/00, to give his assessment of the amount of lottery funding awarded to Association Football compared to that received by the Gaelic Athletic Association. (AQW 3010/00)

Mr McGimpsey: All applications for lottery funding are considered against the same eligibility and prioritisation criteria set out in the Sports Council's information and guidance booklets. Although the ratio of awards made to applications received is roughly the same for both sports, more applications were received from the GAA than from association football.

EDUCATION

Alcohol Education Programme

Mrs Carson asked the Minister of Education to detail progress on co-ordinating an alcohol education programme for primary and secondary level children. (AQW 2783/00)

The Minister of Education (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 children aged 4 to 16. Support is available to schools under the Northern Ireland Drug Strategy to address the development of drug education programmes, including education about alcohol. My colleagues and I on the Ministerial Group on Drugs are now considering how we can best achieve implementation of both the Drug Strategy and the Strategy for Reducing Alcohol Related Harm.

School Maintenance Work: West Tyrone

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 2494/00, to detail (a) the estimated cost of undertaking work on each of the schools listed and (b) the anticipated timescale for the completion of work in each case. (AQW 2842/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The estimated cost of work at each of the schools listed is attached. The Western Education and Library Board has indicated that the work will be completed during the course of this financial year.

Name of School	Estimated Cost
Ballycolman Nursery, Strabane	£10,700
Denomona Primary, Fintona	£9,500
Drumlegagh Primary, Newtownstewart	£2,800
Edwards Primary, Castlederg	£3,800
Erganagh Primary, Castlederg	£10,500
Gortin Primary, Plumbridge	£5,000
Killen Primary, Castlederg	£8,000
McClintock Primary, Omagh	£6,500
Newtownstewart Primary	£40,000
Omagh County Primary	£5,500
Sion Mills Primary	£11,800
Sixmilecross Primary	£3,400
Strabane Primary	£50,000
Barrick Street Primary, Strabane	£27,500
Drumnabey Primary, Castlederg	£10,000
Envagh Primary, Drumquin	£2,300
Evis Primary, Strabane	£2,000
Knocknagor Primary, Trillick	£2,600
Loughash Primary, Donemana	£2,000
Loreto Convent Primary, Omagh	£3,600
Our Lady of Lourdes Primary, Omagh	£19,500
Recarson Primary, Omagh	£5,000
Sacred Heart Primary, Tattyreagh, Omagh	£1,400
St Brigid's Primary, Sixmilecross	£5,500

Name of School	Project Cost
St Brigid's Primary, Gortin	£10,000
St Brigid's Primary, Mountfield	£16,000
St Caireall's Primary, Carrycoughan, Castlederg	£4,000
St Colmcille's Primary, Omagh	£30,000
St Columba's Primary, Clady	£30,000
St Columbkille's Primary, Carrickmore	£16,000
St Conor's Primary, Omagh	£5,000
St Eugene's Primary, Victoria Bridge	£10,000
St Joseph's Primary, Fintona	£16,500
St Lawrence's Primary, Fintona	£14,000
St Mary's Boys' Primary, Strabane	£224,600
St Mary's Primary, Ballymagorry, Strabane	£120,000
St Mary's Primary, Drumquin	£2,200
St Matthew's Primary, Ballygawley	£3,200
St Patrick's Primary, Carrickmore	£4,000
St Patrick's Primary, Castlederg	£150,000
St Patrick's Primary, Eskra	£3,900
St Patrick's Primary, Gortin	£10,000
St Patrick's Primary, Newtownstewart	£7,000
St Patrick's Primary, Seskinore	£900
St Teresa's Primary, Omagh	£129,000
Castlederg High	£30,000
Omagh High	£18,000
Strabane High	£10,000

Name of School	Project Cost
Dean Brian Maguire High, Carrickmore	£15,000

Our Lady of Mercy, Strabane	£25,000
St Eugene's High, Castlederg	£20,000
St John's High, Dromore	£30,000
St Joseph's High, Plumbridge	£7,500
Sacred Heart College, Omagh	£25,000
Heatherbank Special, Omagh	£4,500
Glenside Special, Strabane	£5,500

Gap Funding

Mr Tierney asked the Minister of Education to detail (a) what actions he has put in place to assist groups in completing the necessary application forms for GAP funding (b) how many applications have been made and (c) what is the turn around timescale. (AQW 2923/00)

Mr M McGuinness: In line with arrangements set in place by the Department of Finance and Personnel and the Special European Union Programmes Body a list of Departmental contact points for enquiries were included in the documentation supplied to applicants for GAP funding. A contact point in my department was on the list.

301 applications have been received and are currently being considered. My Department intends to have this process concluded by mid June.

Telecommunications Masts: Independent Audit

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Education to detail any information he has obtained from his independent audit of telecommunications masts situated on board property. (AQW 2947/00)

Mr M McGuinness: No information is available yet. The audit is being undertaken by the Radio Communications Agency who plan to carry out the audit in the next few months.

School Transport Policy

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education to state what changes he intends making to his school transport policy. (AQO 1522/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The existing school transport policy supports parental preference and enables education and library boards to provide transport assistance where a pupil is unable to gain a place in a suitable school within statutory walking distance of his or her home.

While I have no plans to make changes at present, I do, however, intend to conduct a review of the policy later this year and I will consider whether changes are necessary at that time. I will also consider carefully the Environment Committee's recommendations in relation to the safety of home to school transport, when they are made available.

Common Funding Policy for Grant-Aided Schools

Mr Leslie asked the Minister of Education to detail the time spent formulating the proposals contained in the document 'A Common Funding Policy for Grant- Aided Schools'. (AQO 1494/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The work on the common funding formula was taken forward along with other work on school funding generally and it is not possible therefore to account for the time spent in formulating proposals.

North/South Youth Exchange Scheme

Mrs Courtney asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of schools in the Western Education and Library Board area that have indicated their willingness to avail of the North/South Youth Exchange Scheme. (AQO 1518/00)

Mr M McGuinness: There is no single North/South Youth Exchange Scheme but there are a range of mechanisms which facilitate and assist North/South exchanges between schools and youth organisations. I understand from the Western Education and Library Board area that approximately 60 schools in the board area are involved in a variety of projects and programmes with schools in the South.

Pre-School Education Funding: Criteria

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education to carry out an assessment to ascertain whether the current criteria governing pre-school educational funding is disadvantaging the voluntary play group sector. (AQO 1524/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Under my Department's Pre-School Education Expansion Programme, the voluntary and private playgroup sector is, for the first time, able to access funding for places which have in the past been funded largely from parental contributions or other sources. I am aware of the concerns of voluntary and private centres in some areas that their viability will be threatened by the opening of new statutory nursery provision nearby. I have therefore asked officials from my Department to discuss the issue with officers of the relevant Pre-school Education Advisory Groups and will consider whether any action is necessary after those discussions have been completed.

Good Citizenship

Mr Poots asked the Minister of Education if he intends to introduce good citizenship to the education curriculum. (AQO 1530/00)

Mr M McGuinness: I refer the Member to the answer given to the Member for Strangford, Mr Kieran

McCarthy in the Oral Answers Booklet for 27 November 2000, page 323.

School Building Programme: Backlog

Mr M Murphy asked the Minister of Education to detail (a) the extent of the backlog in the school building programme and (b) the steps he is taking to address the problem. (AQO 1534/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The current backlog is estimated at some £500 million. On 1 March I announced details of an investment package to address the backlog of building work across the school estate. The package was in two parts. The first part included 17 projects to be taken forward under the conventional school building programme representing an investment of over £62 million. The second part provided for up to 8 secondary school projects to be taken forward under public-private partnerships with a total capital value of some £70 million. A further £16.2 million for four school projects has been made available under the Executive Programme Funds.

Promotion of Literacy and Numeracy

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Education if he plans to implement a specified curriculum for the teaching of literacy and numeracy for students in the 14 and 16 years-old age cohort, such as Her Majesty's Government has proposed for England and Wales.

(AQO 1528/00)

Mr M McGuinness: No. Our Strategy for the Promotion of Literacy and Numeracy provides the focus for driving up further the standards being achieved by pupils of all ages in all schools. A review of the strategy, and how it can be strengthened and developed further is being carried out by my officials, in consultation with the boards and CCMS.

Nursery School Places

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister of Education to detail the progress to date in providing nursery school places for all three and four year old children.

(AQO 1501/00)

Mr M McGuinness: In 1997 there were funded places for 45% of children in their final pre-school year, whose ages range from three years two months to four years two months. As a result of my Department's Pre-School Education Expansion Programme, that level has risen to 75% this academic year (2000/01), and is expected to exceed 85% in 2001/02. It is the long-term objective of the programme that a funded place will be available for every child in their final pre-school year whose parents wish it by March 2003.

Any extension of the programme to cover the remaining three year olds would be dependent on additional resources being available.

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Commercial Appraisal

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether an assessment has been made on the competitiveness of businesses that are being encouraged to invest in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 2863/00)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Sir Reg Empey): A cornerstone to the development of a fast growing knowledge-based economy is to attract more investment into Northern Ireland and enhance the international competitiveness of businesses already operating in Northern Ireland. IDB's policies and programmes have for several years now been focused on promoting the attraction of new inward investment and the growth of existing companies.

All projects that are submitted to IDB requesting financial assistance are subjected to a rigorous commercial appraisal. This includes a wide-ranging assessment of the competitiveness of the investment opportunity as well as that of the sponsor business.

In addition IDB's new Business Excellence Service is helping existing companies to develop their international competitiveness by identifying areas where efficiencies and savings can be achieved and where the introduction of best practice leads to new sales opportunities.

Skills Audit: Down District Council Area

Mr McGrady asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail what discussions have taken place with the Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment concerning the skills audit to be undertaken in respect of the Down District Council area; and to make a statement.

(AQW 2899/00)

Sir Reg Empey: IDB have been working closely with Down District Council to market the area to a number of potential inward investors. At a meeting on 8 March with the Council's Economic Development Sub-Committee, IDB help was sought to identify travel-to-work patterns of South Down residents who work for some of the larger Belfast based IT companies. The Council are keen to obtain this data to reinforce their local sales message to potential investors.

IDB committed to speak with the T&EA who are best placed to offer practical support, and during a subsequent discussion in April between the chief executives of IDB and the T&EA it was agreed that the T&EA would liaise directly with the council on this issue. IDB will, of course, be keen to understand how the real business opportunity Down has to offer to potential investors can be strengthened.

Electricity Costs: Climate Change Levy

Mr Close asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to give his assessment of the impact on the Northern Ireland economy of a further 5% increase in electricity bills due to the climate change levy; and to make a statement. (AQW 2918/00)

Sir Reg Empey: I am fully aware of the impact of the Climate Change Levy on our already high electricity prices and I have received a stream of correspondence about the matter. The levy has unfortunately coincided with the very significant increases in world gas prices which the generating companies are feeding through to consumers.

The introduction of the levy is a taxation matter and is the responsibility of HM Treasury. Prior to its introduction I made strong representations to Treasury seeking exemption for electricity, natural gas and LPG in Northern Ireland. Regrettably the Chancellor agreed to provide only an exemption for natural gas for five years, subject to the approval of the European Commission.

I share the concern about the impact of high energy prices on industrial competitiveness and action has been taken or is underway to reduce energy costs. These include 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 and 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 most cost effective and environmentally friendly combined heat and power technology and the continuing campaign to promote greater energy efficiency. Companies may also make use of the range of services, including free energy surveys and interest free loans to support energy efficiency measures, which are available through the recently established Carbon Trust and administered by the Industrial Research and Technology Unit.

The issues involved in seeking to reduce our high electricity prices are complex. At my request, the regulator has recently issued a consultation paper with proposals for restructuring the industry with a view to driving down prices. As you are aware, my Department has also commissioned consultants, in conjunction with the Department of Public Enterprise, to consider all-island solutions to our energy situation. A major conference in June will consider the emerging findings from this study which we expect to deliver long term benefits for business and domestic consumers.

Gap Funding: Application

Mr Tierney asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (a) what actions he has put in place to assist groups in completing the necessary application forms for GAP funding (b) how many applications have been made and (c) what is the turn around timescale. (AQW 2925/00)

Sir Reg Empey:

- (a) Following the Assembly announcement on GAP funding arrangements, and in advance of the formal press advertisement, two project promoters sought and received DETI advice on interim funding eligibility. In order to ensure equitable assessment of the applications, a DETI selection committee has been established.
- (b) To date DETI has received 25 applications. 17 have been re-directed to the appropriate Departments and eight are awaiting formal assessment.
- (c) Evaluation of these applications will be completed by the 25 May 2001 and promoters will be notified of the decision immediately thereafter.

Global Point: Public Safety

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to explain what he intends to do to ensure the integrity of fencing around the Global Point site in Newtownabbey and if he will give an undertaking that unfinished or dangerous locations within the site will be visited to ensure that the safety of local children is fully protected. (AQW 2932/00)

Sir Reg Empey: On completion of the current earthworks development at Global Point, due for completion late May 2001, the risks to children and the public at Global Point will not be significantly greater than those associated with most open space areas. The IDB's professional advisers have however undertaken a risk assessment in respect of the most significant risks at Global Point namely access from the business park to the Antrim - Bleach Green railway line, to some areas of relatively steep embankment adjacent to the southern

reaches of the perimeter cyclepath / walkway and to the Threemilewater watercourse and associated tributaries. IDB in conjunction with Translink will ensure that the boundary with the railway is effectively secured by means of planting or fencing and that the steep embankments are appropriately fenced. It is standard practice not to fence watercourses such as the Threemilewater, however where the river enters the culvert, the entrance has been adequately guarded. All works at Global Point have been designed to appropriate civil engineering standards and reasonably practicable steps taken to manage the most significant risks.

European Commission's 4th Report on World Shipbuilding

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to give his assessment of the European Commission's Fourth Report on the situation in world shipbuilding (COM (2001) 219). (AQW 2974/00)

Sir Reg Empey: I welcome the European Commission's fourth report on the situation in world shipbuilding, which provides further valuable analysis of the market and unfair trade practices. The report confirms the continuing serious difficulties in the world shipbuilding market characterised by very low prices and significant over-capacity, and the urgent need to maintain pressure on Korea to remedy their unfair trading practices. The European Union (EU) is pursuing, with the support of the United Kingdom, a bilateral/trade policy remedy towards Korea. The EU has been endeavouring to secure a bilateral solution but this has not so far led to a favourable outcome. In view of this situation, there was strong support at the 14/15 May 2001 meeting of the EU Industry/Energy Council to take action against Korea in the World Trade Organisation unless a bilateral solution is achieved before 30 June 2001. My Department and the Department of Trade and Industry will continue to monitor events.

ENVIRONMENT

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: Strangford Lough

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to confirm (a) that areas of outstanding natural beauty are a criterion for the allocation of Peace II rural development funding and (b) that Strangford Lough will be designated as an area of outstanding natural beauty. (AQW 2789/00)

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Foster): The Natural Resource Rural Tourism Initiative under the EU

Peace II Programme is a joint initiative between my Department, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. There will be public consultation on the detail of its proposals in the near future.

The Initiative will create the capacity to use Peace II funding to improve the tourism infrastructure and associated skills within the areas concerned to help towards economic growth.

Areas of outstanding natural beauty designated under the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (NI) Order 1985 and environmentally sensitive areas designated under the Agriculture (Environmental Areas (N.I.)) Order 1987, are eligible for consideration under the initiative.

However, to qualify for assistance under the Initiative these areas must also be areas of economic and social disadvantage. The Strangford Lough area does not qualify as a disadvantaged area. This applies also to other scenic parts of rural Northern Ireland.

I have asked my officials to prepare a report on the issues surrounding the designation of the remaining AONBs including Strangford Lough. 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 on future AONB designations.

However, the fact that the Strangford Lough area has not yet been designated has not, in this instance, had any bearing on its eligibility for funding under the Natural Resource Rural Tourism Initiative of the Peace II Programme.

Development Matters: Jordanstown/Whiteabbey Area

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the steps he intends to take to ensure that the natural and built environment in the Jordanstown/Whiteabbey area is protected from (a) over development (b) unsuitable development and (c) developers clearing existing houses and trees prior to planning approval. (AQW 2876/00)

Mr Foster: The Jordanstown/Whiteabbey area falls within the area covered by the Belfast Urban Area Plan 2001 and is subject to the Department's existing planning policies and guidance set out in the area plan and planning policy statements.

The Jordanstown/Whiteabbey area is particularly attractive and it has seen change in recent years as development opportunities have been realised. It is recognised that such change can have an effect on the established environment of an area but in permitting any new development, the Department seeks to ensure that those impacts are understood and kept to a minimum.

The Department will continue to apply all existing policies and guidance to this area, although like all other areas, development pressures will continue. In line with the current Government policy to increase the percentage of new houses built within the urban area, change is likely to continue.

The Lenamore area is currently designated as an area of townscape character which provides a measure of protection and the opportunity now presents itself for local residents and elected representatives to make representation to the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan Team on any additional areas of townscape character or conservation areas which they feel should be included in the new plan, which is being prepared to replace the Belfast Urban Area Plan 2001.

The Department has to consider each planning application on its own merits and, where appropriate, will ensure the retention of existing trees and vegetation by applying conditions to planning approvals or by the imposition of tree preservation orders (TPOs). Proposals are also being considered for inclusion in a forthcoming Planning Amendment Bill to strengthen powers with respect to protection of trees.

Generally, however, every site proposed for residential development will be subject to the requirements of the Department's 'Creating Places' document. This will require new proposals to respect the setting and characteristics of the site and the surrounding area. The Department will also be publishing further policy guidance on housing development within urban areas in the near future. The final version of Planning Policy Statement 7 'Quality Residential Development' and a consultation draft of Development Advice Note 8 'Small Unit Housing Development' will be published before the summer.

Although it is understandable that local residents are concerned that developers can clear existing houses and trees prior to planning approval, such action is permitted unless the individual property is a listed building and the trees are protected by a tree preservation order. Such designations can only apply to the best architectural properties and the most significant trees.

The Aghalee Bar: De-Listing

Mr Close asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the current position regarding the proposed delisting of 2, Soldierstown Road, Aghalee. (AQW 2911/00)

Mr Foster: The Aghalee Bar, at 2 Soldierstown Road, Aghalee, was de-listed on 3 April 2001.

A survey undertaken in September 2000 revealed that significant alterations had been made to both the interior and the exterior of the building, including the incorporation of modern features. Accordingly a proposal to de-list

was put to the Historic Buildings Council at its meeting on 16 February 2001. This was unanimously agreed.

Lisburn Borough Council, which was also consulted, did not reply within the deadline for response. Its subsequent objection to the proposal was not received until after de-listing had occurred.

Lough Neagh: Conservation

Mr Carrick asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the steps he is taking to conserve nature and the countryside in the Lough Neagh area. (AQW 2941/00)

Mr Foster: Lough Neagh has long been recognised at UK and international levels for its importance in nature conservation terms. Consequently, it has been afforded protection as an area of special scientific interest (ASSI), a special protection area (SPA) and a Ramsar site, in accordance with Northern Ireland legislation and European and international Directives and conventions.

In order to assist the proper management of such an important natural area the Lough Neagh Co-ordinating Committee was established to ensure that statutory bodies with responsibilities for Lough Neagh take a collective approach to its management. This Committee, chaired by my Department, includes officials from Government Departments and local authorities closely involved in the management of the area.

In addition, the Lough Neagh Advisory Committee, representatives of user groups and other bodies with an interest in the area, provides advice to the co-ordinating committee.

Both committees are working together to develop an overall strategy for the sustainable management of the Lough Neagh area, and at present they are collating information to enable a consultation paper to be issued this summer. Further consultation on a draft strategy is also planned for late 2001 and it is anticipated that the final strategy will be published in spring of 2002.

The Planning Service of my Department is currently preparing area plans for each of the district council areas around Lough Neagh. Each area plan will identify sites that are already subject to statutory nature conservation designations, both domestic and international. Sites of local nature conservation importance will also be identified.

The conservation interests of these areas will be taken into account when assessing any proposed developments affecting them.

Area plans may also identify local landscape policy areas, for which policies will be tailored to specific needs which can include nature and countryside conservation.

Licensed Disposal Operation: Kilroot Power Station

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 2320/00, to detail (a) what length of time has the licensed disposal operation left to run at Kilroot Power Station (b) what safeguards are there for nearby residents and (c) what conditions are being imposed to safeguard the visual impact to the coast.

(AQW 2945/00)

Mr Foster: The licensed disposal operation at Kilroot Power Station is not time limited, although the agreed final profile of the site will in practical terms determine the life of the facility. This was agreed as part of the planning process. The planning permission also addresses restoration of the site.

The safeguards for local residents are set out in the conditions contained in the planning permission and in the waste disposal licence. The waste licence is enforced by Carrickfergus Borough Council.

The planning service of my Department agreed the final height and profile of the site after consideration of its location and impact on the coastline.

Telecommunication Mast: Ganaway, Ballywalter

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment, in relation to the application for a telecommunications mast at Ganaway, Ballywalter, to detail (a) the date the application was submitted to the Planning Department (b) the discussions that took place (c) how long the application was with planners and (d) the reason for the delay in replying to the applicant outside the 42-day timescale.

(AQW 2952/00)

Mr Foster: The application for consent under the Department's prior approval procedure for the erection of this mast was received by the Downpatrick Divisional Planning Office on 23 January 2001.

The application was discussed at the divisional office's internal group meeting on 1 March 2001, following advertisement in the press on 15 February 2001 and a site inspection on 21 February 2001. The decision to refuse prior approval was taken at the group meeting following careful consideration of the application. The decision letter was generated on 2 March 2001 and, after signature by an authorised officer, was registered on the Planning Service computer system under an issue date of 6 March 2001.

The application was under consideration by the Planning Service for a period of 42 days from the date of receipt, 23 January 2001, until the date of decision, 6 March 2001.

The application was processed in accordance with the usual 42 day timescale. Unfortunately the Planning Service has no record of the actual date of posting of the decision and is, therefore, not in a position to comment on the delay in receipt of the formal notice by the applicant. Normally such decisions would be posted on the same day as they are registered on the agency's computer system.

Revised administrative procedures have now been introduced to ensure that this situation does not arise again. These include earlier decision making in prior approval cases and use of fax and recorded delivery for communicating decisions.

Animal Waste Disposal: Irish Sea

Mr McGrady asked the Minister of the Environment whether waste from animal carcasses is being dumped into the Irish Sea by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

(AQW 2953/00)

Mr Foster: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) is advised by the Environment Agency for England and Wales on the environmentally safe disposal of animal wastes. The treatment and disposal of such waste is a matter for MAFF. My Department has no remit in this matter.

My Department has been advised by the Environment Agency that liquid wastes from two burial sites used by MAFF are collected and treated to eliminate the risk of spreading the foot-and-mouth virus.

The collected waste from the Great Orton site in Cumbria is tankered to a waste water treatment works at Workington operated by United Utilities. Here the treated liquid is discharged to sea through a three kilometre outfall, which was subjected to computer modelling for its effectiveness in dispersion. I understand that the total dilution rate of the original waste, through this whole treatment process and at discharge, is one in 40 million. This is considered by the Great Britain authorities to be the best practicable environmental option under the circumstances and to represent zero impact on human health.

The waste from the Birkshaw burial site near Lockerbie, Dumfriesshire, is collected, treated against foot-and-mouth virus, and then deposited at a landfill operated by ALCO Waste Management Ltd site near Workington. Effluent from this site is further treated before discharge to foul sewer under and in accordance with a trade consent issued by United Utilities.

I understand that the Environment Agency has undertaken monitoring of the effluents and sampling at the marine outfalls, has carried out coastal surveys and has arranged for aerial photographs to be taken of the discharges. I further understand that to date no environmental impact has been observed.

Animal Waste Disposal: Irish Sea

Mr McGrady asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the action he will take to prevent the dumping of waste from animal carcasses into the Irish Sea by the Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food; and to make a statement. (AQW 2954/00)

Mr Foster: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) is advised by the Environment Agency for England and Wales on the environmentally safe disposal of animal wastes. The treatment and disposal of such waste is a matter for MAFF. My Department has no remit in this matter.

My Department has been advised by the Environment Agency that liquid wastes from two burial sites used by MAFF are collected and treated to eliminate the risk of spreading the foot-and-mouth virus.

The collected waste from the Great Orton site in Cumbria is tankered to a waste water treatment works at Workington operated by United Utilities. Here the treated liquid is discharged to sea through a three kilometre outfall, which was subjected to computer modelling for its effectiveness in dispersion. I understand that the total dilution rate of the original waste, through this whole treatment process and at discharge, is one in 40 million. This is considered by the Great Britain authorities to be the best practicable environmental option under the circumstances and to represent zero impact on human health.

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I understand that the Environment Agency has undertaken monitoring of the effluents and sampling at the marine outfalls, has carried out coastal surveys and has arranged for aerial photographs to be taken of the discharges. I further understand that to date no environmental impact has been observed.

Animal Waste Disposal: Irish Sea

Mr McGrady asked the Minister of the Environment to give his assessment on the dumping of waste from animal carcasses into the Irish Sea by the Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food; and to make a statement. (AQW 2964/00)

Mr Foster: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) is advised by the Environment Agency for England and Wales on the environmentally safe disposal of animal wastes. The treatment and disposal of

such waste is a matter for MAFF. My Department has no remit in this matter.

My Department has been advised by the Environment Agency that liquid wastes from two burial sites used by MAFF are collected and treated to eliminate the risk of spreading the foot-and-mouth virus.

The collected waste from the Great Orton site in Cumbria is tankered to a waste water treatment works at Workington operated by United Utilities. Here the treated liquid is discharged to sea through a three kilometre outfall, which was subjected to computer modelling for its effectiveness in dispersion. I understand that the total dilution rate of the original waste, through this whole treatment process and at discharge, is one in 40 million. This is considered by the Great Britain authorities to be the best practicable environmental option under the circumstances and to represent zero impact on human health.

The waste from the Birkshaw burial site near Lockerbie, Dunfriesshire, is collected, treated against foot-and-mouth virus, and then deposited at a landfill operated by ALCO Waste Management Ltd site near Workington. Effluent from this site is further treated before discharge to foul sewer under and in accordance with a trade consent issued by United Utilities.

I understand that the Environment Agency has undertaken monitoring of the effluents and sampling at the marine outfalls, has carried out coastal surveys and has arranged for aerial photographs to be taken of the discharges. I further understand that to date no environmental impact has been observed.

Public Service Agreements

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of the Environment to give his assessment of the impact of public service agreements on the best value regime for local authorities. (AQW 2977/00)

Mr Foster: The public service agreements apply to Government Departments only and not to local authorities.

Within my Department's public service agreement is a specific objective to support a system of local government which meets the needs of citizens and ratepayers. This objective is in keeping with the broad principles of Best Value.

Transfer of Vehicle Registration Marks

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of people applying for transfer of vehicle registration marks in the years 1999-2000 and 2000-01. (AQW 3023/00)

Mr Foster: The registration and licensing of vehicles are excepted matters. They are 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 (DETR).

DVLNI do not hold details of the number of people applying for transfers of vehicle registration marks. Individuals, especially dealers, may make multiple applications during a year.

In 1999-2000 a total of 22,931 registration marks were transferred and 21,765 in 2000-01. These figures include marks transferred within Northern Ireland, from Northern Ireland to Great Britain and from Great Britain to Northern Ireland.

Spread of Pond Weed: Lough Erne

Mrs Carson asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the long term effect of the spread of pond weed which may develop due to the presence of zebra mussels in Lough Erne. (AQW 3030/00)

Mr Foster: Zebra mussels have now become abundant in Lough Erne. They feed by filtering minute algae out of the water. This has now resulted in the water becoming clearer. The nutrients that would have been used by the algae are now potentially available for the growth of other aquatic plants, including pondweeds. These plants have always been present in Lough Erne, though the former growth of algae in the water reduced their abundance.

Excessive growths of algae pondweeds and zebra mussels are all symptoms of excessive nutrients in the lake system (eutrophication). It is impossible to predict by how much the pondweed communities will expand. Expansion of these communities would to some extent be a return to a former state. However, the expansion could favour species tolerant of nutrient enrichment at the expense of those that require good water quality.

EHS has detailed information on the distribution of aquatic plant communities from the Northern Ireland Lakes Survey carried out in the early 1990s. Future monitoring work by EHS will show what kinds of changes have taken place.

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Financial Assistance

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline any discussions he has had with the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food with regard to formulating a financial package of assistance as a result of foot-and-mouth disease in Northern Ireland. (AQW 2862/00)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):

Assistance for those suffering hardship as a result of foot-and-mouth disease is a matter for the Executive and has not involved the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, though the Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development has close contact with MAFF and keeps the Executive informed of developments.

The OFMDFM led taskforce links into the Rural Taskforce set up in Great Britain and this will ensure that Northern Ireland benefits from any wider initiatives.

The First and the Deputy First Ministers have today announced a new Help for Business scheme to provide grant assistance for the rate bills of those businesses that have been seriously affected by foot-and-mouth disease. Information on the scheme is being widely distributed in the press and the media.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Financial Assistance for the Tourist Industry

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail any plans to compensate the tourist industry for financial loss due to the foot-and-mouth outbreak. (AQW 2873/00)

Mr Durkan: The Executive recognise the adverse impact which the foot-and-mouth disease has had on certain businesses in Northern Ireland and has discussed the issue on a number of occasions.

The tourism industry along with other most affected sectors will benefit from the range of measures already announced which include deferring payment of tax, no interest charges for deferral period, deferral of rate payments and access to the Small Funds Loan Guarantee Scheme.

The important effort over coming weeks and months will be to put in place effective measures to restore confidence in the tourism sector and to encourage visitors back to the region. Central to this effort was the launch on 5 April of the new tourism strategy which will inject £1 million into tourism to support promotion effort overseas, as well as more locally centred, initiatives.

On 21 May the First and the Deputy First Ministers announced a new Help for Business scheme that will make grants available to help pay the rates bills of those businesses that have been seriously affected by foot-and-mouth disease. This scheme should be of particular assistance to the tourism sector and the scheme extends uniquely to very small accommodation facilities that pay domestic rates.

NI Block Grant Allocation

Mr McGrady asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail what further discussions he will hold with the Chancellor of the Exchequer concerning the

block grant allocation to Northern Ireland; and to make a statement. (AQW 2903/00)

Mr Durkan: I have publicly expressed my concerns about how the Northern Ireland expenditure block is determined via the Barnett Formula. I do not believe that the Barnett Formula is workable under the new resource accounting and budgeting framework, and I have expressed this view directly to the Treasury.

Over the coming months my officials will have further discussions with their Treasury counterparts on this issue and I will, when necessary, discuss further with Treasury Ministers. What is needed is an objective and transparent assessment of expenditure needs which will highlight that relative need is higher in Northern Ireland.

Gap Funding

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (a) what actions he has put in place to assist groups in completing the necessary applications forms for GAP Funding (b) how many applications have been made and (c) what is the turn around timescale.

(AQW 2912/00)

Mr Durkan: My Department has overall responsibility for EU Structural Funds in Northern Ireland and prepared an information pack, including an application form, for issue to any groups responding to the gap funding advertisement which was placed in the local press by DFP on 16 March 2001. However, it does not directly manage any of the priorities for funding in the programmes and consequently no applications for gap funding were received. As Minister of Finance and Personnel, I can respond on behalf of the Special EU Programmes Body, which is the managing authority for the PEACE II. (a) The information pack which was issued to all those who responded to the press advertisement contained a telephone contact point in the programmes body through which information and advice was available; (b) 152 applications are being dealt with directly by the body; and (c) it is expected that decisions on all applications will be taken by the end of May or early June 2001.

Disability in Northern Ireland

Ms Ramsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (a) what percentage of the adult population is disabled and (b) what percentage of children in the population is disabled. (AQW 2955/00)

Mr Durkan: There is no complete register of disabled people in Northern Ireland; therefore exact numbers and percentages are not available.

The most recent comprehensive study of disability in Northern Ireland (published in 1992) estimated that there were 201,000 people aged 16 years or over, living

in Northern Ireland with a physical, sensory or learning disability. This was based on the survey finding of an adult disability prevalence rate of 174 per thousand.

The same study estimated that there were 14,600 children aged under 16 years of age, living in Northern Ireland with a physical, sensory or learning disability. This was based on the survey finding of a prevalence rate of 35 per thousand.

Civil Service Transfer List

Mr Fee asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (a) how many Civil Service employees are on the current Civil Service transfer list and (b) the destination to which members of the Civil Service are seeking transfer. (AQW 2960/00)

Mr Durkan: [holding answer 17 May 2001]: As at 17 May there were 5,220 members of the NICS on the NICS transfer lists.

The system provides for individuals to indicate up to four location preferences. The destinations to which transfers have been requested are shown in the table below.

The numbers shown against each location are the number of current transfer requests which state that location as the first preference.

TABLE 1 - NUMBER OF 1ST PREFERENCE REQUESTS BY DESIRED LOCATION

Andersontown	32	Antrim	110	Arches Centre	1
Armagh	116	Augher	1	Ballycastle	2
Ballycraigy	-	Ballynahinch	33	Ballinamallard	-
Ballyclare	8	Ballymena	248	Ballymoney	43
Banbridge	140	Bangor	244	Ballygawley	-
Bushmills	-	Carrickfergus	88	Castlewellan	-
Crossgar	-	City Centre	777	Coleraine	192
Cookstown	94	Corporation Street	10	Craigavon	77
Crumlin	2	Downpatrick	168	Dundonald	32
Dungannon	97	Enniskillen	86	Falls Rd SSO	17
Falls Rd T&EA	3	Glengormley	2	Greater Belfast East	16
Greater Belfast North	4	Greater Belfast South	2	Greater Belfast West	2
Greater Belfast	147	Hillsborough	8	Hollywood Road	27
Hollywood	2	Kilkeel	27	Kilrea	-
Knock	32	Knockbreda	17	Londonderry - Derry	317
Ladas Drive	7	Larne	82	Limavady	86
Lishally	42	Lisburn	180	Lisnaskea	2
Loughgall	3	Lisnagelvin	23	Lurgan	106
Magherafelt	159	Maghera	-	Markethill	-

Moira	-	Netherleigh	33	Newtown-stewart	-
Newtownabbey	61	Newtownbreda	49	Newtownards	154
Newcastle	56	Newforge	16	Newry	194
Omagh	136	Pomeroy	-	Portadown	68
Rathfriland	1	Riversdale	-	Shaftesbury Square	8
Shankill	6	Stormont Estate	428	Strabane	96
Veterinary Research Labs.	-	-	-	-	-

TABLE 2 - CURRENT WORK LOCATION OF STAFF REQUESTING TRANSFER TO NEWRY AS 1ST PREFERENCE

No current NICS work location	*1
Armagh	18
Banbridge	5
City Centre	99
Cookstown	1
Corporation Street	1
Craigavon	4
Downpatrick	3
Greater Belfast	9
Hydebank	1
Kilkeel	5
Lisburn	5
Lurgan	2
Newcastle	1
Newforge	1
Newry	**19
Newtownards	2
Omagh	1
Portadown	4
Seagoe	1
Stormont Estate	11

* Member of staff currently on career break.

** Staff already working in Newry and requesting a transfer to another location within Newry

Noble Report: Deprivation Indicators

Mr McMenamin asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to give details of progress on the work to update the deprivation indicators led by Prof Mike Noble, head of the review team at Oxford University.

(AQO 1514/00)

Mr Durkan: The Noble Team made available a draft report on the university website on 30 April. This report, on which comments have been invited, deals with the methodology underpinning the research. The team have

also published the third in a series of newsletters which describes the construction of the new measures of deprivation and illustrates how they may be used. Feedback sessions on progress for those originally consulted in the course of the research have been held in Derry, Omagh, Lurgan and Belfast in the past three weeks.

My officials are currently performing quality assurance tests on the initial electoral ward rankings and scores provided by the team. This work will inform the consultants' final decisions on the new measures which it is planned will be published during the month of June.

Barnett Formula/NI Block Grant

Mr Leslie asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail what discussions he has had with the Treasury over the Barnett Formula/NI Block Grant in this financial year.

(AQO 1526/00)

Mr Durkan: In response to representations by myself and the First and Deputy First Ministers during the 2000 Spending Review, HM Treasury agreed to a number of adjustments in the operation of the Barnett formula. These changes mean that the block allocation for this financial year and the next two years is enhanced by an extra £40 million a year.

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. However, 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.

Also, at a recent joint press conference with the Finance Minister of the Welsh Assembly I expressed my 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 with HM Treasury. I also expect that the Executive will be making further representations to Treasury ministers in the coming months.

Ulster Savings Scheme

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to reintroduce new Ulster Savings account certificates.

(AQO 1491/00)

Mr Durkan: Current policy to close down the Ulster Savings Scheme derives from a 1990 policy review, which found that the scheme's contribution to the then NI borrowing requirement was marginal, and that no other factor could be identified to justify the cost of its continued operation.

There are no plans to replace the scheme at this time.

Alternative Sources of Funding for the Public Sector

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail what action he proposes to take to identify alternative sources of funding to meet the needs of the public sector. (AQO 1503/00)

Mr Durkan: As I announced on 15 March 2001 a new high-level working group is being established to look into alternative sources of funding from the private sector to address the shortfall of public sector investment in Northern Ireland.

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Children Order Regulations and Guidance: Volume 7

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline what consultation has taken place with the statutory, community and voluntary sectors regarding the publication of volume 7 of the Children Order Regulations and Guidance - Schools Accommodating Children and to detail the steps taken to equality proof the regulations under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. (AQW 2846/00)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms de Brún): Volume 7 of the Children Order Regulations and Guidance deals with the commencement of Article 176 of the Children (NI) Order 1995. The regulations and guidance were the subject of extensive consultation between my Department, the Department of Education and those schools providing boarding accommodation for pupils. The draft guidance was also sent to health and social services boards and trusts and to education and library boards for comment. No equality assessment was carried out as the policy was already contained in primary legislation but I can confirm that this policy area will be evaluated in the programme for equality impact assessments on individual policies.

Déileálann Imleabhar 7 de Rialacháin agus Threoir an Oird Pháistí le tosú Alt 176 d'Ord Páistí (TÉ) 1995. Cuireadh na Rialacháin agus an Treoir faoi réir comhairlithe leathain idir an Roinn s'agamsa, an Roinn Oideachais agus na scoileanna sin ag cur cóiríochta cónaithe ar fáil dá gcuid daltaí. Cuireadh an dréacht-threoir chuig Boird agus Iontaobhais Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta agus chuig Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne fosta dá léirmheas orthu. Ní dhearnadh measúnú comhionannais mar go raibh an polasaí sa bhunreachtáíocht cheana féin

ach tig liom a dhearbhu go measúnfar an réimse polasaí seo sa chlár do mheasúnuithe ar éifeacht an chomhionannais ar pholasaithe indibhidiúla.

Cryptosporidium

Mr Close asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether cryptosporidiosis is a notifiable disease in Northern Ireland and is this comparable with the situation throughout the rest of the United Kingdom. (AQW 2855/00)

Ms de Brún: Cryptosporidium is a microscopic parasite which causes cryptosporidiosis when transmitted to humans.

Cryptosporidiosis is not currently a notifiable disease here.

Laboratories voluntary report confirmed cases of cryptosporidium to the consultant in communicable disease control in each of the relevant health and social services board areas. There are similar arrangements in Great Britain.

Is seadán micreascópach é Crioptasporaidiam is cúis le crioptasporíreois nuair a tharchuirtar ar dhaoine é.

Faoi láthair, ní galar atá le cur in iúl anseo é Crioptasporaidiam.

Cuireann saotharlanna cásanna dearbhaithe crioptasporaidiam in iúl go deonach don Lia Comhairleach san Ionad Smachtaithe Galar Tógalach i ngach ceann de na ceantair Bhoird Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta. Tá siad seo cosúil leis na socruithe sa Bhreatain Mhór.

Fertility Treatment: Criteria

Mr O'Connor asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the criteria required to receive fertility treatment on the Health Service. (AQW 2856/00)

Ms de Brún: A wide range of fertility services is provided on the basis that patients are eligible for health and personal social services treatment. The precise treatment provided will depend on individual need and the clinical intervention that is considered to be appropriate.

Soláthraítear réimse leathan seirbhísí toirchithe ar an bhonn go bhfuil othair i dteideal cóireála seirbhísí sláinte agus sóisialta pearsanta a fháil. Braithfidh an sórt cóireála a sholáthrófar ar riachtanas an duine aonair agus ar an idirghabháil chliniciúil a shílfeá cuí.

Alternative Medicine: Homeopathic Treatment

Mr O'Connor asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) the benefits offered by homeopathic treatment and (b) whether such treatment is a cost effective use of healthcare resources. (AQW 2857/00)

Ms de Brún: I refer the Member to my answer to AQW 2858/00.

Luaim don Bhall an freagra a thug mé ar AQW 2858/00.

Complementary and Alternative Medicine

Mr O'Connor asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail her plans and offer patients homeopathic treatment by professional practitioners. (AQW 2858/00)

Ms de Brún: My Department is currently considering a detailed report on complementary and alternative medicine produced recently by the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology. The report examines issues such as the regulation and training of practitioners, the evidence of efficacy, the development of a research base, the provision of information to the public and healthcare clinicians and the delivery of services. I shall want to study my officials' analysis of these issues and the likely implications for the health and social services before determining the way ahead for homeopathy and other complementary or alternative medicines.

Tá an Roinn s'agamsa ag déanamh machnaimh faoi láthair ar mhionthuirisc ar Leigheas Comhlántach agus Malartach foilsithe le déanaí ag Roghchoiste Theach na dTiarnaí ar Eolaíocht agus Theicneolaíocht. Breathnaíonn an tuairisc ar cheisteanna amhail rialú agus oiliúint gnáthdhochtúirí, cruthú na héifeachtachta, forbairt ionaid taighde agus cur ar fáil eolais don phobal agus do dhochtúirí cúraim sláinte agus soláthar seirbhísí. Is mian liom scrúdú a dhéanamh ar anailís mo chuid oifigeach ar na ceisteanna seo agus ar na himpleachtaí dóchúlacha do na seirbhísí sláinte agus sóisialta sula ndéanfaidh mé cinneadh ar an bhealach chun tosaigh do homéapaite agus do leighis chomhlántacha agus mhalartacha eile.

Homeopathy Treatment: Benefits

Mr O'Connor asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to ensure that healthcare professionals within the Health Service are made aware of the benefits of homeopathy treatment, particularly as it is an approved treatment funded by the Health Service. (AQW 2859/00)

Ms de Brún: I refer the Member to my answer to AQW 2858/00.

Luaim don Bhall an freagra a thug mé ar AQW 2858/00.

Homeopathy: Healthcare Training

Mr O'Connor asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to make provision for the training of local healthcare professionals in the use of homeopathy as an effective treatment within the

healthcare system and to meet future demands as public awareness increases. (AQW 2860/00)

Ms de Brún: Provision of training for health professionals in the use of homeopathy is currently a responsibility of the professional bodies. There is an increasing interest in the development of homeopathy as a complementary approach to the care of service users. All the professional bodies are adopting an evidence-based approach to training and development and complementary therapies will of course need to be subject to the same rigour as the more traditional therapies.

Na forais ghairmiúla atá freagrach faoi láthair as soláthar oiliúna do ghairmithe sláinte in úsáid hoiméapaite. Tá suim i bhforbairt hoiméapaite mar chur chuige comhlántach do chúram úsáideoirí seirbhísí ag dul i méid. Tá na forais ghairmiúla uile ag glacadh le cur chuige d'oiliúint agus d'fhorbairt bunaithe ar chruthú, agus go deimhin, beidh ar theiripí comhlántacha bheith faoi réir na rialachán dian céanna is atá na gnáth-theiripí traidisiúnta.

Hospital Appointments

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of hospital appointments (a) brought forward and (b) postponed in each of the last three years for which figures are available. (AQW 2871/00)

Ms de Brún: Information is not available in the form requested.

Níl an t-eolas ar fáil san fhoirm a iarradh é.

Cancellation of Operations

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of people who have had operations cancelled (a) before admission to hospital and (b) after admission to hospital in each of the last three years for which figures are available. (AQW 2872/00)

Ms de Brún: Information is not available in the form requested.

Níl an t-eolas ar fáil san fhoirm a iarradh é.

Homeopathy

Mr O'Connor asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide general practitioners and hospital doctors with referral and funding guidelines to facilitate contracting professional homeopaths and that copies of these guidelines should be made available to patients. (AQW 2882/00)

Ms de Brún: I refer the Member to my answer to AQW 2858/00.

Luaim don Bhall an freagra a thug mé ar AQW 2858/00.

Potential Role of Homeopathy

Mr O'Connor asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to commission a study to evaluate the potential role of homeopathy in public healthcare in Northern Ireland. (AQW 2883/00)

Ms de Brún: I refer the Member to my answer to AQW 2858/00.

Luaim don Bhall an freagra a thug mé ar AQW 2858/00.

Security Arrangements for Ambulance Personnel

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 2288/00, to detail her plans to enhance security arrangements for Ambulance Service personnel. (AQW 2889/00)

Ms de Brún: The Ambulance Service Health and Safety Committee has taken a number of initiatives to improve staff security. These include a review of training arrangements which resulted in the inclusion of 'Dealing with Conflict' as part of the Ambulance Technician Award and the use of the media to highlight the problem and enlist community support in preventing further attacks on staff. The Ambulance Service management is continuing to work with staff side organisations to identify ways in which the safety of staff can be enhanced.

Thosaigh Coiste Sláinte agus Sábháilteachta na Seirbhíse Otharcharr roinnt tionscnamh le slándáil na foirne a fheabhsú. Ina measc tá athbhreithniú socrúithe oiliúna arbh iad cur san áireamh "Ag Déileáil Le Coimhlint" mar chuid den Duais Teicneora Otharcharr, agus úsáid na meán cumarsáide leis an fhadhb a thabhairt chun suntais agus le tacaíocht an phobail a fháil chun tuilleadh ionsaithe ar an fhoireann a chosc, a tháinig astu. Tá an Bhainistíocht Seirbhíse Otharcharr ag obair ar aghaidh le heagraíochtaí foirne chun a aithint dóigheanna le sábháilteacht na foirne a mhéadú.

Speech and Language Therapy: Adults

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail her plans to cut waiting times for adults awaiting speech and language therapy. (AQW 2892/00)

Ms de Brún: I am aware of the pressure on therapy services and of the need for additional therapists. My Department has been engaged in a workforce survey, the results of which are expected in the next few months. This survey will help inform decisions on the student intake level for the 2001/02 academic year. There are currently a total of 83 students taking a four year under-

graduate speech and language therapy course at the University of Ulster, and additional trained staff will help to address the needs.

Meanwhile, provision of therapeutic services is the responsibility of health and social services boards and trusts, having regard to available resources and the priority of individual cases determined by clinical assessment.

Tá an brú ar sheirbhísí teiripeacha agus an gá le teiripithe breise ar eolas agam. Bhí an Roinn s'agamsa i mbun suirbhé meithle oibre a bhfuiltar ag súil lena thorthaí i gceann cupla mí. Cuideoidh an suirbhé seo le socrúithe a dhéanamh ar leibhéal an ghlacadh isteach mac léinn don bhliain acadúil 2001/02. Faoi láthair, tá 83 mac léinn ag déanamh cúrsa céime Teiripe Labhartha agus Teanga ceithre bliana in Ollscoil Uladh agus cuideoidh an fhoireann oile bhreise le riar ar na riachtanais.

Idir an dá linn, is iad Boird agus Iontaobhais Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta atá freagrach as cur ar fáil seirbhísí teiripeacha, na hacmhainní atá ar fáil agus tosaíocht chásanna aonair cinnte de réir measúnaithe chliniciúil.

Speech and Language Therapy: Children

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail her plans to reduce the number of children awaiting speech and language therapy. (AQW 2893/00)

Ms de Brún: My Department has established a joint working group with officials from the Department of Education to consider the therapy support required by children with special educational needs and how this can best be provided. The work of the group will help to quantify unmet need and inform service targeting, planning and development of therapy services to children with special educational needs.

Bhunaigh an Roinn s'agamsa comhghrúpa oibre le hoifigigh ón Roinn Oideachais le machnamh a dhéanamh ar an tacaíocht theiripeach atá de dhíth ar pháistí le riachtanais speisialta oideachais agus ar an dóigh is fearr léi seo a sholáthar. Cuideoidh obair an ghrúpa le riachtanas neamhriartha, spriocadh seirbhísí déanta, chomh maith le planáil agus forbairt seirbhísí teiripeacha do pháistí le riachtanais speisialta oideachais a chainníochtú.

Assembly Questions

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQO 1261/00, to detail the number of questions for written answer she has failed to answer within the specified time. (AQW 2896/00)

Ms de Brún: Since 13 December 1999 I have provided answers to 1,063 written questions with 30 failing to meet the specified deadline.

Ó 13 Nollaig 1999 thug mé freagra ar 1063 ceist scríofa nár theip ach 30 díobh an spriocam ar leith a bhaint amach.

IVF Treatment

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to consider reducing the cost of IVF treatment thereby ensuring that many more couples would benefit. (AQW 2905/00)

Ms de Brún: I announced on 24 April that sub-fertility services, including in-vitro fertilisation (IVF) treatment, would be the subject of a public consultation exercise later this year. The consultation will address issues such as the cost of IVF and the eligibility for access to treatment.

D'fhógair mé ar an 24 Aibreán go mbeadh seirbhísí fothoirchithe, cóireáil toirchiú in-vítrea (TIV) san áireamh, ina n-ábhar cleachtaidh chomhairlithe phoiblí níos moille i mbliana. Rachaidh an comhairliú i gceann ceisteanna amhail costas TIV agus an chóireáil atá daoine i dteideal a fháil.

IVF Treatment

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail her plans to ensure that women who already have a child through IVF treatment will be given assistance and access to the new free fertility treatment. (AQW 2907/00)

Ms de Brún: I refer the Member to my answer to AQW 2905/00.

Luaim don Bhall an freagra a thug mé ar AQW 2905/00.

IVF Treatment

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the steps she is taking to ensure that older couples have access to IVF treatment. (AQW 2908/00)

Ms de Brún: I refer the Member to my answer to AQW 2905/00.

Luaim don Bhall an freagra a thug mé ar AQW 2905/00.

IVF Treatment

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail, by health board area, the number of women applying for IVF treatment through their GPs in the years 1999-2000 and 2000-01. (AQW 2909/00)

Ms de Brún: Information is not available in the form requested.

Níl an t-eolas ar fáil san fhoirm a iarradh é.

Gap Funding

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) what actions she has put in place to assist groups in completing the necessary application forms for gap funding (b) how many applications have been made and (c) what is the turn around timescale. (AQW 2913/00)

Ms de Brún: Applicants seeking support through DHSSPS under the interim funding arrangements announced by the Minister of Finance and Personnel to the Assembly on 12 February, received an information pack from the European Union Special Programmes Body along with an application form. In addition, departmental staff and staff attached to the NI Pre-school Playgroups Association were available to handle telephone requests for further information from prospective applicants.

In total, my Department received 225 applications for assistance under the interim funding arrangements. It is anticipated that the groups that applied to DHSSPS will be notified of decisions on their applications in the early part of June.

Fuair iarratasóirí ag iarraidh tacaíochta tríd an RSSSSP de réir na socruithe eatramhacha maoinithe fógartha ag an Aire Airgeadais agus Pearsanra don Tionól ar an 12 Feabhra, paca eolais chomh maith le foirm iarratais ó Fhoras an Aontais Eorpaigh um Chláir Speisialta. Ina theannta sin, bhí foireann na Roinne agus foireann ó Chumann Naíolann Réamhscolaíochta TÉ ar fáil le hiarratais theileafóin ar thuilleadh eolais ó iarratasóirí ionchasacha a láimhseáil.

Fuair an Roinn s'agamsa 225 iarratas san iomlán do chúnamh airgid de réir na socruithe eatramhacha maoinithe. Táthar ag súil go gcuirfear socruithe déanta ar a n-iarratais in iúl go luath i Mí Mheithimh do na grúpaí a chuir iarratais isteach chuig an RSSSSP.

'Best Practice - Best Care': Costs

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the costs of publishing the document 'Best Practice - Best Care' a framework for setting standards, delivering services and improving monitoring and regulations in the HPSS' and what were the costs of the sections printed in the Irish language. (AQW 2914/00)

Ms de Brún: The cost of designing and printing 'Best Practice - Best Care' was £19,026.57. There was no significant additional cost of printing the foreword in Irish; there was however a charge of £48.15 for the translation of the foreword into Irish.

To underline my commitment to making key documents available in other formats and languages, this document is available in Irish, Chinese, Braille and audiocassette. The estimated cost of these is £8,890.05.

£19,026.57 ba ea costas dearadh agus cur i gcló “Sárchleachtadh - Sárchúram” Ní raibh costas tábhachtach breise as clóbhualadh an bhrólaigh i nGaeilge ach gearradh £48.15 ar aistriú an bhrólaigh go Gaeilge áfach.

Le béim a chur ar mo ghealltanas eochaircháipéisí a chur ar fáil i leaganacha agus i dteangacha eile, tá an cháipéis seo ar fáil i nGaeilge, Sínis, i mBraille agus ar téip. Meastar gurb é £8,890.05 an costas air seo.

Hepatitis: People Diagnosed

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 2537/00, to detail the number of (a) people diagnosed with non-A and non-B hepatitis prior to 1994 and (b) haemophiliacs diagnosed with non-A and non-B hepatitis prior to 1994. (AQW 2915/00)

Ms de Brún: This information is not available in the form requested.

Níl an t-eolas ar fáil san fhoirm a iarradh é.

Haemophiliacs

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of haemophiliacs with (a) hepatitis C since 1994 and (b) treated with blood clotting products before 1985. (AQW 2916/00)

Ms de Brún: This information is not available in the form requested.

Níl an t-eolas ar fáil san fhoirm a iarradh é.

Cryptosporidiosis

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) the outbreaks of cryptosporidium within the last two years and (b) what steps have been taken by her to reduce further outbreaks. (AQW 2920/00)

Ms de Brún: There were three outbreaks of cryptosporidiosis here during the last two years. The first in May 2000 primarily related to North Down and South Belfast and was associated with 129 laboratory confirmed cases. The cause was strongly suspected to be waterborne. The second was in August/September 2000 and mainly involved the Lisburn/Poleglass area of Belfast and was associated with 117 laboratory confirmed cases. Again it was considered waterborne. There has been a

third outbreak recently, affecting people living in the Eastern and Northern Health Board areas. The source of the outbreak is most likely the Donore treatment works. It is too early to give final numbers of those affected.

The prevention of the entry of cryptosporidium into the treated water supply is the responsibility of the Water Service of the Department of Regional Development. I understand it is implementing a range of measures to minimise the risk of cryptosporidium entering the public water supply. These include risk assessment of all water sources, upgrading of water treatment works to provide effective barriers against cryptosporidium, the replacement of conduits susceptible to ingress and a programme of sampling and testing of the water supply.

Bhí 3 ráig de chrioptaspóraideois inseo le linn an dá bhliain deireanacha. Bhain an chéad cheann i mBealtaine 2000 go príomha leis an Dún Thuaidh agus Béal Feirste Theas agus bhí baint aici le 129 cás dearbhaithe ag saotharlanna. Meastar go láidir gurbh uisce a ba chuis léi. Tharla an dara ráig i Lúnasa/Méan Fómhair 2000 i gceantar Lios na gCearrbhach/an Phoill Ghlais i mBéal Feirste agus bhí baint aici le 117 cás dearbhaithe ag saotharlanna. Arís, measadh gur tháing sí ó uisce. Tharla an tríú ráig ar na mallaibh, a bhí ar dhaoine ina gcónaí i gceantair Bhoird Sláinte an Oirthir agus an Tuaiscirt. Is dócha gurb iad oibreacha cóireála Donore foinse na ráige iad. Tá sé róluath go fóill líon deiridh na ndaoine sin ar a raibh sí a thabhairt.

An tSeirbhís Uisce ón Roinn Forbartha Réigiúnaí atá freagrach as cosc a chur ar chrioptaspóraidiam ag dul isteach sa soláthar uisce cóireáilte. Tuigim go bhfuil sí ag cur réimse beart i bhfeidhm leis an bhaol ó chrioptaspóraidiam ag dul isteach sa soláthar uisce poiblí a íoslaghdu. Ina measc tá measúnú ar bhaol gach foinse uisce, athchóiriú oibreacha cóireála uisce le bac níos éifeachtaí a chur ar chrioptaspóraidiam, malartú seolphiopaí tugtha dá ligean isteach agus clár samplála agus trialach an tsoláthair uisce.

Publication of Reports

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the report name and issue date of the following four reviews (a) care in the community (b) intensive care services (c) acute services and (d) cardiac surgery. (AQW 2921/00)

Ms de Brún: The information requested is set out in the table below.

Name of Review	Issue Date (Date of Report)
Community Care Review	Due September 2001
Review of Intensive Care Services	Reported in February 2000
Acute Hospitals Review	Due to report in the near future
Cardiac Surgery Review	Due to report in the near future

Tá an t-eolas a iarradh leagtha amach sa tábla thíos.

Ainm an Athbheithnithe	Dáta Foilsithe (Dáta na Tuairisce)
Athbheithniú ar Chúram Pobail	Le cur amach i Mí Mheán Fómhair 2001
Athbheithniú ar Sheirbhísí Dianchúraim	Tuairisc tugtha i Mí Feabhra 2000
Athbheithniú ar Ghéarotharlanna	Le tuairisc a thabhairt ar ball
Athbheithniú ar Mháinliacht Chairdiach	Le tuairisc a thabhairt ar ball

Intensive Care Review

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) which of the 26 recommendations of the intensive care review have been implemented and (b) which have not. (AQW 2922/00)

Ms de Brún: Of the 26 recommendations in the intensive care review nine have been fully implemented and plans are in place to complete the implementation of the remainder over the next three years. Details on each recommendation are listed in the table below.

	Recommendation	Action
1	Intensive Care Capacity	Implemented
2.	High Dependency Capacity	Partially implemented
3.	Regional Intensive Care Unit	Implemented
4.	High Dependency Care in smaller acute hospitals.	Partially implemented
5.	Nursing Staff.	Implemented
6.	Grade Mix.	Partially implemented
7.	Induction (General)	Partially implemented
8.	Induction (Intensive Care and High Dependency)	Partially implemented
9.	Development Programme	Partially implemented
10.	Rotation Schemes	Implemented
11.	Flexible Working	Implemented
12.	Training Plans	Implemented
13.	Competent Medical Staff	Partially implemented
14.	Review of Medical Training Programmes	Partially implemented
15.	Clinical Supervision	Partially implemented
16.	Regional Guidelines	Partially implemented
17.	Intensive Care National Audit and Research Centre. (ICNARC)	Partially implemented
18.	Regional Audit	Implemented
19.	Paediatric Intensive Care Staff	Implemented
20.	Paediatric Intensive Care.	Implemented
21.	Transfer of critically ill children	Partially implemented
22.	Establishment of Services	Partially implemented
23.	Regional Information Assessment	Partially implemented
24.	Development of Systems	Partially implemented
25.	Intensive Care Service.	Partially implemented
26.	Monitoring and Reviewing	Partially implemented

De na 26 moladh san Athbheithniú ar Dhianchúram, cuireadh naoi gcinn i bhfeidhm go iomlán agus tá sé i gceist cur i bhfeidhm na coda eile a chríochnú le linn na dtrí bliana seo chugainn. Liostáiltear sonraí gach moladh sa tábla thíos.

	Moladh	Beart
1	Toilleadh Dianchúraim	Curtha i bhfeidhm
2.	Toilleadh Ardspleáchais	Curtha i bhfeidhm i bpáirt
3.	Ionad Réigiúnach Dianchúraim	Curtha i bhfeidhm
4.	Cúram Ardspleáchais i ngéarotharlanna níos lú.	Curtha i bhfeidhm i bpáirt
5.	Foireann Banaltrachta	Curtha i bhfeidhm
6.	Meascán Grád	Curtha i bhfeidhm i bpáirt
7.	Insealbhú (Ginearálta)	Curtha i bhfeidhm i bpáirt
8.	Insealbhú (Dianchúram agus Ardspleáchas)	Curtha i bhfeidhm i bpáirt
9.	Clár Forbartha	Curtha i bhfeidhm i bpáirt
10.	Scéimeanna Rothlacha	Curtha i bhfeidhm
11.	Obair Sholúbtha	Curtha i bhfeidhm
12.	Pleananna Oiliúna	Curtha i bhfeidhm
13.	Foireann Chumasach Leighis	Curtha i bhfeidhm i bpáirt
14.	Athbheithniú Clár Oiliúna Leighis	Curtha i bhfeidhm i bpáirt
15.	Maoirseacht Chliniciúil	Curtha i bhfeidhm i bpáirt
16.	Treoirínte Réigiúnacha	Curtha i bhfeidhm i bpáirt
17.	Ionad Iniúchta Náisiúnta, Dianchúraim agus Taighde (IINDCT)	Curtha i bhfeidhm i bpáirt
18.	Iniúchadh Réigiúnach	Curtha i bhfeidhm
19.	Foireann Dianchúraim Phéidiatraicigh	Curtha i bhfeidhm
20.	Dianchúram Péidiatraiceach	Curtha i bhfeidhm
21.	Aistriú páistí atá i mbaol báis	Curtha i bhfeidhm i bpáirt
22.	Bunú Seirbhísí	Curtha i bhfeidhm i bpáirt
23.	Measúnú Réigiúnach Eolais	Curtha i bhfeidhm i bpáirt
24.	Forbairt Chóras	Curtha i bhfeidhm i bpáirt
25.	Seirbhís Dianchúraim	Curtha i bhfeidhm i bpáirt
26.	Monatóireacht agus Athbheithniú	Curtha i bhfeidhm i bpáirt

Whiteabbey Hospital

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail her plans to ensure that Whiteabbey Hospital remains a vital part of hospital provision for residents in east Antrim, south Antrim and north Belfast; and to make a statement. (AQW 2933/00)

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 an Grúpa Athbheithnithe ar Ghéarotharlanna tuairisc ar fhorbairt amach anseo seirbhísí otharlainne. Roimh an tuairisc sin, ní bheadh sé

ceart domsa trácht ar sholáthar seirbhísí géarotharlainne amach anseo i gceantar ar bith.

Provision of Stroke Services

Mr McGrady asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what plans have been put in place to allocate capital funding to each hospital in order that they can provide a Stroke Unit; and to make a statement. (AQW 2935/00)

Ms de Brún: The commissioning of services for stroke patients is a matter for health and social services boards, which have recently come together to develop a regional approach to the provision of stroke services. My Department will consider any emerging proposals for capital developments in the normal way.

Is ceist do Bhoird Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta é coimisiúnú seirbhísí d'othair stróc, a bhuail le chéile ar na mallaibh le cur chuige réigiúnach do sholáthar seirbhísí stróc a fhorbairt. Déanfaidh an Roinn s'agamsa an gnáthmhachnamh ar mholtaí ar bith d'fhorbairtí caipitil a thiocfaidh amach as.

Cryptosporidiosis

Mr McGrady asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what measures have been put in place to eradicate the current strain of cryptosporidiosis which has occurred in the Eastern Health and Social Services Board area; and to make a statement. (AQW 2936/00)

Ms de Brún: The current strain of cryptosporidiosis, which has been identified in cases in the Eastern Health and Social Services Board area is type 1, i.e. the human form of the disease. The prevention of the entry of cryptosporidium into the treated water supply is the responsibility of the Water Service of the Department for Regional Development, and I understand that the Eastern Health and Social Services Board have established a multi agency outbreak control team to investigate the cause of the cryptosporidiosis outbreak. A probable source of contamination of the water supply, involving site drainage at the Donore Point Water Treatment Works, has been found and repairs made. The Minister for Regional Development has asked Prof Adrian Long, Queen's University, Belfast, to carry out an examination of the circumstances surrounding the probable contamination of the water supply. It is hoped that Professor Long's report will be available at the end of this month.

Sórt 1, is é sin, an fhoirm daonna den ghalar, is ea an ráig reatha de chrioptaspóireois a aithníodh i gceantar Bhord Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta an Oirthir. Is í an tSeirbhís Uisce ón Roinn Forbartha Réigiúnaí atá freagrach as an chosc ar chrioptaspóraidiam ag dul isteach sa soláthar

uisce cóireáilte agus tuigim gur bhunaigh Bord Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta an Oirthir Foireann IIGHníomhaireachta Smachtú Ráige le cúis na ráige crioptaspóraideoise a fhiosrú. Fuarthas foinse dhóchúil truaillithe a bhfuil baint aici le taoscadh suímh ag Oibreacha Cóireála Uisce Donore Point, sa soláthar uisce agus deisíodh í. D'iarr an tAire Forbartha Réigiúnaí ar an Ollamh Adrian Long, Ollscoil na Banríona Béal Feirste, scrúdú a dhéanamh ar na tosca is cúis le truailliú dóchúil an tsoláthair uisce. Táthar ag súil go mbeidh tuairisc an Ollaimh Long ar fail ag deireadh na míosa seo.

Cryptosporidium: Drinking Water

Mr Carrick asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to give her assessment on the safe level of cryptosporidium in drinking water as recommended in the Bouchier Report. (AQW 2940/00)

Ms de Brún: The most recent report of the Bouchier Committee indicated that it is not currently possible to recommend a health related standard for cryptosporidium in drinking water.

A treatment standard for treated water has been agreed at less than 1 oocyst in 10 litres of treated water.

Chuir an tuairisc is déanaí de Choiste Bouchier in iúl nach féidir caighdeán bainteach le sláinte do chrioptaspóraidiam in uisce inólta a mholadh faoi láthair.

Aontaíodh caighdeán cóireála d'uisce cóireáilte ar níos lú ná 1 úchist i 10 lítear d'uisce cóireáilte.

Community Care Review

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) those recommendations of the community care review that have been implemented and (b) how the review has impacted on policy within her Department. (AQW 2942/00)

Ms de Brún: The community care review team is on course to provide me with a report and recommendations by the end of September 2001. The review will take account of other ongoing reviews and current policies within my Department.

Tá an fhoireann athbhreithnithe chúraim phobail ag gabháil tuairisce agus moltaí a sholáthar dom faoi dheireadh Mheán Fómhair 2001. Cuirfidh an t-athbhreithniú athbhreithnithe eile ag dul ar aghaidh faoi láthair agus na polasaithe reatha istigh sa Roinn s'agamsa san áireamh.

Acute Hospitals Review: Costs

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) the cost of the acute hospital review to date (b) how much was paid to

each member in total and (c) confirm the amount claimed by each member in travelling and subsistence expenses. (AQW 2943/00)

Ms de Brún:

- (a) The cost to date of the acute hospitals review is £409,238. This figure includes salaries, commissioned research and office expenses.
- (b) The total remuneration and (c) travelling and subsistence amounts paid in respect of each member is shown in the table.

Member	Total remuneration paid to date	Travelling & Subsistence Expenses
Chairman	£34,558	£158.10
Member 1	£15,512.50	£7,827.50
Member 2	£7,135.40	£2,735.40
Member 3	£6,929.15	£1,729.15
Member 4	£5,881.25	£681.25
Member 5	£9,461.85	£1,161.85
Member 6	£4,103.50	£1,503.50
Member 7	£2,403.21	£303.21
Member 8	No Claim made yet	No Claim made yet
Member 9*	£5,200	Nil
Member 10*	£600	Nil
Total	£91,784.86	£16,099.96

* No longer with the group.

- (a) £409,238 is ea an costas go dtí seo ar an Athbhreithniú ar Ghéarocharlanna. Cuireann an figiúr seo tuarastail, taighde coimisiúnaithe agus costais oifige san áireamh.
- (b) Léirítear sa tábla thíos an t-airgead iomlán íoctha agus (c) costais taistil agus chothaithe íoctha do gach ball.

Ball	Airgead iomlán íoctha go dtí seo	Costais Taistil agus Chothaithe
Cathaoirleach	£34,558	£158.10
Ball 1	£15,512.50	£7,827.50
Ball 2	£7,135.40	£2,735.40
Ball 3	£6,929.15	£1,729.15
Ball 4	£5,881.25	£681.25
Ball 5	£9,461.85	£1,161.85
Ball 6	£4,103.50	£1,503.50
Ball 7	£2,403.21	£303.21
Ball 8	Gan éileamh déanta go fóill	Gan éileamh déanta go fóill
Ball 9*	£5,200	Nil
Ball 10*	£600	Nil
Iomlán	£91,784.86	£16,099.96

* Gan leis an ghrúpa níos mó.

Mobile Phones: Health Risk

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 2236/00, whether she intends to make public the findings of her review of safety implications. (AQW 2946/00)

Ms de Brún: In response to the recommendations of the Stewart report on mobile phone technology, a programme management committee has been set up to advise on further research in this field. It has recently been inviting bids for research projects, in a number of areas such as effects on brain function, improvements in dosimetry and the consequences of exposure to pulsed signals. Actual research work is unlikely to begin until October and publication of findings will follow in due course.

Mar fhreagairt ar mholtaí thuairisc Stewart ar theicneolaíocht ghuthán soghluaiste, bunaíodh Coiste Bainistíochta Cláir le comhairle a thabhairt ar thaighde breise sa réimse seo. Ar na mallaibh, bhí sé ag fáiltiú roimh thairiscintí do thionscadail taighde i roinnt réimsí amhail éifeachtaí ar fheidhm na hinchinne, feabhsuithe i ndáileogmhéadracht agus iarmharta nochtheadh do chomharthaí bíge. Ní dócha go dtosódh fíorobair thaighde go dtí Deireadh Fómhair agus leanfaidh foilsiú na dtorthaí in am is i dtráth.

IVF Treatment

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to consider introducing a means test for IVF treatment to ensure that those least able to afford it would qualify for such treatment. (AQW 2950/00)

Ms de Brún: I refer the Member to my answer to AQW 2905/00.

Luaim don Bhall an freagra a thug mé ar AQW 2905/00.

Occupational Therapy: Ards Borough Council Area

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of patients referred to occupational therapy departments in the Ards Borough Council area in 1998-99, 1999-00 and 2000-01 and outline the steps she is taking to address the backlog of cases. (AQW 2956/00)

Ms de Brún: Numbers of referrals to occupational therapists in the Ards Borough Council area for the financial years 1998-99 to 2000-01 are detailed in the table below.

Year	Number of Referrals
1998/99	2,348
1999/00	2,239
2000/01	1,991

In line with the Programme for Government I have secured an additional £0.5 million in the current financial year to provide an extra 20 community occupational therapists. My Department's priorities for action 2001/2002 includes a target that boards and trusts should reduce the numbers waiting for occupational therapy assessment for housing adaptation by 20% over the period April 2001 to March 2002. Implementation of the recommendations contained in the preliminary report of the joint DHSSPS/Housing Executive review of the housing adaptations service commenced on 1 March 2001 and should improve the throughput of such cases.

Mionléirítear sa tábla thíos líon na ndaoine atreoraithe chuig teiripithe saothair i gComhairle Ceantair na hAirde do na blianta airgeadais 1998/99 go 200/01.

Bliain	Líon na nDaoine Atreoraithe
1998/99	2,348
1999/00	2,239
2000/01	1,991

De réir Chlár um Rialtas, chinntigh mé £0.5m breise sa bhliain reatha airgeadais le 20 teiripí saothair pobail breise a sholáthair. I 'Tosaíochtaí do Bhearta 2000/2002' mo Roinne tá sprioc ann inar chóir do Bhoird agus d'Iontaobhais líon na ndaoine ag fanacht ar mheasúnú teiripe saothair d'oiriúint tithíochta a laghdú de réir 20% le linn na tréimhse Aibreán 2001 go Márta 2002. Thosaigh cur i bhfeidhm na moltaí istigh i réamhthuirisc Chomhathbhreithniú na RSSSP/an Fheidhmeannas Tithíochta ar an tSeirbhís Oiriúnú Tithíochta ar an 1 Márta 2001 agus ba chóir dó próiseáil chásanna mar seo a fheabhsú.

IVF Treatment

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail how she will assist those couples, who have previously received IVF treatment resulting in the birth of a child, but who have since been unsuccessful in qualifying for free fertility treatment. (AQW 2957/00)

Ms de Brún: I refer the Member to my answer to AQW 2905/00.

Luaim don Bhall an freagra a thug mé ar AQW 2905/00.

Northern Ireland Hospice

Mr J Wilson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in the light of the investigation by the BBC's Spotlight programme into the affairs of the Northern Ireland Hospice on Tuesday 8 May, to consider establishing a public inquiry into the

affairs of the hospice or to suggest what course of action needs to be taken as a means of restoring public confidence in such an essential institution.

(AQW 2958/00)

Ms de Brún: As an independent voluntary organisation, managerial issues are a matter for the hospice to resolve through its own procedures. I am of course very much aware of the need to maintain public confidence in the hospice, given the key role that it plays in the provision of services, and I hope that the present dispute can be resolved as soon as possible.

Mar eagraíocht neamhspleách dheonach, is ceist don Ospáis le réiteach trína gnáthaimh féin iad ceistanna bainistíochta. Go deimhin, tá eolas iontach agam ar an ghá le muinín an phobail as an Ospáis a choinneáil, ag cur an eochair-ról atá aici i soláthar seirbhísí san áireamh, agus tá súil agam gur féidir an díospóid atá ann faoi láthair a réiteach a luaithé agus is féidir.

Suicide Rate

Mr Fee asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the financial resources made available to reduce the rate of suicide. (AQW 2959/00)

Ms de Brún: Funding to reduce the rate of suicide is contained within the budget for mental health services and there is no separate allocation for it. £124 million was available for mental health services in 1999-2000 and a further £2 million has been added to this budget in the current year. In addition, £4.5 million has been allocated to substance misuse initiatives under the drugs strategy in recognition of the link between suicide and substance abuse. The Department also provides £0.5 million to support the work of voluntary organisations which provide services for people with mental health problems and £0.8 million is being made available over three years to a new out of hours community mental health service in the Southern HSS Board. All of these measures should assist in the efforts to reduce the rate of suicide.

Tá an maoiniú leis an ráta féinmharaithe a laghdú istigh sa bhuiséad do sheirbhísí sláinte meabhrach agus níl dáileadh ar leith eile ann dó. Bhí £124m ar fáil do sheirbhísí sláinte meabhrach i 1999/2000 agus cuireadh £2m breise leis an bhuiséad seo sa bhliain reatha. Ina theannta sin, dáileadh £4.5m ar scéimeanna mí-úsáid substaintí faoi choimirce na Straitéise Drugaí mar aitheantas ar an cheangal idir féinmharú agus mí-úsáid substaintí. Cuireann an Roinn £0.5m ar fáil fosta le tacú le hobair eagraíochtaí deonacha a sholáthraíonn seirbhísí do dhaoine le fadhbanna sláinte meabhrach agus tá £0.8m á chur ar fáil thar tréimhse 3 bliain do sheirbhís nua sláinte meabhrach pobail taobh amuigh de gnáthuaireanta oibre i mBord SSS an Deiscirt. D'fhéadfadh na bearta seo uile cuidiú leis na hiarrachtaí chun an ráta féinmharaithe a laghdú.

Registered Child Minders

Mr Fee asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the steps she is taking to increase the number of registered child minders; and to make a statement. (AQW 2962/00)

Ms de Brún: Childminders are registered, inspected and supported by the Early Years Teams in the health and community services trusts. Many of the trusts work in partnership with the Northern Ireland Childminding Association (NICMA) to provide pre-registration training for childminders and also support other training initiatives. Trusts also sponsor childminding places for children who are in need in their area.

Tá feighlithe leanaí cláraithe, iniúchta agus faigheann siad tacaíocht ó Fhoirne Túsbhlianta in Iontaobhais Sheirbhísí Sláinte agus Pobail. Oibríonn cuid mhaith de na hIontaobhais i bpáirtíocht le Cumann Feighlithe Páistí Thuaisceart Éireann (CFPTÉ) chun oiliúint reamhchláraithe d'fheighlithe páistí agus tugann siad tacaíocht do thionscnaimh oiliúna eile. Tugann Iontaobhais urraíocht d'áiteanna feighlithe do pháistí a bhfuil riachtanais othru ina gceantar.

Direct Entry Midwifery Course

Ms Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether she has any plans to introduce the direct entry midwifery course in Northern Ireland. (AQW 2968/00)

Ms de Brún: A departmental education strategy group is considering this matter in consultation with the HPSS and the profession.

Tá Grúpa Rannógach Straitéise Oideachais ag déanamh machnaimh ar an cheist seo i gcomhairle leis na SSSP agus leis an Ghairm.

Castlederg Ambulance Station

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail her plans to address public health issues at Castlederg Ambulance Station. (AQW 2972/00)

Ms de Brún: The Ambulance Service has undertaken remedial work to improve conditions at Castlederg Ambulance Station, and is currently making arrangements for the provision of sluice facilities.

Ghlac an tSeirbhís Otharcharr uirthi féin obair leasúcháin a dhéanamh le coinníollacha oibre ag Stáisiún Otharcharr Chaisleán na Deirge a fheabhsú, agus tá sí ag déanamh socruithe faoi láthair le háiseanna bualchomhla a sholáthar.

Regional Adoption Inspection Report

Ms Hanna asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail when the regional adoption inspection document will be launched. (AQO 1517/00)

Ms de Brún: The regional report is due to be completed by the end of June and should be formally launched in September of this year.

Táthar leis an Tuairisc Réigiúnach a chríochnú faoi dheireadh Mhí Mheithimh agus is cóir go seoltar í go foirmiúil i Mí Mheán Fómhair na bliana seo.

Vacancies for Nurses and Speech and Language Therapists

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average number of vacancies that exist within the public sector for (a) nurses and (b) speech and language therapists. (AQO 1523/00)

Ms de Brún: HSS trusts reported a total of 477 nurse vacancies as at 21 March 2001.

Currently there are 39 vacant speech & language therapy posts throughout the Health and Personal Social Services. These figures include a number of vacancies for temporary staff to cover maternity leave and long-term sick leave of permanent staff. Some vacancies are for part-time staff.

Chuir Iontaobhais SSS in iúl go raibh 447 (ceithre chéad daichead is a seacht) bhfolúntas ann do bhanaltraí ag an 21 Márta 2001.

Faoi láthair, tá 39 (tríocha is a naoi) bhfolúntas poist ann do theiripithe labhartha agus teanga ar fud na Seirbhísí Sláinte agus Sóisialta Pearsanta. Cuireann na figiúirí seo roinnt folúntas d'fhoireann shealadach san áireamh le saoire mháithreachais agus tinnis fhadtéarmaigh na foirne buaine a chumhdach. Tá cuid de na folúntais ann d'fhoireann pháirtaimseartha.

Development of Cancer Services

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to give an update on facilities and/or resources being put in place to improve the service to cancer patients; and to make a statement. (AQO 1500/00)

Ms de Brún: This year a total of £6 million is available for the development of cancer services, on top of the additional £8 million which was allocated last year. These resources have facilitated the development of oncology services at the cancer units, with over 50% of day-patient chemotherapy now provided outside of the cancer centre in Belfast. So far, two additional consultant oncologists and 70 nurses have been appointed to the cancer centre

and cancer units, bringing the total staff involved in the provision of radiotherapy and chemotherapy services to adult cancer patients to approximately 500. In addition, £4 million is being made available for the development of a new day hospital and outpatients suite as part of the first phase of the cancer centre development at Belfast City Hospital.

Tá £6 mhilliún san iomlán ar fáil i mbliana d'fhorbairt seirbhísí ailse mar bharr ar an £8 milliún breise a dáileadh anuraidh. Chuidigh na hacmhainní seo le forbairt seirbhísí oinceolaíochta ag na hionaid ailse, le breis agus 50% de cheimiteiripe othar lae á soláthar anois taobh amuigh den ionad ailse i mBéal Feirste. Go dtí seo, ceapadh beirt oinceolaithe comhairleacha breise agus 70 banaltra don ionad ailse agus do na hionaid ailse eile araon, sin thart faoi 500 san iomlán ar an fhoireann ag soláthar seirbhísí raiditeiripe agus ceimiteiripe d'othair aosacha le hailse. Ina theannta sin, tá £4 mhilliún á chur ar fáil d'fhorbairt otharlainne nua lae agus seomra éisothar mar chuid den chéad chéim i bhforbairt an ionaid ailse ag Otharlann Cathrach Bhéal Feirste.

Telemedicine Facilities

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail progress being made towards the development of telemedicine facilities in local hospitals. (AQO 1532/00)

Ms de Brún: Telemedicine is increasingly being used by clinicians in the diagnosis, treatment and care of patients. A survey in 1998 reported that there were 63 projects here involving this technology. A number of telemedicine services have now been established, including paediatric cardiology tele-video ultrasound diagnosis between Altnagelvin Hospital and the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children and a tele-neurology link between the minor injuries units in the Ards and Bangor Community Hospitals and the accident and emergency department of the Ulster Hospital. This new technology offers the potential to improve the quality of service to patients and I am keen to encourage its development.

Tá an teili-leigheas atá á úsáid ag cliniceoirí i bhfáthmheas, cóireáil agus cúram othar ag dul i méid. Chuir suirbhé a rinneadh i 1998 in iúl go raibh 63 (seasca is a trí) thionscadal ag úsáid na teicneolaíochta seo. Tá roinnt seirbhísí teili-leighis ar bun anois, ina measc tá fáthmheas péidiatraiceach cairdeolaíochta ultrafhuaimne teili-fhíse idir Otharlann Alt na nGealbhán agus Otharlann Ríoga Bhéal Feirste do Pháistí Tinne, agus nasc teili-néareolaíochta idir Ionaí Mhionghortuithe in Otharlanna Pobail na hAirde agus Bheannchair agus an Roinn Timpistí agus Éigeandálaí in Otharlann Uladh. Tugann an teicneolaíocht nua seo an deis le cáilíocht na seirbhísí atá ar fáil d'othair a fheabhsú agus tá an-spéis agam ina forbairt a spreagadh.

Ambulance Service: Communication System Upgrade

Ms McWilliams asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the recently installed communication system upgrade in the Ambulance Service is functioning adequately. (AQO 1493/00)

Ms de Brún: The communication system has not been recently upgraded. However, it is the intention to replace existing analogue equipment with a new digital communication system by the year 2004. A medical priority dispatch system will be piloted in the EHSSB area by March 2002 and the Ambulance Service is currently considering the case for a single control centre.

Níor athchóiríodh an córas cumarsáide ar na mallaibh. Tá sé ar intinn agam áfach an trealamh analóige atá ann faoi láthair a mhalartú ar chóras nua digiteach cumarsáide faoin bhliain 2004. Déanfar píolótú ar Chóras Seolta Tosaíochta Leighis i gceantar an BSSSO faoi Mhárta 2002 agus tá an tSeirbhís Otharcharr ag déanamh machnaimh faoi láthair ar an chúis d'ionad stiúrtha amháin.

Breast Screening: Over 60s

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to give her assessment of mammography screening for the over 60s. (AQO 1512/00)

Ms de Brún: Women between the ages of 50 and 64 are invited for breast screening every three years. Last year there was an uptake rate of 74% out of the 46,000 women invited, an increase of 1% on 1999. No invitation is sent to women beyond age 64 but they may continue to attend, if they wish. My Department is currently examining the implications of extending the programme to women up to age 70.

Tugtar cuireadh do mhná idir 50 agus 64 bhliain d'aois le teacht le haghaidh scagadh chích gach trí bliana. Anuraidh, tháinig 74% (seachtó is a ceithre faoin chéad) de na 46,000 (daicheadh is a sé mhíle) bean ar tugadh cuireadh dóibh, sin méadú de 1% (a haon faoin chéad) ar 1999. Ní thugtar cuireadh do mhná níos sine ná 64 bhliain d'aois ach is féidir leo coinneáil leo ag freastal más mian leo. Faoi láthair, tá mo Roinn ag scrúdú impleachtaí leathnú an chlár do mhná go dtí 70 bliain d'aois.

Craigavon Area Hospital: Under-Capacity

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what steps she is taking on the issue of capacity in Craigavon Area Hospital and whether additional funding will be made available to meet public demand. (AQO 1529/00)

Ms de Brún: As I have previously made clear, our hospital service is facing a serious problem regarding under-capacity. This problem is a direct result of years of underfunding of the HPSS by successive governments. I am continuing to press the case for additional resources with my Executive colleagues to address this matter.

In order to ease pressure on Craigavon Area Hospital a range of measures have been introduced. These include: increasing the number of intensive care and high dependency beds at the hospital; the development of a six bed day procedure unit for medical patients; and the enhancement of community provision to help alleviate the pressure at the hospital. In addition, a further four beds have been opened in the gynaecology ward.

I have asked the Southern Health and Social Services Board and Craigavon Area Hospital Trust to work together to ensure that capacity at Craigavon Area Hospital and the overall service capacity in the Southern Board Area are being used to best effect. I understand that a business case for the development of a high-quality 40 bed prefabricated unit is also being drawn up. I will give this business case my urgent attention once it is agreed with the Southern Health and Social Services Board and submitted to my Department.

Mar a chuir mé in iúl go soiléir cheana féin, tá fadhb thromchúiseach ag ár seirbhísí otharlainne maidir le tearcasmhainn. Tá an fhadhb seo ann mar thoradh díreach ar rialtais leanúnacha ag tearcmhaoiniú na SSSP leis na blianta. Coinním liom ag éileamh ar mo Chomhghleacaithe san Fheidhmeannas tuilleadh acmhainní a chur ar fáil le dul i gceann na ceiste seo.

Leis an bhrú ar Otharlann Ceantair Craigavon a mhaolú tugadh réimse beart isteach. Ina measc tá méadú i líon na Leapacha Dianchúraim agus Ardspleáchais ag an otharlann; forbairt ionad gnámhaimh lae sé leaba d'othair leighis; agus méadú i soláthar pobail leis an bhrú ar an otharlann a mhaolú. Ina theannta sin, cuireadh ceithre leaba breise ar fáil sa bhorda liachta ban.

D'iarr mé ar Bhord Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta an Deiscirt agus ar Iontaobhas Otharlann Ceantair Craigavon obriú le chéile le cinntiú go bhfuil acmhainn iomlán na seirbhísí i mBord an Deiscirt á húsáid a éifeachtaí agus is féidir. Tuigim go bhfuil cás gnó d'fhorbairt ionad réamhdhéanta ardcháilíochta 40 leaba á dhréachtú. Breithneoidh mé ar an chás gnó seo go práinneach a luaithe agus a aontaítear le Bord Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta an Deiscirt agus a chuirfear isteach chuig mo Roinn é.

Co-operating to Safeguard Children

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to advise on the timescale for the completion of the rewrite of 'Co-operating to Safeguard Children' and to confirm if this document will

be subject to equality screening and impact assessment under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

(AQO 1509/00)

Ms de Brún: 'Co-operating to Safeguard Children' is at final draft stage. The last consultation round with the four Area Child Protection Committees has just ended. The deadline for final comments was 1 May 2001. All comments have now been received and these are currently being considered. In relation to equality screening and impact assessment under section 75, the Department intends to issue the draft for consultation on equality issues in June.

Tá an cháipéis 'Ag Comhoibriú le Páistí a Chosaint' ag an chéim dheireanach dréachta. Tá an babhta deireanach comhairlithe leis na ceithre Choiste Ceantair Chosaint Páistí críochnaithe anois. 1 Bealtaine 2001 ba ea an dáta deiridh do mholtaí deireanacha. Fuarthas gach moladh anois agus tá machnamh á dhéanamh orthu faoi láthair. Maidir le scagadh comhionannais agus measúnú éifeachta faoi alt 75, tá sé ar intinn ag an Roinn an dréacht a fhoilsiú le haghaidh comhairliú ar cheisteanna comhionannais i Mí Mheithimh.

Human Organs Inquiry

Mr Neeson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the progress to date by the inquiry into the retention of children's organs.

(AQO 1519/00)

Ms de Brún: I am advised that the administrative and support arrangements for the Human Organs Inquiry have been finalised and that advertisements were placed in the press last week. These provided information and contact details covering both the inquiry and the relatives reference group and invited comment from all interested parties.

I am also advised that the chair of the inquiry, Mr John O'Hara, is writing to all relevant authorities seeking information and comment. I understand that the inquiry team and the relatives reference group have met to discuss their respective roles and how they can work collaboratively, where appropriate.

I am also informed that the inquiry team has met the parents support group Heartbreak and that it has established links with relevant bodies in England, Scotland, Wales and in the South.

Cuireadh in iúl dom gur cuireadh bailchríoch ar na socrúithe riaracháin agus tacaíochta don Fhiosrúchán Orgán Daonna, agus gur cuireadh fógraí sa phreas an tséachtain seo caite. Chuir siad seo eolas agus sonraí teagmhála ar fáil ag cumhdach an Fhiosrúcháin agus an Ghrúpa Tagartha Gaolta araon, agus d'iarr siad moltaí ar gach uile pháirtí leasmhar.

Cuireadh in iúl dom fosta go mbeadh Cathaoirleach an Fhiosrúcháin, An tUasal O'Hara, ag scríobh chuig na húdaráis fheiliúnacha uile ag iarraidh eolais agus moltaí.

Tuigim gur bhuail Foireann an Fhiosrúcháin agus an Grúpa Tagartha Gaolta le chéile lena rólanna féin agus leis an dóigh ar féidir leo comhoibriú a dhéanamh, más cuí é, a phlé.

Cuireadh in iúl domhsa fosta gur bhuail Foireann an Fhiosrúcháin leis an ghrúpa tacaíochta tuismitheoirí 'Heartbreak' agus gur bhunaigh si naise le forais fheiliúnacha i Sasana, in Albain, sa Bhreatain Bheag agus sa Deisceart.

HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

Skills Audit: Down District Council Area

Mr McGrady asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to outline what progress has been made in respect of the skills audit to be undertaken by the Training and Employment Agency for the software sector for the Down District Council area; and to make a statement. (AQW 2898/00)

The Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Dr Farren): A meeting has been arranged between my officials and the chief executive of Down District Council to discuss in detail what useful information can be supplied with regard to the availability of software skills. Following that meeting on 15 June I will be in contact to inform you of progress.

Gap Funding

Mr Tierney asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail (a) what actions he has put in place to assist groups in completing the necessary application forms for gap funding (b) how many applications have been made and (c) what is the turn around timescale. (AQW 2924/00)

Dr Farren: Guidance was issued by DFP and SEUPB with the application forms.

There are 45 employment and training single programme projects in the voluntary and community sectors already receiving gap funding under arrangements initiated by my Department last June and are continuing to receive such interim support.

The Department received 123 applications for PEACE gap funding of which 89 were accepted to undergo the department's selection procedure. Four applications were not eligible for gap funding, and 30 applications were returned to the Special EU Programmes Body for re-allocation.

Peace gap applications were to be returned to SEUPB by 12 April 2001. After the allocation process, Depart-

ments are expected to have undertaken their selection procedure and to begin issuing letters of rejection or acceptance during the week beginning 21 May 2001.

Asbestosis: Compensation

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail what compensation has been paid to persons suffering from asbestosis in each of the last five years for which figures are available. (AQW 2944/00)

Dr Farren: Payments made by the Department under the Pneumoconiosis (Workers' Compensation) scheme have been:

1996/1997	£5,616
1997/1998	£16,700
1998/1999	£11,747
1999/2000	£ Nil
2000/2001	£11,527

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Signal Detonators

Mr O'Connor asked the Minister for Regional Development what procedures are in place in respect of the carriage by Translink of signal detonators and to confirm that no breach of the procedures has occurred in recent months. (AQW 1821/00)

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Campbell): The making and enforcement of Regulations to ensure the safe keeping of signal detonators is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Office.

Traffic Management Schemes: Newtownabbey

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his plans to increase the level of funding for road safety and traffic management schemes within Newtownabbey; and to make a statement. (AQW 2875/00)

Mr Campbell: I recently announced a 30% increase in funding available for traffic calming schemes in an endeavour to improve road safety in Northern Ireland. This means that £1.8 million, including an increase of some £400,000 will be spent on traffic calming measures in the current financial year. These additional funds will be used to bring forward some high priority schemes that would otherwise have to wait to the following year for completion.

The Roads Service proposes to carry out two traffic calming schemes in the Newtownabbey Borough Council area during the current financial year – at Glenbane Avenue, Rathcoole and at Ashgrove Road, Newtownabbey. These will in total cost in the region of £55,000. Also programmed for completion in 2001-02 are a number of accident remedial and traffic management schemes.

Sewage and Water Treatment Works: Ballyhornan/Bishops court

Mr McGrady asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail what progress has been made on the provision of a new sewage and water treatment works for the Ballyhornan/Bishops court area of South Down.

(AQW 2904/00)

Mr Campbell: The Urban Wastewater Treatment Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995, which implement the EU Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive, require the provision of appropriate treatment for wastewater at locations, such as Ballyhornan/Bishops court area of South Down, by 31 December 2005.

Consulting engineers were initially appointed to provide a report on the most efficient method of treating wastewater in this area. Water Service subsequently asked the consultants to extend the scope of the study to take in the entire eastern coast of Lecale. This will ensure the optimum solution for wastewater treatment in the wider area. The report is due to be completed next month. However, due to other priorities and current levels of funding, it is unlikely that the scheme will commence before the 2003-2004 financial year.

Ballyhornan and the surrounding area receives its water supply from the Silent Valley source. A new water treatment works for the Silent Valley is programmed for completion in late 2004 at a cost of some £35 million.

Traffic Calming: Costs

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the amount spent on traffic calming measures in each district council area.

(AQW 2926/00)

Mr Campbell: The table below shows the expenditure incurred by the Department's Roads Service on traffic calming schemes in each district council area during the financial year 2000-2001:

District Council Area	Expenditure	District Council Area	Expenditure
Antrim	£35,000	Down	£35,000
Ards	£43,000	Dungannon	£38,000
Armagh	£85,000	Fermanagh	£42,000
Ballymena	£51,000	Larne	£6,000
Ballymoney	£95,000	Limavady	£33,000

District Council Area	Expenditure	District Council Area	Expenditure
Banbridge	£8,000	Lisburn	£23,000
Belfast	£164,000	Magherafelt	£2,000
Carrickfergus	£26,000	Moyle	£18,000
Castlereagh	£135,000	Newry & Mourne	£46,000
Coleraine	£13,000	Newtownabbey	£40,000
Cookstown	£2,000	North Down	£25,000
Craigavon	£120,000	Omagh	£56,000
Derry	£33,000	Strabane	£74,000

Funding for traffic calming schemes is not apportioned on a district council area basis but is an integral part of the minor works allocation for each Roads Service Division.

Traffic calming schemes within each division are prioritised using criteria which take account of the nature of the roads, their accident histories, traffic volumes and speed on the roads.

Drinking Water: Quality

Mr Carrick asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail each water supply zone in Northern Ireland which fails to comply with drinking water quality regulations as published by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. (AQW 2937/00)

Mr Campbell: The Water Service has a statutory responsibility to supply water that meet the standards contained in the Water Quality Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1994. These Regulations implement national standards and incorporate the requirements of the EU Drinking Water Directive.

During 1999, 104 water supply zones were routinely monitored for 86 individual parameters and over 54,000 tests were undertaken. 98.1% of all these tests met the regulatory requirements, which were met in full for 64 of the parameters. A water supply zone will be non compliant if one parameter fails on a single occasion. A total of 92 supply zones failed one or more of the parameters.

Information on zonal compliance is contained in appendix 4 of the Water Service's 1999 'Drinking Water Quality Report', which is in the public domain. The 2000 report will be published at the end of June. More detailed information is also contained in the Drinking Water Register which is available for public inspection at Water Service's Divisional Offices in Ballymena, Belfast, Craigavon and Londonderry.

Water Quality Targets

Mr Carrick asked the Minister for Regional Development to explain why the water quality target of 98.2% set out in the Programme for Government is less than the actual outcome of tests meeting regulatory

standards between 1996-99 as outlined in the 1999 report by the Northern Ireland Drinking Water Inspectorate.

(AQW 2938/00)

Mr Campbell: The compliance target of 98.2% for 2001-02, set out in the Programme for Government, relates to compliance with the regulatory standards contained in The Water Quality Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1994, as measured at the customers' taps. This compares to compliance of 98.19% in 1996; 98.12% in 1997; 97.96% in 1998; and 98.10% in 1999. The results for 2000 will be published at the end of next month.

The regulatory compliance, set out in figure 1 of the 1999 report by the Northern Ireland Drinking Water Inspector, relates to overall water quality. This includes microbiological quality at water treatment works and service reservoirs in addition to compliance at the customers' taps. Overall water quality was 98.89% in 1996; 98.89% in 1997; 98.86% in 1998; and 98.95% in 1999.

Water Service: Sewage Effluent Standards

Mr Carrick asked the Minister for Regional Development to provide a list of the Water Service sewage effluent standards containing all the necessary parameters as agreed between the Water Service and the Environment and Heritage Service for population equivalents of up to (a) 1,000 persons (b) 2,000 persons and (c) over 10,000 persons.

(AQW 2939/00)

Mr Campbell: The Water Service has 918 wastewater treatment works. Of these:-

- 648 serve a population equivalent up to 250 persons
- 136 serve a population equivalent between 251 and 1,000 persons
- 55 serve a population equivalent between 1,001 and 2,000 persons
- 40 serve a population equivalent between 2,001 and 10,000 persons
- 39 serve a population equivalent in excess of 10,000 persons

Responsibility for setting the discharge standards for the effluent from wastewater treatment works rests with the Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) of the Department of the Environment.

Most of the works, serving population equivalents of up to 250 persons, are subject to descriptive consents. These are currently being reviewed by EHS. The 270 works, serving population equivalents greater than 250 persons, have registered discharge standards. The volume of information relating to discharge standards for the 270 works, serving population equivalents greater than 250 persons, is such that it would be impractical to include it in a written reply. The information is already in the public domain and is contained in a public register, which can be viewed at the EHS office at Calvert House, Castle Place, Belfast.

Flooding: Whitehead

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant AQW 2272/00, if he will make public the outcome of the investigation into cost effective interim solutions for the areas susceptible to flooding in the Ford Cottages and Ransevyn areas of Whitehead.

(AQW 2949/00)

Mr Campbell: The investigation of possible interim solutions for areas susceptible to flooding in the Marine Parade, Lumford Avenue/Ford Cottages, Donegal Avenue, and Ransevyn Estate areas of Whitehead, is taking longer than originally anticipated. The investigation involves extensive site survey work, and detailed computer modelling and analysis of the sewerage systems in these areas. The engineering consultants involved are due to report in late June 2001 and their recommendations will be carefully considered. I will write to the Member outlining the outcome of the investigation and the itemising of any interim solutions which may be cost effective.

Marshallstown Road, Carrickfergus: Accidents

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (a) the number of accidents on the Marshallstown Road, Carrickfergus in each of the last five years and (b) the steps he intends to take to improve road safety on this stretch of road.

(AQW 2967/00)

Mr Campbell: The provision of information in relation to road traffic accidents is a matter for the Northern Ireland Office.

My Department's Roads Service continually monitors road safety and accident trends on all roads to assess if there is a requirement for additional road safety measures. All personal injury road traffic accidents are investigated and plotted to identify accident cluster sites that might require to be treated by engineering measures.

An examination of the personal injury road traffic accidents on Marshallstown Road has not identified any sites where engineering factors are a significant contributing cause of accidents. However, last year, recognising that there had been a number of damage only accidents the Roads Service provided enhanced road signage at the junction of Marshallstown Road and Belttoy Road.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Monkstown: Larger Estate Strategy

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development to outline what discussions he has had with other

agencies to ensure that the phased improvement schemes in Monkstown form part of a larger estate strategy to enhance the quality of life and environment in the area.

(AQW 2931/00)

The Minister for Social Development (Mr Morrow):

This is an operational matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. An estate-based strategy was approved for Monkstown in August 1991. To support this strategy, Housing Executive officials meet regularly with the representatives of Monkstown Community Forum, the Monkstown Community Resource Centre and local public representatives. Other agencies such as the Roads Services, the RUC and Translink attend as necessary.

New Build Social Housing: South Down

Mr McGrady asked the Minister for Social Development to outline his plans for the provision of new build social housing in South Down; and to make a statement.

(AQW 2934/00)

Mr Morrow: Current plans for housing provision in the South Down constituency over the next three year period are as shown in the attached appendix. In summary:

Currently on Site	No of Schemes	No of Houses
	8	115

Year	Schemes Planned	No of Houses
2001/02	10	95
2002/03	8	53
2003/04	8	56

The social housing programme is a three-year rolling programme, which is updated annually by the Department in conjunction with the Housing Executive. The Housing Executive's role is to continually reassess housing need. Year one is firm, but at each annual roll forward, the plans for years two and three are updated.

APPENDIX

Provider	Location	Units	Type of Housing
Currently on-site			
Housing Executive	Orlits, Ph 1, Downpatrick	5	Family
Housing Executive	Ardglass	14	Family
Housing Executive	Drumaness/Ballynahinch	4	Family
Ulidia HA	Bridle Loanan, Warrenpoint	24	Family
Ulidia HA	Fountain Court, Downpatrick	28	Family
Clanmil HA	Bridge St., Ph2, Downpatrick	15	Family
Presbyterian HA	Cross St., Killyleagh	10	Family

Provider	Location	Units	Type of Housing
Craigowen HA	Mourne Grange, Kilkeel	15	Learning Difficulties
2001/02			
Clanmil HA	St. Patricks Av., Downpatrick	5	Family
Clanmil HA	172 Saul St., Downpatrick	9	Family
Clanmil HA	9 English St., Downpatrick	9	Family
Clanmil HA	Castlewellaan Rd., Newcastle	14	Family
South Ulster HA	Ballyroney	1	Family
Rural HA	Burrenwood Rd., Ph3, Castlewellaan	16	Family
Oaklee HA	Hillside Dr, Kilkeel	1	Family
Oaklee HA	Bridge St.B, Kilkeel	6	Family
Oaklee HA	Bridge St.A, Kilkeel	7	Mental Health
Habinteg HA	Mount Cres., Downpatrick	27	Single/Homeless
2002/03			
Clanmil HA	18-22 Scotch St., Downpatrick	3	Family
Rural HA	Cabra, Rathfriland	4	Family
Rural HA	Ballela, Banbridge	4	Family
Ulidia HA	Ardmore Ave., Downpatrick	6	Family
HA to be identified	Orlits, Ph 2, Downpatrick	5	Family
HA to be identified	Windmill Gdns., Ph2, Ballynahinch	14	Family
HA to be identified	Killough	3	Family
Craigowen HA	Mourne Grange, Kilkeel	14	Learning Difficulties
2003/04			
HA to be identified	Ph 9, Ardglass	5	Family
HA & land to be identified	Rostrevor	12	Family
HA & land to be identified	Ballyroney	4	Family
HA & land to be identified	IDB site, Newcastle	15	Family
HA & land to be identified	Crossgar/Saintfield	5	Family
HA & land to be identified	Strangford	5	Family
HA & land to be identified	Downpatrick	6	Mental Health
HA & land to be identified	Down District	4	Children Leaving Care

**Building Work:
Model Farm, Downpatrick**

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 2646/00, to detail the amount of compensation and interest that was paid to the Housing Executive by the developer. (AQW 2951/00)

Mr Morrow: The amount paid by the developer was as follows:

	£
Land Value	100,000.00
Interest (01/11/00-09/03/01)	2,486.30
Legal Fees	940.01
Compensation	21,573.69
Total	125,000.00

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 1 June 2001

Written Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Community Relations Strategy: Review

Ms Lewsley asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail (a) the circumstances and considerations that caused it to review Community Relations policy (b) the terms of reference for the review (c) who will be conducting the review and (d) when the review will commence. (AQW 2900/00)

Reply:

- (a) The current community relations policy framework dates back to the early 1990s. Since then there have been significant political, social and legislative changes, notably the Belfast Agreement in 1998, the establishment of devolved government and new equality and human rights legislation. The Executive considers that improved community relations have an important role in consolidating peace and political development and wishes to ensure that a strategy is pursued which reflects and builds on the progress that has been made.

The Programme for Government contains the commitment to “by 2002, review and put in place a cross-departmental strategy for the promotion of community relations, leading to measurable improvements in community relations”.

- (b) The terms of reference for the review of the Community Relations Strategy are as follows:
- to review the background to, and development of, existing community relations policy;
 - to identify the aims and objectives of existing community relations policy and the policy instruments used to achieve them;
 - to assess the impact and achievements of current policy;

- to examine in the light of relevant developments, including the recently completed evaluations of the District Council Community Relations Programme and the Community Relations Council, whether the aims of community relations policy remain appropriate, and whether changes are required to existing policy instruments;
- to consult with key stakeholders, particularly those working in local communities, to improve community relations;
- to make recommendations on further policy aims and objectives; and
- to recommend a framework for monitoring and evaluating the impact on community relations of future policy and to fulfil the Programme for Government intention that improvements stemming from the new strategy should be measurable.

- (c) The review will be led by Dr Jeremy Harbison, who is currently a Deputy Secretary in the Department for Social Development. He will be supported by officers from our Department’s Community Relations Unit.

- (d) The review will commence in June; preliminary work is already under way.

Special Rebate Scheme: Petrol Retailers

Mr Close asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to support a special rebate scheme for petrol retailers in Northern Ireland. (AQW 2910/00)

Reply: We have made representations on the issue of illicit fuel to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and HM Customs & Excise officials who are well aware of the pressures on legitimate retailers. The British Government has indicated it strongly resists the general concept of subsidies to offset adverse market conditions. As far as a rebate scheme is concerned, we understand that the European Commission ruled that a rebate scheme, designed to reduce the impact of cross-border differentials in retail prices on petrol retailers introduced by the Netherlands in 1997, was incompatible with Community law.

Illegally Imported Fuel

Mr Close asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail what assistance they have given to petrol retailers in their efforts to have sites selling illegally imported fuel closed down.

(AQW 2917/00)

Reply: We are very concerned about the serious impact on Northern Ireland petrol retailers of illegally imported fuel. Primary responsibility for combating fuel smuggling lies with HM Customs & Excise and at various meetings with the Chancellor of the Exchequer

and Customs & Excise officials we have pressed the need for vigorous action on the matter. We understand that since September 2000, Customs & Excise have increased their resources in Northern Ireland devoted to tackling oils fraud by a factor of four. Initial analysis from Customs & Excise suggests that progress is being made with a doubling of fuel and tripling of vehicles seized in 2000/01 compared with the previous year.

Recruitment: Public Advertisement

Mr Weir asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail whether job vacancies within the office are advertised in the public domain.

(AQW 3038/00)

Reply: Vacant permanent civil service posts in the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister are filled by the lateral transfer or internal promotion of existing staff or by open recruitment. Recruitment is normally by public advertisement in line with the requirements of the Northern Ireland Civil Service Commissioners.

Punishment Attacks

Mr Hilditch asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail any discussions with the Secretary of State regarding punishment attacks.

(AQW 3166/00)

Reply: We have not jointly discussed punishment attacks with the Secretary of State.

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Recruitment: Public Advertisement

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail whether job vacancies within her Department are advertised in the public domain.

(AQW 3014/00)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers): Vacant civil service posts in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development are filled by recruitment, internal transfer or promotion of existing staff. Recruitment is normally by public advertisement, in line with the requirements of the Northern Ireland Civil Service Commissioners.

Ewe Prices

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 2718/00, to

investigate whether producers in Northern Ireland are being treated unfairly, particularly within the ewe trade.

(AQW 3096/00)

Ms Rodgers: There is little I can add to my response to AQW 2718/00. The level of prices paid to sheep producers is a commercial matter between the producers themselves on the one hand and processors on the other.

While Northern Ireland producers will obviously have been affected by the lack of marketing opportunities as a result of Foot and Mouth controls, I have no evidence to suggest they have been treated unfairly. If you have any evidence on this matter you might wish to forward it to the Office of Fair Trading, which is responsible for competition issues.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Impact on Agriculture Industry

Mr McClelland asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the estimated cost of foot-and-mouth disease to Northern Ireland's agriculture industry.

(AQO 1568/00)

Ms Rodgers: My Department has made estimates of the impact of Foot and Mouth Disease under various scenarios. Members will appreciate that a fair degree of uncertainty attaches to any exercise of this sort and the estimates must be treated as illustrative rather than predictive. If we can achieve regionalisation by the end of June, and maintain it thereafter, the net loss to farmers is likely to be less than £10 million, the bulk of it in the sheep sector. If we are unable to achieve regionalisation, and must wait until the UK is free of the disease to export, then losses to producers could be between £15 million and £20 million, about half in the sheep sector. If we were to have an outbreak on the scale of that in Great Britain, then the impact on farmers could rise to somewhere between £60 million and £70 million.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Securing Regionalisation

Mr McMenamin asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail what steps she is taking to secure regionalisation for Northern Ireland following the closure of our markets as a result of foot-and-mouth disease.

(AQO 1565/00)

Ms Rodgers: I had a very full and frank discussion with Commissioner Byrne about the Foot and Mouth Disease situation in Northern Ireland while I was in Brussels for the May Agriculture Council meeting last week. Again I stressed the importance of export markets to the overall agri-food industry. I also updated him on the disease situation and progress with the serological testing of sheep in the two Surveillance Zones in Ardboe and Cushendall. I urged the Commissioner to use his

influence to have Northern Ireland considered as a foot-and-mouth-disease free region as soon as possible.

Commissioner Byrne was very supportive of our case and as a result of my meeting with him I am confident that full regionalisation will be restored to Northern Ireland in early June. This of course will be subject to there being no further cases of foot-and-mouth disease and the final results of the serological testing.

Organic Aid/Farming Scheme

Mr Neeson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of applications received under the Organic Aid Scheme. (AQO 1552/00)

Ms Rodgers: The Organic Aid Scheme has not been open to new applications since 1998, by which time only three producers had applied under the scheme.

The Organic Farming Scheme was introduced in June 1999. This significantly increased the amount of aid available to prospective organic producers, particularly in the first two years of conversion to organic methods when costs, including additional costs arising due to training and organic certification, are highest.

Since the introduction of the Organic Farming Scheme, 60 producers farming a total of just over 3,330 hectares have been accepted into the Scheme. Payments to producers under this Scheme in the 2000/01 financial year totalled £470,000.

Countryside Management Scheme

Mr Close asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of applications made under the Countryside Management Scheme. (AQO 1551/00)

Ms Rodgers: The Countryside Management Scheme was introduced in 1999 and opened for applications during the period 24 May to 30 July that year. A total of 1,010 applications were received, of which 435 were eliminated or withdrawn for various reasons following on-farm audits, leaving 575 potential entrants.

However, because of the need to have the Northern Ireland Rural Development Plan approved by the European Commission, these applications could not be taken forward until April this year. Agreements were issued then to the 400 producers who wished to proceed with their applications and some 280 of these have already been signed. I expect this figure to increase further over the coming weeks.

The second round of the CMS opened for applications from 21 May until 31 July 2001. At this stage it is too early to speculate on the total number of applications we can expect to receive.

Livestock Dealers

Mr Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to review the regulations and licensing of livestock dealers in Northern Ireland. (AQO 1548/00)

Ms Rodgers: The fallout from the foot-and-mouth disease outbreaks here in Northern Ireland has called into question some of the farming practices we have been using in the past few years. As a result, I have already announced that I will be taking forward a package of measures aimed at preventing, as far as possible, the importation and spread of foot-and-mouth disease. This will include, amongst other things, a review of how livestock dealers operate. I will of course be consulting widely on any proposals I would intend to bring forward, and will take into account the views of the Vision Subgroup which is considering the lessons to be learned from the foot-and-mouth outbreak.

IACS Application Forms

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what percentage of IACS (Integrated Administrative Control System) forms were returned by 15 May 2001. (AQO 1553/00)

Ms Rodgers: Of the IACS forms issued to producers for the 2001 scheme year, 95.1% were completed and returned by 15 May, the date by which applications had to be received to avoid penalties for being late. This is very close to the 2000 scheme year when 95% of completed IACS applications were received at the same stage.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: All-Ireland Approach

Mr O'Neill asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, as a result of foot-and-mouth disease, to detail what steps she has taken with her Ministerial counterpart in the Irish Government to develop an all-Ireland animal health strategy. (AQO 1569/00)

Ms Rodgers: I recognise that the question of tackling a disease such as foot-and-mouth disease does require an all-island approach because diseases do not recognise political borders. As such I have been in regular and close contact with Joe Walsh on how to handle the situation and last month, under the aegis of the North/South Ministerial Council, we agreed that sustained co-operation was essential. We have set in train a work programme to develop a strategy for the prevention, containment and eradication of future epizootic disease outbreaks on the island.

Low Incidence BSE Status

Mr Kane asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail those representations she has made

in order to achieve low incidence BSE status for Northern Ireland. (AQO 1541/00)

Ms Rodgers: I had a number of meetings throughout last year with Commissioner Byrne to press our case for a relaxation of the beef ban because of our low incidence of BSE. However, the increased level of awareness of BSE and heightened public concerns arising from developments in France and other Member States in the latter part of last year, were such that I decided it would not have been appropriate and could indeed have been counter-productive for me to proceed with the case at that time.

I remain fully committed to obtaining a relaxation of the export ban in Northern Ireland and will raise the case when the conditions are more conducive.

CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Recruitment: Public Advertisement

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail whether job vacancies within his Department are advertised in the public domain. (AQW 2981/00)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McGimpsey): I can confirm that vacant civil service posts are filled by recruitment, internal transfer or promotion of existing staff. Recruitment is normally by public advertisement, in line with the requirements of the Northern Ireland Civil Service Commissioners.

Lottery Funding: GAA and Association Football

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 2683/00, to list the individual GAA and Association Football projects that received lottery funding, together with the amounts received, since 1995-96. (AQW 3009/00)

Mr McGimpsey: The information is as follows:

Gaelic Athletic Association

Year	Project	Amount
1995/96	Derry Co GAA Board (Development of Centre of Excellence at Owenbeg, Dungiven)	£167,075
1998/99	Antrim Co GAA Board (Development of Casement Park)	£321,938
	Down Co GAA Board (Development of Pairc Esler Ground)	£90,000
	Armagh Co GAA Board (Development of Athletic Grounds)	£100,000
2000/01	Ulster Council GAA (Talented Junior Development Plan)	£25,000

In addition, lottery awards totalling £9.7 million were paid to 167 Gaelic Football Clubs between 1995-1996 and 2000-01.

ASSOCIATION FOOTBALL

Year	Project	Amount
1995/96	IFA (purchase of mini buses)	£22,400
1998/99	IFA (DTI awards – European U18 Finals 1999)	£50,300
1999/2000	IFA (U18 Euro Championship 2001)	£15,000
2000/01	IFA (1 st European U17 Championship Finals)	£18,400
	IFA (1 st European U19 Championship)	£18,400
	NI Women's FA (Talented Junior Development Plan)	£37,500
	IFA (Talented Junior Development Plan)	£19,350
	IFA (Talented Junior Development Plan)	£25,538

In addition, lottery awards totalling £4.4 million were paid to 77 Football Clubs between 1995-1996 and 2000-01.

Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether the minutes and accounts of the National Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland (NMGNI) are available to the public or staff. (AQW 3036/00)

Mr McGimpsey: The Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland (MAGNI) do not make their minutes available to either staff or the public. However, my officials are currently discussing this issue with MAGNI's chief executive.

So far as the accounts are concerned, these are in the public domain. Unfortunately, the production of the accounts for 1998/99 has been delayed for technical and other reasons beyond the control of MAGNI and my Department, and these will be put before the Assembly as soon as possible.

Women's Soccer

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to give his assessment on ladies' soccer in Northern Ireland; and to make a statement. (AQW 3037/00)

Mr McGimpsey: The sport of women's soccer is the fastest growing sport in the world and women's soccer within Northern Ireland reflects this trend, although the level of growth would not match that, for example, in the USA and Scandinavia.

There are, however, issues relating to the administration and development of women's soccer which need

to be addressed and these are being considered in the context of the work being taken forward by my Department to develop proposals for a Soccer Strategy for NI. I recognise the importance of women's soccer and would like to see it developed to its full potential.

Senior Cricket

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to give his assessment of senior cricket; and to make a statement. (AQW 3058/00)

Mr McGimpsey: Responsibility for the development of sport in the province rests with the Sports Council for Northern Ireland (SCNI).

The Sports Council is currently engaged with the Northern Ireland representatives of the Governing Body of the Sport, the Irish Cricket Union, in taking forward a development plan for the sport in the province. This will complement the existing All-Island Development Plan, which was drawn up by the Irish Cricket Union.

I am encouraged that the sport is being developed in a strategic way. This should build upon the recent successes of the Irish Under-15 team in winning the European Championship and the Under-19 team in qualifying for the last three World Cups. It is to be hoped that the senior Ireland team will progress to the World Cup Finals through the forthcoming preliminary stages in Canada.

Special Olympics World Summer Games 2003: Host Town Programme

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 2832/00 and AQW 2833/00, to outline how he can assist those towns volunteering for the Host Town Programme for the Special Olympics World Summer Games in 2003. (AQW 3093/00)

Mr McGimpsey: The Host Town Programme is being promoted and managed by the Special Olympics World Summer Games Organising Committee with the assistance of the Bank of Ireland, the lead sponsor of the event. Any towns and cities wishing to participate in the Programme should contact their local Bank of Ireland branch for appropriate advice and guidance.

EDUCATION

Special Educational Needs: Statutory Assessments

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Education to detail the length of time to assess children for special needs tuition. (AQW 2986/00)

The Minister of Education (Mr M McGuinness):

The time specified for statutory assessments in the Special Educational Needs (Amendment) Regulations 1998 is 18 weeks from the date when a Board either writes to parents proposing to carry out an assessment, or parents request one from a Board, until the Board issues a copy of the proposed statement to the parents. The regulations provide that this period of time may be exceeded in certain circumstances, e.g. where exceptional personal circumstances affect the child or his parent during the 18-week period.

Special Educational Needs: Statutory Assessments

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Education to detail how frequently assessments for special needs tuition are carried out. (AQW 2987/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Statutory assessments of special educational needs are carried out as and when required. These are normally instigated when a parent, school or Health and Social Services Board or Trust makes an Education and Library Board aware that a child appears to have special educational needs and requests that a statutory assessment be carried out. Once made, statements of special educational needs are reviewed annually. Reassessments are carried out either as a result of annual reviews indicating that a child's special educational needs have changed significantly or on request by parents, schools etc.

Special Schools: Funding

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister of Education to detail his plans to review current funding mechanisms used by Education and Library Boards in allocating resources to Special Schools in order to eradicate funding anomalies between the Boards and schools. (AQW 3000/00)

Mr M McGuinness: In 1991 a Working Party was set up to consider the possibility of extending LMS to special schools. It concluded that this was not practicable because of the need for sufficient financial flexibility to meet the wide range of children's needs and learning difficulties in special schools. It recommended, however, that, rather than a fully delegated budget, special schools should receive, each year, a partially delegated budget, being a sum of money comprising certain items of recurrent expenditure (other than staff costs).

The Working Group's recommendations were accepted by Government, and these arrangements have been in place since 1993/94. I am aware, however, that there is some inconsistency among Boards in the delegation arrangements. Currently the Boards' Special Educational Needs Regional Strategy Group has established a Best Value sub-group to undertake a review of Special Education

funding arrangements. Their report is expected by the end of the calendar year. I will consider what action needs to be taken after that Group has reported its findings.

Special Schools: Funding

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister of Education to consider setting up a Consultation Panel to look at the concept of Partially Delegated Budgets as it applies to Special Schools. (AQW 3001/00)

Mr M McGuinness: In 1991 a Working Party was set up to consider the possibility of extending LMS to special schools. It concluded that this was not practicable because of the need for sufficient financial flexibility to meet the wide range of children's needs and learning difficulties in special schools. It recommended, however, that, rather than a fully delegated budget, special schools should receive, each year, a partially delegated budget, being a sum of money comprising certain items of recurrent expenditure (other than staff costs).

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Special Schools: Funding

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister of Education to detail (a) any plans to introduce formula funding to Special Schools and (b) any directions given by his Department to Education and Library Boards to introduce formula funding to these schools. (AQW 3002/00)

Mr M McGuinness: In 1991 a Working Party was set up to consider the possibility of extending LMS to special schools. It concluded that this was not practicable because of the need for sufficient financial flexibility to meet the wide range of children's needs and learning difficulties in special schools. It recommended, however, that, rather than a fully delegated budget, special schools should receive, each year, a partially delegated budget, being a sum of money comprising certain items of recurrent expenditure (other than staff costs).

The Working Group's recommendations were accepted by Government, and these arrangements have been in place since 1993/94. I am aware, however, that there is some inconsistency among Boards in the delegation arrangements. Currently the Boards' Special Educational Needs Regional Strategy Group has established a Best Value sub-group to undertake a review of Special Education

funding arrangements. Their report is expected by the end of the calendar year. I will consider what action needs to be taken after that Group has reported its findings.

Special Schools and Home Tuition: Funding

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister of Education to detail how much funding is allocated to each Education and Library Board for Special Needs Units/Schools. (AQW 3003/00)

Mr M McGuinness: My Department gives Education and Library Boards a block grant each year from which they are expected to pay for the various services they provide. Within their block grant Boards are free to establish their own spending priorities. The amount spent on special schools each year falls under the heading of Special Schools and Home Tuition and that for special units is included within Primary and Secondary Schools and is not separately identifiable. The amounts spent by Boards under the Special Schools and Home Tuition heading in the 1999/2000 financial year were approximately as follows:

BELB	WELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB
£15m	£9.1m	£10.4m	£12.2m	£6.5m

Local Management of Schools Schemes: Special Schools

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister of Education to detail his plans to extend the Local Management of Schools consultation document to cover Special Schools. (AQW 3004/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The consultation document covers those schools which come within the Local Management of Schools Schemes, i.e. nursery, primary, secondary and grammar, and attempts to devise a common formula for use in all these types of schools. Special schools do not come under these arrangements because of the need to retain sufficient budgetary flexibility to meet the needs of the wide range of children's learning difficulties and disabilities in those schools and I have no plans to change this situation.

Recruitment: Public Advertisement

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail whether job vacancies within his Department are advertised in the public domain. (AQW 3013/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Vacant civil service posts are filled by recruitment, internal transfer or promotion of existing staff. Recruitment is normally by public advertisement, in line with the requirements of the Northern Ireland Civil Service Commissioners.

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Tourism: Integrated Recovery Plan

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the efforts being made to re-establish Northern Ireland as an attractive tourist/activity destination. (AQW 2965/00)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Sir Reg Empey): Since my announcement of £1 million additional funding made available to NITB to counter the impact of foot-and-mouth disease restrictions, an integrated recovery plan is being implemented. The plan contains over 100 actions and is being progressed with a range of trade and industry partners.

Teleworkers

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail, by constituency, the number of teleworkers employed in Northern Ireland. (AQW 2976/00)

Sir Reg Empey: The most up-to-date estimate relating to teleworkers from the Labour Force Survey refers to the period March to May 2000 and indicates that there were 25,000 teleworkers in employment in Northern Ireland. Data at Parliamentary Constituency level cannot be released as they do not reach the minimum required threshold level for accuracy.

Recruitment: Public Advertisement

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail whether job vacancies within his Department are advertised in the public domain. (AQW 3011/00)

Sir Reg Empey: Vacant civil service posts are filled by recruitment, transfer or promotion of existing staff. Recruitment is normally by public advertisement, in line with the requirements of the Northern Ireland Civil Service Commissioners.

Building an Innovative Economy

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to give his assessment on how Northern Ireland enterprises are managing the dynamics of innovation, taking into consideration the European Commission Report, of 26 April 2001, entitled 'Building an Innovative Economy in Europe' (No 1P/01/610). (AQW 3031/00)

Sir Reg Empey: In order to gain competitive advantage Northern Ireland's companies need to improve and fully

exploit their innovation capabilities and the Research, Development and Innovation Strategy on which we have recently embarked will provide a framework for achieving this. The Interdepartmental Working Group which is overseeing preparation of the Strategy has initiated a consultation exercise with key stakeholders and has appointed consultants with expertise in the innovation field to assist with this work. The insights on innovation policy contained in the EC Report will certainly help to inform the Northern Ireland Strategy as it evolves.

C-MAC Network Systems

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail what discussions he has had to minimise job losses at C-Mac, Carrickfergus. (AQW 3162/00)

Sir Reg Empey: I have been taking a keen interest in C-MAC Network Systems, including performing the official announcement of the investment. The announcement to employees on 8 May was disappointing but it was a commercial decision forced on the company by the global downturn in the telecommunication and electronics sectors. I am confident that every effort is being made to minimise job losses.

Solectron

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail what discussions he has had to minimise job losses at Solectron, Carrickfergus. (AQW 3163/00)

Sir Reg Empey: I have been taking an interest in the situation at Solectron in Carrickfergus even before the company publicly announced its intention on Friday 19 May to enter into a consultative process. My officials are in regular contact with the management team and every effort is being made to minimise the prospective redundancies, primarily by the consultative committee, whose membership includes elected representatives of the workforce.

Getty Connections

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail what discussions he has had to minimise job losses at Getty Connections, Carrickfergus. (AQW 3164/00)

Sir Reg Empey: I have been kept abreast of the situation at Getty Connections in Carrickfergus. My officials are in regular contact with the management team. Every effort is being made to minimise prospective redundancies with specific efforts on the identification of additional new customers.

Nortel Networks

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail what discussions he has had to minimise job losses at Nortel, Newtownabbey.

(AQW 3165/00)

Sir Reg Empey: I am meeting with the top management of Nortel Networks' Monkstown plant on a regular basis and I have been kept abreast of the ongoing situation. The recently announced job losses are the direct result of the worldwide telecommunications downturn which has had a significant effect on Nortel Networks' global operations. My officials are also in regular contact with the management team. Every effort is being made to minimise lay-offs by ensuring that the Northern Ireland facility is given all possible support to maintain its position as the company's largest optical plant in Europe and is advantageously placed to secure the ongoing production of Nortel Networks' key optical internet products.

ENVIRONMENT

Article 31 Applications: Timescale

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the average time it takes for an Article 31 planning case to reach a conclusion. (AQW 2997/00)

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Foster): For those Article 31 applications which reached a final decision during 2000-01 financial year, the average time taken to process applications from designation to a formal decision was 141 weeks.

However, the Member will wish to note that such a broad average needs to be interpreted with care, as it includes a wide range of variation in the processing of these complex and often, by their very nature, contentious planning cases. There are essentially three different routes for progressing these major applications, namely: a Public inquiry; a Notice of Opinion (NOP) to approve; or NOP to refuse.

The majority of Article 31 cases are determined by the NOP route. Of the 27 decisions reached during 2000-01, 12 proceeded by an NOP to approve and took 135 weeks on average to process; seven followed an NOP to refuse, taking an average 137 weeks to reach a final decision. The remaining eight applications required a public inquiry and took on average 189 weeks to be determined.

If a public inquiry or a hearing on an NOP to refuse is required, jurisdiction passes to the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC). The time taken between a request to the PAC for an inquiry or hearing and receipt of the PAC report can range from 36 to 64 weeks.

Another key factor influencing the timescale for determining applications is the time taken by applicants to submit outstanding information necessary to determine the application, including Retail and Traffic Impact Assessment. Other factors which affect performance include the timely submission of environmental information, public consultation and consideration by key consultees, which is generally outside my Department's control. Judicial review proceedings also lead to delay in the issue of decisions, which again is outside the control of the Department.

Finally, the Member will wish to note that my Department has set in place a number of measures to improve overall processing times including establishing dedicated teams within Planning Service Headquarters to process all Article 31 applications; an ongoing review of procedures; criteria for designating Article 31 cases; plus senior management priority involvement in reducing the backlog.

Recruitment: Public Advertisement

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail whether job vacancies within his Department are advertised in the public domain. (AQW 3012/00)

Mr Foster: My department adheres to the NICS policy where vacant civil service posts are filled by recruitment, internal transfer or promotion of existing staff. Recruitment is normally by public advertisement, in line with the requirements of the Northern Ireland Civil Service Commissioners.

Planning Applications: Woodburn Road/Ellis Street, Carrickfergus

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment to detail all planning applications approved for the Woodburn Road and Ellis Street areas of Carrickfergus in each of the last five years. (AQW 3018/00)

Mr Foster: I have provided a schedule which details all the planning applications which have been approved for Woodburn Road and Ellis Street in the last five years.

PLANNING APPROVALS GRANTED ON ELLIS STREET AND WOODBURN ROAD WITHIN THE LAST 5 YEARS.

ELLIS STREET, CARRICKFERGUS

Ref. No.	Proposal	Address	Date Approval Issued
V/96/0162	Alterations and Additions to Dwelling	15 Ellis Street	07/02/97
V/96/0223	New Pitched Roof to Existing Rear Return	4 Ellis Street	08/10/96

Ref. No.	Proposal	Address	Date Approval Issued
V/96/0265	Site of Housing Development	Rear Of 2-100 Ellis Street	11/11/97
V/97/0127	Improvement to Dwelling	32-36 Ellis Street	25/09/97
V/97/0297	Replacement Roof Covering	Carrickfergus Family Resource Centre, Ellis Street	08/01/98
V/98/0045	Alterations and Additions to dwelling and New Garage	16 Ellis Street	01/05/98
V/98/0060	Housing Development (100 No. New Dwellings)	Rear Of 2-100 Ellis Street	27/02/99
V98/0132	Change of Use of Shop to Home Bakery and Café (Retrospective)	45-47 Ellis Street	20/07/98
V/99/0247	Pitched Roof	2 Ellis Street	16/11/99
V/2000/0119/F	Boundary Fence	Hawthorns Adult Training Centre, Ellis Street	09/08/00
V/2000/0279/F	Alterations and Additions to Dwelling	13 Ellis Street	21/11/00

WOODBURN ROAD, CARRICKFERGUS

Ref. No.	Proposal	Address	Date Approval Issued
V/96/0028	Re-Roofing of Dwelling	52 Woodburn Road	26/03/96
V/96/0076	Extension to Dwelling	19 Fairview Terrace	25/04/96
V/96/0110	Housing Development	54-58 Woodburn Road	27/08/96
V/96/0158	Change of Use From Manufacturing and Office to Storage/Office Hire Shop	Unit 2, 22A Woodburn Road	25/09/96
V/96/0160	Sign	Unit 2, 22A Woodburn Road	05/09/96
V/96/0183	Garage, Utility Room with Bedroom Above	9 Woodlawn Court	03/09/96
V/96/0209	Replacement Fence	Woodburn Road/Woodburn Avenue Junction	08/10/96
V/96/0259	Housing Development (29 No. New Dwellings and Garages)	Between Prospect Gardens and Fairview Terrace, Woodburn Road	30/09/97
V/96/0308	Change of House Types – Site no. 3	54-58 Woodburn Road	29/01/97

Ref. No.	Proposal	Address	Date Approval Issued
V/97/0033	Site of Dwelling	Plot 3, West of 84 Woodburn Road	05/06/97
V/97/0046	Change of Use of Terraced Houses to Self-Catering Accommodation for Tourists	13, 14, 15 Fairview Terrace	25/04/97
V/97/0048	Extension to Rear Of Existing Shop for Retail Purposes and Additional Storage	BP Filling Station, Woodburn Road	11/09/97
V/97/0057	Site of Dwelling	Plot 2, West of 84 Woodburn Road	05/06/97
V/97/0058	Site of Dwelling	Plot 1, West of 84 Woodburn Road	04/06/97
V/97/0117	New Pitched Roof and Equipment Store	Carrickfergus Rugby Club, Woodlawn Grounds, Woodburn Road	10/07/97
V/97/0160	Sign	Clipperstown Filling Station, Woodburn Road	11/09/97
V/97/0207	Extension and Alterations to Kitchen	Woodburn Community Centre, Woodburn Road	25/09/97
V/97/0245	Extension to Warehouse	22 Woodburn Road	19/11/97
V/97/0316	Extension to Dwelling	31 Woodburn Road	18/02/98
V/98/0036	Site of Additional Warehousing and Light Industrial Units	Keeburn Industrial Estate, Woodburn Road	08/04/98
V/98/0140	Extension to Existing Car Park	22 Woodburn Road	20/07/98
V/98/0145	Extension to Dwelling	16 Woodburn Road	20/07/98
V/98/0178	Additional Warehousing and Industrial Units Including Use of Part as Builders Merchant Premises	Keeburn Industrial Estate, Woodburn Road	08/09/98
V/98/0253	Change of Use of Store to Pool Room	Brown Cow Inn, 9-12 Fairview Terrace	03/03/99
V/99/0022	Proposed Commercial Units	Keeburn Industrial Estate, Woodburn Road	14/04/99

Ref. No.	Proposal	Address	Date Approval Issued
V/99/0029	Changing Accommodation and Car Parking	Woodburn Playing Fields, Woodburn Road	03/03/99
V/99/0150	Change of Use of Retail Storage Area to Post Office	10 Woodburn Road	06/08/99
V/1999/0250/A	Sign	Keeburn Industrial Estate, 61 Woodburn Road	14/01/00
V/1999/0288/F	Royal Mail Sorting Office and Delivery Yard	Keeburn Industrial Estate, 61 Woodburn Road	18/01/00
V/2000/0013/F	Residential Development for 6 New Dwellings	Rear Of 84 Woodburn Road	23/06/00
V/2000/0068/F	Change of Use from Concrete Manufacturers Building and Yard to Builders Merchants and Yard for Parking and Storage	Keeburn Industrial Estate, 61 Woodburn Road	26/09/00
V/2000/0070/F	Porch	5 Woodlawn Villas, Woodburn Road	05/05/00

Planning Appeals Commission

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to detail, in respect of the Ards Borough Council area (a) the number of appeals that the Planning Appeals Commission has received in the years 1999-20000 and 2000-01, and of these (i) how many were successful and (ii) how many were refused. (AQW 3024/00)

Mr Foster: In the years 1999-2000 and 2000-01 there were 46 appeals to the Planning Appeals Commission.

The breakdown is as follows:-

Allowed 18
Refused 12

In addition, 4 were withdrawn, 11 are awaiting a decision and 1 was an invalid appeal.

Notification of Vehicles Written Off

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to amend the legislation whereby the transfer of a vehicle registration mark would incorporate confirmation from an insurance company that the vehicle is a write-off. (AQW 3026/00)

Mr Foster: The registration and licensing of vehicles are excepted matters. They are 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.

Under an existing Code of Practice the Association of British Insurers requires their members to notify the licensing authorities when a vehicle is written off. There is no evidence of any failure to comply with the Code of Practice and there is therefore no need to change current practice.

Moreover, in order to combat vehicle fraud, there is a requirement throughout the UK for all written-off vehicles involved in the transfer of registration marks to be presented for inspection by the licensing authorities. As registration policy is an excepted matter, there is no opportunity for Northern Ireland to act unilaterally on this issue.

Zebra Mussels: Effect on Fish Stock

Mrs Carson asked the Minister of the Environment to detail what effect zebra mussels are having on coarse and game fish stock. (AQW 3029/00)

Mr Foster: Zebra mussels are now very abundant in Upper and Lower Lough Erne but they have not spread elsewhere within Northern Ireland. The most obvious effect has been an increase in the clarity of the water in shallow areas. This is mainly due to the fact that zebra mussels feed by filtering the water and extracting the microscopic aquatic life.

Officials from my Department, DCAL Fisheries Division, DARD Aquatic and Environmental Science Division, DRD Water Service and Waterways Ireland have set up a Zebra Mussel Control Group to assess the impact of this invasive species.

The effect of zebra mussels on fish populations will be indirect and will take some time to be fully apparent. It is expected that changes to water chemistry, bottom sediments and ultimately the fish food chain will affect fish populations to some extent.

Review of Public Administration

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment to detail any timetable to review Local Government, including any period of consultation. (AQW 3033/00)

Mr Foster: The Executive is committed to a comprehensive review of public administration in Northern Ireland. Administration of local public services will be considered as part of that review and I intend to engage the local government sector in that process at the earliest opportunity. The Executive is considering the detailed requirements for taking the review forward and these will inform the programme for consulting local government.

Illegal Dumping: Knockagh Road

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment to detail his plans to tackle the problem of illegal dump sites on the Knockagh Road, Carrickfergus; and to make a statement. (AQW 3034/00)

Mr Foster: Officials from my Department visited the Knockagh Road, Carrickfergus, site on 23 February 2001 and 19 April 2001, following receipt of a number of complaints about illegal dumping, and confirmed that a breach of the Planning (NI) Order 1991 had taken place. Enforcement action will be considered on receipt of consultation responses from a number of statutory bodies on the use of the site.

I am also aware that there is an area of agricultural land opposite 56 Knockagh Road which is being filled with inert waste for the purpose of agricultural improvement and does not require planning permission.

My Department received a complaint about illegal dumping of waste at the Slievetrue Road, Newtownabbey, site on 17 May 2001. Permission is currently awaited from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, under the foot-and-mouth guidelines, to allow my officials to carry out a site visit.

Illegal Dumping: Slievetrue Road

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment to detail his plans to tackle the problem of illegal dump sites on the Slievetrue Road, Newtownabbey; and to make a statement. (AQW 3035/00)

Mr Foster: Officials from my Department visited the Knockagh Road, Carrickfergus, site on 23 February 2001 and 19 April 2001, following receipt of a number of complaints about illegal dumping, and confirmed that a breach of the Planning (NI) Order 1991 had taken place. Enforcement action will be considered on receipt of consultation responses from a number of statutory bodies on the use of the site.

I am also aware that there is an area of agricultural land opposite 56 Knockagh Road which is being filled with inert waste for the purpose of agricultural improvement and does not require planning permission.

My Department received a complaint about illegal dumping of waste at the Slievetrue Road, Newtownabbey, site on 17 May 2001. Permission is currently awaited from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development under the foot-and-mouth guidelines, to allow my officials to carry out a site visit.

Noise Nuisance: Prosecutions by District Councils

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of prosecutions for noise nuisance throughout the 26 district council areas. (AQW 3050/00)

Mr Foster: My Department does not gather data on the numbers of prosecutions for noise nuisance by district councils.

Complaints of noise and vibration are dealt with by district councils under statutory nuisance powers contained in the Pollution Control and Local Government (Northern Ireland) Order 1978. Decisions to prosecute and details relating to those cases are matters for each district council.

Carrickfergus Town Walls

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment to give his assessment on the state of repair of the old town walls at Carrickfergus. (AQW 3053/00)

Mr Foster: Carrickfergus town walls, enclosing the Medieval town, were built in the early seventeenth century, replacing earlier earthen ramparts. They are of basalt stone rubble construction, on average some 6m high and 1.5m thick.

Over a distance of 350m, clockwise from Northgate to Joymount, the walls are in State Care and are in good condition. Conservation work has been carried out on this section in the past and the Environment and Heritage Service is reviewing the need for more work here.

From Northgate anticlockwise for a distance of 150m, the walls are mainly owned by Carrickfergus Borough Council and are scheduled for protection under Article 3 of the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (NI) Order 1995. Continuing anticlockwise from the Albert Road/Lancasterian Street junction the remainder of the circuit of the wall has been destroyed, but it can be traced from old maps and its foundations have been located at intervals in archaeological excavations.

The wall is reasonably well preserved along the back of the properties at the east side of Albert Road. However, the condition of parts of the scheduled length of the wall along Albert Road gives rise to concern. Discussions are under way with the council about its repair.

Radar Station at Carrickfergus Harbour

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment to give his assessment of the heritage value of the disused radar station at Carrickfergus Harbour. (AQW 3062/00)

Mr Foster: The radar station is a grade B2 listed building. It was designed by Donald Shanks, Education Architect to Belfast Education Committee, as a radar school for Belfast College of Technology, and is believed to be unique.

While the building has been vandalised and has suffered water damage, the essential architectural elements are still intact. It stands as an interesting and important

twentieth-century addition to the historic area around the harbour at Carrickfergus.

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Census Forms

Mr Taylor asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (a) the percentage return of completed Census Forms and (b) his proposals to encourage the return of outstanding Census Forms; and to make a statement.

(AQW 2988/00)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan):

As of Friday 18 May it is estimated that over 90% of Census forms had been returned. Work continues to collect the remaining forms. To assist in this the Census Advertising Campaign will continue until the end of May and the Census Helpline will remain open until the end of June. Census Field Staff will continue to visit those households who for one reason or another have not returned their Census Form.

Nursery/Childcare Provision

Mrs Nelis asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail when the funding for nursery/childcare provision for the community/voluntary sector will be allocated.

(AQW 2989/00)

Mr Durkan: The initial allocations of the Executive Programme Funds — announced by myself to the Northern Ireland Assembly on 2 April 2001 — did not involve the community/voluntary sector given the tight timescale. The Executive wanted to undertake a consultation package with this sector to determine the best way to meet its needs.

Work is currently under way to draw up proposals in this area for consideration by the Executive during the next allocation of Tranche II funds in September 2001.

Departmental Property: Holywood, County Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail whether his Department owned property at 15 Larch Hill, Holywood, Co Down, at any stage in the last five years.

(AQW 3015/00)

Mr Durkan: Land Registers records indicate that the property at 15 Larch Hill, Holywood, Co Down has not been owned by the Department of Finance and Personnel at any stage in the last five years.

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Royal Group of Hospitals: Short-Term Loan

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in respect of the accumulated operational deficit at the Royal Group of Hospitals, to detail (a) the date on which the short-term loan of £10.5 million was issued by the former Department of Health and Social Services (b) the date on which an allocation of £10.5 million was made to the Trust specifically to repay the loan (c) the date on which a further £7.7 million was made available to the Trust to eradicate the remaining operational deficit and (d) what other Trusts received assistance to eradicate their deficits.

(AQW 2975/00)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms de Brún):

- (a) The cumulative short-term loan of £10.5 million to the Royal Group of Hospitals and Dental Hospital HSS Trust was issued in two stages — £4.5 million in March 1999 and £6 million in March 2000.
- (b) and (c) These amounts were allocated to the Royal Group of Hospitals and Dental Hospital HSS Trust on 29 March 2001.
- (d) Belfast City Hospital HSS Trust, Green Park HSS Trust, Craigavon Area Hospital Group HSS Trust, Altnagelvin Hospitals HSS Trust, the Ulster Community and Hospitals HSS Trust, Sperrin Lakeland HSS Trust and North and West Belfast HSS Trust also received assistance to clear their cumulative deficits. This was largely funded by the £18 million special allocation approved by the Executive for Trust deficits.
- (a) Eisíodh an iasacht charnach ghearrthéarmach £10.5m d'Iontaobhas SSS Ghrúpa Ríoga na nOtharlann agus na nOtharlann Fiaclóireachta i ndá ghála - £4.5m i Márta 1999 agus £6m i Márta 2000.
- (b) agus (c) Dáileadh na suimeanna seo ar Iontaobhas SSS Ghrúpa Ríoga na nOtharlann agus na nOtharlann Fiaclóireachta ar an 29 Márta 2001.
- (d) Fuair Iontaobhas SSS Otharlann Cathrach Bhéal Feirste, Iontaobhas SSS na Páirce Glaise, Iontaobhas SSS Ghrúpa Otharlann Ceantair Craigavon, Iontaobhas SSS Otharlanna Alt na nGealbhán, Iontaobhas SSS Phobal Uladh agus Otharlann, Iontaobhas SSS Shliabh Speirín agus Thír na Lochanna agus Iontaobhas SSS Bhéal Feirste Thuaidh agus Thiar cúnamh airgid fosta lena n-easnamh charnacha a ghlanadh. Tháinig an chuid is mó den mhaoiniú airgid seo ón dáileadh

speisialta de £18m ceadaithe ag an Fheidhmeannas d'easnamh Iontaobhas.

Recruitment: Public Advertisement

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail whether job vacancies within her Department are advertised in the public domain.

(AQW 2980/00)

Ms de Brún: Vacant civil service posts are filled by recruitment, internal transfer or promotion of existing staff. Recruitment is normally by public advertisement, in line with the requirements of the Civil Service Commissioners.

Líontar folúntais do phoist sa státseirbhís trí earcaíocht, aistriú inmheánach foirne nó trí ardú céime a thabhairt don fhoireann atá ann faoi láthair. Trí fhógraí poiblí a dhéantar earcaíocht de ghnáth, de réir iarratais Choimisinéirí na Státseirbhíse.

Dialysis Provision: Altnagelvin Hospital

Mrs Nelis asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail her plans to increase the provision of dialysis treatment at Altnagelvin Hospital to avoid the need for seriously sick people having to travel to Omagh for treatment; and to make a statement.

(AQW 2990/00)

Ms de Brún: The Regional Medical Services Consortium, which brings together the four Health and Social Services Boards, is currently considering the need to review the provision of dialysis here to ensure we are keeping pace with needs.

Tá an Cuibhreannas Seirbhísí Réigiúnacha Leighis, a bhfuil na ceithre Bhord Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta le chéile air, ag déanamh machnaimh ar an ghá le hathbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar sholáthar scagdeallaithe anseo le cinntiú go bhfuilimid ag coinneáil suas le riachtanais.

Child Abuse

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the steps she is taking to develop a strategy to reduce the level of child abuse in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 2995/00)

Ms de Brún: Child abuse is being tackled on a number of fronts. The Department's core strategy is based on interagency co-operation through the four Area Child Protection Committees. The goal is to build partnerships across all agencies that are working together to create a better and safer future for children. A revision of guidance for the interagency handling of child abuse is under way. The publication entitled 'Co-operating to Safeguard

Children' will be available for equality assessment consultation in June.

In addition, Health and Social Services Boards received an extra £10 million in 2000-2001 for the development of quality services for children. The reduction of physical and sexual child abuse is amongst the range of issues which are being addressed as part of the development of services by Boards and Trusts.

My Department also continues to fund the Our Duty to Care project, within the Volunteer Development Agency. The Project provides support, information and training for voluntary organisations and community-based groups working with children based on the Our Duty to Care guide.

On a continual basis my Department operates a Pre-employment Consultancy Service. This service, which has been in operation for more than 20 years, allows employers and voluntary organisations to check the suitability of those applying to work with children as a safeguard against abuse. In order to strengthen current arrangements I will be bringing forward proposals for a Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults Bill.

My Department is also represented on the Joint Working Group on Child Protection established by the North/South Ministerial Council. One of the aims of the group will be the development of a mechanism for the reciprocal identification of people considered to be unsuitable for working with children.

Táthar ag tabhairt faoi íde ar pháistí ar roinnt dóigheanna. Tá príomhstraitéis na Roinne bunaithe ar chomhoibriú idirghníomhaireachta tríd na ceithre Choiste Ceantair um Chosaint Páistí. Is í an aidhm páirtíochtaí a chruthú trasna na ngníomhaireachtaí uile atá ag obair le chéile chun todhchaí níos fearr agus níos sábháilte a chruthú do pháistí. Tá athbhreithniú treorach do láimhseáil idirghníomhaireachta íde ar pháistí á dhéanamh. Beidh an foilseachán dar teideal 'Ag Comhoibriú le Páistí a Chosaint' ar fáil do chomhairliú ar mheasúnú comhionannais i Meitheamh.

Ina theannta sin, fuair Boird Shláinte agus Sheirbhísí Sóisialta £10 milliún breise i 2000-2001 le seirbhís ardcháilíochta do pháistí a fhorbairt. Tá an laghdú in íde fhisiciúil agus ghnéasach ar pháistí i measc an réimse cheisteanna atá á ndéileáil leo ag Boird agus ag Iontaobhais mar chuid d'fhorbairt seirbhísí.

Leanann an Roinn s'agamsa ar aghaidh fosta an tionscadal 'Our Duty to Care' a mhaoiniú laistigh den Ghníomhaireacht Fhorbairt Saorálaithe. Tugann an tionscadal tacaíocht, eolas agus oiliúint d'eagraíochtaí deonacha, agus do ghrúpaí pobalbhunaithe ag obair le páistí, bunaithe ar an treoir 'Our Duty To Care'.

Tá Seirbhís Chomhairlithe Réamhfhostaíochta ag an Roinn s'agamsa a fheidhmíonn ar bhonn leanúnach. Ligeann an tseirbhís seo, tá ag feidhmiú le níos mó ná 20 bliain anuas, d'fhostóirí agus d'eagraíochtaí deonacha

fóirsteanacht iad siúd ag cur iarratas isteach le hobair le páistí a sheiceáil mar chosaint in éadan ide. Leis na socruithe reatha a neartú beidh mé ag tabhairt moltaí chun tosaigh do Bhille Chosaint Páistí agus Daoine Fásta Lagchuidithe.

Tá ionadaíocht ón Roinn s'agamsa ar an Chomhghrúpa Oibre ar Chosaint Páistí bunaithe ag an Chomhairle Aireachta Thuaidh-Theas. Is é ceann d'aidhmeanna an ghrúpa meicniocht a fhorbairt d'aithint chomh- mhalartach daoine a shíltear mífhóirsteanach le hobair le páistí.

Use of Private Hire Taxis

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 2674/00, to detail the reasons for the wide comparative diversity of spending across the trust boards. (AQW 3007/00)

Ms de Brún: Trusts are required to deliver the services for which they are responsible in the most effective and cost efficient manner. There is a variety of reasons for the diversity of spending on taxi services across the Trust boards. These include the geographical area served by the Trust; the range and nature of the services provided by the Trust; the size of the population served by the Trust; whether the Trust is a community or hospital Trust; and the availability of in-house transport or ambulance services.

Éilítear ar Iontaobhais an tseirbhís as a bhfuil siad freagrach a sholáthar sa dóigh is éifeachtaí agus is costas-éifeachtaí. Tá fáthanna éagsúla ann don chaiteachas éagsúil ar sheirbhísí tacsáí ar fud Bhoird na nIontaobhas. Ina measc tá an limistéar ar a riarann an tIontaobhas, réimse agus saghasanna na seirbhísí soláthraithe ag an Iontaobhas, méid an daonra ar a riarann an tIontaobhas, cé acu gur Iontaobhas pobail nó otharlainne é an tIontaobhas nó nach é, agus infhaighteacht seirbhísí inmheánacha iompair nó otharcharr.

Use of Private Hire Taxis

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 2674/00 and 2675/00, to detail whether any Trust Boards have failed to adhere to the appropriate criteria for the use of private hire taxis by Trust Boards; and to make a statement.

(AQW 3008/00)

Ms de Brún: Trusts must have measures in place to assess the use of private hire taxis against the appropriate criteria.

Only the Causeway Health and Social Services Trust has advised that they have failed to adhere to the appropriate criteria for the use of private hire taxis. That Trust has advised that the taxis used through its Transport Department conform to all appropriate criteria for the

use of private taxis. However, the Trust's Child and Community Care Directorate also use taxis and the hire of these taxis has not fully conformed to the criteria set out in the Regional Transport Manual for HPSS. The Trust is currently seeking to rectify this situation and considering placing all taxi requirements under the responsibility of its Transport Department where full compliance is in operation.

Níor chuir ach Iontaobhas Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta an Chlocháin in iúl gur theip orthu cloí leis na critéir chuí d'úsáid tacsaithe priobháideacha.

Chuir an tIontaobhas sin in iúl go ndéarna na tacsaithe úsáidte trína Roinn Iompair de réir na gcritéar cuí uile d'úsáid tacsaithe priobháideacha. Úsáideann Bord Stiúrtha Chúram Páistí agus Pobail an Iontaobhais tacsaithe fosta áfach, agus níl fáil na dtacsaithe seo déanta go hiomlán de réir na gcritéar leagtha amach sa Lámhleabhar Réigiúnach Iompair do na SSSP. Tá an tIontaobhas ag iarraidh an riocht seo a chur ina cheart faoi láthair agus ag déanamh machnaimh ar chur riachtanas tacsaithe uile faoi chúram a Roinne Iompair, áit a bhfuil géilleadh iomlán i bhfeidhm.

Organ Donations

Mrs Carson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what action she is taking to highlight the need for organ donors.

(AQW 3028/00)

Ms de Brún: There is a growing need for organ donations and I am anxious to encourage more people to join the organ donor register. I shall be supporting a number of local events, the first of which will take place next month, to promote the register over the next year. I shall also be endorsing NHS publicity for the register. I supported the recent 'Belfast Telegraph' campaign encouraging people to consider becoming organ donors. My Department displays posters and leaflets encouraging people to join the organ register at a range of public buildings, including Health Centres, hospitals, dental surgeries, libraries and District Council Offices; and also recently issued 6,000 leaflets to civil servants.

Tá an gá do dheontais orgán ag méadú agus tá mé ar bís le níos mó daoine a spreagadh le dul ar an chlár deontóirí orgán. Beidh mé ag tacú le roinnt imeachtaí áitiúla, a mbeidh an chéad cheann ann an mhí seo chugainn leis an chlár a chur chun cinn le linn na bliana seo chugainn. Beidh mé ag droimscríobh poiblíochta na SNS don chlár fosta. Thacaigh mé le feachtas deireanach an Belfast Telegraph ag spreagadh daoine le bheith ina ndeontóirí orgán. Cuireann an Roinn s'agamsa póstaer agus bileoga eolais ar taispeáint ag spreagadh daoine le dul ar an chlár orgán ag réimse foirgneamh poiblí, Ionaid Shláinte, otharlanna, clinicí fiacloireachta, leabharlanna agus Oifigí Comhairle Ceantair san áireamh, agus ar na malllaibh, sheol sí 6,000 bileog eolais chuig státseirbhísigh.

HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

Recruitment: Public Advertisement

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail whether job vacancies within his Department are advertised in the public domain. (AQW 2983/00)

The Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Dr Farren): Vacant posts in the Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment are filled by recruitment, internal transfer or promotion of existing staff. Recruitment is normally by public advertisement, in line with the requirements of the Northern Ireland Civil Service Commissioners.

North Down and Ards Institute of Further and Higher Education

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail the estimated start date for the construction of an extension to the Newtownards College of Further Education and to detail what extra facilities will be available as a result of this extension. (AQW 2992/00)

Dr Farren: My Department has not received any specific proposal to address accommodation deficiencies at the Newtownards site of the North Down and Ards Institute of Further and Higher Education.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Reduction of Public Bodies or Quangos

Mrs Carson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the action he intends to take to reduce the number of public bodies or quangos under the control of his Department. (AQW 2868/00)

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Campbell): Consideration of the number and role of public bodies in Northern Ireland will be a key aspect of the Review of Public Administration. Pending the outcome of this Review, I will continue to monitor the role, responsibilities and effectiveness of the public bodies under the control of my Department to ensure value for money in the use of public resources.

Public accountability must be a key factor in this consideration.

Free Travel for Pensioners: Mossley West Station

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his policy to ensure that the ability to increase passenger numbers, offered by the introduction of "free travel for pensioners", is not denied to residents in Newtownabbey wishing to use the station at Mossley West. (AQW 2879/00)

Mr Campbell: Translink hope to have Mossley West Station open by 1 October 2001, the date for the introduction of free travel for older people. Elderly residents in the area should, therefore, be able to enjoy free travel on both trains and buses from 1 October. In addition elderly people will be able to travel free on the bus service they provide for the Mossley area. For example, there is a total of 43 daily services on weekdays and 30 services on Saturdays between Mossley and Belfast.

Street Lighting Function: Downpatrick

Mr McGrady asked the Minister for Regional Development to undertake to retain street lighting consultancy within the Downpatrick Regional Roads Service Division; and to make a statement. (AQW 2897/00)

Mr Campbell: You will be aware that, in my letter to you dated 22 May 2001, I advised that my Department's Roads Service has decided to proceed with the restructuring of its Street Lighting function. Roads Service believes that this restructuring is necessary to provide the most efficient and effective service delivery. The decision was taken following consultation with Trade Union Side.

Belfast to Larne Railway Line: Maintenance Costs

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 2215/00, to detail the total cost of this maintenance. (AQW 2948/00)

Mr Campbell: Translink has advised that the costs of the maintenance work carried out on the Belfast to Larne railway line during 2000/01 totalled £472,554. Of this amount £261,036 was incurred on work to the track, £107,116 on signalling, £97,021 on structures, £3,786 on defences and £3,595 on crossings.

Road Safety for Children

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the discussions that are taking place between his Department and the Department of Education regarding initiatives to improve road safety for children walking to school. (AQW 2961/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service has recently established a Northern Ireland School Travel Advisory Group which is made up of representatives from Roads Service, the Department of Education, the Education and Library Boards, the Health Promotion Agency, Translink, the Department of the Environment's Road Safety Education Unit, the Police, School Teachers and parent group representatives.

Roads Service officials are in close liaison with Department of Education officials and other members of the Group to encourage and support Safer Routes to Schools pilot projects. These projects will assist and encourage young people to travel to and from school in safety, using modes of transport other than the private car.

Traffic-Calming Schemes

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail, by constituency, traffic-calming schemes (a) applied for and (b) due to be implemented in this financial year. (AQW 2971/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service does not maintain information on traffic-calming schemes on a parliamentary constituency basis.

The table below, however, shows the number of requests for traffic-calming schemes received by Roads Service in 2000/01 on a district council basis:

District Council Area	Number of Requests	District Council Area	Number of Requests
Antrim	6	Down	25
Ards	25	Dungannon	6
Armagh	13	Fermanagh	7
Ballymena	8	Larne	4
Ballymoney	6	Limavady	12
Banbridge	11	Lisburn	26*
Belfast	108*	Magherafelt	2
Carrickfergus	17*	Moyle	1
Castlereagh	20*	Newry & Mourne	33
Coleraine	8	Newtownabbey	31*
Cookstown	3	North Down	18*
Craigavon	7	Omagh	5
Derry	13	Strabane	10

Note: The requests marked * above were received in the 2000 calendar year and not the 2000/01 financial year.

The table below shows the number of schemes (on a district council basis) that Roads Service has identified for possible inclusion in its 2001/02 traffic-calming programme:

District Council Area	Number of Schemes	District Council Area	Number of Schemes
Antrim	-	Down	4
Ards	3	Dungannon	2
Armagh	1	Fermanagh	1
Ballymena	3	Larne	-
Ballymoney	2	Limavady	2
Banbridge	-	Lisburn	5
Belfast	13	Magherafelt	2
Carrickfergus	-	Moyle	1
Castlereagh	4	Newry & Mourne	3
Coleraine	2	Newtownabbey	2
Cookstown	-	North Down	1
Craigavon	5	Omagh	2
Derry	5	Strabane	3

Note: The schemes listed above are being progressed through the relevant statutory procedures, including public consultation. At this stage it is not possible to identify those schemes which will actually be initiated during the current financial year.

Recruitment: Public Advertisement

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to confirm whether it is normal practice to advertise job vacancies within his Department in the public domain.

(AQW 2982/00)

Mr Campbell: In the Department for Regional Development, as in all other Government Departments, vacant civil service posts are filled by recruitment, internal transfer or promotion of existing staff. Recruitment is normally by public advertisement, in line with the requirements of the Northern Ireland Civil Service Commissioners.

Traffic-Calming Measures: Victoria Road, Carrickfergus

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to give his assessment of traffic-calming measures on the Victoria Road, Carrickfergus. (AQW 2985/00)

Mr Campbell: The objective of traffic-calming measures is to improve driver behaviour and control speed to a level in keeping with the surrounding urban environment. Victoria Road is an important link road between Larne Road and Prince Andrew Way in Carrickfergus. In autumn 1998, following extensive consultations with local residents, my Department's Roads Service introduced various traffic-calming measures along this road in the form of two mini roundabouts and a number of traffic islands and pedestrian refuges. Roads Service considers that these measures are working satisfactorily and has no plans to implement further measures.

Public Liability Claims: Vehicle Damage

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to give a breakdown of the public liability claims lodged against his Department in respect of damage to vehicles by District Council area for the years 1999-2000 and 2000-01. (AQW 2993/00)

Mr Campbell: I regret that the number of vehicle damage public liability claims lodged against the Department by District Council area is not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Public Liability Claims: Vehicle Damage

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 2649/00, to detail the number of public liability claims for damage to vehicles by District Council area for the years 1999-2000 and 2000-01. (AQW 2996/00)

Mr Campbell: I regret that the number of vehicle damage public liability claims lodged against the Department by District Council area is not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Review of Speed Restriction Zone: Killen

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development to consider extending the speed restriction zone at Learmore Road, Killen, Castlederg, to incorporate the new community hall development at Killen. (AQW 3017/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service, in conjunction with the RUC, has recently reviewed the position of the speed limit in Killen. It has been decided to extend the existing limit to include the access to the new community hall. The necessary legislative process is now being initiated and, if there are no objections, the proposed extension will be in place within the next few months.

Traffic Volumes: Ellis Street/Woodburn Road, Carrickfergus

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the measures that Roads Service has taken to cope with the additional traffic generated in Ellis Street and Woodburn Road, Carrickfergus, over the last five years. (AQW 3019/00)

Mr Campbell: While my Department's Roads Service has not carried out any measures to cope with the additional traffic generated in Ellis Street/Woodburn Road, Carrickfergus, over the last five years, I am pleased to advise you that alterations to the existing road layout are planned for the junction of Davy Street/Ellis Street where it meets Irish Quarter West. This work is included

in the Roads Service 2001-02 traffic management programme of works. Also, Roads Service is currently investigating the need to improve the junction of Woodburn Road and Prospect Road.

I should explain that Roads Service continuously monitors traffic flows on main routes throughout the road network. Traffic volumes on other routes are monitored, as necessary, to enable Roads Service to make informed decisions on maintenance or other improvements that may be required. Traffic flows on Ellis Street/Woodburn Road are not, therefore, monitored on a regular basis and specific information for this route is not available over the last five-year period. Roads Service did, however, undertake a traffic survey in Ellis Street in December 2000 to provide information for a Carrickfergus Borough Council Air Quality Review. This survey recorded an average two-way daily traffic flow of 10,700 vehicles.

Traffic Volumes: Ellis Street/Woodburn Road, Carrickfergus

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to give his assessment of the increase in traffic on Woodburn Road and Ellis Street, Carrickfergus in the last five years. (AQW 3020/00)

Mr Campbell: While my Department's Roads Service has not carried out any measures to cope with the additional traffic generated in Ellis Street/Woodburn Road, Carrickfergus, over the last five years, I am pleased to advise you that alterations to the existing road layout are planned for the junction of Davy Street/Ellis Street where it meets Irish Quarter West. This work is included in the Roads Service 2001/02 traffic management programme of works. Also, Roads Service is currently investigating the need to improve the junction of Woodburn Road and Prospect Road.

I should explain that Roads Service continuously monitors traffic flows on main routes throughout the road network. Traffic volumes on other routes are monitored, as necessary, to enable Roads Service to make informed decisions on maintenance or other improvements that may be required. Traffic flows on Ellis Street/Woodburn Road are not, therefore, monitored on a regular basis and specific information for this route is not available over the last five-year period. Roads Service did, however, undertake a traffic survey in Ellis Street in December 2000 to provide information for a Carrickfergus Borough Council Air Quality Review. This survey recorded an average two-way daily traffic flow of 10,700 vehicles.

Traffic Calming Measures: Ellis Street/Woodburn Road, Carrickfergus

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to introduce traffic calming measures for Woodburn Road and Ellis Street in Carrickfergus. (AQW 3021/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service has advised me that Woodburn Road/Ellis Street is an important link road between Marine Highway and Middle Road in Carrickfergus. Traffic-calming measures, in the form of central road markings, right turn lanes and traffic islands, were provided along this link road in May 1995. While one of the most effective traffic-calming measures is the road hump, such treatment is normally only considered for residential streets where the main objective is to reduce vehicle speeds to approximately 20 mph. Road humps are not considered to be appropriate on Woodburn Road/Ellis Street as they may cause congestion and delays on this link road and encourage drivers to seek alternative routes through nearby residential streets.

Recruitment of Industrial Staff: Water Service, Conlig

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his plans to offer permanent positions to those casual workers presently employed by the Water Service in Conlig, Bangor. (AQW 3025/00)

Mr Campbell: In recruiting permanent industrial staff, Water Service complies with the Northern Ireland Civil Service recruitment procedures of selection on merit on the basis of fair and open competition. These procedures take account of relevant employment and equality legislation.

Water Service is therefore unable to offer permanent positions to existing casual industrial staff, but such staff can apply for any advertised permanent post providing they satisfy the requirements specified in the advertisement.

Roads Maintenance Budget

Mr C Murphy asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the criteria for the allocation of the roads maintenance budget for each region. (AQW 3039/00)

Mr Campbell: The roads maintenance budget available to my Department is allocated across the four Roads Service divisions on the basis of need, using a range of weighted indicators tailored to each maintenance activity. For example, the indicators used to allocate funds for the resurfacing of the non-trunk road network take account of the amount of travel on the network, the

condition of the network and the carriageway length and area in each division. Each division employs these indicators when apportioning its allocation across district council areas within the division.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Recruitment: Public Advertisement

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail whether job vacancies within his Department are advertised in the public domain. (AQW 2984/00)

The Minister for Social Development (Mr Morrow): Vacant civil service posts are filled by recruitment, or by internal transfer or promotion of existing staff. Recruitment is normally by public advertisement, in line with the requirements of the Northern Ireland Civil Service Commissioners.

Cancer Patients: Benefit Claims

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of cancer patients at Belvoir Park Hospital who have been turned down for Disability Living Allowance and Incapacity Benefit in the financial years 1999-2000 and 2000-01. (AQW 2994/00)

Mr Morrow: The Social Security Agency does not hold this information and it could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Occupational Therapy: Referrals

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development to give his assessment on the number of outstanding occupational therapist referrals in respect of private sector housing. (AQW 3042/00)

Mr Morrow: The Occupational Therapy (OT) service is the responsibility of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSS&PS). However, the Housing Executive has advised that, at 3 March 2001 the number of private sector referrals to the OT service was 2,207.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 8 June 2001

Written Answers to Questions

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Livestock Marts

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of (a) livestock Marts in Northern Ireland (b) people whose livelihood depends on Marts and (c) people laid off as a result of the foot-and-mouth crisis and to outline the steps she is taking to ensure adequate compensation for this sector.

(AQW 2894/00)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers): There are 46 licensed livestock markets in Northern Ireland. I am not in a position to detail the number of people whose livelihood depends on Marts nor the number of people laid off as a result of the Foot and Mouth crisis as my Department has no reason to hold this information. In relation to compensation for Livestock Markets, the Executive has announced a "Help for Business Scheme" which aims to provide a grant to cover non-domestic rates to those businesses which can demonstrate that they have suffered financial hardship as a result of the Foot and Mouth crisis. Businesses, such as livestock marts, which were proscribed from operating from 1 March by DARD will automatically be eligible for this grant for the period that the restrictions are in force.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Compensation Claims

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 2694/00, to detail the number of (a) animals slaughtered to date (b) farmers who have received compensation and how much each was paid (c) valuations carried out and (i) the number disputed and (ii) those still outstanding and (d) claims found to be inaccurate.

(AQW 2895/00)

Ms Rodgers: I confirm that the information you requested is as follows:-

(a) Cattle	-	5024
Sheep	-	42413
Pigs	-	3622
Others	-	89
Total	-	51,148

(b) Payments have not all been made yet but there are approximately 180 claimants. For reasons of confidentiality it is not possible to disclose how much each was paid. The latest available total figure for compensation is in the region of £5m.

(c) There were 287 valuations carried out by DARD officials and one by an Independent Valuer.

(c) (i) Prior to agreement of valuation the owner has the opportunity to ask for an independent valuation if he/she is not satisfied with the Department's figure so any disputes are resolved by that process. See answer at (c) above. Once a statement of valuation of animals is signed this is legally binding on both the owner of the animals and the Department.

(c) (ii) There are no valuations outstanding.

(d) None of the claims were found to be inaccurate.

Pig Producers: Financial Assistance

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the measures she has taken to ease the financial difficulties currently facing pig producers.

(AQW 3047/00)

Ms Rodgers: The UK obtained EU State Aid approval last December to introduce the Pig Industry Restructuring Scheme. This has two elements – Outgoers and Ongoers. Outgoers has now closed and I'm pleased to report that some £2.85m will be paid to some 410 successful applicants in Northern Ireland. Ongoers remains open to 3 August. To date, just over £1m has been committed to successful Ongoers applicants here.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Compensation

Mr Leslie asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 2803/00, to detail the highest and lowest amounts of compensation paid per animal culled as part of the foot-and-mouth precautions for (a) rams (b) breeding ewes (c) ewes with lamb(s) (d) lambs and (e) dairy cows.

(AQW 3073/00)

Ms Rodgers: I am sorry that I am unable to provide the above information as statistics on animals culled are not recorded in a format which facilitates the breakdown you requested.

Rivers Agency: Lismore Drain

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the work carried out by the Rivers Agency on a site owned by a private developer at the junction of Glenkeen Avenue/ Jordanstown Road, Newtownabbey. (AQW 3090/00)

Ms Rodgers: The works undertaken adjacent to the junction of Glenkeen Avenue and Jordanstown Road, Newtownabbey are part of a more extensive scheme being carried out on various sections of the Lismore Drain to improve its hydraulic capacity and prevent flooding of properties adjacent to it. The works at this particular reach involved the replacement of an existing hydraulically inadequate culvert with a pipe of greater diameter. Final payments have yet to be made, but the cost is of the order of £60,000. The fact that part of the property adjacent to the Glenkeen Avenue/Jordanstown Road junction, through which the watercourse passes, was acquired by a private developer subsequent to the planning of the scheme was coincidental, and had no bearing on the need for the scheme.

IACS Applications

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail what efforts she made to have the deadline extended for the completion of Integrated Administrative Control Systems forms. (AQW 3091/00)

Ms Rodgers: DARD, together with the other UK Agriculture Departments, consulted the Commission on a possible extension to the 15 May deadline for IACS applications. However, extending the deadline would have risked delays to IACS related payments later this year. Instead, as a safer option, the UK Departments opted to secure flexibility from the Commission for farmers to amend submitted applications.

Rivers Agency: Lismore Drain

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the cost of works carried out by the Rivers Agency on a site owned by a private developer at the junction of Glenkeen Avenue/ Jordanstown Road, Newtownabbey. (AQW 3105/00)

Ms Rodgers: The works undertaken adjacent to the junction of Glenkeen Avenue and Jordanstown Road, Newtownabbey are part of a more extensive scheme being carried out on various sections of the Lismore Drain to improve its hydraulic capacity and prevent flooding of properties adjacent to it. The works at this particular reach involved the replacement of an existing hydraulically inadequate culvert with a pipe of greater diameter. Final payments have yet to be made, but the cost is of the order of £60,000. The fact that part of the

property adjacent to the Glenkeen Avenue/Jordanstown Road junction, through which the watercourse passes, was acquired by a private developer subsequent to the planning of the scheme was coincidental, and had no bearing on the need for the scheme.

CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Senior Hockey in Northern Ireland

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to give his assessment of men's senior hockey; and to make a statement. (AQW 3059/00)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McGimpsey): Responsibility for the development of sport in the province rests with the Sports Council for Northern Ireland (SCNI). The Sports Council is working with the Governing Body of the Sport, the Irish Hockey Association, on a development plan for hockey. This plan is being taken forward by hockey's Development Officers, engaged with assistance from SCNI.

Hockey has served the community well, but there is still potential for development and hopefully this can be realised through the planning process now in hand.

Senior Hockey in Northern Ireland

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to give his assessment of women's senior hockey; and to make a statement. (AQW 3060/00)

Mr McGimpsey: Responsibility for the development of sport in the province rests with the Sports Council for Northern Ireland (SCNI). The Sports Council is working with the Governing Body of the Sport, the Irish Hockey Association, on a development plan for hockey. This plan is being taken forward by hockey's Development Officers, engaged with assistance from SCNI.

Hockey has served the community well, but there is still potential for development and hopefully this can be realised through the planning process now in hand.

Junior Soccer: Greater Belfast Area

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to give his assessment on the future of junior soccer in the Greater Belfast area given the reduction in the number of soccer pitches available; and to make a statement. (AQW 3061/00)

Mr McGimpsey: Firstly, I should explain that under Article 10 of the Recreation and Youth Service (NI) Order 1986, it is the responsibility of District Councils

to ensure that there are adequate facilities for recreational, social, physical and cultural activities.

You will be aware that the Department is currently considering how longer term problems facing football can be addressed and the outcome of the work I have put in place to develop a Soccer Strategy for Northern Ireland will also be relevant in dealing with the development of the game at all levels.

Fernhill Museum

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail what assistance has been offered to the Fernhill Museum at Glencairn Park, Belfast.

(AQW 3086/00)

Mr McGimpsey: My officials met with the manager of Fernhill House Museum on 25 May 2001 to discuss the funding difficulties that the museum now faces. Following the meeting, officials are currently engaged in gathering the information they need to support an in-year bid for resources to address Fernhill's immediate need. I understand that the museum's manager is also in contact with other funding providers.

Motor-Cycle Road Racing: Funding

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail when he will officially announce the moneys available for motorcycle road racing in Northern Ireland and will the announcement be made before the funding for motorbike circuits is released.

(AQW 3098/00)

Mr McGimpsey: I fully recognise the need for funding to carry out the improvements at road circuits as recommended in the Motor Cycle Union of Ireland commissioned Road Race Task Force Report.

Work will be carried out on a partnership basis between the Department of Regional Development, Northern Ireland Electricity, British Telecom, Sports Council for NI and the Motor Cycle Union of Ireland. My Department is coordinating their efforts and work is ongoing to establish the funding required. An announcement will be made regarding distribution arrangements when the total funding needed is known.

Motor-Cycle Road Racing: Funding

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the method of distributing finance to improve safety for each motorcycle racing event as recommended by the motorcycle task force. (AQW 3099/00)

Mr McGimpsey: I fully recognise the need for funding to carry out the improvements at road circuits as

recommended in the Motor Cycle Union of Ireland commissioned Road Race Task Force Report.

Work will be carried out on a partnership basis between the Department of Regional Development, Northern Ireland Electricity, British Telecom, Sports Council for NI and the Motor Cycle Union of Ireland. My Department is coordinating their efforts and work is ongoing to establish the funding required. An announcement will be made regarding distribution arrangements when the total funding needed is known.

Sports Institute for Northern Ireland

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 1986/00, to detail the arrangements in place to ensure that talented individuals throughout Northern Ireland have equality of access to the specialist services provided through the Sports Institute for Northern Ireland.

(AQW 3146/00)

Mr McGimpsey: The Sports Institute will consist of specialist facilities and services based mainly at the Jordanstown Campus of the University of Ulster. The very nature of the Institute is that it will be primarily for the development of Northern Ireland's elite, and potential elite athletes, to allow them to increase their performance in major competitions. While the Institute will, in the first instance, develop specialist facilities for only a limited number of sports there will be generic training facilities and specialist services available to all of Northern Ireland's top athletes irrespective of their sport, their gender or their level of ability/disability.

Develop Greyhound Racing

Mr Fee asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail any plans he has to develop greyhound racing.

(AQW 3167/00)

Mr McGimpsey: Greyhound racing is not recognised as a sport in Northern Ireland, nor indeed in any other part of the United Kingdom, and I am not aware of any plans to develop this activity at present.

EDUCATION

Pupils Statemented in Schools

Mr Fee asked the Minister of Education to detail what steps he is taking to (a) decrease the time taken to have pupils statemented in schools and (b) ensure mutual recognition of statements between the Education and

Library Boards so that when a child moves from one area to another he/she does not need to be re-statemented.

(AQW 3056/00)

The Minister of Education (Mr M McGuinness): The time specified for statutory assessments in regulations is 18 weeks from the date when an Education and Library Board writes to parents proposing to carry out an assessment, or parents request one, until the Board issues a copy of the proposed statement. The regulations provide that this period may be exceeded in certain circumstances. The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice recommends that no more than eight weeks should elapse between the issue of the proposed and final statements. Both measures aim to reduce the overall time taken and I have no plans to change them.

Under the same regulations where a child with a statement of special educational needs moves from one Board area to another, the old Board must transfer the statement to the new Board which in turn must inform parents within six weeks that the statement has been transferred and whether it proposes to carry out its own assessment. Even if a new assessment is carried out, the original statement remains in force until the new one has been completed. A new assessment will of course ensure that current provision is still suitable to meet the child's needs and this can only be to the child's benefit.

Temporary Classrooms

Mr Fee asked the Minister of Education to detail, by Board area, the number of schoolchildren being taught in temporary classrooms in (a) primary schools; and (b) secondary schools.

(AQW 3057/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Information in the form requested is not readily available and could only be compiled at disproportionate cost.

West Tyrone: Capital Expenditure on Schools

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Education to make it his policy to increase capital expenditure on schools in West Tyrone.

(AQW 3070/00)

Mr M McGuinness: I am committed to improving the entire schools estate, including schools in West Tyrone, and I shall continue to strive for an increase in capital funding to achieve this.

West Tyrone: Capital Expenditure on Repairs

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Education to detail how much capital expenditure has been allocated for (a) new school buildings and (b) repairs and improvement to school buildings in West Tyrone since May 1997.

(AQW 3078/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Capital funding made available for new school major work projects in West Tyrone since 1997 is set out below. Expenditure allocated for repairs and improvements is not readily available in the form requested and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

	£m
Gibson Primary School, Omagh	2.65
St Dymphna's Primary School, Dromore	3.00
St Mary's Primary School, Killyclogher	2.39
Strabane Special School	5.02
Total	13.06

Pre-School Education Advisory Groups

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education to detail the level of Pre-school Education Advisory Groups (PEAG) funding made available for each constituency for the years 1999-00 and 2000-01.

(AQW 3084/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The funding made available in each constituency for the years 1999-00 and 2000-01 under the Pre-School Education Expansion Programme (which is planned at education and library board level by the 5 Pre-School Education Advisory Groups (PEAGs)) is shown in the table below. It is important to bear in mind that the Expansion Programme is building upon pre-school provision which existed prior to the commencement of the Programme and that the level of such provision varied from area to area.

The figures include both recurrent and capital expenditure, and are rounded to the nearest thousand pounds.

	£000	
Constituency	1999/00	2000/01
Belfast East	54	227
Belfast North	173	208
Belfast South	96	301
Belfast West	348	570
East Antrim	214	447
East Londonderry	404	736
Fermanagh/South Tyrone	227	461
Foyle	312	1,079
Lagan Valley	249	438
Mid Ulster	433	1,040
Newry/Armagh	125	417
North Antrim	251	611
North Down	164	505
South Antrim	196	1,323
South Down	270	825
Strangford	340	350
Upper Bann	80	135
West Tyrone	174	918

School Transport Policy: East Antrim

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Education to detail the improvements he intends to make to his school transport policy for the constituency of East Antrim. (AQW 3088/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The current home to school transport arrangements approved by my Department require Education and Library Boards to provide transport assistance where a pupil is unable to gain a place in a suitable school within statutory walking distance of his or her home (2 miles for primary school age pupils and 3 miles for post-primary pupils). The definition of a suitable school has regard to the well established categories of controlled, Catholic maintained, Integrated, and Irish-medium and in the grammar sector, denominational and non-denominational schools.

The current policy is applied equally to all pupils in attendance at grant-aided schools regardless of the constituency or board area in which they live. I plan to review the policy later this year, and any changes made as a result of that review will apply equally to all areas.

West Tyrone: Play Groups

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Education to detail what financial support was given to playgroups in West Tyrone in the years 1999-00 and 2000-01. (AQW 3103/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Under my Department's Pre-School Education Expansion Programme, the voluntary and private playgroup sector is, for the first time, able to access funding for places which have in the past been funded largely from parental contributions or other sources. In the 1999/00 and 2000/01 financial years amounts totalling £174,000 and £249,000 respectively were paid to non statutory settings in the West Tyrone constituency. The figures include the allocation to one private Day Nursery, which has been included for the sake of completeness.

Teachers' Salaries: Percentage of Budget

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 2878/00, to give his assessment on whether there is sufficient funds available to purchase books and materials required by Primary Schools given the percentage of delegated budgets that are allocated to teachers' salaries. (AQW 3104/00)

Mr M McGuinness: It is vital that each school has sufficient resources available to provide books and other materials to support teaching and learning.

The budget allocated to each school is unhypothecated and thus the Board of Governors decide the spending priorities including the amount to be spent on teacher

salaries, books and equipment. School budgets are augmented from time to time by other financial allocations which can be used to purchase books and materials such as the £20.4m allocated to schools from the Budget Addition this year and the £1.5m allocated last year for reading schemes in the primary sector.

I am aware however that some schools have above average teaching costs and that this can reduce the amount available to the school for spending on items such as books and equipment. I have therefore brought forward proposals in the consultation document on the common formula which, if implemented, would compensate schools for these additional costs.

Common Funding Formula: Impact on Learning Support Centres

Mrs Carson asked the Minister of Education to outline the action he will take to lessen the adverse impact to learning support centres in the event that the proposed Common Funding Formula is implemented. (AQW 3111/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The proposals for special unit funding set out in the Consultation Document on a common funding formula are designed to bring the arrangements for the funding of units and the level at which they are funded on to a consistent footing across all education and library board areas. In developing these proposals we have sought to ensure there is no adverse impact on special units attached to mainstream schools and I would encourage all involved to highlight any evidence to the contrary in their response to the consultation.

Transitional funding arrangements will be in place to help offset any difficulties being experienced by individual schools in coping with changes to their overall budget allocation.

Religious Education in Schools

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister of Education whether he has any plans to place greater emphasis on Religious Education tuition within the school curriculum. (AQW 3133/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Religious Education is a compulsory element of the curriculum for all registered pupils in grant-aided schools in Northern Ireland, which reflects the importance attached to the subject. There are currently no plans to change the amount of time spent teaching Religious Education in the school curriculum.

Rural Schools: Improve School Transport

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister of Education to detail the steps he is taking to improve transport services to

rural schools so that they can increase their pool of pupils. (AQW 3134/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The current policy on home to school transport is applied equally to all pupils in attendance at grant-aided schools. Under the current arrangements pupils will not receive transport to schools outside statutory walking distance, where there is a suitable school within that statutory distance. I intend to review the transport policy later this year and any changes made as a result of that review will apply equally to pupils in rural and urban areas.

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Aggregate Tax: Impact on Industry

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (a) what assessment he has made of the likely impact of the aggregate tax on industry and industrial development and (b) what meetings he has had with the Department of Finance regarding this matter. (AQW 3125/00)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Sir Reg Empey): I share the concern of the Industry that the proposed aggregates levy of £1.60 per tonne could have an adverse impact in Northern Ireland.

It is not possible to make a precise assessment of the impact of the tax on jobs.

The First and Deputy First Ministers met the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 24 January this year to emphasise the Executive's concern. Subsequently, my Department and Department of Finance, in consultation with the NI Quarry Products Association, put a detailed case to the Chancellor advocating the exclusion of Northern Ireland from this levy. The Chancellor has asked for a more detailed analysis of the potential effect upon Northern Ireland and this work is presently underway.

The proposed date for the introduction of the levy is April 2002.

ENVIRONMENT

Planning (NI) Order 1991: Public Nuisance

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment to consider amending Article 41 of the Planning (NI) Order 1991 to allow monitoring of infill activities to prevent public nuisance. (AQW 3052/00)

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Foster): [holding answer 5 June 2001]: I have no plans to amend Article 41 of the Planning (NI) Order 1991.

Article 41 allows for the submission of an application to determine whether operations on land, or a change of use of land requires planning permission. This Article can be used for the purposes of determining whether infill activity requires planning permission, or if it is permitted development under the Planning (General Development) Order 1993.

Where such activity is regarded as permitted development under the 1993 Order, and does not require explicit planning permission, my Department's Planning Service has no further role to play. The detection and prevention of public nuisance is a matter for District Councils.

Where it is not regarded as permitted development, planning permission must be obtained from my Department. In such instances, any infilling activity which proceeds without permission, will be regarded as unauthorised, and enforcement action may be considered.

Telecommunication Masts: Planning Permission

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the representation he has received in respect of the granting of planning permission for the erection of telecommunication masts. (AQW 3075/00)

Mr Foster: This information is not available in the format requested by the Member. My Department is currently working towards producing this information, and I will write again to the Member in due course.

Telecommunication Masts

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of telecommunication masts erected in the years 1999-00 and 2000-01 for which full planning approval was granted. (AQW 3082/00)

Mr Foster: During 1999/00, 60 applications for full planning approval for telecommunications masts were granted. During 2000/01 the figure was 135. In addition, my Department granted 76 and 247 prior approval applications in 1999/00 and 2000/01 respectively.

My Department does not hold information on the number of telecommunication masts erected following such approvals.

Telecommunication Masts

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of telecommunication masts currently awaiting planning approval. (AQW 3083/00)

Mr Foster: A total of 48 applications for full planning permission for the erection of Telecommunications Masts are currently under consideration by my Department. In addition, 62 prior approval applications are also currently under consideration.

Ground based masts up to 15 metres in height, and certain masts on buildings, are permitted development under the Planning (General Development) Order (NI) 1993 (as amended), but are subject to my Department's prior approval as to siting and appearance. Ground based masts over 15 metres in height require full planning permission.

Planning Applications: 42-Day Time Period

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the steps he is taking to prevent telecommunication companies from taking advantage of the 42 day time-period for planning applications; and to make a statement. (AQW 3097/00)

Mr Foster: My Department has introduced revised administrative arrangements for dealing with applications for telecommunications development which are subject to the 42 day prior approval procedure. The new arrangements include earlier decision making within the 42 days to ensure that decisions are received by applicants before the expiry of this period. My Department will also make greater use of fax, e-mail and recorded delivery for communicating decisions to ensure that this deadline is met.

The Member will be aware that my Department also issued a consultation paper seeking views on possible amendments to planning controls for telecommunications development. All responses have now been received and are currently under consideration. I will be consulting with the Executive Committee on the outcome of the exercise, and hope to make a statement in due course.

Historic Buildings: Fast Track for Listing

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment to consider introducing a fast track method for listing historic buildings. (AQW 3110/00)

Mr Foster: A fast track method of listing historic buildings in England and Wales is through issue of building preservation notices (commonly known as temporary or spot-listing). The question of whether to introduce such notices in Northern Ireland was addressed in a consultation paper 'Proposals for Amendments to Planning Legislation in Northern Ireland' published by my Department in March 1999. The issue remains under consideration for possible inclusion in a Planning (Amendment) Bill which I propose to introduce in the Assembly in the 2001-02 Assembly Session.

Private Sector Housing: Criteria

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the criteria set down for private sector housing development; and to make a statement. (AQW 3135/00)

Mr Foster: All planning applications for residential development are expected to conform to the concepts and approach outlined in the 'Quality Initiative' announced by the then Minister for the Environment in January 1996. The Initiative requires the Department to secure a higher quality of design, layout and landscaping for new residential development, incorporating formal open space, walks and cycleways and supporting public transport provision, with more planting and greater comprehensive planning and design of sites.

Since the launch of the Initiative my Department has produced a number of documents, which provide detailed policies and guidance for the delivery of quality and sustainability in new residential development. These include:

Planning Policy Statement 1: 'General Principles' incorporates the Quality Initiative and the need for good design together with sustainable development and mixed use in residential developments.

Planning Policy Statement 7 'Quality Residential Developments' (PPS7), which has been published in draft consultation form, sets out the Department's policies for achieving quality in new residential developments and highlights that the key themes of quality and sustainability must be demonstrated to secure planning permission. PPS7 also outlines how my Department will secure the necessary standards through the planning process by a comprehensive approach to the planning of an area, including the requirement for Design Concept Standards or Concept Master Plans for all residential development proposals. The Statement is expected to be published in final form during the summer.

'Creating Places – Achieving Quality in Residential Developments', published in May 2000, provides supplementary guidance and is recognised as the principal practical guide for intending developers in the design of all new housing areas, covering issues such as site analysis, overall design strategies and detailed design requirements.

In addition, my Department is preparing a revised version of Development Control Advice Note 8 – 'Small Unit Housing – New Development in Existing Residential Areas' to provide intending developers with guidance on development on brownfield sites in urban areas, and housing development within established residential areas.

I consider that these documents, and the emerging Regional Development Strategy being prepared by the Department for Regional Development, will provide

clear guidance on the requirements for the delivery of quality residential development.

Telecommunication Masts: Local Opinion

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the steps he is taking to ensure that local opinion is taken fully into consideration in the siting of telecommunication masts. (AQW 3137/00)

Mr Foster: Current procedures already allow for public opinion to be taken into consideration in the siting of telecommunications masts. My Department advertises all applications for telecommunications masts, whether they be full planning applications, or Prior Approvals under the Prior Approval system as laid down in Part 17 of the Planning (General Development) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 1998.

Prior approval applications are notified to the appropriate District Council, which is given an opportunity to comment within the statutory period. Full applications are referred to the appropriate District Council in the same way as any other proposal. All representations received by my Department are taken into account when making a decision.

The Member will be aware that my Department also issued a consultation paper seeking views on possible amendments to planning controls for telecommunications development. All responses have now been received and are currently under consideration. I will be consulting with the Executive Committee on the outcome of the exercise, and hope to make a statement in due course.

Fisherman's Quay: Heritage Value

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment to give his assessment of Fisherman's Quay, Carrickfergus in terms of heritage value. (AQW 3141/00)

Mr Foster: Fisherman's Quay in Scotch Quarter, Carrickfergus is of considerable maritime heritage importance. It was built in the 1830s to serve the local fishing community. Few contemporary quays survive in such a good condition.

Arrangements are being made for a full survey of the quay by the Environment and Heritage Service of my Department by autumn 2001. When the survey report is available consideration will be given to the Quay's statutory protection, either as a listed building or as a scheduled historic monument.

There are extensive documentary references to Fisherman's Quay which I have asked EHS officials to copy to the Member for information.

Amblers Mill: Heritage Value

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment to give his assessment of Amblers Mill, Carrickfergus in terms of heritage value. (AQW 3142/00)

Mr Foster: Amblers Mill is not currently listed. The Environment and Heritage Service of my Department has recently commissioned an historical and architectural survey of the property. The survey report will be considered in detail before a decision is taken on whether the building meets listing criteria.

Any proposal to list the building would be subject to consultation with the Historic Buildings Council and Carrickfergus Borough Council.

Archaeological Digs

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of archaeological digs currently being undertaken by the Environment and Heritage Service. (AQW 3143/00)

Mr Foster: Three archaeological excavations are currently being undertaken by the Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) of my Department, at Greencastle and Sketrick Castle, County Down, and at Portmuck, County Antrim.

In order to ensure high standards all archaeological excavations are required to be licensed by my Department under the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (NI) Order 1995. In the year to 31 March 2001, 80 excavation licences were issued. Of these, 63 were issued for developer-funded excavations, 12 for EHS excavations, and 5 for university-based excavations. Since 1 April 2001, 12 excavation licences have been issued, 9 for developer-funded excavations and 3 for EHS excavations.

Summary reports on all excavations are published annually, and may be obtained from EHS.

Retiring Councillors: Financial Package

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment to detail when he plans to implement a financial package for retiring councillors who have given long years of service to local government. (AQW 3265/00)

Mr Foster: I have had a number of approaches on the question of financial reward in recognition of the long-term contribution of councillors from, among others, "The National Association of Councillors".

There is, however, no commitment included in the Programme for Government to deal with this issue and indeed no legislation available for such a scheme.

However I believe that the question of reward to councillors for long years of service is an important issue and that it should be considered as part of the proposed review of the public sector which will, of course, have local government as a very significant element.

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Rural Economy: Foot-and-Mouth Disease Impact

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to give his assessment of the impact of the current outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease on the rural economy of Northern Ireland. (AQW 2874/00)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan): It is too soon to take a definitive view of the full consequences of the outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease for the rural economy or the wider economy in Northern Ireland. Impacts vary across sectors and localities and the situation is still developing. A better perspective will emerge later in the year as the tourist season progresses. The Economic Taskforce established in the OFMDFM will continue to monitor the economic effects of FMD.

Rates (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998: Delay

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the reasons for the delay in the enactment of The Rates (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 and to confirm the steps he is taking to make it fully operational. (AQW 3032/00)

Mr Durkan: The 1998 Order (which came into operation on 1 April 1999) provided only the broad enabling power to introduce a relief scheme. It did not provide specific details of a scheme. The Executive, earlier this year, decided to bring forward the scheme as quickly as possible and not to await the outcome of the rating policy review. Consequently, on 20 March, I was able to announce that work on the scheme would continue with a target implementation date of 1 October 2002. To date 512 rural settlements have been identified with boundaries delineated on maps. A sample survey has been completed to identify eligible properties within these settlements and an estimate made of the revenue loss. Work is continuing on refining criteria, rules and procedures for the scheme and associated subordinate legislation will be brought forward later this year. Consultation with the District Councils is also planned.

Pensioners: Impact of Budget

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to give his assessment of the impact of the budget on the income of pensioners. (AQW 3063/00)

Mr Durkan: The Executive Committee's "Programme For Government" makes clear the commitment to supporting the elderly. The Budget for 2001-02 has a beneficial impact on the income of the elderly. Firstly, maintaining parity with the Social Security system in Great Britain will provide numerous benefits for the elderly such as the Minimum Income Guarantee and the Age Related Pension Increases. On top of this, the Budget also has provision for the introduction of free travel for the elderly on public transport from 1 October 2001.

There are also other measures, outside the scope of Public Expenditure, which have been adopted such as the Age Related Tax Allowances for pensioners.

Peace II: Intermediary Funding Bodies

Ms Morrice asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to explain the delay in finalising the tendering procedure for the Intermediary Funding Bodies for Peace II and to detail when the Intermediary Funding Bodies will be informed as to the outcome of their tender bids. (AQW 3087/00)

Mr Durkan: I indicated in my answer to an earlier Assembly Question on this subject on 23 April 2001 that the tendering exercise would not be completed until May 2001. The tendering procedures were completed within this timetable and any organisation which responded to the advertisement for Intermediary Funding Bodies under PEACE II will be informed individually, in writing, of the outcome of its tender bid and a Press Release placing this information in the public domain will be issued no later than 8 June 2001.

Northern Ireland: Gross Domestic Product

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to give his assessment of the fall in Northern Ireland's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the period 1995-99. (AQW 3092/00)

Mr Durkan: The nominal and real Gross Domestic Product for Northern Ireland over each of the last five years are detailed in the table below. Real GDP figures were rebased to 2000/01 prices. During this period the NI economy continued to grow in both real and nominal terms.

NI Nominal / Real Gross Domestic Product		
(£ million)	Nominal	Real
1995	14,297	16,652
1996	14,936	16,854

NI Nominal / Real Gross Domestic Product		
(£ million)	Nominal	Real
1997 ^P	15,952	17,504
1998 ^P	16,501	17,604
1999 ^P	17,003	17,733
1995-1999 % Change	18.9	6.5

^P Provisional

District Council Areas: EU Grants

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to review the need to establish a monitoring system to identify District Council areas from which there were fewer applications for EU grants than could have been expected. (AQW 3115/00)

Mr Durkan: Future applications for EU Structural Funds assistance will include details of relevant postcodes which will provide information to allow the profile of applications from individual District Council areas to be monitored over the lifetime of the Programmes.

Peace II: Funding Applications

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether the Intermediate Funding Bodies administering Peace II funding will be required to proactively seek applications from areas meeting the criteria but from which there is a lack of successful funding applications. (AQW 3116/00)

Mr Durkan: The distribution of funding by all the programmes implementing bodies will be determined by the extent to which project promoters are able to demonstrate how their projects address the Programme's overall objectives, as well as the relevant Priority and Measure – level objectives, and target areas, sectors and groups adversely affected by the conflict in Northern Ireland. It is expected that implementing bodies will give every assistance to ensure that all sectors of the population participate fully in the Programme and where community infrastructure is weak, action will be taken to address this.

Intermediate Funding Bodies: Press Release

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to advise when he expects to announce the Intermediate Funding Bodies selected to administer Peace II funding and what monitoring systems will be used to ensure equality in the distribution of funds. (AQW 3117/00)

Mr Durkan: A press release will be issued tomorrow, 8 June 2001 by the Special EU Programmes Body, the Managing Authority for PEACE II, announcing the outcome of the tendering procedures for Intermediary Funding Bodies. Monitoring of the Programme will be carried out

by the Programmes Body, under the supervision of the Monitoring Committee, and the Programmes Body will develop adequate evaluation procedures, tools and indicators to ensure that the horizontal principle of balanced intervention/equal opportunities is fully respected in the delivery of the Programme.

Aggregate Tax: Case for Northern Ireland Exemption

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (a) what recent meetings he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer regarding the introduction of the aggregate tax and (b) what steps he will be taking to alleviate the impact of this tax. (AQW 3124/00)

Mr Durkan: I have not met the Chancellor on this issue however the First Minister and Deputy First Minister raised the issue of the aggregate levy on behalf of the Executive at a meeting with him on 24 January. They subsequently provided a detailed exposition of the case for a Northern Ireland exemption from the tax in early March. Discussions with Treasury are continuing at official level with a view to securing an appropriate derogation to alleviate the impact of the tax here.

Rate Relief: Irish League Clubs

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to consider giving Rate Relief to Irish League Clubs during the close season. (AQW 3144/00)

Mr Durkan: I have no plans to give Rate Relief to Irish League Clubs during the close season. The Review of Rating Policy, which is currently underway, will look however at the need for and application of all existing reliefs.

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Anti-Drugs Initiatives

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the meetings she has had with representatives of other governments concerning anti-drugs initiatives. (AQW 3045/00)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms de Brún): Through the Ministerial Group on Drugs I have met with the NIO Minister, Adam Ingram, on three occasions to discuss our Drug Strategy and action to reduce drug related harm.

My officials have met and discussed drug related issues with their counterparts in the rest of Ireland and in England, Scotland and Wales.

Tríd an Ghrúpa Aireachta ar Dhrugaí, bhuail mé leis an Aire OTÉ Adam Ingram trí huaire lenár Straitéis Drugaí agus lenár mbearta leis an dochar bainteach le drugaí a laghdú, a phlé.

Bhuail mo chuid oifigeach lena gcomhghleacaithe sa Deisceart, i Sasana, in Albain agus sa Bhreatain Bheag agus phléigh siad ceisteanna bainteach le drugaí leo.

Residential Care for Pensioners

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to give her assessment of the financial cost in this and the next financial year of providing residential care for pensioners. (AQW 3048/00)

Ms de Brún: The most recent expenditure figures show that £123.5 million was spent on this in 1999/00. This figure was uplifted for inflation and pay increases in 2000-01 and 2001-02 by 2.5-3.5% and 3.5-5.0% respectively. The budget for this year also provided for additional expenditure of some £2 million for additional community care packages, a significant proportion of which will be used for residential and nursing home care. A further £3.9 million has been made available to take account of the capital limit changes. The increase for this sector next year has not yet been agreed, but it will include an additional £9 million to take account of the introduction of free nursing care.

Taispeánann na figiúirí caiteachais is déanaí gur caitheadh £123.5 milliún ar seo i 1999/00. Ardaíodh an figiúr seo mar thoradh ar bhoilsciú agus ar ardú pá i 2000-01 agus 2001-02 le 2.5-3.5 agus 3.5-5.00% faoi seach. Sholáthair buiséad na bliana seo do chaiteachas breise de £2 mhilliún do phacáistí breise cúraim phobail; caithfear cuid nach beag de seo ar chúram cónaithe agus tí altranais. Cuireadh £3.9 milliún breise ar fáil le hathruithe teorainn chaipitil a chur san áireamh. Níor socraíodh ardú don bhliain seo chugainn don earnáil seo go fóill, ach glacfaidh sé £9 milliún san áireamh toisc teacht isteach cúram altranais saor in aisce.

Anti-Drugs Strategy

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to give her assessment as to whether the anti-drugs strategy is meeting the objectives and targets that have been set. (AQW 3071/00)

Ms de Brún: Since the launch of our Drug Strategy in August 1999, we have made good progress towards delivering its overall aims and objectives.

All of the 36 projects funded from the resources allocated to support the Drug Strategy are well underway and many are starting to see the benefits of their work.

Interim reports have been received from the projects and examples of early benefits include the uptake of the Needle Exchange scheme, the participation of over 1200 parents in education and awareness sessions in the NHSSB area and the official opening of the 10-bed inpatient addiction unit, scheduled for June. The five Education and Library Board projects are established and working in schools; voluntary and statutory partnerships are working well within the North Down and Ards and Newtownabbey areas; and projects in Irvinestown, Strabane, Derry, Lurgan and Antrim are in place and making an impact in their areas.

I recently announced that we would be putting in place new arrangements for the joint implementation of both our Drug Strategy and Strategy for Reducing Alcohol Related Harm. The new model includes the establishment of working groups to develop action in specific areas including Communities, Treatment, Education and Prevention, Research and Information, Social Legislation and Criminal Justice.

We have secured additional resources of over £6m from April 2002 to enable a continued and reinforced focus on implementing our Strategy and taking forward action to tackle drug misuse here.

I am content that good progress has been made but I am also aware that much remains to be done and I am putting in place the mechanisms to make this happen.

Ó seoladh ár Straitéise Drugaí i Lúnasa 1999, bhí dul chun cinn maith déanta againn chun a h-aidhmeanna agus a cuspóirí iomlána a chomhlíonadh.

Tá na 36 tionscadal uile, maoinithe ó acmhainní dailte le tacú leis an Straitéis Drugaí, ag dul ar aghaidh go maith agus tá cuid mhór díobh ag feiceáil tairbhí a gcuid saothair anois. Fuarthas tuairiscí eatramhacha ó na tionscadail agus i measc na samplaí de thairbhí luatha tá toiseacht na scéime Malartú Snáthaide, rannpháirteachas breis agus 1200 tuismitheoir i seisiúin oideachais agus eolais i gceantar BSSST, agus oscailt oifigiúil ionaid andúil 10 leaba d'othair chónaitheacha, socrúithe don Mheitheamh. Tá tionscadail na gcúig Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne bunaithe anois agus ag éirí leo i scoileanna; tá páirtíochtaí deonacha agus reachtúla ag éirí go maith leo laistigh de cheantair an Dúin Thuaidh, na hAirde agus Bhaile na Mainistreach; agus tá tionscadail i mBaile an Irbhinigh, sa Srath Bán, i nDoire, sa Lorgain agus in Aontroim i bhfeidhm agus tá éifeacht acu cheana féin ina gceantair féin.

D'fhógair mé ar na mallaibh go mbeinn ag cur socrúithe nua i bhfeidhm do chomhchur i bhfeidhm ár Straitéise Drugaí agus ár Straitéise do Laghdú sa Dochar Bainteach le hAlcól araon. Cuimsíonn an chreatlach nua seo bunú grúpaí oibre le beart a fhorbairt i réimsí ar leith, Pobail, Cóireáil, Oideachas agus Cosc, Taighde agus Eolas, Reachtaíocht Shóisialta agus Ceart Coiriúil san áireamh.

Chinntigh muid acmhainní breise de bhreis agus £6m ó Aibreán 2002 chun cuidiú linn díriú ar aghaidh agus níos treise ar chur i bhfeidhm ár Straitéise agus ar bheart a thabhairt chun tosaigh le tabhairt faoi mhí-úsáid drugaí anseo.

Tá mé sásta go ndearnadh dul chun cinn maith ach tá a fhios agam fosta go bhfuil cuid mhór eile le déanamh go fóill agus mar sin de, tá mé ag cur na meicníochtaí i bhfeidhm leis seo a dhéanamh.

Awaiting Cardiac Surgery

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail, by parliamentary constituency, the number of patients currently awaiting cardiac surgery. (AQW 3089/00)

Ms de Brún: This information is not available in the form requested.

Níl an t-eolas ar fáil san fhoirm a iarradh é.

Trust Boards: Travel and Subsistence Allowances

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 2765/00, to detail whether any Trust Boards have failed to adhere to the appropriate criteria in payment of travel expenses and subsistence allowances claimed by Trust Board Chief Executives for the financial year 2000-01. (AQW 3094/00)

Ms de Brún: Trusts annual accounts are subjected to external audit. Any issues of concern are advised to Trusts in Management Letters and Internal Control Reports. The Management Letters and Reports for 2000/2001 are not due until 31 October 2001.

Tá cuntais bhliantúla Iontaobhas faoi réir iniúchta eachtraigh. Cuirtear ábhair bhuartha ar bith in iúl d'Iontaobhais i Litreacha Bainistíochta agus i dTuairiscí Stiúrtha Innheánaigh. Ní thiocfaidh na Litreacha agus Tuairiscí Bainistíochta do 2000/2001 amach go dtí an 31 Deireadh Fómhair 2001.

Trust Boards' Spending

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW2765/00, to detail the reasons for the wide comparative diversity of spending across the Trust Boards. (AQW 3095/00)

Ms de Brún: The amount spent by each Trust on mileage expenses and subsistence allowances is dependent on a number of factors. Trusts have different business responsibilities, different geographical coverage and distribution of facilities and different issues to address. It is

for each Trust to determine how much travel is required for the efficient and effective running of its business.

Braitheann an méid a chaitheann gach Iontaobhas ar chostais mhíleáiste agus ar liúntais chothaithe ar roinnt fachtóirí. Tá freagrachtaí éagsúla gnó, limistéir éagsúla threolaíochta, roinnt éagsúla áiseanna agus ceisteanna éagsúla le dul i gceann ag Iontaobhais. Tá gach Iontaobhas é féin freagrach as an mhéid taistil atá de dhíth lena ghnó féin a réachtáil go tiosach agus go héifeachtach a chinneadh.

Ards Hospital: Accident and Emergency Unit

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to upgrade the Accident and Emergency Unit at Ards Hospital to alleviate the demand for Accident and Emergency services at the Ulster Hospital. (AQW 3100/00)

Ms de Brún: The Ulster Hospital came under particular pressure recently and, in response, the Eastern Board and the Ulster Hospitals Trust agreed a package of measures to be put in place immediately. These involved providing additional staff and beds within the hospital to relieve pressure on the Accident and Emergency Department, and a range of other initiatives. These proved successful and the additional measures were stepped down. Following a further sharp increase in the number of patients awaiting admission, the Trust has now re-introduced these measures.

The Minor Injuries Unit at Ards Hospital and the Accident and Emergency Department at the Ulster Hospital will maintain their current services until I have considered the Acute Hospitals Review Group report, which is expected in the near future.

Bhí brú áirithe ar Otharlann Uladh ar na mallaibh agus, mar fhreagairt ar sin, chomhaontaigh Bord an Oirthir agus Iontaobhas Otharlanna Uladh réimse beart le cur i bhfeidhm láithreach. Ina measc seo bhí cur ar fáil foirne agus leapacha breise laistigh den otharlann leis an bhrú ar an Roinn Timpistí agus Éigeandálaí a mhaolú chomh maith le réimse tionscnamh eile. Bhí siad seo rathúil agus níor cuireadh na bearta breise i bhfeidhm. I ndiaidh méadaithe ghéir i líon na ndaoine ag fanacht le dul isteach inti, tá an tIontaobhas anois i ndiaidh na bearta seo a thabhairt isteach.

Coinneoidh an tIonad Mionghortuithe in Otharlann na hAirde agus an Roinn Timpistí agus Éigeandálaí in Otharlann Uladh na seirbhísí atá acu faoi láthair go mbeidh machnamh déanta agam ar thuairisc an Ghrúpa Athbhreithnithe ar Ghéarotharlanna, a mbeifear ag súil léi ar ball.

Altnagelvin Hospital: Hygiene Standards

Mrs Carson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what action she will

take to ensure hygiene standards are maintained at Altnagelvin Hospital. (AQW 3112/00)

Ms de Brún: Cleaning services at Altnagelvin are contracted out and standards are monitored by the contractor, by a nominated Trust officer and by the Central Services Agency. In line with the commitment given in *Priorities for Action*, standards against which all acute Trusts will benchmark the cleanliness of their facilities, are to be issued shortly.

Tugtar seirbhísí glantóireachta in Alt na nGealbhán le déanamh ar conradh, agus déanann an conraitheoir, oifigeach ainmnithe Iontaobhais, agus an Lár-Ghníomhaireacht Seirbhísí monatóireacht ar chaighdeán. De réir an ghealltanais tugtha in *Tosaíochtaí le hAghaidh Gnímh*, tá caighdeán ar a chaithfidh Iontaobhais ghéarotharlann uile glaineacht a n-áiseanna a chomhlíonadh, le heisiúint ar ball.

Altnagelvin Hospital: Patient Care

Mrs Carson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what action she will take to ensure patient care standards are maintained at Altnagelvin Hospital. (AQW 3113/00)

Ms de Brún: The standards of patient care at Altnagelvin are closely supervised by ward managers and clinical services managers. These standards are also subject to periodic audit.

I have made it clear that I expect every effort to be made to maintain safe and effective services in our hospitals. Where problems arise regarding care standards, I expect hospital management to take immediate and effective action.

Bainisteoirí bardaí agus seirbhísí cliniciúla a choinníonn súil ghéar ar na caighdeáin chúram othar in Alt na nGealbhán. Tá na caighdeáin seo de réir iniúchta thréimhsiúil fosta.

Chuir mé in iúl go soiléir go bhfuil mé ag brath ar chách gach iarracht a dhéanamh seirbhísí sábháilte agus éifeachtacha a choinneáil inár n-otharlanna. Má bhíonn fadhbanna ann maidir le caighdeáin chúraim, beidh mé ag brath ar lucht stiúrtha na hotharlainne beart láithreach agus éifeachtach a dhéanamh.

Altnagelvin Hospital: Patient Transfers

Mrs Carson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what action she will take to ensure hospital administration involving patient transfers will be streamlined at Altnagelvin Hospital. (AQW 3114/00)

Ms de Brún: Responsibility for hospital administration procedures covering patient transfers lies with the Trust.

I expect all Trusts to put in place safe and effective patient transfer arrangements. The issue of patient care services is being addressed as part of the work flowing from the Strategic Review of Ambulance Services which was completed last year.

An t-iontaobhas amháin atá freagrach as modhanna riaracháin otharlainne le hothair a aistriú. Tá mé ag brath ar iontaobhais uile socruithe sábháilte agus éifeachtacha d'aistriú othar a chur i bhfeidhm. Táthar ag tabhairt aghaidhe ar sheirbhísí cúraim othair mar chuid den obair a bhí mar thoradh ar an athbhreithniú straitéiseach ar sheirbhísí otharcharr a críochnaíodh anuraidh.

Ministerial Group on Drugs

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 2840/00, to detail when the Ministerial Group on Drugs will meet with the Central Co-ordinating Group for Action Against Drugs. (AQW 3118/00)

Ms de Brún: I refer the Member to my answer to AQW 3122/00.

Luaim don Bhall an freagra a thug mé ar AQW 3122/00.

Tyrone County Hospital: Development Plans

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail current development plans for the Tyrone County Hospital, Omagh. (AQW 3119/00)

Ms de Brún: The Acute Hospitals Review Group will report in the near future on the 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 nGéarotharlann tuairisc ar fhorbairt seirbhísí otharlainne ar ball. Roimh an tuairisc sin, ní bheadh sé ceart domsa trácht ar sholáthar seirbhísí géarotharlainne amach anseo i gceantar ar bith.

Ministerial Group on Drugs

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 2840/00, to explain why the Ministerial Group on Drugs has not met with the Central Co-ordinating Group for Action Against Drugs. (AQW 3122/00)

Ms de Brún: As established by the Executive, the Ministerial Group on Drugs and the Central Co-ordinating Group for Action Against Drugs (CCGAAD) form a co-ordinated approach to dealing with the drugs issue. CCGAAD reports regularly to the Ministerial Group

and it is overseen by it. There is no current need for a meeting between them.

Bunaithe ag an Fheidhmeannas, tá cur chuige comhordaithe ag an Ghrúpa Aireachta ar Dhrugaí agus ag an Ghrúpa Comhordaithe Láir um Bearta in éadan Drugaí (GCLBÉD) ina ndéileáil leis an cheist drugaí. Tugann GCLBÉD tuairisc go rialta don Ghrúpa Aireachta a ndéanann maoirseacht air. Faoi láthair, ní gá cruinniú a bheith eatarthu.

Departmental Capital Budget

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to 2780/00, to detail the steps she is taking to ensure that her Departmental Capital Budget will have sufficient resources in order to cover the outstanding £12 million for the Ulster Hospital Redevelopment Programme and to confirm that the £10 million already allocated will be ringfenced for this matter. (AQW 3138/00)

Ms de Brún: My Department has been assessing the Strategic Development Plan for the Ulster Hospital submitted by the Ulster Community and Hospital HSS Trust. I will have to consider all the issues, including funding, and I will announce my decision on the proposals as soon as possible.

The £10 million allocated to my Department from Executive Programme Funds has been set aside for investment in the Ulster Hospital between now and 2003-04. In addition the Programme for Government identified £2m to address urgent issues within the redevelopment. Once the necessary Business Cases are approved I will want to see how far these resources will allow progress on Phase II of the Trust's Strategic Development Plan. As far as possible, I will be aiming to cover the balance of the cost of the redevelopment programme agreed with the Trust from within the capital budget available to me but, as appropriate, I will bid for the necessary resources to ensure that the work is fully completed.

Bhí an Roinn s'agamsa ag measúnú an Phlean Straitéisigh Forbartha d'Otharlann Uladh curtha isteach ag Iontaobhas SSS Phobal Uladh agus Otharlann. Beidh orm machnamh a dhéanamh ar na ceistanna uile seo, maoiniú san áireamh, agus fógróidh mé mo chinneadh ar na moltaí a luaithe agus is féidir.

Cuireadh an £10 milliún a dáileadh ar an Roinn s'agamsa ó Chistí Chlár an Fheidhmeannais i leataobh d'infheistiú in Otharlann Uladh idir anois agus 2003/04. Ina theannta sin d'aimsigh Clár um Rialtas £2m le dul i gceann ceistanna práinneacha laistigh den athchóiriú. A luaithe agus a cheadófar na Cásanna Gnó is mian liom a mhéad agus a chuideoidh na hacmhainní seo le dul chun cinn ar Chéim II de Phlean Straitéiseach Forbartha an Iontaobhais a fheiceáil. Beidh mé ag iarraidh fuilleach chostas an chlár athchóirithe aontaithe leis an Iontaobhas

a ghlanadh a mhéad agus is féidir ó laistigh den bhuiséad caipitil ar fáil dom, ach, mar is ceart é, déanfaidh mé tairiscint ar na hacmhainní atá riachtanach le cinntiú go gcríochnófar an obair go hiomlán.

Ulster Hospital Trust: Strategic Development Plan

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 2779/00, to detail (a) how the figure of £2 million was determined and (b) what monies will be allocated to the Ulster Hospital Trust to cover their costs in drafting the Strategic Development Plan. (AQW 3139/00)

Ms de Brún: The Strategic Development Plan drawn up by Ulster Community and Hospitals Trust included a proposal to provide 20 additional adult beds to enable the hospital to cope with increasing workloads. The optimal solution identified in the Plan is reinstatement of the former Jaffe Ward at an estimated cost of £1.95m. The budget of £2 million identified in the Programme for Government to finalise and begin implementation of a plan to modernise the Ulster Hospital was based on that figure.

The development of capital investment proposals is a normal business matter for Trusts and my Department does not intend to provide any funding directly to the Trust in respect of developing their Strategic Development Plan.

Sa Phlean Straitéiseach Forbartha dréachtaithe ag Iontaobhas Phobal Uladh agus Otharlann, bhí moladh le 20 leaba a sholáthar do dhaoine fásta chun cur ar chumas na hotharlainne déileáil le hualaí oibre atá ag dul i méid. Is é an réiteach is fearr aitheanta sa Phlean, athchur ar fáil an iar-Bharda Jaffe ar chostas measta ar £1.95m. Bunaíodh an buiséad de £2 milliún, curtha i leataobh i gClár um Rialtas leis an dlaoi mhullaigh a chur ar phlean chun Otharlann Uladh a nuachóiriú agus le tús a chur lena chur i gcrích, ar an fhigiúr sin.

Is gnáthcheist ghnó d'Iontaobhais í forbairt mholtaí infheistíochta caipitil agus níl sé ar intinn ag an Roinn s'agamsa maoiniú ar bith a thabhairt go díreach don Iontaobhas maidir le forbairt a bPlean Straitéisigh Forbartha.

Diabetes: Resources Allocated

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 2548/00, to detail (a) the resources allocated to diabetes services by each Health Board in each of the last five years and (b) the percentage of the Board's overall budget that this represents in each case. (AQW 3149/00)

Ms de Brún: The information requested is not available.

Níl an t-eolas a iarraidh ar fáil.

Diabetes: Central Register

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 2548/00, to detail her proposals to establish a central register of diabetes sufferers. (AQW 3150/00)

Ms de Brún: There are currently no plans for a central register of diabetes sufferers. However, there is a paediatric diabetes register, held by the Department of Epidemiology and Public Health in Queen's University Belfast, on behalf of the local Diabetes Study Group.

Moreover, 60% of adult patients with diabetes receive more than half their routine diabetic care in general practice. In a recent survey here, 96% of practices indicated that they have an active register of people with diabetes. Two thirds of these registers are computerised and it is hoped that the project on Data Retrieval in General Practice will facilitate the development of a more complete record of diabetes sufferers at general practice level.

Níl sé ar intinn faoi láthair clár lárnach d'fhulangaithe diaibéitis a dhéanamh. Tá clár diaibéitis phéidiatraicigh ann áfach ag an Roinn Eipidéimeolaíochta agus Sláinte Poiblí in Ollscoil na Banríona, Béal Feirste, ar son an Ghrúpa áitiúil Staidéir Diaibéitis.

Ina theannta sin, faigheann 60% d'othair aosacha le diaibéiteas níos mó ná leath dá ngnáthchúram diaibéiteach i gclínici. I suirbhé a rinneadh anseo ar na mallabhbh, chuir 96% de chlinici anseo in iúl go bhfuil clár gníomhach de dhaoine le diaibéiteas acu. Tá dhá thrian de na cláir seo ar ríomhairí agus táthar ag súil go gcuideoidh an tionscadal ar Fháil ar Ais Sonraí i gClínici le forbairt chláir níos iomláine d'fhulangaithe diaibéitis i gclínici.

HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

Long-term Unemployment

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail what recent representations he has received on his measures to tackle long-term unemployment. (AQW 3064/00)

The Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Dr Farren): I have received no recent representations. Measures to tackle long-term unemployment include the enhanced New Deal 25+ which was launched in April after extensive consultation; and the Task Force on Employability and Long-Term Unemployment which will be engaging with a wide range of people and organisations interested in these issues.

Basic Numeracy and Literacy

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment whether there is a need for investment to improve adult basic numeracy and literacy in each District Council area.

(AQW 3131/00)

Dr Farren: There is a need to address the problem of adult basic numeracy and literacy throughout Northern Ireland.

This is a key priority for my Department which is working to produce a strategy later in the year.

Peace I Funding: Carrickfergus Borough Council Area

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to explain why none of the 22.25 million funds for Peace I administered by Proteus was allocated to the Carrickfergus Borough Council area. (AQW 3132/00)

Dr Farren: Of the 951 applications PROTEUS received seeking funding from the EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation four were from the Carrickfergus Borough Council area.

Of these one was transferred to LEDU as the applicant had applied to PROTEUS under a measure for which it had no responsibility. The remaining three projects all failed the selection process because they did not comply with the Peace and Reconciliation Programme's guidelines for EU assistance.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Omagh: Road Adoption Criteria

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development to consider adopting the section of road from 114 Beltany Road, Omagh through to Castletown Road, Omagh. (AQW 2978/00)

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Campbell): The Private Streets (Northern Ireland) Order 1980 provides that my Department's Roads Service may adopt a road into the public road network if it is of the opinion that the road should become public (eg where there is significant public usage) and the majority of the frontagers or the landowner(s) request or agree to the adoption in writing. The legislation also requires Roads Service, except in exceptional circumstances, to be satisfied that the road is fit and proper to be adopted. In exercising this provision, a road that falls below adoption standards

would normally have to be upgraded at the expense of the frontagers or the landowner(s) before adoption.

I understand that the section of road in question is a private laneway which has minimal public usage as the adjacent adopted Killynure Road provides access between Beltany Road and Castletown Road. The laneway is extremely substandard in terms of structure, width and visibility and, even if it were to be considered as a desirable enhancement of the public road network, it would require substantial investment by the frontagers or the landowner(s) to bring it up to adoption standards.

Carrickfergus/Whitehouse: Sewerage System Upgrade

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to give his assessment on the sewage system for Ellis Street and Woodburn Road in Carrickfergus following new developments in these areas. (AQW 3022/00)

Mr Campbell: The sewerage system serving Ellis Street and Woodburn Road was constructed using the historic practice of combined foul and storm sewers.

Water Service is not aware of any out of sewer flooding at Ellis Street associated with heavy rainfall. Flooding from the sewer at Woodburn Road has however occurred during periods of exceptional rainfall. A detailed investigation has been undertaken and a number of short-term measures, to reduce the risk of future flooding, have been identified. These will be implemented within the next 18 months, subject to all necessary agreements.

Water Service has stipulated that separate storm and foul sewers are provided for the recent and proposed housing developments in these areas. This means that only the foul sewage from these developments is connected to the existing sewers. The volume of this is small in relation to capacity of the sewerage system and does not significantly increase the risk of flooding from the sewers.

A major upgrading of the sewerage network in the Carrickfergus and Whitehouse areas is planned to commence in 2006. This will enable the system to cope with future demands, reduce the risk of flooding, and meet environmental objectives.

Chemicals in Drinking Water Supply

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (a) whether a chemical used to make the inner coating of many food tins is present in the drinking water supply (b) what effect filtration has on the chemical and (c) what steps he is taking to address this issue.

(AQW 3027/00)

Mr Campbell: It is assumed the question refers to Bisphenol A, which has been the subject of recent articles about food contamination from protective liners applied

to food tins. Bisphenol A is used in the production of epoxy resins, which are used to coat some water supply pipes, as well as food tins. The independent Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food considers there is no evidence that the levels of Bisphenol A in canned foods surveyed were likely to be of health concern.

All products, which are in contact with drinking water, must be approved for use under the Water Quality Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1994. Materials are approved only after lengthy investigation by a panel of experts, called The Committee for Chemicals and Processes, who will take into account the potential leaching of chemicals into supply. The resins used to coat watermains have received approval under the Regulations. Indeed, only a very small percentage of watermains are epoxy lined, and it is unlikely that this situation will significantly change.

In the circumstances, there is no evidence that the presence of Bisphenol A in the water supply is a source of concern. However, Water Service is not complacent about these issues, and liaises closely with the Chief Medical Officer and the Drinking Water Inspector to ensure that its monitoring and testing arrangements are appropriate to cover any elements or substances in the water supply which may be detrimental to public health. In addition, Water Service contributes to a United Kingdom wide water industry research programme, which investigates issues such as the effect of chemicals entering drinking water, and on appropriate methods of removal of such chemicals.

Emergency Sewer Repair Work: Contracted Out

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to (a) detail his policy on contracting out emergency sewage repair work to external contractors (b) detail the number of occasions that this took place over the last three years and (c) give his assessment as to whether this is the most cost effective way of meeting the demands placed upon the Water Service Agency. (AQW 3054/00)

Mr Campbell: Water Service efficiency strategy is based on the United Kingdom Government's "Modernising Government" and "Better Quality Services" initiatives. The strategy involves implementing an annual programme of efficiency measures which target the activities and processes considered to offer the greatest scope for improvement in quality or cost. The efficiency measures are employed in an integrated manner to deliver the year on year efficiencies which allow Water Service to operate within the challenging running cost targets it faces annually.

Efficiency programmes over the last ten years have included market testing of a range of functions. In some cases this has resulted in work being contracted out. In other instances work has been retained through successful in-house bids.

Water Service has for many years used both in-house resources and external contractors in operational activities associated with sewer repair work such as desilting of sewers, sewer and manhole repairs and clearing sewer blockages. Over the past three years clearing sewer blockages has been contracted out in all areas except Belfast and Craigavon where in-house bids were successful. This involved two separate tender competitions.

The tendering process used for all these contracts followed European Union procurement procedures. All tenders were carefully evaluated against quality and cost criteria to ensure that the most economically advantageous offer was accepted for each contract. The contracts are monitored to ensure that the work continues to be provided in a cost-effective manner. At the end of the current contracts further tender competitions will be held.

I have been assured by Water Service that these arrangements are kept under review and that they represent the most cost effective means of delivering a high quality service to the public.

Roadworks: Co-ordinated Approach

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the measures he is taking to ensure that a co-ordinated approach is adopted by utilities where it is necessary to undertake roadworks. (AQW 3072/00)

Mr Campbell: Utilities have a statutory right to open roads and footways for the purpose of installing and maintaining their equipment. While my Department's Roads Service cannot prevent utilities from carrying out this work, it does endeavour, as far as possible, to co-ordinate their activities. For example, Roads Service has introduced a computer-based Northern Ireland Street Works Register and Notification System enabling it to monitor on-going and proposed street works by utilities and to negotiate with utilities where there is a conflict in their proposals. In addition, Roads Service has published a Code of Practice for the Co-ordination of Street Works and Works for Road Purposes and Related Matters which requires utilities to co-operate with one another so that, where possible, their works are carried out on a co-ordinated basis.

Safer Cycling

Mr Gibson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his plans to increase the level of safety for cyclists. (AQW 3074/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Northern Ireland Cycling Strategy, which was published in June last year, identifies a range of measures that will be undertaken by a number of agencies in the short to medium term to improve conditions for cyclists, including safety, and will

help to establish a pro-cycling culture. A copy of this document has been placed in the Assembly Library.

North Down/Ards Wastewater Treatment Works

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to give a timescale for the introduction of a new waste water treatment works planned for Newtownards. (AQW 3085/00)

Mr Campbell: North Down and Ards Borough Councils have accepted my invitation to nominate Councillors to join a Working Party to review the suitability of the criteria and processes used in the site selection for the new North Down/Ards Wastewater Treatment Works. The Working Party will commence the review shortly after the Local Government elections on 7 June and report to me by the end of August.

I will give detailed consideration to the findings which emerge from the review and I hope to be in a position to make an announcement on the most appropriate site in Autumn 2001. Subject to planning approval and land acquisition, the construction of the new Works is scheduled to commence in 2004. It will take three years to complete and is estimated to cost £35 million.

Assaults in Railway Stations

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of assaults that have occurred in railway stations in each of the last five years. (AQW 3107/00)

Mr Campbell: Translink has advised that there were six reported assaults in railway stations during 1996/1997, ten in 1997-98, seven in 1998-99, three in 1999-2000 and four in 2000-2001.

Adopted Roads: Castlederg

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail when Hazelgrove, Drumquin Road, Castlederg and Dergvale, Castlegore Road, Castlederg will be adopted by Roads Service. (AQW 3120/00)

Mr Campbell: In the case of private streets that have been determined through the planning process, it is the responsibility of developers to bring roads and sewers up to required standards for adoption by my Department. Where such roads and sewers are provided to the prescribed standards, they are adopted promptly.

As regards the developments at Hazelgrove and Dergvale, only the roads and sewers in Phase I of the latter have been adopted. Other roads and sewers have not yet been constructed to adoption standards.

Where satisfactory completion of roads and sewers is not effected within a reasonable period from the date of completion of houses, my Department has powers under the Private Streets (Northern Ireland) Order 1980, as amended, to enable it to complete the necessary work at developers' expense. Such action is normally only initiated after efforts to persuade developers to meet their obligations have not been successful, with each case being carefully considered on its merits.

My Department's Roads Service will contact the developers of Hazelgrove and Dergvale in an effort to resolve any outstanding issues so the roads and sewers in these developments can be completed and adopted as soon as possible.

Road Safety: Hamilton's Corner

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail what action is being taken to address road safety issues at Hamilton's Corner on the A5 between Sion Mills and Strabane. (AQW 3121/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service monitors personal injury road accidents across Northern Ireland to identify locations where specific engineering measures, in the form of accident remedial schemes, would reduce the number of road traffic accidents. I am advised that, when compared to other locations, the accident history at Hamilton's Corner on the A5 between Sion Mills and Strabane would not presently warrant such a scheme.

Aggregate Tax

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (a) his assessment of the impact of the aggregate tax on his policies (b) whether he has corresponded with the Department of Finance and Personnel regarding the likely impact of the tax and (c) what plans he has in place to alleviate any adverse impact. (AQW 3123/00)

Mr Campbell: I refer the Member to my answers of 12th January 2001 (AQW 1025/00) and 9th February 2001 (AQW 1490/00) to similar questions.

The introduction of the tax will raise roads structural maintenance costs by some 4% and the cost of capital schemes by between 4% and 17% depending on the nature and scale of the works.

The impact on the Water Service capital programme is estimated at about 1% additional costs and about 0.5% on the public transport capital budget.

As recently as last month (May 2001) my Department made further representations to the Department of Finance and Personnel on my behalf and registered bids for additional resources to cover the increased costs in the

context of next year's Budget. The bids reflect current estimated costs which total just under £8 million, rather than the £7 million we had assessed earlier. Failure of the bids will impact adversely on my capital programmes, particularly in the Roads Service, where the structural maintenance programme will also be severely affected.

Residential Areas: Speed Restrictions

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development if he plans to introduce legislation to enable residential areas to be protected by the introduction of 20mph speed restrictions and traffic calming ramps. (AQW 3145/00)

Mr Campbell: As indicated in my answer to your Written Assembly Question (AQW 102/00) on 29 September 2000, the legislation permitting the introduction of 20 mph speed limits on roads in residential areas in Northern Ireland is already in place. My Department's Roads Service has now introduced eleven 20 mph zones, each with self-enforcing traffic calming measures, and a further three zones are currently being developed. Roads Service will continue to create such zones through its on-going traffic calming programme which is aimed at reducing the number and severity of road traffic accidents.

Strabane: Bus Terminal

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 2748/00, if he will make it his policy to provide a purpose built bus terminal facility in Strabane. (AQW 3148/00)

Mr Campbell: The provision of a purpose built bus terminal facility in Strabane is primarily an operational issue for Translink and the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company to decide upon. Such a project would, however, have to be considered with other pressing transport priorities and would have to compete for the limited funding that is currently available for public transport in Northern Ireland. Although I accept that a purpose built bus terminal in Strabane would be highly desirable, I would not be justified, in the light of their other priorities, in asking Translink and the Holding Company to alter their programme to build such a facility now.

Motorring: Congestion Charge

Mr Gibson asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 2645/00, whether he has undertaken discussions with local authorities regarding the introduction of a congestion charge for motorists. (AQW 3157/00)

Mr Campbell: I have not had any discussions with district councils or any other organisations regarding the introduction of a congestion charge for motorists. However,

my Department's consultation paper, "Developing a Regional Transportation Strategy", which was published in January 2001, identified road user charging as a means of reducing traffic congestion and a potential source of funding for local transport improvements. A preliminary study on the introduction of such charging in Belfast is currently being undertaken by consultants on behalf of Roads Service.

When feedback from the consultation paper and the study findings have been assessed, I shall consider whether it is appropriate to undertake more detailed work on the introduction of road user charging. I can assure you, however, that any proposal to introduce such charging will, of course, be the subject of detailed consultation with appropriate interested parties.

Public Transport: Disabled

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the programme for upgrading public bus services to ensure that the disabled are adequately catered for. (AQW 3188/00)

Mr Campbell: Translink has embarked upon a programme to replace older buses in its fleet with new low floor accessible vehicles that will be easier for disabled people to use. The Budget for 2001-02 provides £1.7 million to assist Translink with its bus replacement programme. I am seeking additional funds for bus replacement grants.

As part of a national trial, Translink has been invited to operate a prototype fully accessible express coach on its Goldliner services. Discussions are in progress with a view to introducing the coach later in the year.

My Department continues to provide funding to Translink for the operation of Easibus services designed to meet the needs of elderly and disabled passengers. In 2001-02, revenue support of £122,000 has been earmarked for these services.

Public Transport: Disabled

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail how much funding was allocated to upgrade public transport for the disabled in the years 1999-00 and 2000-01. (AQW 3212/00)

Mr Campbell: In 1999-2000 and 2000-01, my Department provided the following funding to upgrade public transport for people with disabilities:

	£million	
	1999/00	2000/01
Bus purchase grant (low floor buses)	1.700	1.700

	£million	
	1999/00	2000/01
Rural Transport Funding for accessible midi-buses	0.368	-
Accessible minibuses for Rural Community Transport Partnerships	-	0.410
Revenue support for Easibus and Dial-a-Ride services for people with disabilities	0.644	0.679
Total	2.712	2.789

Grant was paid to Translink during these years from the European Regional Development Fund to assist the upgrading of bus and railway stations at Bangor, Newry, Armagh, Coleraine and Central Station in Belfast. The works included improvement of access to facilities for people with disabilities.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

NIHE: Constraints

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development whether there are constraining factors influencing the size of the Housing Executive's new build programme and to state how the new build programme compares against identified strategic requirements. (AQW 3040/00)

The Minister for Social Development (Mr Morrow): Independent research carried out on behalf of the Housing Executive and published in *The Northern Ireland Housing Market Review 2001-04*, has identified a need for some 1,500 new social dwellings each year. Current funding allocations, for the next 3 year period, allow for Housing Associations, which now provide all new social housing, to provide on average 1,300 new dwellings per year. It is estimated that some additional £28m, over the 3 year period, would be required to fund provision up to the projected level of need.

As part of last year's Spending Review, I made a substantial bid to cover the shortfall in provision. However, given the pressures on other funding priorities, the Assembly's Executive Committee was not able to meet the bid in full.

Given that resource difficulties may be a feature for the foreseeable future, my Department has been looking at ways in which to maximise the funding which is available.

New procedures, just introduced, now require Housing Associations to fund major repairs to their properties from their own resources, where previously they could apply to the Department for grant aid.

The Department and the Housing Executive are also pioneering new methods of procurement, which produce new social housing at a low cost to the public purse. A number of schemes are being advanced under competitive bidding arrangements, whereby Housing Associations are providing housing at rates of grant below the norm. Additionally, a new 'land for houses initiative' is being promoted where a Developer obtains Housing Executive land in exchange for providing social housing on part of the site.

I am still committed to the housing effort and while recognising the continued pressures on resources, intend to make a bid for additional resources at the next available opportunity.

Supporting People Project

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the 35 organisations making up the external reference group on the implementation of the "Supporting People" project and to explain the criteria used for the selection of these organisations. (AQW 3041/00)

Mr Morrow: The Supporting People project is being implemented by the Department for Social Development in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. The External Reference Group is an information sharing forum and has no responsibilities as regards the actual implementation of the project.

Nominations to the External Reference Group were sought from the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations and the Council for the Homeless NI which are the main umbrella bodies for those agencies dealing with the provision and management of supported housing schemes. Direct approaches were also made to a number of other Agencies to make sure that the full range of interests were represented.

The organisations represented are as follows:

- Equality Commission, Disability Unit
- Fold Housing Association
- A representative from the 4 Area Health Boards
- United Response
- North & West Housing
- Foyle Homeless and Advice
- Abbeyfield NI Development Society
- Triangle Housing Association
- Edward Street, Portadown (Hostel)
- Council for the Homeless
- Simon Community
- Extern
- MENCAP
- National Schizophrenia Fellowship

Building Capacity in Rural Areas Project: Areas

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development, following the Housing Executive's recent successful bid from Executive Programme Funds for the Building Capacity in Rural Areas project, to detail the 12 selected areas where it is intended to enhance community infrastructure. (AQW 3043/00)

Mr Morrow: An area selection process forms part of the project for which funding has been awarded and the final choice of project areas will only be known following a comprehensive profiling exercise in rural areas, by the Housing Executive, based on detailed selection criteria for example:

- Rural Estates will be targeted (ie outside Belfast and the larger towns).
- No direct community development support or activity in the last 3 years.
- Areas of high social need based on benefit dependency levels.
- Lack of community infrastructure (eg little/no local voluntary groups or community facilities).
- Areas will be spread across the Province.

An important aspect of the project is the contribution it will make to the broader regeneration and renewal strategies to be developed within rural communities as well as dealing with New TSN and Promoting Social Inclusion.

Building Capacity in Rural Areas: Plans

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the Housing Executive's plans for the Building Capacity in Rural Areas project, following the recent successful bid from Executive Programme Funds. (AQW 3044/00)

Mr Morrow: I should emphasise that the Building Capacity in Rural Areas project is a partnership initiative involving the Housing Executive, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), the Rural Community Network (RCN), the NI Voluntary Trust and all the local communities. The project is aimed at community development in rural estates in villages and more dispersed localities and is also referred to as the Rural Housing Estates Programme (RHEP).

£560K has been set aside in each of the years 2001-02 – 2003-04 (£140K from EPF; £140K from DSD; and £280K from DARD through PEACE II.).

The project will support both the Rural Development Programme and the Rural Housing Strategy with the aim of enhancing community infrastructure in 12 areas selected by the Housing Executive. Each area must have at least 500 NIHE homes with no or low existing representative community organisations and little evidence of community development. Another important consideration is the longer-term sustainability and growth of the communities concerned and any other complementary regeneration plans proposed or anticipated.

Discussions will take place with District Councils and Rural Networks to develop partnerships which will guide locally led teams to implement plans tailored to address the special needs of each locality and it is hoped that the first stage of local engagement will take place by the autumn.

NIHE: Anti-Social Behaviour Unit

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of prosecutions for breaches of the NIHE tenancy agreement in each of the 26 District Council areas, for (a) nuisance neighbours and (b) rent arrears. (AQW 3051/00)

Mr Morrow: The information is set out in the attached table. With the setting up by the Housing Executive of an Anti-Social Behaviour Unit, in November 2000, it is anticipated that the number of cases proceeding to court and enforcement will increase.

FINANCIAL YEAR 2000/2001

District Council	Anti- social Behaviour	Rent Arrears (Debt)
Antrim	0	92
Ards	1	134
Armagh	0	100
Ballymena	0	190
Ballymoney	0	23
Banbridge	0	75
Belfast	2	457
Carrickfergus	0	126

District Council	Anti- social Behaviour	Rent Arrears (Debt)
Castlereagh	0	277
Coleraine	0	44
Cookstown	0	45
Craigavon	0	103
Derry	0	104
Down	0	105
Dungannon	1	42
Fermanagh	0	62
Larne	0	88
Limavady	0	39
Lisburn	2	554
Magherafelt	0	36
Moyle	0	12
Newry & Mourne	0	60
Newtownabbey	1	304
North Down	0	235
Omagh	0	7
Strabane	0	15
Totals	7	3,329

Child Poverty: Co-ordinated Approach

Mr M Murphy asked the Minister for Social Development to detail what discussions he has had with other Departments to promote a co-ordinated approach to eliminating child poverty. (AQW 3066/00)

Mr Morrow: My Department contributes to the policy of eliminating child poverty through those aspects of the social security benefits system which target families on low incomes. In that context, my officials maintain contact with, principally, the Department for Social Security but also with the Inland Revenue and other Whitehall Departments, and other Northern Ireland Departments.

NIHE: Homeless

Mr G Kelly asked the Minister for Social Development to detail, by housing district on a monthly basis for the year 2000-01, (a) the number of individuals or families who were presented as homeless to the Housing Executive; (b) the number of homeless individuals or families; and (c) the waiting time of those accepted as homeless by the Housing Executive. (AQW 3067/00)

Mr Morrow: The table below, shows the total number of households who presented as homeless and were awarded full duty applicant status during the year 2000/01. A full duty applicant is someone to whom the Housing Executive owes a duty under the Housing (NI) Order 1988. Under that Order, the Housing Executive is required to secure that accommodation is made available for persons

who are homeless, in priority need, and not intentionally homeless.

The average time taken to rehouse those households accepted as homeless was 131 days. A total of 3,995 accepted homeless households were rehoused during the year. The figures for the Homeless Advice Centre (HAC) cases are shown separately because they relate to those who presented as homeless from outside NI, or who have no fixed address.

Districts	Number of households Presenting	Accepted as Full Duty Applicant	Waiting times for Accepted Applicants * (Days)				
			0-28	29-91	92-182	183 - 365	366+
Belfast 1	257	144	5	9	6	12	20
Belfast 2	494	213	23	34	33	24	12
Belfast 3	306	183	6	14	8	17	42
Belfast 4	361	184	32	39	15	12	8
Belfast 5	334	260	95	62	19	6	1
Belfast 6	615	340	32	59	29	26	38
Belfast 7	505	243	25	44	23	32	26
Bangor	434	260	27	90	33	14	2
Ards	584	262	46	73	23	20	1
Castlereagh	413	180	30	46	21	20	1
Lisburn	652	280	50	93	51	16	7
Dairyfarm	210	67	0	4	4	9	16
Down	534	266	36	55	44	35	9
Banbridge	271	98	34	25	5	4	0
Newry	459	184	48	54	21	13	2
Armagh	120	77	22	13	5	1	0
Brownlow	217	86	25	17	17	9	0
Dungannon	282	102	23	12	8	2	0
Fermanagh	302	144	43	45	11	7	0
Portadown	138	89	22	15	5	1	0
Ballymena	600	276	40	49	52	24	5
Antrim	429	212	43	41	10	6	2
Newtown-abbey1	241	124	24	35	12	5	2
Newtown-abbey 2	255	155	34	41	10	6	3
Carrickfergus	365	151	15	45	20	8	5
Larne	223	107	28	19	8	1	0
Ballycastle	41	26	4	4	2	0	0
Ballymoney	100	52	20	17	3	1	2
Coleraine	288	141	24	42	17	7	2
Waterloo Place	353	221	12	15	17	50	79
Waterside	385	257	67	39	26	26	13
Collon Tee	275	212	11	15	30	68	42
Limavady	118	80	18	32	12	3	0

Districts	Number of households Presenting	Accepted as Full Duty Applicant	Waiting times for Accepted Applicants * (Days)				
			0-28	29-91	92-182	183 - 365	366+
Magherafelt	176	98	30	20	7	4	0
Strabane	127	100	14	17	20	8	1
Omagh	124	49	13	5	2	0	0
Cookstown	136	57	25	10	1	1	0
HAC	952	463	47	65	52	32	35
N1 Total	12,694	6,457	1,093	1,314	682	530	376

* The figures in these columns relate only to those who have been re-housed and do not including those waiting to be re-housed.

NIHE: A1 (I) Status

Mr G Kelly asked the Minister for Social Development to detail, by housing district on a monthly basis for the year 2000-01, (a) the number of applications for A1 (I) status and (b) the number of individuals or families on Housing Executive waiting lists with A1 (I) status.

(AQW 3068/00)

Mr Morrow: A1(I) was an identifier used in the previous scheme which was replaced at November 2000. The current scheme records similar cases in the intimidation/civil disturbance category. The table below provides the information on these cases by Housing Executive District Office area.

A monthly breakdown of the figures could only be provided at a disproportionate cost. The figures for the Homeless Advice Centre (HAC) cases are shown separately, because they relate to those who presented as homeless from outside NI, or who have no fixed address.

Applications for Re-housing on Grounds of Intimidation/Civil disturbance by Housing Executive District Office area			
District Office	Number presented	Number accepted	Number on the waiting list*
Belfast 1	32	25	15
Belfast 2	67	29	32
Belfast 3	51	25	6
Belfast 4	103	72	15
Belfast 5	231	193	16
Belfast 6	151	100	25
Belfast 7	14	34	72
Bangor	27	17	11
Newtownards	30	12	5
Castlereagh	53	18	17
Lisburn	91	29	8
Dairyfarm	19	5	8
Downpatrick	19	10	9
Banbridge	27	9	1
Newry	22	14	1

Applications for Re-housing on Grounds of Intimidation/Civil disturbance by Housing Executive District Office area			
Armagh	16	9	2
Brownlow	11	8	1
Portadown	26	16	2
Dungannon	19	9	0
Fermanagh	10	6	0
Ballymena	78	43	5
Antrim	41	26	4
Newtownabbey 1	28	22	6
Newtownabbey 2	47	28	5
Carrickfergus	53	25	7
Larne	22	14	0
Ballycastle	4	4	2
Ballymoney	14	8	1
Coleraine	32	20	6
Waterloo Place	8	5	2
Waterside	48	35	4
Collon Tce	0	0	1
Limavady	9	6	0
Magherafelt	3	4	0
Strabane	3	4	0
Omagh	1	1	0
Cookstown	10	10	1
HAC	258	173	0
N Ireland	1678	1068	290

* The figures while including some of those accepted as homeless during the last year, they also include those from previous years who have not yet been re-housed and exclude those who have been already been re-housed.

Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings: Applications

Mr G Kelly asked the Minister for Social Development to detail, by housing district on a monthly basis for the year 2000-01, (a) the number of applications to the Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings Scheme and (b) the number of applications accepted for the Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings Scheme. (AQW 3069/00)

Mr Morrow: The number of applications received per month is set out in Table 1. Table 2 shows details of applications received over the year by District Council area. Of the 176 applications received, 38 did not qualify, and 15 were subsequently withdrawn. No monthly or geographic breakdown of the 123 applications which proceeded, is readily available.

TABLE 1 - SCHEME FOR THE PURCHASE OF EVACUATED DWELLINGS

Applications per Month	
April	11
May	7
June	16

Applications per Month	
July	14
August	21
September	27
October	12
November	23
December	9
January	12
February	13
March	11
Totals	176

TABLE 2

Applications Received 2000/01	
District Council	Number
Antrim	12
Ards	3
Armagh	4
Ballymena	5
Ballymoney	2
Banbridge	3
Belfast	47
Carrickfergus	13
Castlereagh	8
Coleraine	7
Cookstown	0
Craigavon	18
Derry	5
Down	1
Dungannon	2
Fermanagh	1
Larne	12
Limavady	2
Lisburn	7
Magherafelt	1
Moylke	0
Newry & Mourne	2
Newtownabbey	12
North Down	5
Omagh	4
Strabane	1
Totals	176

Pensioners: Means Testing

Mr Gibson asked the Minister for Social Development to give his assessment of means testing in respect of pensioners seeking to claim benefits. (AQW 3076/00)

Mr Morrow: State pension, which remains the foundation of most pensioners' incomes in retirement, is not means tested.

The social security system has always used means-tested benefits as part of a complementary mixture of provision alongside contributory and universal benefits. Each plays a part in meeting people's needs.

Pensioners may get additional help under the Minimum Income Guarantee. This is paid through Income Support which is an income-related benefit designed to help people whose income is below a specified level. This ensures that the additional help available is focused effectively on those pensioners who are in most need.

Poverty

Mr Gibson asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of households that were living in poverty in (a) 1997 and (b) at the latest date for which figures are available in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 3077/00)

Mr Morrow: There is no consensus on the definition of poverty or on how it should be measured. In Great Britain the Family Resources Survey allows an analysis of income inequalities. This survey will be extended to Northern Ireland from April 2002, as existing Northern Ireland sources of information are not adequate to allow comparable analyses.

Social Security data allows an analysis of the number of social security benefit units in Northern Ireland claiming a means-tested benefit:

NUMBER OF BENEFIT UNITS

Social Security Benefit	1997	Latest Date
Income Support	164,081	171,398 (February 2001)
Jobseeker's Allowance (Income-based)	49,188	32,216 (March 2001)
Family Credit/ Working Families Tax Credit	28,000	41,393 (November 2000)
Housing Benefit	141,100	129,191 (February 2001)

1. A household can comprise more than one benefit unit.
2. Information is taken from Quarterly Statistical Enquiries for Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance, Housing Benefit and Family Credit/Working Families Tax Credit. Data for 1997 is taken at November. Housing Benefit data for 1997 may be an over-estimate.
3. Family Credit was replaced by Working Families Tax Credit in November 1999 and is administered by the Inland Revenue.

Appeals Service

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (a) the number of appeals regarding benefit decisions in each of the last five years (b) the

number of appeals that were resolved in each in each of the last five years (c) the number of appeals currently being considered and (d) what steps are being taken to reduce the time taken to complete the appeals process.

(AQW 3081/00)

Mr Morrow: The number of appeals currently being considered is 5,230.

Year	Appeals Received	Appeals Heard
1996/1997	16,276	20,122
1997/1998	17,335	21,177
1998/1999	16,141	19,245
1999/2000	13,193	16,347
2000/2001	19,564	20,584

The Department for Social Development places a high priority on the reduction in the length of time to process an appeal. The Social Security Agency has increased the number of appeal writers and as a result the number of appeals to be written is reducing steadily. The Appeals Service has taken steps to reduce the time taken to complete the appeals process by recruiting additional administrative staff, authorising overtime working, increasing the number of weekly sessions for benefit related appeals and, in liaison with the Office of the President of Appeal Tribunals, cross-training medical members and initiating the planned recruitment of additional legally and medically qualified panel members.

Housing Benefit Scheme

Mr Gibson asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has any plans to change the Housing Benefit system.

(AQW 3102/00)

Mr Morrow: There are no plans to change the Housing Benefit scheme. However, from 2 July 2001 the arrangements for Decision Making and Appeals in respect of Housing Benefit will be brought into line with those applying in other social security benefits. These arrangements will provide for a right of appeal from a decision of the relevant authority to an appeal tribunal, with a further right of appeal, on a point of law, to the Social Security Commissioner, and from there to the higher courts. Under the revised arrangements Review Boards will be abolished from 2 July.

Also from 2 July 2001 the present cash limited Housing Benefit discretionary hardship scheme, will be replaced by a new cash limited Discretionary Housing Payments scheme. These new payments, will not be payments of housing benefit, but will be available at the discretion of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to those tenants whose benefit has been restricted by the rules governing maximum rent and whom the Executive consider are in

need of financial assistance, in addition to their benefit, in order to meet housing costs.

Housing Debt

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of prosecutions for housing debts per parliamentary constituency, in each of the last five years. (AQW 3109/00)

Mr Morrow: The information you requested is not available by parliamentary constituency. It is however, available by District Council area and is presented in the table below.

NUMBER OF PROSECUTIONS FOR HOUSING DEBT BY DISTRICT COUNCIL AREA

District Council	1996/97	1997/98	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01
Belfast	543	609	580	749	547
Bangor	142	155	128	168	260
Newtownards	107	114	107	118	172
Castlereagh	204	202	303	284	289
Lisburn	252	256	389	504	648
Down	66	54	130	86	123
Banbridge	27	23	24	7	98
Newry	22	55	47	42	76
Armagh	24	52	60	51	115
Craigavon	140	81	44	93	117
Dungannon	11	10	10	10	45
Fermanagh	27	23	35	28	65
Ballymena	202	230	264	241	224
Antrim	257	77	184	209	126
Newtownabbey	100	84	125	214	341
Carrick	77	56	58	40	333
Larne	59	72	64	76	95
Moyle	33	0	17	18	13
Ballymoney	6	6	44	5	26
Coleraine	64	46	37	30	76
Derry	112	130	122	80	123
Limavady	20	20	13	7	42
Magherafelt	27	15	7	10	39
Strabane	27	23	18	23	19
Omagh	22	19	5	10	9
Cookstown	15	16	11	4	55
NI Total	2586	2428	2826	3107	4076*

* Includes cases pending at 31 March 2001.

Disability Living Allowance: Number of Claims

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development, in respect of Disability Living Allowance, to detail (a) the number of claims for this allowance for each constituency in each of the last five years (b) his assessment of why some constituencies have a higher take-up rate than others and (c) what policy is in place to determine the authenticity of each claim. (AQW 3127/00)

Mr Morrow: The Social Security Agency does not hold information on the number of actual claims to Disability Living Allowance for each constituency, and therefore cannot comment on the take-up rate per constituency.

Each claim to Disability Living Allowance is considered on its own merit. To determine the authenticity of each claim and to ensure that customers receive the correct amount of benefit, supporting evidence is required for the majority of claims before a decision is given. Supporting evidence includes a report from the customer's doctor, an Agency doctor, consultant or social worker.

Minimum Income Guarantee: Uptake

Mr Gibson asked the Minister for Social Development to give his assessment on the factors mitigating the take-up of the minimum income guarantee. (AQW 3128/00)

Mr Morrow: The Social Security Agency has undertaken a range of measures to actively encourage uptake of the Minimum Income Guarantee. These initiatives have resulted in an additional 4,500 Pensioners receiving Minimum Income Guarantee with an average extra payment of £23.00 per week. Work will continue in this area to ensure Pensioners claim and receive all the help they are entitled to.

Pensioners: Occupational Pensions

Mr Gibson asked the Minister for Social Development whether an assessment has been made of the number of pensioners who have an occupational pension. (AQW 3130/00)

Mr Morrow: The Social Security Agency has carried out no assessment of the number of pensioners who have an occupational pension.

Housing Benefit Claims

Mr Gibson asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of people currently waiting for their Housing Benefit claim to be processed; and to make a statement. (AQW 3155/00)

Mr Morrow: At the end of May the Housing Executive was processing 1,483 claims from tenants in the public

rented sector and 2,106 from the private sector. In addition, amendments to 983 existing public sector claims were being processed, along with 1,346 in the private sector.

The Housing Executive is required by legislation to process all claims for Housing Benefit within 14 days of receiving all necessary information. During 2000/01 this was achieved in 96.4% of claims from tenants in the public rented sector, and 91.3% in the private rented sector.

The average number of days taken to assess new claims was 13.4 days for public sector claims, and 23 days for the private sector.

In a case in which the Housing Executive is unable to process a private sector claim within the statutory time limit, and the reason is not the fault of the claimant, the Executive will make a payment on account based on the information available.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 15 June 2001

Written Answers to Questions

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Common Fisheries Policy: Green Paper

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline her assessment of the objectives and options contained in the European Commission's Green Paper on the future of the Common Fisheries Policy after 2002. (AQW 2475/00)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers): *[holding answer 3 May 2001]*: The Green Paper is a comprehensive analysis, which provides a good basis for developing options for the future improvements to the Common Fisheries Policy. Currently the views of a wide range of local organisations (and the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee) are being sought on the Green Paper and I would obviously wish to consider the comments received before firming up a definitive stance for the debates ahead. At this point however, I would endorse the position as set out by the European Commission on the need for reform, on the key issues to be addressed and on specific objectives it has set for the future of the Common Fisheries Policy. These include a strengthening of the conservation and environment dimensions; emphasis on social and economic aspects of the policy; equity in monitoring and control; need for more stockholder involvement; improved fleet policy to match fishing capacity and stocks; improved research and scientific advice; and better health and safety and consumer protection.

Common Fisheries Policy: Green Paper

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline her proposals to assist and encourage the fishing industry to contribute to debate on the European Commission's Green Paper on the future of the Common Fisheries Policy after 2002. (AQW 2492/00)

Ms Rodgers: A consultation exercise was launched on 13 April which, invited views from a wide range of local organisations, including those in the fishing industry, on the European Commission's Green Paper. To encourage responses, in the related press release I have advised of the significance of this document and that the debate which will follow will influence decisions on future policy for this important industry.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 2573/00, to detail (a) whether the 'ad hoc' committee sought an amnesty for farmers involved in smuggling and (b) are any of the members of the committee suspected of being engaged in smuggling. (AQW 2998/00)

Ms Rodgers: *[holding answer 5 June 2001]*: Both my officials and I met groups of farmers from South Armagh at the time of the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak there. Those attending the meetings varied on each occasion and I am not clear which, if any, of those groups was the 'ad hoc' committee to which you refer. I can confirm, however, that at no time did individual farmers or those representing them raise the question of an amnesty in relation to smuggling activity. As I have stated on a number of occasions, the RUC are investigating a number of individuals relating to the circumstances surrounding the FMD outbreak. It is not for me to comment on those investigations or whom they may involve.

Copeland Water, Carrickfergus

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to give her assessment of works carried out at Copeland Water, Carrickfergus in relation to flood alleviation. (AQW 3187/00)

Ms Rodgers: I can confirm that, following a flooding incident arising from exceptionally heavy rainfall in Carrickfergus on 9 October 2000, the Rivers Agency carried out remedial works to reduce the risk of future flooding from the Copeland Water. The works included the reinforcement of the riverbank eroded by the flooding, and upgrading of a major grille at the upstream limit of the designated section of the watercourse. These works should ensure the restoration of the level of flood protection to an acceptable standard for an urban watercourse.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Meat Imports

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (a) from which countries meat imports are banned (b) if meat is being imported from countries currently affected by foot-and-mouth disease

and (c) what steps are being taken to ensure all food from these countries is thoroughly tested.

(AQW 3198/00)

Ms Rodgers: The answer to the points in your question are:-

- (a) The UK has placed a complete ban on imports of fresh meat from certain third countries with foot-and-mouth-disease outbreaks. These countries are Argentina, Brazil, South Africa, Swaziland and Uruguay, although this is under review at present.
- (b) Imports of meat into Northern Ireland are subject to veterinary checks. For consignments imported from unrestricted member states the checks will be carried out at the point of destination. However imports from GB (under present arrangements) and third countries must undergo full documentary, identity and where appropriate physical checks at the ports and border inspection posts. Only meat officially certified from non-restricted areas is accepted into Northern Ireland.
- (c) Controls are therefore based on the exclusion of products from high risk areas rather than the testing of imported products which at best would be an effective procedure in detecting localised contamination with virus.

TB: Livestock Movement Restrictions

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (a) her policy with regard to those farmers who have restrictions placed on the movement of livestock due to TB and (b) what steps she has taken to redress the financial losses incurred.

(AQW 3204/00)

Ms Rodgers:

- (a) In the case of suspect tuberculosis for example where there is suspicion at slaughter or where five or fewer animals react at the tuberculosis test (reactors), the herd is placed under restriction. If examination at slaughter proves negative then the restrictions may be lifted following the completion of a clear herd test carried out at least 60 days after the removal of the reactors. Where tuberculosis is confirmed the herd is restricted until two clear herd tests are achieved at intervals of 60 days after removal of any reactors. Animals can continue to be moved to slaughter when the herd is restricted for either support or confirmed tuberculosis.
- (B) Compensation for all animals slaughtered as a result of tuberculosis is paid at 100% of the market value for both reactor and in-contact animals. There is no provision for payment of compensation in any other circumstances.

Fishing Vessel Decommissioning Scheme

Mr O'Neill asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the criteria for the decommissioning of fishing vessels.

(AQW 3241/00)

Ms Rodgers: Work continues on the development of a fishing vessel decommissioning scheme. Currently the draft scheme is based on a tendering system by vessel owners for the disposal of their fishing vessels. Amongst the eligibility requirements would be that the vessel must be at least 12 metres long, fished at least 75 days in each of the preceding two years and at least 10 years old. Bids would be ranked according to the vessel capacity units times days at sea. Based on the bids, the Department would set separate 'strike prices' for vessels considered to be mainly targeting whitefish stocks at depletion risk and for other vessels outside this criteria. Successful applicants would then receive grant based on the strike price once their vessel had been decommissioned. The licence in respect of the vessel would be revoked but the owners would retain the track record (expressed in terms of fixed quota allocation (FQA) units) of the vessel.

Support for Fisherman

Mr O'Neill asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail what proportion of the recent package of support for fishermen has been allocated to whitefish and prawn fishermen.

(AQW 3242/00)

Ms Rodgers: My announcement of 29 March advised that the European Commission has agreed to allocate 29 million euros to assist the fishing industry through a range of measures. These include decommissioning of fishing vessels, processing and marketing, safety training, quality and marketing of fish on board fishing vessels, assistance to the Harbour Authority for capital projects and the promotion of fisheries products. With this wide range of measures it is not possible to quantify how much of this total amount will be of direct benefit to whitefish and prawn fishermen. Indeed, details of how this funding is to be allocated between measures has still to be agreed by the Monitoring Committee for the N.I Programme for Building Sustainable Prosperity. I will be making an announcement detailing the allocations as soon as the Monitoring Committee has agreed these. However, my earlier announcement did advise that of the total amount available £5 million would be available in the current financial year for the decommissioning of fishing vessels. Currently it is proposed that £3.75 million of this money would be targeted at whitefish boats catching these fish stocks at most depletion risk for example, Irish Sea Cod, with the remainder be used for other (including nephrops) vessels.

CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Promoting Ulster Culture Overseas

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the steps he is taking to promote Ulster culture overseas. (AQW 3046/00)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McGimpsey): *[holding answer 5 June 2001]*: The Department is committed to the early development of a marketing strategy to promote awareness of Northern Ireland's rich cultural treasures.

Northern Ireland's creativity and cultural expression are unique selling points. The Department is committed to helping build a positive image of Northern Ireland by developing and enhancing our cultural facilities and supporting a joined-up approach to the development of cultural tourism. The Department's Diversity 21 programme in particular, seeks to celebrate, and promote, the diverse cultures within Northern Ireland. This should include continued co-operation between the Tourist Board and bodies in the cultural sector, most notably the Arts Council. The Northern Ireland Film Commission also has a key role to play by attracting film and television production to Northern Ireland and promoting awareness of Northern Ireland locations. This will build confidence in Northern Ireland through new images on screens around the world.

The Department's Corporate Strategy sets out DCAL's ambitions for promoting a positive image of Northern Ireland abroad. DCAL is contributing to the cost of the Ulster Orchestra's appearance at the UK in NY festival in October 2001 as part of the Northern Ireland arts programme being co-ordinated by the British Council.

Tha Boord o Ulster Scotch, which is jointly funded by DCAL and the Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands in the Republic of Ireland, has a specific remit to promote greater awareness and use of Ulster-Scots language and culture. Tha Boord's Corporate Plan, produced in January 2001, outlines the strategy for promoting Ulster-Scots language and culture at home and abroad.

The Institute of Ulster-Scots studies set up at the Magee Campus of the University of Ulster is jointly funded by Tha Boord o Ulster Scotch and the university. One of the objectives of the Institute is to promote understanding and awareness of the Ulster-Scots identity within and beyond Northern Ireland.

The Institute of Ulster-Scots Worldwide Academic Network was launched on 5 April 2001 in Washington DC. I attended the reception to celebrate the launch. The purpose of the network is 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. Working

arrangements have been established with universities in Scotland, Canada, USA and Australia.

The Columba Initiative aims to foster close cultural and linguistic ties among the Gaelic-Speaking communities of Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Funding is provided from all three areas.

Ulster-Scots Language and Culture

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in respect of Ulster Scots language and culture, to detail (a) what steps he has taken to promote this matter (b) how much funding has he allocated to this matter (c) his policies for its future development and (d) what meetings he has had with the Department of Education to promote Ulster Scots language and culture within schools. (AQW 3210/00)

Mr McGimpsey: My Department, along with the Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands (DAHGI), funds the North/South Language Implementation Body which incorporates Tha Boord of Ulster-Scots. Tha Boord 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 the period 2001-02 to 2003-04. The aim of the plan is to 'promote the study, conservation, development and use of Ulster-Scots as a living language'. The plan supports four major themes at a total cost of £1.45 million over three years. These are: supporting Ulster-Scots as a living language and promoting its use and development; acting as a key contributor to the development of the Ulster-Scots culture; establishing partnerships with the education and community sectors to promote the study of the Ulster-Scots language, culture and history; developing the public's understanding of the Ulster-Scots language and culture.

For the year 2000-01 funding of £667,000 was available to Tha Boord. DCAL provided £500,000 of this. In 2001-02 £1.29m is available to Tha Boord. DCAL will provide £970,000 of this. Resources may also be available for projects with a language dimension which meet the objective criteria of Executive mainstream programmes.

The UK Government signed the Council of Europe Charter on Regional or Minority Languages in March 2000, recognising Ulster Scots as a language for the purposes of Part II and undertaking to apply general principles and objectives and not to discriminate against the languages recognised. My Department leads an Interdepartmental Group which is considering how best to implement the charter.

My Department has commissioned research, including a project to help the Ulster-Scots Language Society develop its strategic planning capability and a survey of

views on provision of Government services and official matters in Ulster Scots.

Officials from my Department and the Department of Education have met and discussed a range of educational issues including Ulster-Scots. A further meeting has been arranged. Both Departments have agreed to co-operate more closely to develop a co-ordinated approach to relationships with the North-South Language Body and with official counterparts in the Republic of Ireland. I believe this will help both Governments and the North/South Language Body to develop a coherent strategy for fulfilling education-related functions in both parts of the island of Ireland.

Youth Sport Programme

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail his plans to increase the participation of young people in sport. (AQW 3248/00)

Mr McGimpsey: The participation of young people in sport is one of the Sports Council's key work areas. At present over 700 schools are involved in its Youth Sport Programme and the Council is currently reviewing its Youth Sport Strategy to consider how to develop further opportunities for young people.

National Sports Stadium

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 1870/00, whether he has any plans to meet the Chairman of the Irish Football Association to discuss progress regarding the building of a national sports stadium for Northern Ireland. (AQW 3259/00)

Mr McGimpsey: I have no plans to discuss this matter with the Irish Football Association at present. The viability and sustainability of such a project is still under consideration. The subject is being considered in the context of the soccer strategy but a national stadium has implications for sports other than soccer.

Sport in School

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail what steps he is taking, in conjunction with the Minister of Education, to promote and encourage pupils to participate in sport at school. (AQW 3261/00)

Mr McGimpsey: Physical education is compulsory within the Northern Ireland curriculum for all pupils from age 4 to 16 to enable pupils to develop an understanding of the importance of physical activity to a healthy lifestyle in later life. Schools are encouraged to give pupils at least 2 hours PE per week and the programme of study enables teachers to develop the particular

sporting interests of all pupils. This is complemented by the Youth Sport Programme which is delivered in partnership with schools, education and library boards, district councils and the Sports Council for Northern Ireland and is consistent with my Department's objectives of promoting participation in sport.

Soccer Strategy

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail what developments have taken place since the publication of 'Creating a Soccer Strategy for Northern Ireland'. (AQW 3267/00)

Mr McGimpsey: The report, 'Creating a Soccer Strategy for Northern Ireland, Views of the Stakeholders', which was published on 5 February, was the outcome of a consultation exercise commissioned by my Department and was a key stage of the process in working towards a strategy for the sport. It provided an agenda for a conference workshop held on 10-12 February at which representatives of the key stakeholders debated the issues facing soccer and developed ideas for the future development of the game.

The advisory panel, which I established to guide and advise on the process, is currently at the critical stage of working on recommendations. I expect to receive the panel's report by the end of the summer and this will form the basis of a draft strategy document that I intend to publish for consultation, probably in September.

NI Film Commission

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (a) how much funding has been provided to promote Northern Ireland as a suitable location for the film industry (b) what meetings he has had with the Northern Ireland Film Commission and (c) what policy he is pursuing to promote this industry. (AQW 3268/00)

Mr McGimpsey: During the current financial year my Department will provide assistance totalling £412,000 to the Northern Ireland Film Commission, and the Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment will provide £250,000. The commission will receive a further £360,000 from a range of other organisations, including the UK Film Council and the British Film Institute.

I have had a number of meetings with the new chairman of the commission and my senior officials meet the chairman and chief executive of the commission on a regular basis.

The chairman and board of the commission are currently developing a new strategy which will be aimed at developing the sector in Northern Ireland. I expect to be in a position to discuss the new strategy with the board

of the Northern Ireland Film Commission in the very near future.

EDUCATION

Aggregates Tax on Schools Repairs

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail (a) his assessment of the impact of aggregates tax on schools repairs and building projects and (b) what meetings he has had with the Minister of Finance and Personnel regarding this matter. (AQW 3126/00)

The Minister of Education (Mr M McGuinness): The cost of aggregate would be about 0.6% of the contract value and is estimated to amount to an additional cost of £600,000 per year. My officials have raised this pressure on the capital budget with DFP officials and I will be discussing this with the Minister for Finance and Personnel at our next meeting.

Expulsion of Pupils from School

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Education to detail what recent representations he has received in respect of his policy on the expulsion of pupils from school. (AQW 3170/00)

Mr M McGuinness: No formal representations have been made to me recently about my Department's policy on the expulsion of pupils, the arrangements for which are governed by both primary and secondary legislation. However, I understand that officials in my Department have recently received representations from some education and library boards and some schools about:

- the operation of the current expulsion arrangements and the problems surrounding the admission of expelled pupils to alternative schools; and
- the need for a review of strategies aimed at tackling pupil disaffection and challenging behaviour.

As a result of these representations and earlier research, including that on developing alternative education strategies for disaffected pupils, my Department will be undertaking a comprehensive review of the effectiveness of the current expulsion and suspension arrangements in consultation with interested parties. The aim will be to complete this review by mid 2002. In addition a draft strategy on alternative education provision for disaffected pupils will be published for consultation during the next school year.

Class Management System

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Education whether he has any plans to support schools in using information technology to tackle truancy. (AQW 3171/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Every school is responsible for monitoring the attendance of its pupils and for notifying the education and library boards about persistent absenteeism. The existing computerised administration system used by most schools (CLASS) contains an attendance module which enables schools to monitor individual pupil attendance on a morning and afternoon basis. The option of developing the existing CLASS management information modules to provide more meaningful information and reports on non-attendance, behaviour, suspensions, and expulsions, is currently being explored.

Woodburn Primary School, Carrickfergus

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Education to detail any plans he has to upgrade Woodburn Primary School, Carrickfergus. (AQW 3177/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Woodburn Primary School is a controlled school which is the responsibility of the North-Eastern Education and Library Board. A capital scheme to replace the school has been placed on the Department's capital priority list but a new site must be found before the Board can complete an economic appraisal. The Board is currently reviewing facilities at the school with a view to undertaking some essential minor works to meet short term needs.

Promoting Environmental Issues

Mr Fee asked the Minister of Education to detail the steps he is taking to promote awareness of environmental issues in (a) primary schools (b) secondary schools and (c) grammar schools. (AQW 3182/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Awareness of environmental issues is already included in the curriculum, mainly through the science programme of study which is compulsory for all children aged 4-16. In addition, environmental responsibility is one of the issues which has been highlighted by the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) as part of the current curriculum review.

Aggregated Schools Budget (ASB)

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Education in relation to the consultation document 'A Common Funding Formula for Grant-Aided Schools', to give a commitment to provide the necessary figures to each individual school to enable them to determine how the low and high aggregated schools budget (ASB) will impact on the funding available to them. (AQW 3195/00)

Mr M McGuinness: I do not intend to release the Department's assessment of the impact of the formula on individual schools because this could be misleading

in view of the various assumptions which have had to be made in constructing the funding model. These assumptions and other constraints are outlined in the consultation document.

I have however decided to release the value of the AWPU applicable to the low and high ASB models and schools may wish to use this in framing their response. I must however stress that these AWPU figures are based on the composite pupil count for 2000/1 and would also be subject to change should the various assumptions made in the model require revision. The relevant figures are:-

high ASB model £1,236.72; and;

low ASB model £1,203.91

Translation Services

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 2668/00, to detail the normal translation service used by the Department including (a) was the service initially put out to tender (b) how many applications were received for the tender (c) how much was the tender worth (d) on what basis was the tender awarded (e) who was the successful applicant and (f) when is the tender due for renewal. (AQW 3196/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The Department of Education commissions translation work from a number of Irish language translators drawn from a list available to Departments. Work is commissioned as required from a translator who is available and able to complete the work within the required deadline. No tendering process is entered into in respect of each piece of work commissioned. A review of translation services for Departments is currently being undertaken by an inter-departmental group.

Translation Services

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 2668/00, to detail (a) the date on which the single tender action was initiated (b) how many bids were received for the tender (c) on what basis was the tender awarded and (d) who was the successful applicant. (AQW 3197/00)

Mr M McGuinness: A single tender action was initiated on 16 March 2001 with a recommended translator to translate the Consultation Document on a Common Funding Formula for Grant-Aided Schools and the Response Form into Irish. This was the only invitation made by the Department to have this work processed. The job was undertaken by Mr Sean McNally.

Arson Attacks: Cost of Repairs

Mr Leslie asked the Minister of Education to provide the estimated cost of repairing schools damaged by

arson attacks in the North-Eastern Education Library Board area in the calendar year 2000. (AQW 3207/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The board has estimated the cost of repairing controlled and maintained schools to be some £74,000.

Common Funding Formula: Dalriada School, Ballymoney

Mr Leslie asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 2861/00, to detail the monetary value attached to each age weighted pupil unit for (a) a high aggregated schools budget (ASB) and (b) a low ASB.

(AQW 3208/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The age weighted pupil unit cash value used in the illustrated outcomes at Annex 1 of the document was £1,236.72 under the high ASB model and £1,203.91 under the low ASB model.

I must however stress that these AWPU figures are based on the composite pupil count for 2000-01 and would also be subject to change should the various assumptions made in the model require revision.

Common Funding Formula: Dalriada School, Ballymoney

Mr Leslie asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 2861/00, to detail the monetary value in the formula deriving from (a) TSN - social deprivation and (b) TSN - special education need. (AQW 3209/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The amounts due to Dalriada School under the proposals for TSN funding contained in the consultation document 'A Common Funding Formula for Grant Aided Schools' are as follows:-

Social Deprivation:	£6,910
Special Educational Need:	£762

I must however stress that these figures are subject to the constraints set out in section 18.2 of the consultation document and could change should the various assumptions made in the model require revision.

Local Management Scheme for Schools

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education whether legislation is required to introduce a unified local management scheme (LMS) for schools. (AQW 3232/00)

Mr M McGuinness: A common LMS Scheme will be necessary to make clear the detailed operation of the common funding formula to which each funding authority must adhere and I have been advised that legislation will be required to achieve this.

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

National Minimum Wage

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of people who have benefited from the national minimum wage since its introduction. (AQW 3229/00)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Sir Reg Empey): The national minimum wage (NMW) is a reserved matter, on which DTI leads for the UK as a whole. They estimate that some 1.5 million jobs in the United Kingdom were paying below the minimum rate when the legislation was introduced in April 1999.

There is no definitive estimate of the number of people directly affected by the NMW legislation. However, the new earnings survey estimates that the percentage of Northern Ireland employees earning less than the NMW reduced from 6.6% in April 1998 to 2.3% in 1999 and 1.2% in April 2000.

ENVIRONMENT

Knockagh Monument

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment to detail what steps he is taking to ensure the conservation and preservation of Knockagh Hill. (AQW 3183/00)

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Foster): My Department has taken a number of steps to ensure the conservation and preservation of Knockagh Hill:

- (a) The area is located within the Belfast urban area greenbelt where there is a presumption against development.
- (b) The extent of the nature conservation value of the Knockagh Hill and its main habitats were mapped following a 'Nature in the City' survey commissioned by my Department in 1999, while the Area Plan identifies for protection sites of nature conservation importance in the Knockagh area.
- (c) In addition, the Knockagh Hill was designated as an Area of High Scenic Value by my Department in the Carrickfergus Area Plan 2001, due to its scenic and landscape quality. This designation will ensure that any new development maintains the particular landscape quality and character of the area. The Carrickfergus Area Plan also identified Knockagh as an Area of Constraint on Mineral Development in recognition of the damaging

effects that mineral development could have on its scenic quality.

- (d) A number of archaeological sites in the area have been recorded by my Department including the County Antrim War Memorial, known locally as "The Knockagh monument", which has been afforded statutory protection by listing under part V article 42 1(a) of the Planning (NI) Order 1991. Any proposals affecting this monument would be subject to the normal Listed Building Consent process.

The Carrickfergus Area Plan will remain in force until it is superseded by the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan. The issues paper for the new plan, to be published by my Department in the autumn of this year, will provide the opportunity for further debate on the issue of landscape protection in the area.

Vehicle Excise Duty: Public Awareness

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the steps he has taken to make the public aware of the rebate on vehicle excise duty for car engines under 1500cc. (AQW 3205/00)

Mr Foster: The registration and licensing of vehicles are excepted matters. They are 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 (DETR).

The extension of the reduced rate of vehicle excise duty to include cars with engine sizes up to 1549cc, taxed in the PLG class, was announced in the Chancellor's March Budget. The implementation date for this extension is 1 July 2001. In Northern Ireland approximately 125,000 vehicles will qualify for a rebate on their licence.

A "stop press" note was added to a series of advertisements being run in the 3 main newspapers in Northern Ireland in March giving details of the previous rebate scheme for vehicles with engine sizes up to 1200cc. This note advised customers about the extension of the reduced rate of duty to 1549cc and told them that keepers would be notified later with full details. Information on the scheme has been available in leaflets which have been obtainable since March at the agency's 8 local offices, or by telephoning the agency's headquarters in Coleraine. Information has also been available on the agency's website.

DVLNI will issue a letter in the first week of July to the registered keeper of each eligible car. The letter will include a tear-off claim form and rebates will be paid on receipt of the claim form. This will be supported by an advertising campaign which will be run in the Belfast Telegraph, Newsletter and Irish News between 24 June and 2 July 2001. In late August, the same papers will carry advertisements to encourage any keepers who

have not returned their application forms for their rebate to do so as soon as possible.

Disposal Site at Kilroot Power Station

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 2320/00, to detail the conditions specified regarding the height and profile of the disposal site at Kilroot Power Station. (AQW 3216/00)

Mr Foster: The operator is required to comply with the approved plan for the ash disposal area, ref: 6285/E/7, under the planning permission granted on 21 July 1987.

The plan, which details the approved elevations and sections for the disposal area, provides for a mound with a storage capacity of approx. 2,500,000 tonnes levelling out at 16 metres in height, with additional storage capacity of approx. 620,000 tonnes on top plateauing out at 32 metres height.

The mound was measured by my officials during a site visit on 8th June 2001 and found to be 14 metres in height.

The plan can be viewed by the public by arrangement with Planning Headquarters; Special Studies Section, at Bedford House, Bedford Street, Belfast, Tel 02890 252940, and I have arranged for a copy to be sent to you.

Noise Nuisance: Collation of Data

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 3050/00, whether he has any plans to collate the data in order that an assessment of the extent of the problem can be made. (AQW 3219/00)

Mr Foster: The Department does not currently have any plans to collate data on the number of prosecutions for noise nuisance taken by district councils in Northern Ireland.

Details of the number of prosecutions taken under the relevant legislation, the Pollution Control and Local Government (NI) Order 1978 should be available from each district council. It should, of course, be noted that under the Order it is also open to the occupiers of premises affected by noise to complain direct to the magistrates' court.

Collation of data on prosecutions for noise nuisance is not among my Department's priorities at present.

Planning Service: Ensuring Completion Standards

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment to detail what steps are taken by the Planning Service to

ensure that development proposals are completed to planning standards prior to the developer leaving the site. (AQW 3220/00)

Mr Foster: The operator is required to comply with the approved plan for the ash disposal area, ref: 6285/E/7, under the planning permission granted on 21 July 1987.

The plan, which details the approved elevations and sections for the disposal area, provides for a mound with a storage capacity of approx. 2,500,000 tonnes levelling out at 16 metres in height, with additional storage capacity of approx. 620,000 tonnes on top plateauing out at 32 metres height.

The mound was measured by my officials during a site visit on 8th June 2001 and found to be 14 metres in height.

The plan can be viewed by the public by arrangement with Planning Headquarters; Special Studies Section, at Bedford House, Bedford Street, Belfast, Tel 02890 252940, and I have arranged for a copy to be sent to you.

Car Insurance Discs: Introduction

Ms Armitage asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has any plans to introduce a car insurance disc, similar to the vehicle excise disc. (AQO 1602/00)

Mr Foster: I would refer the Member to the Memorandum of Reply to the Public Accounts Committee's Report on Road Safety which was laid before the Assembly by the Department of Finance and Personnel on 1 December 2000.

The following is an extract from the memorandum of reply:

"DOE notes the Committee's recommendation that compulsory display of MOT discs should be introduced as quickly as possible and extended to include insurance discs. Introduction of a MOT certificate in disc format will become possible as part of the DVTA test equipment replacement programme. The change to disc format can be made under current legislation. Initially, display will be on a voluntary basis. New subordinate legislation would be required to make display of discs compulsory. This would become possible when the test equipment replacement programme has been completed and all MOT certificates are available in disc format. The earliest date for completion of the replacement programme is mid-2002, subject to contract. In the meantime, DOE will draw up policy proposals for consultation with the public and with the Assembly Environment Committee to take account also of wider MOT compliance and enforcement issues. The idea of introducing a similar requirement for insurance will also be examined in this context."

This remains the position in relation to the introduction of car insurance discs.

“Sly Fox” Moy, County Tyrone

Mrs Carson asked the Minister of the Environment whether he took into account the issue of road safety when considering the planning application for an extension to “The Sly Fox”, Moy, Co. Tyrone; and to make a statement. (AQW 3228/00)

Mr Foster: I can confirm that my Department took into account the issue of road safety in its consideration of this proposal.

In accordance with standard consultation procedures, the Department for Regional Development’s Roads Service was consulted on this planning application. Their response, received on 21 July 1998, raised no objection to the proposed development.

Improving Road Safety Policy

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of the Environment to detail any future plans to improve road safety policy. (AQW 3233/00)

Mr Foster: I would refer the Member to the consultation document which I published on 2 May 2001 and which seeks views on a new road safety strategy for Northern Ireland to 2010. A copy of the document was provided to all Members and further copies are available in the Assembly Library.

The document provides an analysis of the road safety problem in Northern Ireland, reviews current road safety measures and the reductions in road casualties made to date. It presents for consideration proposals for long-term casualty reduction targets and indicates a number of potential measures which would contribute to road casualty reduction in Northern Ireland.

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Peace II Funding

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail when Peace II Funding will become available. (AQW 3217/00)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan): Following the formal signing of the PEACE II Operational Programme by Commissioner Barnier on 22 March 2001, work has proceeded in drawing up the programme complement, which sets out the detail of the programme at measure level, for agreement by the Monitoring Committee. The programme complement must be agreed within three months of the signing of the operational programme, (ie by 21 June 2001) and the latest draft has been tabled for consideration by the Monitoring Committee

at its meeting on 15 June 2001. The implementing bodies involved in the delivery of the programme will be able to issue calls for projects after the programme complement has been agreed and it is anticipated that funding will begin to become available to groups on the ground from September onwards. This is to allow time for evaluation and selection procedures to take place.

Gap Funding

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to give an assessment of gap funding. (AQW 3218/00)

Mr Durkan: There has been considerable interest in the gap funding advertisement, which was placed in the local press on behalf of Departments and the Special EU Programmes Body on 16 March 2001, with approximately 1000 applications received in response. The great majority of applications received were from community and voluntary sector organisations previously funded under PEACE I. Departments and the Special EU Programmes Body are currently processing these applications and have started to issue letters of offer, or rejection, to project sponsors. This process is expected to be completed within the next two weeks. Only after decisions have been taken on each individual project application received will it be possible to provide an overall assessment of gap funding. This information will therefore be made available once Departments and the Special EU Programmes Body have completed their selection procedures.

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Response Times of Occupational Therapy Departments

Mr Fee asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what progress is being made with improving the response times by occupational therapy departments to referrals by the Housing Executive grants department. (AQW 3168/00)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms de Brún): Implementation of the recommendations in the preliminary report of the joint Housing Executive/Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety review of the housing adaptations service commenced in March. The health and social services boards intend to deploy the additional 20 occupational therapists which are being funded by my Department this year, on housing adaptation assessments. These measures should make a significant contribution to my priorities

for action target of a 20% reduction in the numbers waiting for occupational therapy housing adaptation assessments.

Thosaigh cur i bhfeidhm na moltaí i Réamhthuaisir Chomhathbheithníú an Fheidhmeannais Tithíochta/na Roinne Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí ar an tseirbhís oiriúnú tithíochta i Márta. Tá sé ar intinn ag Boird Shláinte agus Sheirbhísí Sóisialta 20 teiripí saothair breise, atá á maoiniú ag an Roinn s'agamsa i mbliana, a chur i mbun oibre ar mheasúnuithe oiriúnú tithíochta. Ba chóir do na bearta seo cuidiú go mór le sprioc mo Thosaíochtaí do Bhearta le líon na ndaoine ag fanacht le measúnuithe oiriúnú tithíochta teiripe saothair a laghdú faoi 20% a bhaint amach.

Occupational Therapists: Newry and Mourne Trust

Mr Fee asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what progress is being made to increase the number of occupational therapists employed by the Newry and Mourne Trust.

(AQW 3169/00)

Ms de Brún: Health and social services boards and Trusts are responsible for ensuring that there are sufficient occupational therapists to provide the level of service to meet the assessed needs of their population.

Newry and Mourne HSS Trust will shortly be recruiting additional occupational therapy staff in line with the trust's share of the resources made available this year. The posts will be advertised within the next few weeks.

Boird agus Iontaobhais Shláinte agus Sheirbhísí Sóisialta atá freagrach as cinntiú go bhfuil go leor teiripithe saothair ann leis an leibhéal seirbhíse atá riachtanach a sholáthar le riar ar riachtanais mheasúnaithe a ndaonraí.

Beidh Iontaobhas SSS an Iúir agus Mhúrn ag earcú foirne breise teiripe saothair ar ball de réir sciar an Iontaobhais de na hacmhainní curtha ar fáil i mbliana. Fógrófar na poist laistigh den chúpla seachtaine seo chugainn.

Data Collection on Cancellation of Operations

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 2872/00, to detail what information is available on this matter.

(AQW 3174/00)

Ms de Brún: My Department collects information on numbers of elective admissions to the surgical specialties that were readmitted within one month if they have had a previous operation cancelled on the day that they were due to be admitted. This information is collected quarterly for each local trust and for ordinary admissions and day cases separately. My Department also collects annual information on "did not attend"

(DNA) rates for inpatient admissions and outpatient appointments. This information has been published in the annual performance tables publication, which is available in the Assembly Library and on my Department's website.

Cruinníonn an Roinn s'agamsa eolas ar líon na ndaoine glactha isteach sna speisialtachtaí máinliachta agus a athghlacadh isteach laistigh de mhí amháin má bhí obráid acu roimh ré curtha ar ceal ar an lá a glacadh isteach iad. Cruinnítear an t-eolas seo go ráithiúil do gach Iontaobhas áitiúil, do dhaoine glactha isteach sa ghnáthdhóigh agus do chásanna lae ina gceann agus ina gceann. Cruinníonn an Roinn s'agamsa eolas bliantúil fosta ar rátaí dofhreastalta do ghlacadh isteach othar cónaitheach agus do choinní éisothar. Foilsíodh an t-eolas seo i bhfoilseachán bliantúil Tháblaí Feidhmithe, atá ar fáil i Leabharlann an Tionóil agus ar líonláithreán mo Roinne.

Hospital Appointments

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 2871/00, to detail what information is available on this matter.

(AQW 3175/00)

Ms de Brún: The main data collected by my Department which are relevant to this question are numbers of outpatient clinics cancelled by hospitals. This information is published in the annual hospital statistics publication, which is available in the Assembly Library and on my Department's website. My Department also collects information on 'did not attend' (DNA) rates for inpatient admissions and outpatient appointments. These figures are published in the performance tables, which are also available in the Assembly Library and on my Department's website.

Líon na gclinicí éisothar cealaithe ag otharlanna is ea na príomhshonraí cruinnithe ag an Roinn s'agamsa atá bainteach leis an cheist seo. Foilsítear an t-eolas seo san fhoilseachán bliantúil Staidreamh Otharlann, atá ar fáil i Leabharlann an Tionóil agus ar líonláithreán mo Roinne. Cruinníonn an Roinn s'agamsa eolas bliantúil fosta ar rátaí dofhreastalta do ghlacadh isteach othar cónaitheach agus do choinní éisothar. Foilsítear na figiúirí seo sna Táblaí Feidhmithe, atá ar fáil i Leabharlann an Tionóil agus ar líonláithreán mo Roinne fosta.

Speech and Language Therapy: Children

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 2893/00, to detail when the report of the joint working group will be made available.

(AQW 3176/00)

Ms de Brún: The joint working group has identified a number of key issues and is currently determining the

work needed to take these forward. It is not therefore yet in a position to set a timetable for completion of its task.

D'aithin an comhghrúpa oibre roinnt eochaircheisteanna agus tá sé ag cinneadh ar an obair atá de dhíth le dul i gceann na gceisteanna seo faoi láthair. Mar sin de, níl sé réidh go fóill le clár ama a shocrú do chríochnú a thaise.

Health Trusts: Alternative Day Care Centres

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the criteria health trusts follow in their approach to funding alternative day care centres. (AQW 3178/00)

Ms de Brún: The provision of day care is a matter for health and social services trusts, who will take account of issues such as the clinical assessment of the needs of the potential users of the services and the availability of resources.

Is ceist d'Iontaobhais Shláinte agus Sheirbhísí Sóisialta é soláthar cúraim lae, a ghlacfaidh san áireamh ceisteanna amhail measúnú clínicíúil riachtanais úsáideoirí ionchasacha na seirbhísí agus infhaighteacht acmhainní.

Chiropodists: Ards Community Trust

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of chiropodists employed in the Ards Community Trust area in 1999-2000 and 2000-01. (AQW 3189/00)

Ms de Brún: In both 1999-2000 and 2000-01, there were 6.2 whole-time equivalent chiropodists employed by the Ulster Community & Hospitals Trust.

Sa bhliain 1990-2000 agus 2000-01 araon, bhí 6.2 coslia coibhéis ama iomláin fostaithe ag Iontaobhas SSS Phobal & Otharlann Uladh.

Mobile Chiropody Service: Greyabbey

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of patients cared for by the mobile chiropody service in the Greyabbey area in the years 1999-2000 and 2000-01. (AQW 3190/00)

Ms de Brún: The mobile chiropody service in the Greyabbey area cared for 43 patients in 1999-2000 and 48 patients in 2000-01.

Thug seirbhís chosliach shoghluaiste Na Mainistreach Léithe cúram do 43 othar sa bhliain 1999-2000 agus do 48 othar sa bhliain 2000-01.

Mobile Chiropody Service: Greyabbey

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to explain why the mobile chiropody service, provided through the Ards Community Trust, was withdrawn from the Greyabbey Area. (AQW 3191/00)

Ms de Brún: The mobile chiropody service provided by the Ulster Community & Hospitals Trust was withdrawn from the Greyabbey area because of mechanical breakdown. Service users from Greyabbey were offered chiropody clinic appointments in Newtownards, which would require them to travel by public transport. This alternative arrangement is proving unacceptable to service users who are elderly/or vulnerable and unable to travel by public transport. The Eastern Health and Social Services Board is working with the trust to find a resolution to this matter.

Tarraingíodh seirbhísí gluaisteacha cosliachta soláthraithe ag Iontaobhas SSS Otharlanna agus Phobal Uladh siar i gceantar na Mainistreach Léithe mar gheall ar chliseadh mheicniúil. Tairgeadh coinní a dhéanamh d'úsáideoirí seirbhísí ón Mhainistir Liath le clínicí cosliachta i mBaile Nua na hArda, a mbeadh orthu taisteal chucu ar iompar poiblí. Is léir go bhfuil na socrúithe eile doghlactha d'úsáideoirí seirbhísí atá cnagaosta/nó leochaileach agus nach bhfuil ábalta taisteal ar iompar poiblí. Tá Bord Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta an Oirthir ag comhoibriú leis an Iontaobhas le teacht ar réiteach na ceiste seo.

Drugs: Enbrel and Remicade

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 1841/00, to detail (a) the funding arrangements for the drugs Enbrel and Remicade (b) why these drugs are not being made widely available (c) why only 42 patients have received these drugs and (d) what steps she is taking to increase provision. (AQW 3199/00)

Ms de Brún:

- Approximately £500,000 is currently being allocated in this financial year (2001-2002) for these two new drugs (Enbrel and Remicade). Each HSS Board has taken account of these new developments and there has been a gradual introduction of these drugs in each Board area.
- I am currently awaiting further expert advice on the effectiveness of these medicines and as with any new and complex drug therapy, patient safety is of the utmost importance; there remain some concerns about the potential for serious side effects. These include serious blood disorders, nervous system problems and increased susceptibility to tuberculosis and other infections. In the meantime my Department

will continue to work with HSS boards, clinicians and service users to promote a gradual introduction of these drugs, taking account of guidelines from the Society of Rheumatology, emerging evidence of effectiveness and the availability of resources.

- (c) At the time of this response, details available from health boards indicate that 66 service users are currently receiving these drugs. Boards have agreed to take a cautious approach to a gradual introduction of these drugs taking account of increasing evidence of effectiveness and available resources. It is crucial that those patients who do receive these drugs remain under specialist supervision and have their treatment carefully monitored and evaluated.
- (d) If a decision is made to move beyond their gradual introduction and further resources are necessary, I will not hesitate to seek the support of the Executive to ensure that they are made available to meet these emerging requirements.
- (a) Tá thart fá £500,000 á dháileadh faoi láthair sa bhliain airgeadais seo (2001-2002) don dá dhruaga nua (Embrel agus Remicade). Chuir gach Bord SSS na forbairtí seo san áireamh agus tugadh na drugaí seo isteach de réir a chéile i ngach ceantar Boird.
- (b) Faoi láthair tá mé ag fanacht le comhairle breise ó shaineolaithe ar éifeacht na gcógas seo agus de réir mar a tharlaíonn de ghnáth le tabhairt isteach teiripe nua agus choimpléascaigh drugaí ar bith, tá tábhacht as cuimse ag baint le sábháilteacht othar, ach tá roinnt buarthaí ann go fóill faoi na seachthorthaí tromchúiseacha féideartha. Ina measc tá easláintí fola, fadhbanna néarchórais agus méadú i dtógáilacht d'eitinn agus do ghalruithe eile. Idir an dá linn, leanfaidh an Roinn s'agamsa ar aghaidh comhoibriú a dhéanamh le Boird SSS, dochtúirí agus le húsáideoirí seirbhísí le tabhairt isteach de réir a chéile na ndrugáí seo a chur chun cinn, ag cur treoirlínte ó Chumann na Réamaiteolaithe, fianaise shoiléir éifeachta agus infhaighteacht acmhainní san áireamh.
- (c) Ag uair an fhreagra seo, léiríonn sonraí ar fáil ó Bhoird Shláinte go bhfuil 66 úsáideoir seirbhísí ag fáil na ndrugáí seo faoi láthair. Chomhaontaigh Boird cur chuige airdeallach a ghlacadh do thabhairt isteach de réir a chéile na ndrugáí seo, ag cur níos mó fianaise éifeachta agus infhaighteachta acmhainní san áireamh. Tá sé barrthábhachtach go gcoinneofar na hothair sin a fhaigheann na drugaí seo faoi mhaoirseacht shainiúil agus go ndéanfar monatóireacht agus measúnú cúramach ar a gcóireáil.
- (d) Má dhéanfar cinneadh le dul thar a dtabhairt isteach de réir a chéile, agus acmhainní riachtanacha breise de dhíth, ní bheidh aon leisce orm iarracht a dhéanamh tacaíocht an Fheidhmeannais a fháil le cinntiú go gcuirfear ar fáil le riar ar na riachtanais shoiléire seo iad.

Ulster Hospital: Waiting Lists

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) the number of patients on waiting lists at the Ulster Hospital in comparison to each hospital in Northern Ireland (b) whether waiting lists at the Ulster Hospital are increasing or decreasing and (c) what steps are being taken to alleviate the waiting lists at the Ulster Hospital.

(AQW 3200/00)

Ms de Brún:

- (a) Information on persons waiting for inpatient treatment is collected on the basis of trust rather than hospital. Details of persons waiting for inpatient treatment in each local trust for the quarter ending March 2001 (the latest date for which information is available) are given in the table below.

PERSONS WAITING FOR INPATIENT TREATMENT IN EACH TRUST, 31 MARCH 2001

Royal Group Trust	11,897
Belfast City Hospital Trust	7,549
Greenpark Healthcare Trust	4,491
Ulster Community & Hospitals Trust	5,620
Down Lisburn Trust	803
Mater Infirmorum Trust	1,706
Causeway Trust	1,785
United Hospitals Group	4,623
Craigavon Group Trust	6,809
Newry & Mourne Trust	919
Altnagelvin Group Trust	3,807
Sperrin Lakeland Trust	1,987
Total	51,996

- (b) Between 30 March 2000 and 31 March 2001, the number of persons waiting for inpatient treatment in the Ulster Community & Hospitals Trust increased by 10%, from 5,092 to 5,620.
- (c) In line with the *Framework for Action on Waiting Lists*, which I issued last September, the Ulster Hospital has developed a waiting list action plan proposing a range of measures to deliver waiting list targets. This is currently under discussion with the Eastern Health and Social Services Board.
- (a) Cruinnítear eolas ar dhaoine ag fanacht le cóireáil othair chónaithigh de réir Iontaobhais seachas otharlainne. Tugtar sonraí daoine ag fanacht le cóireáil othair chónaithigh i ngach Iontaobhas áitiúil don ráithe ag críochnú Márta 2001 (an dáta is déanaí atá eolas ar fáil) sa tábla thíos.

**DAOINE AG FANACHT LE CÓIREÁIL OTHAIR
CHÓNAITHIGH I NGACH IONTAOBHAS, 31 MÁRTA 2001**

Iontaobhas an Ghrúpa Ríoga	11,897
Iontaobhas Otharlann Cathrach Bhéal Feirste	7,549
Iontaobhas Chúram Sláinte na Páirce Glaise	4,491
Iontaobhas Phobal Uladh agus Otharlann	5,620
Iontaobhas an Dúin/Lios na gCearrbhach	803
Iontaobhas an Mater Infirmorum	1,706
Iontaobhas an Chlocháin	1,785
Iontaobhas Ghrúpa na nOtharlann Aontaithe	4,623
Iontaobhas Ghrúpa Craigavon	6,809
Iontaobhas an Iúir agus Mhúirn	919
Iontaobhas Ghrúpa Alt na nGealbhán	3,807
Iontaobhas SSS Speirín Tír na Lochanna	1,987
Iomlán	51,996

- (b) Idir an 31 Márta 2000 agus an 31 Márta 2001, mhéadaigh líon na ndaoine ag fanacht le cóireáil othair chónaithigh in Iontaobhas Phobal Uladh agus Otharlann faoi 10%, ó 5,092 go 5,620.
- (c) De réir an *Creatlach le hAghaidh Gnímh ar Liostaí Feithimh*, a chuir mé amach i Mí Mheán Fómhair anuraidh, d'fhorbair Otharlann Uladh Gníomhphean ar Liostaí Feithimh ag moladh réimse beart le spriocanna liostaí feithimh a bhaint amach. Tá sé seo faoi chaibidil i láthair na huaire le Bord Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta an Oirthir.

Hospitals: Bed Occupancy Rates

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) the bed occupancy rate for each hospital and (b) what steps she has taken to ensure that hospitals can reduce or increase bed occupancy. (AQW 3201/00)

Ms de Brún:

- (a) This information is detailed in the table below. This information is also published in the annual hospital statistics publication, which is available in the Assembly Library and on my Department's website.

PERCENT BED OCCUPANCY BY HOSPITAL, 1999/2000

Altnagelvin Area	77.8
Spruce House	85.9
Waterside	84.4
Loane House	92.1
Longstone	94.8
Mullinure	93.9
Oaklands	78.3
South Tyrone	79.6
St. Lukes	77.2

Belfast City	87.1
Belvoir Park	79.2
Jubilee	53.6
Windsor House	98.6
Coleraine	73.6
Dalriada	83.2
Robinson Memorial	85.6
Ross Thomson	92.0
Route	45.7
Craigavon Area	73.9
Lurgan	93.1
Craigavon PNU	84.5
Downe	77.7
Downshire	89.1
Lagan Valley	81.0
Lagan Valley PNU	99.5
Thompson House	86.2
Gransha	90.9
Roe Valley	92.7
Stradereagh	82.5
Waterside	98.0
Forest Lodge	75.6
Forster Green	67.1
Musgrave Park	70.4
Holywell	86.8
Whiteabbey PNU	81.3
Mater	85.7
Daisy Hill	71.7
Muckamore Abbey	90.3
RBHSC	75.3
Royal Maternity	66.2
Royal Victoria	85.3
Knockbracken	85.2
Shaftesbury Square	35.0
Young Peoples Centre	85.0
Erne	65.8
Omagh General	96.1
Tyrone & Fermanagh	92.0
Tyrone County	69.6
Ards	84.1
Bangor	84.5
Ulster	86.8
Antrim	76.2
Braid Valley	89.0
Mid-Ulster	72.1
Moyle	84.7
Whiteabbey	92.0
Total	81.5

- (b) I have taken a number of steps to improve the capacity of hospitals to deal with demand. These include the allocation of significant additional resources for improved hospital and community

care, planning for winter or other pressures, as well as enhanced provision of intensive care and high dependency beds.

- (a) Mionléirítear an t-eolas seo sa tábla thíos. Tá an t-eolas seo foilsithe i bhfoilseachán bliantúil Staidreamh Otharlann fosta, atá ar fáil i Leabharlann an Tionóil agus ar líonláithreán mo Roinne.

**CÉATADÁN NA LEAPACHA GAFA DE RÉIR
OTHARLAINNE, 1999/2000**

Ceantar Alt na nGealbhán	77.8
Teach an Sprúis	85.9
Taobh an Uisce	84.4
Teach Uí Luain	92.1
Longstone	94.8
Muileann an Iúir	93.9
Tír na nDárach	78.3
Tír Eoghain Theas	79.6
Naomh Lúcas	77.2
Otharlann Cathrach Bhéal Feirste	87.1
Páirc Belvoir	79.2
Iubhaile	53.6
Teach Windsor	98.6
Cúl Raithin	73.6
Dál Riada	83.2
Cuimhneachán Mhic Roibín	85.6
Ross Thomson	92.0
Route	45.7
Otharlann Ceantair Craigavon	73.9
An Lorgain	93.1
ISN Craigavon	84.5
An Dún	77.7
Downshire	89.1
Gleann an Lagáin	81.0
ISN Ghleann an Lagáin	99.5
Teach Thompson	86.2
Gráinseach	90.9
Gleann Rua	92.7
An tSráid Riabhach	82.5
Taobh an Uisce	98.0
Lóiste na Coille	75.6
Faiche Forster	67.1
Páirc Musgrave	70.4
Holywell	86.8
ISN na Mainistreach Fionne	81.3
Mater	85.7
Cnoc Daisy	71.7
Mainistir Mhaigh Chomair	90.3
ORBFPT (RBHSC)	75.3
Otharlann Ríoga Mháithreachais	66.2
Otharlann Ríoga Vichteoiria	85.3
Cnoc Breacán	85.2
Cearnóg Shaftesbury	35.0

Ionad Ógánach	85.0
An Éirne	65.8
Otharlann Ghinearálta na hÓmaí	96.1
Tír Eoghain agus Fear Manach	92.0
Otharlann Chontae Thír Eoghain	69.6
Aird	84.1
Beannchar	84.5
Uladh	86.8
Aontroim	76.2
Gleann na Brád	89.0
Lár Uladh	72.1
Mael	84.7
An Mhainistir Fhionn	92.0
Iomlán	81.5

- (b) Rinne mé roinnt beart le cumas na n-otharlann le déileáil leis an éileamh a fheabhsú. Ina measc bhí dáileadh acmhainní riachtanacha breise do chúram otharlainne agus pobail níos fearr, do phleanáil do bhrúnna geimhridh nó eile, chomh maith le soláthar níos fearr leapacha dianchúraim agus ardspleáchais.

Delayed Discharges

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) the number of delayed discharges in each hospital for each of the last six months and (b) what steps she is taking to reduce the number. (AQW 3202/00)

Ms de Brún:

- (a) Information on delayed discharges prior to February 2001 is only available by trust and is detailed in Table 1 below. Table 2 below gives details of delayed discharges for each hospital from the end of February onwards.

TABLE 1. DELAYED DISCHARGES BY TRUST

Trust	Month Ending		
	30 Nov. 2000	31 Dec. 2000	31 Jan. 2001
Belfast City Hospital HSS Trust	30	21	23
Down Lisburn HSS Trust	25	7	6
Greenpark HSS Trust	26	16	21
Mater Hospitals HSS Trust	3	2	9
Royal Group of Hospitals HSS Trust	29	23	31
Ulster Community and Hospitals HSS Trust	45	30	29
Causeway HSS Trust	25	17	33
United Hospitals HSS Trust	80	70	47

Trust	Month Ending		
	30 Nov. 2000	31 Dec. 2000	31 Jan. 2001
Armagh and Dungannon HSS Trust	31	31	28
Craigavon Group Hospitals HSS Trust	27	16	36
Newry and Mourne HSS Trust	8	14	14
Altnagelvin Area Hospitals HSS Trust	19	13	14
Sperrin Lakeland HSS Trust	11	5	3
Total	359	265	294

TABLE 2. DELAYED DISCHARGES BY HOSPITAL

Hospital	Month Ending		
	28 Feb. 2001	31 Mar. 2001	30 Apr. 2001 ⁽¹⁾
Belfast City Hospital	31	30	31
Forster Green	5	2	1
Lagan Valley Hospital	4	6	2
Mater Infirmorum Hospital	2	2	10
Musgrave Park Hospital	20	19	9
Royal Victoria Hospital	28	32	36
Ulster Hospital	32	30	31
Antrim Hospital	1	2	8
Braid Valley Hospital	24	16	14
Coleraine Hospital	27	37	29
Dalriada	3	0	4
Mid-Ulster Hospital	5	7	7
Moyle Hospital	7	5	3
Robinson Memorial Hospital	2	3	4
South Tyrone Hospital	10	9	8
Whiteabbey Hospital	16	22	25
Craigavon Area Hospital	13	14	12
Daisy Hill Hospital	10	12	8
Loane House	8	9	7
Lurgan Hospital	24	22	21
Mullinure	14	14	15
Altnagelvin Hospital	13	16	10
Erne Hospital	2	4	4
Tyrone County	0	2	0
Total	301	315	299

⁽¹⁾ These figures are provisional and may be subject to revision.

(b) Delays in discharge from hospital are a matter of concern for my Department and I have asked boards to take appropriate action to reduce these. I have also made a further £2m available to fund an additional 230 community care packages this year and my Department is monitoring the provision of these packages regularly.

(a) Níl an t-eolas ar scaoileadh amach moillithe othar roimh Fheabhra 2001 ar fáil ach de réir Iontaobhais agus tá na mionsonraí liostaithe i dTábla 1 thíos. Cuireann Tábla 2 thíos mionsonraí ar fáil ar scaoileadh amach moillithe othar do gach otharlann ó dheireadh Mhí Feabhra ar aghaidh.

TÁBLA 1. SCAOILEADH AMACH MOILLITHE OTHAR DE RÉIR IONTAOBHAIS

Iontaobhas	Deireadh Míosa		
	30 Sam. 2000	31 Noll. 2000	31 Ean. 2001
Iontaobhas SSS Otharlann Chathair Bhéal Feirste	30	21	23
Iontaobhas SSS an Dúin/Lios na gCearrbhach	25	7	6
Iontaobhas SSS na Páirce Glaise	26	16	21
Iontaobhas SSS Otharlann an Mater	3	2	9
Iontaobhas SSS Grúpa Ríoga na nOspidéal	29	23	31
Iontaobhas SSS Phobal & Otharlann Uladh	45	30	29
Iontaobhas SSS an Chlocháin	25	17	33
Iontaobhas SSS na nOtharlann Aontaithe	80	70	47
Iontaobhas SSS Ard Mhacha agus Dhún Geanainn	31	31	28
Iontaobhas SSS Grúpa Otharlann Craigavon	27	16	36
Iontaobhas SSS an Iúir agus Mhúirn	8	14	14
Iontaobhas SSS Otharlanna Cheantar Alt na nGealbhan	19	13	14
Iontaobhas SSS Speirín Tír na Lochanna	11	5	3
Iomlán	359	265	294

TÁBLA 2. SCAOILEADH AMACH MOILLITHE OTHAR DE RÉIR OTHARLAINNE

Otharlann	Deireadh Míosa		
	28 Feab. 2001	31 Már. 2001	30 Aib. 2001 ⁽¹⁾
Otharlann Chathair Bhéal Feirste	31	30	31
Forster Green	5	2	1
Otharlann Ghleann an Lagáin	4	6	2
Otharlann an Mater	2	2	10
Otharlann Pháirc Musgrave	20	19	9
Otharlann Ríoga Victoria	28	32	36
Otharlann Uladh	32	30	31
Otharlann Aontroma	1	2	8
Otharlann Ghleann na Brád	24	16	14
Otharlann Chúil Raithin	27	37	29
Dál Riada	3	0	4
Otharlann Lár-Uladh	5	7	7
Otharlann Mhael	7	5	3
Otharlann Chuimhneacháin Mhic Roibín	2	3	4
Otharlann Dheiscirt Thír Eoghain	10	9	8
Otharlann na Mainistreach Finne	16	22	25
Otharlann Ceantair Craigavon	13	14	12
Otharlann Chnoc na Nóiníní	10	12	8
Teach Uí Luain	8	9	7
Otharlann na Lorgan	24	22	21
Muilleann Úr	14	14	15
Otharlann Alt na nGealbhan	13	16	10
Otharlann na hÉirne	2	4	4
Contae Thír Eoghain	0	2	0
Iomlán	301	315	299

⁽¹⁾ Is figiúirí sealadacha iad seo agus is féidir go n-athrófar iad ag brath ar athbhreithniú.

- (b) Is ábhar imní é do mo Roinnse moill ar scaoileadh amach othar agus d'iarr mé ar Bhoird gníomh cuí a ghlacadh chun iad a laghdú. Ina theannta seo chuir mé £2m eile ar fáil chun 230 pacáiste cúram pobail eile a mhaoiniú i mbliana agus tá soláthar na bpacáistí seo faoi mhonatóireacht rialta na Roinne s'agam.

Chiropody Service: Greyabbey

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the steps taken to provide a chiropody service, through the Ards Community Trust, for residents who are dependant on public transport in the Greyabbey village area. (AQW 3211/00)

Ms de Brún: The vehicle used by the mobile chiropody service was out of service from 20 April to 4 May 2001. During this period patients were offered alternative appointments at chiropody clinics in Newtownards, Portaferry, Portavogie, Ballywalter and Lisbane. Domicillary visits were also offered as an alternative.

A limited use of the vehicle has been possible since 4 May, but the vehicle is still undergoing repairs and will be submitted to a vehicle test on 21 June. It is hoped that the mobile service can be fully restored following that date.

Bhí an fheithicil úsáidte ag an tseirbhís ghluaisteach chosliachta as seirbhís ón 20ú Aibreán go dtí an 4ú Bealtaine 2001. Le linn na tréimhse seo, tairgeadh coinní eile a dhéanamh d'othair le clinici cosliachta i mBaile Nua na hArda, i bPort an Pheire, i bPort an Bhogaigh, i mBaile Bháltair agus sa Lios Bán. Tairgeadh cuairteanna iniúchta tí ina n-áit fosta.

Bhíothas ábalta úsáid theoranta a bhaint as an fheithicil ón 4ú Bealtaine ach tá deisithe á ndéanamh ar an fheithicil go fóill agus cuirfear faoi scrúdú feithicle ar an 21 Meitheamh í. Táthar ag súil go n-athchuirfear an tseirbhís iomlán ar fáil i ndiaidh an dáta sin.

Bowen's Lane Development

Mr Close asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the date on which the contract was signed by Craigavon and Banbridge Community HSS Trust to occupy properties in Bowens Lane, Banbridge Road, Lurgan. (AQW 3224/00)

Ms de Brún: The trust does not have a contract with the Ulidia Housing Association in respect of these properties. The tenants of these properties have an agreement with Ulidia Housing Association – a “licence to occupy” – which is standard procedure in relation to supported housing arrangements. The tenants took up residence of Nos 2 and 3 Bowens Close on 2 April 2001. The trust has agreed in principle a support agreement for the good care and maintenance of the properties with Ulidia Housing Association, which, subject to minor adjustments between the two bodies, will be formally endorsed at a meeting on 22 June 2001 of Ulidia and the trust.

Níl conradh ag an Iontaobhas leis an Chumann tithíochta Ulidia maidir leis na háitribh seo. Tá aontas “ceadúnas le cónaí” ag tionóntaí na n-áitreabh seo le Cumann Tithíochta Ulidia, ar gnáthghnáthamh é maidir le socrúithe tacaíthe

tithíochta. Chuaigh na tionóntaí le cónaí in Uimh.2 & 3 Clós Bowen ar 2 Aibreán 2001. D'aontaigh an tIontaobhas ar shocrú tacaíochta i bprionsabal le Cumann Tithíochta Ulidia faoi dheachúram agus chothabháil na n-áitreabh, a gheobhaidh, ag brath ar mhionathruithe idir an dá chomhlacht, a fhorhuineoidh ar bhonn foirmiúil ag cruinniú idir Ulidia agus an tIontaobhas ar 22 Meitheamh 2001.

Bowen's Lane Development

Mr Close asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail, by date and value, the expenditure incurred by her Department and by the Craigavon and Banbridge Community HSS Trust in the building and furnishing of the developments currently owned by the trust at Bowen's Lane, Banbridge Road, Lurgan. (AQW 3225/00)

Ms de Brún: The properties are owned by Ulidia Housing Association, not Craigavon and Banbridge Community Health and Social Services Trust. Ulidia under its landlord role provided a range of standard fixtures and fittings and white goods. The trust incurred expenditure of approximately £8,000 per house on curtains, soft furnishings and other household necessities.

Is le Cumann Tithíochta Ulidia agus chan le hIontaobhas Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta Phobal Craigavon agus Dhroichead na Banna na háitribh seo. Faoina ról mar thiarna talún, sholáthraigh Ulidia réimse fearas agus córacha caighdeánach(a) agus earraí bána. Tharraing an tIontaobhas air féin caiteachas thart faoi £8,000 an teach ar chuitíní, fheistias bhog, agus ar riachtanais tí eile.

Bowen's Lane Development

Mr Close asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the legal expenses incurred to date on the ongoing litigation in respect of properties in Bowen's Lane, Banbridge Road, Lurgan. (AQW 3226/00)

Ms de Brún: The trust is not involved in any litigation in relation to the properties at Bowen's Close. An application for judicial review has been made in the name of a Mr Ronald Foster, 6 Bowen's Manor in relation to a planning issue.

The trust has made a response via its legal representatives to Mr Foster's solicitor, in relation to received correspondence. The trust is not a notice party to these proceedings.

Níl baint ag an Iontaobhas le plé dlí ar bith maidir leis na háitribh ag Clós Bowen. Cuireadh iarratas isteach le haghaidh Athbhreithnithe Dhlíthiúil in ainm an Uasail Ronald Foster, 6 Mainéar Bowen maidir le ceist pleanála.

Thug an tIontaobhas freagra, trína ionadaithe dlíthiúla, d'Aturnaetha an Uasail Foster, maidir le comhfhreagras a fuarthas. Ní páirtí fógartha sna himeachtaí seo é an tIontaobhas.

Complementary and Alternative Medicine

Mr O'Connor asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail, taking into consideration the House of Lords' Science and Technology Select Committee Report, of 28 November 2000, on complementary and alternative medicine, when she intends to implement the recommendations made by the Northern Ireland Association of Homeopaths, to facilitate patient access to homeopathic treatment through the Health Service. (AQW 3240/00)

Ms de Brún: I refer the Member to my answer to AQW 2858/00.

Luaim don Bhall an freagra a thug mé ar AQW 2858/00.

HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

Northern Ireland Vacancy Figures

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to explain why Northern Ireland vacancy figures have been suspended from the UK national figures for over two years, and to detail the date when they will once more be included. (AQW 3151/00)

The Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Dr Farren): Northern Ireland vacancy statistics were initially suspended because of computer problems and procedural difficulties. The final stages of action to correct these problems and improve the future reliability of vacancy information are nearing completion. My officials are working hard with the Office of National Statistics to secure their agreement to the revised processes and timescales to enable a reinstatement of the Northern Ireland figures in September.

NI Fishing Ports: Employment

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail what steps he has taken to tackle unemployment in each of the fishing ports in Northern Ireland. (AQW 3257/00)

Dr Farren: The Training and Employment Agency makes its full range of services available to the unemployed in the fishing ports, including access to training and

employment opportunities under the Jobskills, New Deal and Worktrack programmes.

can proceed to construction stage on completion of their statutory procedures.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Comber Bypass

Mr Taylor asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (a) the estimated cost of Phase 2 and Phase 3 of the Comber by-pass and (b) the funds that have been allocated to this project in each of next three financial years. (AQW 3005/00)

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Campbell): The scheme to construct Stage 2 of the Comber Bypass, ie between Newtownards Road and Comber Road, is estimated to cost £3.1 million. The North Down and Ards Area Plan 1984 – 1995 contained a proposed road line (referred to as Stage 3 of the Comber Bypass) which would link Ballygowan Road to the existing Bypass. A new area plan for Ards and Down is currently being prepared and this road line will be reconsidered as part of that process. A preliminary estimate for Stage 3 is £1 million.

As you may know, the Roads Service has received Executive Programme Funds for a number of named major road schemes. Other schemes in the Roads Service Major Works Preparation Pool, including Stage 2 of the Comber Bypass, will have to be funded from the Roads Service capital works budget. These funds are not allocated to specific schemes in advance of them being admitted to the Construction Programme.

As regards the Vesting Order for Stage 2 of the bypass, the Roads Service published the Notice of Intention to Make a Vesting Order in the local press on 18 May 2001. The period for receipt of objections ends on 26 June 2001. Assuming there are no objections, the vesting process should be completed by October 2001. The Roads Service would then be in a position to invite tenders in early October 2001 and award the contract for construction in mid-December 2001. The estimated contract period of the scheme is 52 weeks.

While the 2002-03 budget is currently not sufficient to allow all major road schemes, whose statutory processes I would expect to have been completed by that time, to enter the construction programme, funding is currently available for Stage 2 of the bypass assuming the above timescale. If, however, the acquisition of the necessary land is significantly delayed (for example, by the need to hold a public inquiry), then the funding position and the timescale for the scheme would be less certain. I will, of course, be continuing to bid for additional funding to ensure that all of the schemes in the preparation pool

Comber Bypass

Mr Taylor asked the Minister for Regional Development, in respect of the Vesting Order for the Comber by-pass, to detail (a) when will it be published (b) the estimated timescale for invitation to tender following completion of the Vesting Order (c) the estimated timescale for contractors to be on site and (d) the estimated timescale for the contract period; and to make a statement.

(AQW 3006/00)

Mr Campbell: The scheme to construct Stage 2 of the Comber Bypass, ie between Newtownards Road and Comber Road, is estimated to cost £3.1 million. The North Down and Ards Area Plan 1984 – 1995 contained a proposed road line (referred to as Stage 3 of the Comber Bypass) which would link Ballygowan Road to the existing bypass. A new area plan for Ards and Down is currently being prepared and this road line will be reconsidered as part of that process. A preliminary estimate for Stage 3 is £1 million.

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Residential Areas: Speed Restrictions

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the measures in place to ensure that existing legislation permitting the introduction of 20mph speed restrictions in residential areas is consistently applied as a measure to improve pedestrian safety. (AQW 3106/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service assesses potential traffic calming schemes taking into account such criteria as the accident history, the volume and speed of traffic and the local environment of the area or street being considered. These criteria are weighted and locations are assessed and scored to identify priority schemes. For example, as the reduction of road traffic accidents is the main objective of traffic calming, the accident history criterion is weighted highest with additional weighting being afforded to accidents involving vulnerable road users (ie, children and the elderly).

All traffic calming schemes are designed to reduce vehicle speeds to an average of 20 mph. Practical engineering and environmental considerations, however, influence the decision to convert these to 20 mph zones with area-wide schemes often being converted, whereas single streets would not.

Railway Stations: Public Safety

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his plans to ensure railway stations are safe for public use. (AQW 3108/00)

Mr Campbell: A report prepared for Translink in 1998 by W H Stephens & Sons on the condition of stations, halts, platforms and passenger facilities identified and made recommendations on a range of issues, including emergency lighting, external lighting, surfaces and paths, handrails and guard-rails as well as fire provisions. The A D Little Strategic Safety Review of Northern Ireland Railways recommended that the findings of the Stephens report be implemented. Translink is currently implementing these findings as part of its A D Little Implementation Plan.

Railway Halt at Barn, Carrickfergus

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to undertake discussions with the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company in relation to the deteriorating state of the disused railway halt at Barn, Carrickfergus. (AQW 3140/00)

Mr Campbell: Translink has advised that it has no plans to bring the railway halt at Barn, Carrickfergus, which is quite close to the Downshire halt, back into operational use. Translink has also advised that the site has been secured in terms of access and that it does not

present any problems in relation to the safe operation of rail services along the line.

Translink Service: Carrickfergus to Ballyclare

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail when the Rural Transport funded service between Carrickfergus and Antrim Hospital will commence. (AQW 3152/00)

Mr Campbell: Translink is at present unable to specify a commencement date for the service between Carrickfergus and Ballyclare which will connect with its Larne to Antrim Hospital service. However Translink hopes to introduce the service following its driver recruitment programme which is currently underway.

Translink Service: Carrickfergus to Antrim Hospital

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development to explain the reasons for the delay of the opening of the Rural Transport funded service connecting Carrickfergus and Antrim Hospital. (AQW 3153/00)

Mr Campbell: Translink has advised that a shortage of drivers has delayed the start of the Carrickfergus to Ballyclare service which will connect with its Larne to Antrim Hospital service. Translink has also advised that currently they have a major driver recruitment programme under way which hopefully will resolve this problem.

Bus Travel

Mr Gibson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his plans to encourage commuters to travel by bus. (AQW 3158/00)

Mr Campbell: I consider that the provision of high quality bus services is essential for the development of a sustainable transport system and I am actively promoting a number of initiatives that will make travel by bus a more attractive option for commuters and others.

These include the addition of new low floor buses to the Translink bus fleet. My Department provides grant aid to Translink of £1.7 million per annum for bus replacement, and as older, less reliable buses are being phased out they are being replaced by these new style buses. I will continue to press for additional funding to assist Translink to further modernise its fleet.

In addition, the introduction of the first quality bus corridor (QBC) on the Saintfield Road approach to Belfast is proving successful with increased patronage being reported. Further QBCs, on other approaches are planned with the Eastern QBC due to commence in September. It is hoped that the Falls Road QBC will also

be operational in this financial year and that proposals for the City Express will follow closely on.

Bus priority measures, such as priority traffic signalling, and allowing buses faster access to Belfast City Centre along the M1 and Westlink will also help.

Affording commuters new, modern facilities also increases the attractiveness of our bus services. New bus stations have been provided in Newry and Armagh and modern, multi-modal stations have recently been provided in Bangor and Coleraine.

Carrickfergus: Faulty Street Lighting

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to give his assessment of street lighting in Carrickfergus town centre which is continually malfunctioning. (AQW 3185/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service is not aware of any major on-going problems with street lighting in Carrickfergus town centre. Some recent faults have, however, occurred due to NIE supply difficulties. These affected:

- a number of street lights on Marine Highway (the fault was reported to NIE on 10 April 2001 and was repaired on 24 April 2001); and
- street lights in Market Place, Essex Street and Cheston Street (the fault was reported to NIE on 28 May 2001 and was repaired on 30 May 2001).

In addition, the Roads Service is aware that there are two street lights in both Market Place and in High Street with supply failures. These faults have been reported to NIE.

Flooding: Marshallstown and Red Brae Roads

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to give his assessment of works carried out at Marshallstown Road/Red Brae Road to alleviate severe flooding in the area. (AQW 3186/00)

Mr Campbell: Following heavy rainfall last autumn/winter, my Department's Roads Service has carried out drainage works on Marshallstown Road and Red Brae Road to assist storm water to discharge from the carriageways. These works included the redirection of storm water to an adjacent road culvert, the construction of a manhole and the installation of new and larger inlets to gullies on Marshallstown Road. Some minor improvements were also carried out to the inlets of gullies on Red Brae Road. These drainage works should help to alleviate the flooding problem in this area.

Further works will, however, be necessary to prevent storm water run-off from agricultural and commercial

land in the vicinity of Sullatober Lane from flowing onto Marshallstown Road. Roads Service officials are in continued discussions with the relevant landowners regarding the provision of additional drainage facilities.

Rail Link: Portadown and Armagh

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister for Regional Development, in respect of the Regional Development Strategy, to give serious consideration to the re-opening of the rail link between Portadown and Armagh which could, in turn, act as the gateway to a rail link to Monaghan and the West of Ireland. (AQW 3194/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department is preparing a ten-year regional transportation strategy (RTS) for Northern Ireland. This will set out the longer term strategy for the delivery of transport policy. The strategic role for railways will be considered in the development of the RTS and specific line improvements or additions will be considered in more detail as part of the development of transport plans.

Translink, however, currently has no plans to reinstate the rail link between Portadown and Armagh. The funding that was allocated to railways in the Budget approved by the Assembly on 18 December 2000, is required to implement the consolidation option in the Railways Task Force Report. This involves expenditure on the core network which excludes the discontinued rail link between Portadown and Armagh. I should also point out that, to re-open this rail link, very substantial investment would be required both in terms of providing the infrastructure and also meeting the subsequent operational costs.

Road Maintenance

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (a) his policy on road maintenance, in particular the repair of pot-holes, and (b) any performance criteria used by the Roads Service regarding the estimated time for the repair of such faults. (AQW 3203/00)

Mr Campbell: The structural integrity of the road network is a key objective and the top priority of my Department's Roads Service.

In support of this objective the Roads Service undertakes a programme of inspections of all roads and footways for defects, including potholes. The frequency of these inspections depends on the type of road and the volume of vehicular or pedestrian traffic. Town centres and major traffic routes are inspected monthly while all other roads and footways are inspected at either 2 or 4 monthly intervals.

Defects are categorised according to severity, traffic volume and location, ie, urban or rural, and Roads Service duly monitors the response times for repairs against the performance criteria as set out below:-

Repair or make safe, within 1 day of detection, 90% of defects:

- between 50 mm and 100 mm deep on heavily trafficked urban roads* and footpaths**; and
- over 100 mm deep on all roads and footpaths (except on lightly trafficked rural roads).

Repair or make safe within 5 working days of detection, 90% of defects:

- between 20 mm and 50 mm deep on heavily trafficked roads* and footpaths**;
- between 50 mm and 100 mm deep on all roads and footpaths (except heavily trafficked urban roads and footpaths and lightly trafficked rural roads); and
- over 100 mm deep on lightly trafficked rural roads.

* Traffic Volume > 5000 vehicles per day.

** Footways in towns & city centres

Road Maintenance: Ards Borough Council Area

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the funding allocated in each of the last five financial years for the maintenance of roads, excluding major road schemes, in the Ards Borough Council area. (AQW 3214/00)

Mr Campbell: I would refer the Member to the response given by the former Regional Development Minister, Mr Peter Robinson, on 7 July 2000 to his earlier Written Assembly Question AQW 733/99.

Regrettably, because of changes to internal financial systems arising from the reorganisation of Roads Service in 1999-2000, figures for the years 1999-2000 and 2000-01 are not yet available on a council area basis.

Planning Applications: Traffic/Parking Assessment

Mrs Carson asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 2709/00 and AQW 2711/00, to detail the criteria used by the Roads Service when assessing traffic impact and adequate parking facilities for proposed planning applications for extensions to licensed premises. (AQW 3227/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service, when assessing traffic impact and adequate parking facilities for proposed planning applications for extensions to licensed premises, applies the policy contained in Planning Policy Statement (PPS 3) 'Development Control: Roads Considerations' published by the Department of the Environment's Planning Service. A copy of this document has been placed in the Assembly Library.

PPS 3, which was produced in conjunction with the Roads Service, details those matters which will be taken

into account in determining planning applications involving any development which affects the public road network and road safety.

C67A Road: Castlederg to Strabane

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development to liaise with his ministerial counterpart in the Republic of Ireland on the condition of the road surface of the C67A Castlederg to Strabane Road which lies within the Republic of Ireland. (AQW 3230/00)

Mr Campbell: I understand that the section of road in question is the responsibility of Donegal County Council. Officials from my Department's Roads Service have been in contact with the Council and, whilst no work is programmed on this section of road, the Council will arrange for the road to be inspected.

Rural Planning: Review

Mrs Courtney asked the Minister for Regional Development if he has any plans to review rural planning to assist individuals who would hope to build housing within the rural environs. (AQO 1622/00)

Mr Campbell: The draft Regional Development Strategy (RDS) which is nearing completion will include a Spatial Framework for Rural Northern Ireland. The RDS will provide strategic guidance for the development and maintenance of a strong and vibrant rural community, contributing to the overall well being of Northern Ireland. It will include strategic guidelines to encourage; the diversification of the rural economy, the maintenance of a living countryside with a strong network of rural service centres, the creation of an accessible countryside with a responsive transport network; and the continuation of an attractive and unique rural environment managing the use of rural resources in a more sustainable manner.

It is recognised that there is a need to review the existing rural planning strategy to address the current problems facing the rural community. As part of the implementation of the RDS the Department for Regional Development intends to commence the preparation of a new Regional Planning Policy Statement (RPPS) on "The Countryside". This proposal has been included for action as part of the Programme for Government.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Benefits' Take-up

Mr Gibson asked the Minister for Social Development to detail discussions he has had with voluntary organisations in respect of a benefits' take-up campaign. (AQW 3154/00)

The Minister for Social Development (Mr Morrow):

As part of its Targeting Social Need Programme the Social Security Agency has met with a number of voluntary organisations to explore ways of encouraging take-up of benefits. Work will continue in this area to ensure that everyone is aware of, claims and receives their proper benefit entitlement.

Outstanding CSA Appeals

Mr Gibson asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of CSA appeals outstanding as at 30 April 2001; and to make a statement. (AQW 3156/00)

Mr Morrow: There were approximately 95 CSA appeals outstanding at 30 April 2001. The total includes:

- 45 appeals not yet submitted by CSA to the Appeals Service (TAS); and
- 50 appeals submitted by the CSA but not yet arranged for hearing by the Appeals Service.

Pension Credit

Mr Gibson asked the Minister for Social Development to detail his proposals to improve pensions for those pensioners with (a) modest savings and (b) modest occupational pensions. (AQW 3172/00)

Mr Morrow: It is planned that from 2003 pensioners with modest savings and pensioners on modest occupational pensions will benefit from the introduction of the Pension Credit. It will significantly increase the income of retired people, aged 60 and over, who have small pensions or savings, and reward them for their thrift. For the first time, pensioners who have been prudent and planned for retirement will be rewarded rather than penalised as they are under the current system. A consultation document detailing the proposals was published on 9 November 2000. The consultation period ended on 28 February 2001, and the overall design of pension credit is still being considered in light of the responses to the consultation exercise.

**External Cyclical Maintenance Scheme:
Drumalane Park, Newry**

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Social Development to detail what progress has been made on the proposed External Cyclical Maintenance Scheme for Drumalane Park, Newry. (AQW 3179/00)

Mr Morrow: This is an operational matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. The scheme has been approved to proceed. A date of possession is currently being arranged with the contractor and it is anticipated the scheme will start later this month.

**External Cyclical Maintenance Scheme:
Drumalane Park, Newry**

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Social Development to detail how much has been spent, to date, by the Housing Executive on the tendering procedure in respect of the External Cyclical Maintenance Scheme for Drumalane Park, Newry. (AQW 3180/00)

Mr Morrow: This is an operational matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. The cost of tendering this scheme, which includes checking and clearing the tender, is not readily available as such costs are included within the overall cost of tendering for all schemes and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

**External Cyclical Maintenance Scheme:
Drumalane Park, Newry**

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Social Development when he expects the contract to be awarded for the External Cyclical Maintenance Scheme at Drumalane Park, Newry. (AQW 3181/00)

Mr Morrow: This is an operational matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. The contract for this scheme has been awarded and it is due to start on site later this month.

New Build Housing

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Social Development to detail what steps he is taking to fulfil the demand for three bedroom ground floor new build accommodation in the public sector. (AQW 3184/00)

Mr Morrow: Three bedroom bungalow or flat social housing is normally only provided in specific need situations, such as where a family member requires the use, or possible use, of a wheelchair; to replace existing three bedroom ground floor accommodation; or in rural areas for flexibility or to comply with Planning Service requirements. In general, bungalow or ground floor flat accommodation is normally only provided for the elderly or for those suffering a physical disability.

The majority of general needs families can be accommodated in two storey housing. The Department encourages Housing Associations to provide such homes in Lifetime Homes standard, which incorporates design features to make the dwelling more flexible, convenient, safe and accessible. These design features reduce the need for later adaptations and cater for tenants with a variety of permanent and temporary disabilities.

The Housing Executive, as the arbiter of housing need in the Province, is responsible for collating the need for all types of accommodation. Where there is an identified need for three bedroom ground floor provision, that need

is factored into the design of new Housing Association accommodation.

If the member has a specific query, perhaps he could write to me.

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr McHugh asked the Minister for Social Development whether there are any pockets of poverty in rural areas where Working Family Tax Credit take-up is relatively high but Income Support take-up is relatively low.

(AQW 3206/00)

Mr Morrow: The Department does not hold figures on the take-up of Income Support and is unable to provide any information on Working Families Tax Credit which is a reserved matter administered by the Inland Revenue.

Housing Damage: Sectarian Attacks

Ms McWilliams asked the Minister for Social Development if he intends to extend financial assistance granted to Housing Executive tenants in respect of damage caused by sectarian attacks to private homeowners.

(AQW 3223/00)

Mr Morrow: There are no plans to extend financial assistance to private homeowners for damage to their property following sectarian attacks. Private homeowners would be expected to have private insurance cover for damage to their homes. They also have recourse to the Compensation Agency.

The Housing Executive does assist private homeowners who have suffered following intimidation/civil unrest by making available temporary accommodation including transport costs, furniture storage facilities, wind and water-tight repairs to damaged homes and temporary securing of properties.

In addition, the Housing Executive upon written recommendation by the RUC, can purchase an owner-occupier's house under the special purchase of evacuated dwellings (SPED) scheme thereby enabling these homeowners to relocate quickly.

I think you will agree that the Housing Executive already extends a wide range of measures to private owners, bearing in mind that NIHE resources are fully committed in respect of the rest of its activities.

NICVA/Camelot Link Awards Gala

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Social Development to give his assessment of the NICVA/ Camelot Link Awards; and to make a statement. (AQW 3238/00)

Mr Morrow: I was delighted to attend and speak at the 15th NICVA/Camelot Link Awards Gala in the Europa Hotel, Belfast on Wednesday 30 May.

These awards provide charitable organisations with the opportunity to say a very public thank you to a range of companies, employees and individuals for their past support and to encourage them to continue investing their time, skills and resources in the community. The level of support provided by private business and the statutory sector is reflected by the 120 nominations from every sector of the business community.

I was pleased to be able to lend my own congratulations to the achievements of all those who were nominated for awards and, in particular, to those who won. Active citizenship is clearly alive and well in Northern Ireland and these awards offer an ideal opportunity to celebrate and promote what can and is being done. They also serve as an incentive to others in the business community to engage with the voluntary and community sectors as there are incalculable benefits for both.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 22 June 2001

Written Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND THE DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Fernhill House Museum: Funding

Mr Shannon asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to give a breakdown of the funding provided by the Community Relations Council to the Fernhill House Museum in the years 1999-2000 and 2000-01. (AQW 3101/00)

Reply: It is understood from the Community Relations Council that no funding was provided to the Fernhill House Museum during these years.

Children's Forum: Anticipated Budget

Mrs Carson asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister to detail the anticipated budget of the Children's Forum and what the breakdown of that budget will be. (AQW 3159/00)

Reply: The Forum does not have a budget, although we have agreed to provide modest grant aid of £15,000 to one of the member organisations to cover the cost of providing a secretariat.

In addition the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister may commission specific pieces of work from the Forum over the coming months to help with the development of proposals for a commissioner for children and the children's strategy. Any such pieces of work may be supported by further grants, dependent upon the size and nature of the project.

Children's Forum

Mrs Carson asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister if an assurance can be given that the Children's Forum will not be a quango; and to make a statement. (AQW 3160/00)

Reply: The Forum is not a quango. It is an informal working group, brought together at our request for the specific purpose of providing input to proposals for a commissioner for children and a children's strategy.

The purpose of the Forum is to draw on the experience and expertise of children's organisations. This is something that many members have encouraged us to do.

Quangos: Appointments

Mrs Carson asked the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister whether it has any plans to reduce the number of appointments to quangos which any individual can hold at any one time. (AQW 3161/00)

Reply: The code of practice of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Public Appointments does not place a numerical limit on the number of appointments which any individual may hold. However, before offering an appointment to an individual who already holds a public appointment, Departments must be satisfied that the person will be able to devote sufficient time and commitment to the new appointment. Consideration is currently being given to a review of the arrangements for making appointment to public bodies.

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Sheep Industry: Control

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail her plans to regulate, control and police the sheep industry to ensure that there is no illegal movement of, or trade in, these animals; and to make a statement. (AQW 3262/00)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers): The recent outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease has shown that the current sheep identification system is inadequate to trace sheep movements accurately and quickly for disease purposes. To help prevent and contain any further outbreak or illegal movement of sheep it will be necessary to tighten controls, but this will be for the overall good of the industry.

I announced my intention to move to individual sheep identification in a press release on 1 May 2001. My officials are currently working on this issue and I will be consulting widely on any new proposals in due course.

Livestock Marts

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (a) the proposed timescale

for re-opening livestock marts, (b) what compensation will be given to livestock marts and (c) what representations she has made to the Minister of Finance and Personnel to ensure rate relief is obtained for livestock marts. (AQW 3308/00)

Ms Rodgers: The answers to the points raised in your question are:-

- (a) It is still too early to say when livestock markets might be allowed to re-open. This is an issue which is under continuous assessment and any decision on re-opening is conditional on veterinary advice that re-opening would not present unacceptable risk.
- (b) The only compensation provision under foot-and-mouth disease legislation is for animals or materials destroyed as part of the Department's campaign to control and eradicate the disease. There is no provision for "consequential losses" such as those incurred through the closure of livestock marts.
- (c) I have made representations to Minister Durkan, and a "Help for Business Scheme" as detailed in the attached leaflet is now available to those businesses which can demonstrate that they are suffering financial hardship as a result of the foot-and-mouth disease crisis.

Information and Communication Technology

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she will make a statement on the use of information technology to support rural communities. (AQW 3311/00)

Ms Rodgers: I am aware of the exciting opportunities which the effective use of ICT provides for businesses and communities everywhere. Information and Communication Technology has been shown to have the potential to increase the competitiveness of small firms in the broader economy and so can if effectively utilised make a significant contribution to the agrifood sector and rural economy.

My Department has already recognised the potential and has been working to achieve improved uptake and application through a number of initiatives. These have a strong emphasis on education and training which forms the basis for the future exploitation of the opportunities, which this new technology presents.

I obtained additional funding in the 2000-2001 financial year specifically targeted at improving the resources for ICT training and support for farmers in the west of the country. Progress has been somewhat curtailed by the foot-and-mouth disease restrictions but we hope by the end of the summer to be able to launch farmer access computers and training suites as well as the first stage of the Rural Portal being funded under the Programme for Government.

Within the Peace II programme measures are being finalised to enhance existing provision by facilitating unique programmes targeted at the development of the basic skills and effective application of ICT in farm businesses and rural communities.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Compensation

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail what compensation will be given to those farmers who were unable to move cattle due to foot-and-mouth disease restrictions resulting in them now exceeding the over 30 month scheme (OTMS).

(AQW 3314/00)

Ms Rodgers: You may be aware that the only compensation provision under foot-and-mouth disease legislation is for animals or materials destroyed by the Department as part of the campaign to control and eradicate the disease.

I am aware that movement restrictions have in some cases unfortunately prevented cattle being moved to slaughter prior to reaching the 30-month age point and that this has involved loss with the animals then going to the Over Thirty Months Scheme (OTMS). This is a problem that has arisen in FMD - affected areas throughout the UK. It is presently under consideration and it may be that it would be regarded as consequential loss for which the Government does not provide compensation. I am not yet in a position to comment on how this issue might eventually be resolved.

CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

MAGNI: Abolition of Admission Charges

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to give his assessment of the impact of the abolition of admission charges for pensioners and children visiting national museums and galleries; and to make a statement. (AQW 3260/00)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McGimpsey): The abolition of admission charges would be welcomed by MAGNI. However, any such initiative would carry a cost in terms of lost revenue by MAGNI which would need to be sourced elsewhere.

The differing histories and development of individual MAGNI sites means that the implications of any such initiative would vary according to the prevailing situation on each site. The Ulster Museum and Armagh County Museum do not currently charge for admission. Consequently it is not envisaged any proposal relating to admission charges would alter the situation.

The UFTM already grants concessions to adults age 60 and over and to children under five years. The total expected income from admission charges to children and pensioners is £195,100 in 2000-01 rising to £215,000 in 2002-03. The UAFP also has concessions for children and senior citizens. To have granted free admission to these groups during 2000 would have reduced income by £76,750.

Competitive Cycling

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to give his assessment of competition cycling in Northern Ireland. (AQW 3264/00)

Mr McGimpsey: Responsibility for the development of sport in the Province rests with the Sports Council for Northern Ireland (SCNI). The Sports Council currently recognise the Ulster Cycling Federation (UCF) as the governing body of the sport, though the Council has also provided Lottery funding support for the other governing body for cycling in the Province, the Northern Ireland Cycling Federation (NICEF). Both federations, supported by the Sports Council, are currently making efforts to develop agreed plans for the sport and a more co-ordinated approach to local management issues. Progress in this direction will enhance the development of the sport in Northern Ireland.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Relaxation of Restrictions

Mr J Wilson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he will indicate when access will be permitted to (a) areas adjacent to agricultural land and (b) to agricultural land along river banks and lift the restrictions imposed as a result of the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease. (AQW 3297/00)

Mr McGimpsey: The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development announced on Friday 15 June 2001, with Executive Committee approval, a relaxation of the foot and mouth restrictions that will allow greater access to agricultural land and along river banks. The new guidelines recommend that controlled access to fields and farmland where there are no livestock, and to hills, mountains and moorland where there is little likelihood of contact with livestock, may be permitted. Anglers may once again fish rivers, lakes and reservoirs which can be reached without the risk of encountering farm animals.

This relaxation of access to the countryside should, with farmers agreement, enable anglers to access most fisheries providing a common-sense approach is adopted and care is taken to avoid contact with livestock. Following the DARD announcement my Department issued a press release announcing the reopening of those waters in the Public Angling Estate which comply with the new guidelines. The remaining waters will be urgently assessed

and where appropriate farmers or landowners agreement sought for their reopening.

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Improving Tourist Facilities

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the steps he is taking to improve facilities for tourists visiting Northern Ireland. (AQW 3246/00)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Sir Reg Empey): The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) has available, in the current year, £4.714m to spend on the development of tourism facilities. In relation to visitor attractions its current policy is to provide capital support towards the upgrading, re-theming or improved interpretation at those centres that attract non-domestic tourists. In addition, the NITB can provide financial assistance for marketing activity.

NITB/BTA: Milestones Agreement

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline what arrangements exist between the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and the British Tourist Authority to promote Northern Ireland in Great Britain and overseas. (AQW 3249/00)

Sir Reg Empey: Though the British Tourist Authority does not have a statutory obligation to promote tourism to Northern Ireland, good co-operation exists in all markets. A "Milestones Agreement" exists between NITB and BTA which provides for enquiry handling in markets where NITB does not have its own office. Northern Ireland is covered in many BTA publications and has an option to buy into workshops, fairs and trade shows.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Impact on Tourism

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to give his assessment of the impact of foot-and-mouth disease on the number of tourists visiting Northern Ireland in the last six months. (AQW 3250/00)

Sir Reg Empey: It is not possible to provide an official estimate of tourism performance for the last six months. The Northern Ireland Tourist Board has monitored the impact of foot-and-mouth disease closely since March. An initial estimate of the decline in visitors for the months of March and April is calculated at approximately 60,000 visitors.

Strategic Business Links: United States

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of strategic business links forged with the United States of America in each of the last three years. (AQW 3252/00)

Sir Reg Empey: My Department and its agencies have helped support and facilitate strategic business links with the US in a variety of ways.

Since 1999 IDB, LEDU and IRTU have helped 420 NI companies initiate contact with US companies with the aim of establishing a business relationship either through direct sales, distribution agreements, alliance or partnership or technology transfer and development. This figure breaks down over the last three years as follows:

1999	141
2000	147
2001 (to date)	132

At agency level many important links have been forged with influential US organisations and agencies, these include:

- The US Department of Commerce who have organised trade missions into Northern Ireland and facilitated NI company contacts in the USA.
- The US/NI Joint Board on Scientific and Technological Co-operation, established through a Memorandum of Understanding between the Technology Administration of the US Department of Commerce and IRTU.
- Joint Memorandum of Understanding between IDB and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts which has resulted in reciprocal trade missions and a trade and investment conference in Boston.
- Trade and Investment Conference with the New York Economic Development Corporation with US/NI companies.

Many of these contacts at company and agency level build on the strong linkages already established through the valuable work undertaken by councils throughout Northern Ireland and the mutually beneficial research linkages between US and Northern Ireland university departments.

Telecommunications Industry

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to give his assessment of the telecommunications industry in Northern Ireland. (AQW 3254/00)

Sir Reg Empey: In this international and competitive telecommunications sector, the longer-term outlook for the markets serviced by companies in Northern Ireland is positive. Whilst it is accepted that current market conditions are difficult, and this is impacting on local firms, an upturn is anticipated in 2002.

Fishing Ports

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (a) the level of investment in each of the fishing ports in Northern Ireland by the IDB for each of the last 10 years, (b) the level of unemployment in each of the ports in comparison to the (i) district average and (ii) Northern Ireland average. (AQW 3258/00)

Sir Reg Empey:

- Responsibility for support to fishing ports lies with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and not IDB.
- Small area unemployment rates are unavailable for Northern Ireland below District Council area and so there are no measures of the level of unemployment for individual fishing ports. In order to make the comparisons requested unemployment rates are required and the smallest areas for which these are available are District Councils. These figures, plus Northern Ireland averages, are 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.

Job Creation

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of jobs created as a result of work undertaken by his Department and its agencies in each parliamentary constituency in each of the last three years. (AQW 3266/00)

Sir Reg Empey: Information in the tables provided relates to employment in the client companies of the Industrial Development Board (IDB), the Local Enterprise Development Unit (LEDU) and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB). Activity by other parts of DETI, such as the Industrial Research and Technology Unit (IRTU), will also contribute to employment growth in these companies.

Table 1 provides information on employment creations within IDB client companies, for each parliamentary constituency, over the past three years.

Table 2 provides job creations in LEDU client companies. It is presented for the past two years by District Council area, as information is not currently available at parliamentary constituency level or for years earlier than 1999-2000.

Figures in Table 3, supplied in respect of jobs created as a result of work undertaken by the NITB, relate to jobs anticipated to be created upon completion/opening of capital projects in each of the 18 parliamentary constituencies. Figures are detailed on the basis of year of issue of Letter of Offer awarding financial assistance.

INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT BOARD (IDB)**TABLE 1: IDB CLIENT COMPANY EMPLOYMENT CREATIONS BY PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY.**

Parliamentary Constituency	98/99	99/00	00/01
Belfast East	248	484	415
Belfast North	832	1030	1004
Belfast South	896	1908	843
Belfast West	332	326	298
East Antrim	469	1396	1275
East Londonderry	309	360	343
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	658	1185	525
Foyle	202	401	740
Lagan Valley	651	885	540
Mid-Ulster	276	584	482
Newry And Armagh	198	106	142
North Antrim	437	539	284
North Down	151	118	344
South Antrim	1323	874	975
South Down	300	79	133
Strangford	407	597	1449
Upper Bann	1771	713	755
West Tyrone	378	369	239
Total	9838	11954	10786

LOCAL ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT UNIT (LEDU)**TABLE 2: LEDU CLIENT COMPANY BY DISTRICT COUNCIL AREA**

District Council	1999/2000	2000/2001
Antrim	89	83
Ards	164	60
Armagh	149	158
Ballymena	75	40
Ballymoney	1	58
Banbridge	93	70
Belfast	562	420
Carrickfergus	54	46
Castlereagh	211	15
Coleraine	68	102
Cookstown	175	146
Craigavon	118	183
Derry	138	241
Down	60	170
Dungannon	240	88
Fermanagh	175	185
Larne	163	43
Limavady	58	70
Lisburn	138	156
Magherafelt	137	170

District Council	1999/2000	2000/2001
Moyle	29	19
Newry & Mourne	293	291
Newtownabbey	130	109
North Down	58	135
Omagh	58	62
Strabane	95	94
All Northern Ireland	3,525	3,207

NORTHERN IRELAND TOURIST BOARD (NITB)**TABLE 3: JOBS ANTICIPATED TO BE CREATED AS A RESULT OF SELECTIVE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE AWARDED BY NITB IN THE YEARS 1998/99, 1999/2000 AND 2000/01**

Parliamentary Constituency	98/99	99/00	00/01
Belfast East	0	0	0
Belfast North	64	0	0
Belfast South	150	0	0
Belfast West	56	0	0
East Antrim	0	2	5
East Londonderry	35	8	50
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	0	25	31
Foyle	23	7	121
Lagan Valley	8	5	0
Mid Ulster	19	15	0
Newry And Armagh	49	127	0
North Antrim	4	8	10
North Down	2	0	0
South Antrim	17	0	0
South Down	11	10	0
Strangford	0	2	0
Upper Bann	3	2	0
West Tyrone	8	5	0
All Northern Ireland	449	216	217

Injuries at Work

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of people injured while at work in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3272/00)

Sir Reg Empey: The number of people injured while at work in each of the last five years are as follows:-

	96/97	97/98	98/99	99/00	00/01
Major injuries	538	453	613	593	649 ^(p)
Over 3 day injuries	2822	3034	3425	3785	3736 ^(p)
Totals	3360	3487	4038	4378	4385^(p)

^(p) provisional

Fatalities at Work

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of fatalities due to accidents at work in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3273/00)

Sir Reg Empey: The number of fatalities due to accidents at work in each of the last five years are as follows:-

1996/97	1997/98	1998/99	1999/2000	2000/2001
21	24	24	19	16

THE ENVIRONMENT

Telecommunications Mast: Killinchy Street, Comber

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment, in respect of the siting of a telecommunications mast at the rear of the police station in Comber, to detail (a) whether a planning application has been received, (b) if any objections to this application have been received and (c) what steps he is taking to alleviate local concerns.

(AQW 3136/00)

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Foster): [*holding answer 8 June 2001*]: A prior approval application for the erection of a telecommunications mast and ancillary equipment on land at BT Exchange, Killinchy Street, Comber for BT Cellnet, was received on 13 February 2001.

A total of 73 objections were received to the proposal, the vast majority of which related to health concerns.

This application was not processed within the statutory 42-day time limit set down under prior approval regulations, in this case, 27 March 2001. This resulted in a deemed approval being granted for the proposal even though the opinion of the Planning Service was to refuse. The Divisional Planning Manager wrote to BT Cellnet's agents on 3 April 2001 setting out this position.

I understand that the mast has not been erected. Officials met with the operators and their agents on 19 June 2001 to seek a resolution to this matter. At that meeting, officials explained the strength of public opposition to the mast, and confirmed that the opinion of the Department was that prior approval should have been refused in this instance.

The operators were sympathetic to the points being made. They in turn stressed the need for providing a service for their customers in the area, but agreed to look at alternative means for providing this service. They promised to return to officials when they had considered the matter further.

I will of course keep you updated on progress in this matter.

Clearly, mistakes have been made in this case, and I have passed on my concerns to officials. Urgent action has been taken to ensure that these deadlines are not missed in future. New procedures have been introduced, which include earlier decision-making, and more use of fax and recorded delivery.

You will be aware of the Executive Committee's decision on 14 June 2001 to abolish the prior approval system for telecommunications masts and to subject them to full planning control. I would hope to introduce the necessary amending legislation in the Assembly in the autumn.

Removal of Election Posters

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (a) his plans to ensure that all election posters are removed after the election and (b) what penalties are in place for those who fail to comply with such directions.

(AQW 3215/00)

Mr Foster: My Department has recently written to all political parties advising of the statutory Regulations for the display of election posters, including the requirement that they must be removed within 14 days of the close of the relevant poll. Following the effective date, which on this occasion is 21 June 2001, political parties will be reminded about their responsibilities in relation to election posters and the position will be monitored to ensure that all posters are removed. Election candidates normally co-operate fully with my Department in this matter.

Failure to comply with the legislation governing the removal of election posters may result in enforcement action against the party or parties concerned, which could result in court action and the imposition of a fine of up to £1,000.

Residential Development: (Cross Green, Carrickfergus)

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment what provision the Planning Service makes when considering planning applications for new housing developments that are adjacent or in close proximity to main power lines and pylons, particularly at Cross Green, Carrickfergus.

(AQW 3256/00)

Mr Foster: Although it does not have a statutory duty to do so, where appropriate, the Planning Service consults with the Environmental Health Office of the relevant district council in relation to the public safety and health implications of proposed residential development close to main power lines and pylons. The Planning Service takes any comments received into account in its determination of such planning applications.

The Planning Service consulted Carrickfergus Borough Council's Environmental Health Office in relation to the Cross Green development at Woodburn Road, Carrickfergus. No objections were raised to the proposed develop-

ment. Planning permission subsequently issued on 30 September 1997.

Planning Applications: Ards Borough Council Area

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of planning applications in the Ards Borough Council area in the years 1999-2000 and 2000-01 and the average timescale for processing the application. (AQW 3279/00)

Mr Foster: Details of the number of planning applications received for the Ards Borough Council area in the years 1999-2000 and 2000-01, and the average timescale for processing these applications are set out below.

Year	No. of Valid Applications Received	Number Determined to Date	Average Processing Time
1999-00	951	773	20.3 weeks
2000-01	961	527	16.7 weeks

Quality of Beaches

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment to detail any plans he has to improve the quality of beaches around Northern Ireland. (AQW 3286/00)

Mr Foster: My Department's responsibility in relation to beaches is to identify and monitor bathing waters in Northern Ireland that come within the scope of the EC Bathing Water Directive.

Northern Ireland already has an excellent record of compliance with the Directive. Compliance rates are higher than in any other region of the UK. In 2000 all 16 identified bathing waters in Northern Ireland met both the mandatory and the guideline standards of the Directive. Of these, seven were awarded a European Blue Flag. In administering the Blue Flag Scheme, the Tidy Northern Ireland Group takes account of other criteria such as beach facilities, cleanliness and safety. However, there is no room for complacency and my Department will continue to work to minimise pollution from agricultural and sewage sources.

The European Commission has recently issued a paper on possible revisions to the Bathing Water Directive. My Department is consulting District Councils and other interested groups in Northern Ireland about the Commission's proposals.

European Blue Flag Awards

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment to give his assessment of the European Blue Flag Awards

for beach cleanliness in Northern Ireland; and to make a statement. (AQW 3287/00)

Mr Foster: I am delighted to confirm that seven beaches in Northern Ireland were awarded the coveted Blue Flag award this year. These sites were:

- Benone Strand, Co. Londonderry
- Cranfield West, Co. Down
- Millisle Lagoon, Co. Down
- Portrush East Strand, Co. Antrim
- Portrush West Strand, Co. Antrim
- Portstewart Strand, Co. Londonderry and
- Tyrella, Co. Down

These beaches received awards last year but, unfortunately, Ballycastle, which also achieved the award last year, was not listed for 2001.

Blue Flags are awarded only when a beach conforms to strict criteria based on the quality of the water, management of the beach, and provision of information.

A full description of the criteria is available on the Tidy Britain Group web site, www.blueflag.org.

The Blue Flag scheme recognises authorities for their good stewardship of beaches and I would encourage all local councils to participate in the scheme and build on our recent successes.

Carrickfergus: Old Town Walls

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment to detail any plans he has to upgrade the old town walls of Carrickfergus. (AQW 3300/00)

Mr Foster: The part of the old town walls which is in the Department of Environment's care stretches from St Bride's car park clockwise, ending at Joymount.

Conservation work has been carried out on this section in the past and it is in good condition.

There is some concern over the condition of some sections of the wall not in the care of my Department. These sections are scheduled for protection under Article 3 of the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (NI) Order 1995. Discussions have taken place with Carrickfergus Borough Council about the extent and implementation of repairs to the walls within its ownership.

It is hoped that Council will carry out the work with guidance from EHS and in the terms specified by the conditions of a Scheduled Monuments Consent which, on application by the Council, would be issued by the Department under Articles 4 and 5 of the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (NI) Order 1995.

New site notices, explaining the history and features of the walls, will be provided later this year.

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 3053/00, to detail the segments of the old town walls which are the property of Carrickfergus Borough Council. (AQW 3303/00)

Mr Foster: The part of Carrickfergus old town walls which is the property of Carrickfergus Borough Council stretches from St Bride's car park gateway anticlockwise to the junction of Albert Road and Lancasterian Street, except for Northgate.

The Northgate and excavated wall footings in Delaney Green are in the care of the Department of the Environment.

The details of ownership are recorded on maps which can be inspected at the Monuments and Buildings Record, 5-33 Hill Street, Belfast.

Areas of Townscape Character

Mrs E Bell asked the Minister of the Environment to detail what action has been taken to ensure effective consultation in respect of the drawing up of areas of townscape character, in general, and North Down in particular; and to make a statement. (AQO 1627/00)

Mr Foster: All future areas of townscape character will, where appropriate, be designated within development plans. Consultation will take place at various stages of the plan process, and opportunities will be provided for local communities to participate in this process, through public meetings. In addition, following publication of a draft plan, there will be opportunity to make representations on it for consideration by the Planning Appeals Commission, an independent body, prior to final plan adoption.

The North Down Borough Council Area will be covered by the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan, on which work commenced in January of this year. As part of the plan preparation process, work is underway to determine the appropriateness of existing areas of townscape character boundaries. This will consider if new areas of townscape character should be designated, and consider the need for appropriate local policies and guidance for such areas, for inclusion in the plan. These considerations will be made in accordance with my Department's statutory consultation obligations and also the general approach to public participation which I have outlined.

Telecommunications Mast: Jerrettspace

Mr McGrady asked the Minister of the Environment to detail when the telecommunications mast at Jerrettspace will be demolished; and to make a statement. (AQW 3407/00)

Mr Foster: I understand that officials have written to you explaining that Crown Castle, the agents in this case, have written to us confirming their intention to replace the mast once they have secured alternative coverage provisions. It was also explained that there could be some delay in implementing this decision to allow them to complete a technical appraisal of their operations. They hope to minimise this.

Given this position, I am unable to state exactly when the mast will be demolished. However, I would hope that there will not be an undue delay. My officials will of course continue to monitor the situation.

Telecommunications Masts: Consultation Paper

Mr McGrady asked the Minister of the Environment to detail when he will publish his response to the consultation document on mobile telecommunications masts and the Stewart Report; and to make a statement. (AQO 1609/00)

Mr Foster: As I stated in my reply to the oral question from the Member for Upper Bann, my Department issued a consultation paper on 10 November 2000, seeking views on possible changes to planning legislation for the control of development by licensed telecommunications code system operators.

As the Member may know, the original date for responses to the consultation paper was 16 January 2001. The Environment Committee requested an extension of time to consider the issue and the Committee provided its response on 5 April 2001.

I brought the outcome of the consultation paper to the attention of the Executive Committee and after discussion on 14 June 2001, the Committee decided that the best way forward was for full planning permission procedures to be applied for telecommunications masts.

I have asked my officials to consider what legislation is necessary to implement the Executive Committee's decision, and I expect to be able to introduce this legislation in the autumn.

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Rate Collection Agency: Performance Targets 2001-02

Mr Attwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the performance targets which have been set for the Rate Collection Agency (RCA) in 2001-02. (AQW 3296/00)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan): For 2001-02 the following performance targets have been set for the RCA.

Output

To collect 98% (or the 2000-01 outturn if higher) of a forecast £660 million Gross Collectable Rate (excluding Late Assessments) by 31 March 2002.

Efficiency

To achieve a forecast unit cost of £11.61 for collecting rates per hereditament, excluding development costs for the Rates in the Millennium (RIM) and ONE Projects, representing a 1% improvement in real terms on 2000-01.

To achieve a forecast unit cost of £30.52 for processing Housing Benefit cases, excluding development costs for the RIM and ONE Projects, representing a 1% improvement in real terms on 2000-01.

Quality of Service

- To accurately calculate and advise District Councils of the Actual Penny Product outturn for 2000-01 by 30 November 2001.
- To process 98% of Housing Benefit applications free from error.
- To achieve an average turnaround time for processing regular, non-annual Housing Benefit applications of 28 days.
- To issue all eligible rate refunds within 14 working days of being identified as a rate refund.
- To achieve, by 31 March 2002, an overall rating for service provision of "satisfied" or above from at least 85% of respondents.

Financial Management

- To live within budget allocations for 2001-02.

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Fire Service Property: Cost of Vandalism

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cost of vandalism to Fire Service property and machinery in each of the last five years. (AQW 3234/00)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms de Brún): The cost of repairing Fire Authority property damaged by acts of vandalism over the past five years is as set out below.

1996/97	£3,111
1997/98	£3,065
1998/99	£2,815
1999/00	£4,126
2000/01	£1,672

The cost of repairing vehicle damage is not available. Most damage to vehicles is caused by incidents of stone throwing and it is therefore not practical to access the cost of each incident. The frequency of these attacks in some areas does, however, mean that general vehicle refurbishment is required sooner than would normally be the case.

Leagtar amach sa tábla thíos costas cóirithe sealúchas an Údaráis Dóiteáin a ndearnadh damáiste air le cúig bliana anuas de dheasca creachadóireachta.

1996/97	£3,111
1997/98	£3,065
1998/99	£2,815
1999/00	£4,126
2000/01	£1,672

Níl an costas ar dheisiú damáiste ar fheithiclí ar fáil. Rinneadh an chuid is mó den damáiste ar fheithiclí mar gheall ar eachtraí amhail caitheamh cloch, níl sé praiticiúil costas gach eachtra a fháil. Ciallaíonn minicíocht na n-ionsaithe seo i roinnt ceantar áfach go mbíonn athdheisiú ginearálta feithiclí de dhíth níos luaithe ná mar a bheadh sé de dhíth de ghnáth.

Full-Time Fire Cover: East Antrim

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what steps she is taking to establish a full-time Fire Service for the constituency of East Antrim. (AQW 3235/00)

Ms de Brún: The Northern Ireland Fire Brigade maintains a rolling review of Standards of Fire Cover and the associated provision of Fire Service firefighting resources.

The East Antrim area is one of the areas that the Fire Brigade keeps under particular review due to the large amount of development and infrastructure in some of the constituency towns. This particularly applies to the Retained (Part time) Fire Stations located in Carrickfergus and Larne. Both Stations are very busy having attended 887 and 577 calls respectively during 2000. Home Office Standards of Fire Cover are still being met in over 90% of occasions.

However, the Fire Brigade considers that over 600 calls per year is excessive for Retained Stations and will present a report later this year giving a strategic overview of the developing fire cover needs for the next 10 years.

Coinníonn Briogáid Dóiteáin Thuaisceart Éireann athbhreithniú leanúnach ar Chaighdeáin Chumhdach

Dóiteáin agus acmhainní múchta tine na Seirbhíse Dóiteáin leo.

Is é ceantar Aontroma Thoir ceann de na ceantair a choinníonn an Bhriogáid Dóiteáin faoi athbhreithniú áirithe mar gheall ar an mhéid mhór forbartha agus bonneagair déanta i roinnt toghbhailte. Baineann seo go háirithe leis na Stáisiúin Dóiteáin (Pháirtaimseartha) Choinneáilte suite i gCarraig Fhearghais agus i Latharna. Tá an dá stáisiún araon iontach gnóthach mar gur fhreagair siad ar 887 agus ar 577 scairt faoi seach le linn 2000. Tá Caighdeán Trealamh Dóiteáin na hOifige Baile á gcomhlíonadh go fóill i mbreis agus 90% de na huaireanta.

Síleann an Bhriogáid Dóiteáin áfach go bhfuil 600 scairt in aghaidh na bliana iomarcach do Stáisiúin Choinneáilte agus tabharfaidh sí tuairisc níos moille i mbliana ag déanamh léirmheasa straitéisigh ar riachtanais fhorbartha threalamh dóiteáin do na 10 mbliana seo chugainn.

Attacks on Fire Service Personnel

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of attacks on Fire Service personnel in each of the last five years. (AQW 3236/00)

Ms de Brún: The number of incidents which involved hostilities towards Fire Service personnel in each of the last three years is as follows.

	1998	1999	2000
Number of Calls	1155	554	855

Records for the previous two years are not available.

Seo a leanas líon na n-eachtraí ina a thig le nochtheadh do raonta leictreamhaighnéadacha tionchar a bheith aige ar fhorbairt aille nó nach dtig.

	1998	1999	2000
Líon na scairteanna	1155	554	855

Níl cáipéisí don dá bhliain seo a chuaigh thart ar fáil.

Protection For Fire Service Personnel

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what steps she is taking to protect Fire Service personnel from attack whilst on duty. (AQW 3237/00)

Ms de Brún: The Northern Ireland Fire Brigade takes many steps to protect Fire Service personnel from attack whilst on duty. Firefighters are issued with personal protective equipment, including tunics and overtrousers, which are fire-retardant, a helmet fitted with a visor, gloves and steel toe-capped boots.

Fire appliances are fitted with armoured glass and sliding protective screens for the windshields, in addition to internal door locks and locks on the external lockers.

Every firefighter receives extensive training on how to react in a hostile situation and every Incident Commander receives training on dealing with incidents involving civil disturbance. Incident Commanders will also carry out Dynamic Risk Assessment of every incident attended and will not expose firefighters to unnecessary danger in a hostile or civil disturbance incident.

There are regular liaison meetings, at local level, between the Brigade and representatives of the community in an effort to reduce attacks of Fire Service personnel.

Déanann Briogáid Dóiteáin Thuaisceart Éireann cuid mhór beart lena foireann Seirbhíse Dóiteáin a chosaint ó ionsaithe agus iad ar dualgas. Tugtar trealamh cosanta pearsanta don lucht múchta tinte, ina measc tá tuineacha, forbhrístí atá dófhriotaíoch, clogad le scáthlán air, miotóga agus buataisí cruach-chaipíneacha.

Tá fearais dóiteáin gléasta le gloiní armúrtha agus le scáileáin chosanta shleamhnáin do na gaothscáthanna, chomh maith le glais inmheánacha dorais agus glais ar na taisceadán eachtracha.

Faigheann gach trodaí tine oiliúint chuimsitheach ar an dóigh le freagairt ar staid naimhdeach agus faigheann gach Ceannasaí Eachtra oiliúint ar an dóigh le déileáil le heachtraí mar a bhfuil griolsa cathartha. Déanfaidh Ceannasaithe Eachtra Measúnú Bríomhar ar Bhaol gach eachtra a ndeachthas chaige agus ní chuirfidh sé trodaithe tine i mbaol neamhriachtanach in eachtra naimhdeach nó griolsa chathartha.

Bíonn cruinnithe rialta comhoibrithe ann, ag leibhéal áitiúil, idir an Bhriogáid agus ionadaithe an phobail le hiarracht a dhéanamh ionsaithe ar an fhoireann Seirbhíse Dóiteáin a laghdú.

Nursing-Home Beds

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to (a) give her assessment of the impact on the reduction of nursing-home beds and (b) state if she plans to increase funding to address this situation. (AQW 3239/00)

Ms de Brún: In my reply to AQW 574/00, I gave details of the numbers of private nursing-home beds in each Board area in each of the last three years. This information demonstrates that whilst there has been a reduction in private nursing-home beds in the Eastern and Northern Board areas in that period, there has been an increase in such beds in the Southern and Western Board areas.

Health and Social Services Boards and Trusts have operational responsibility for the assessment of the need for nursing-home care in their areas and are constantly

reviewing the beds available against the assessment of need.

I am aware that the private nursing-home sector, like other providers, is under financial pressure and I have already indicated that I am sympathetic to the case made for increased funding. It was for this reason that with my Department's approval Health and Social Services Boards explored the degree to which an above inflationary increase in fees was affordable for 2001-02. The increase in fees between 3.5% and 5.0% for 2001-02 will help the private sector, as will the further £2 million made available for 230 additional community care places in my budget.

I mo fhreagra ar AQW 574/00, thug mé sonraí ar líon na leapacha i dtithe príobháideacha altranais i ngach ceantar Boird in achan bhliain de na trí bliana anuas. Léiríonn an t-eolas seo go raibh méadú sna leapacha seo i gceantair Bhoird an Deiscirt agus an Iarthair cé go raibh laghdú sna leapacha príobháideacha ar fáil i dtithe príobháideacha altranais i gceantair Bhoird an Oirthir agus an Tuaiscirt.

Tá freagrachtaí feidhmithe ag Boird agus Iontaobhais Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta as measúnú an ghá do chúram i dtithe altranais ina gceantair féin agus tá siad ag athbhreithniú i gcónaí na leapacha áta ar fáil in aghaidh measúnú an ghá sin.

Tá a fhios agam go bhfuil an earnáil thithe príobháideacha altranais faoi bhrú airgeadais, cosúil le soláthraithe eile, agus chuir mé in iúl cheana féin go bhfuil mé tuisceanach don chás a rinneadh do níos mó maoiniú. Sin an fáth, le cead ó mo Roinn, ar scrúdaigh Boird Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta an méid a bhí méadú níos mó ná boilsciú i dtáillí inacmhainneach do 2001-2002. Cuideoidh an méadú idir 3.5%-5.0% i dtáillí leis an earnáil phríobháideach, chomh maith leis an £2m breise acuireadh ar fáil do 230 áit breise cúram pobail i mo bhuiséad.

Human Organs Inquiry Team

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) the work undertaken to date by the relatives reference group and the Human Organs Inquiry Team, (b) when the Inquiry Team is expected to report and (c) the approximate cost of this inquiry. (AQW 3244/00)

Ms de Brún: I announced the membership and terms of reference of the Human Organs Inquiry Team and Relatives Reference Group on 22 March. Since then the inquiry team and Relatives Reference Group have advertised widely in the local press inviting comments from the public, which has led to requests for over 90 questionnaires. The inquiry team has held initial meetings with parents and the Royal Victoria Hospital and has also issued letters to all relevant Health and Social Services Trusts and other interested parties requesting

information and views. Analysis of this written evidence has begun and will continue over the summer as more replies are received.

The Relatives Reference Group has heard relatives' concerns at meetings in Derry and Belfast and these concerns have been discussed with the relevant Trusts. Further regional meetings are planned this month and the group continues to maintain frequent contact with the Inquiry to share progress.

The inquiry has cost approximately £52,000 to date; however, it is too soon to say what the overall cost will be. On 22 March I asked the Inquiry to report to me within 12 months.

D'fhógair mé ballraíocht agus téarmaí tagartha Fhoireann an Fhiosrúcháin Orgán Daonna agus an Ghrúpa Tagartha Gaolta ar an 22 Márta. Ó shin, chuir foireann an Fhiosrúcháin agus an Grúpa Tagartha Gaolta fógraí go forleathan sa phreas áitiúil ag iarraidh tuairimí ón phobal, ar tháinig iarratais do bhreis agus 90 ceistiúchán astu. Bhí cruinnithe tosaigh ag Foireann an Fhiosrúcháin le tuismitheoirí agus chuir Otharlann Ríoga Vichteoiria litreacha chuig na hIontaobhais chuí Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta uile agus chuig páirtithe leasmhara eile ag iarraidh eolais agus tuairimí. Thosaigh anailís ar an fhianaise scríofa seo agus leanfaidh seo ar aghaidh le linn an tsamhraidh agus níos mó freagraí á bhfáil.

Chuala an Grúpa Tagartha Gaolta buarthaí gaolta ag cruinnithe i nDoire agus i mBéal Feirste agus pléadh na buarthaí seo leis na hIontaobhais chuí. Tá tuilleadh cruinnithe réigiúnacha eile le socrú an mhí seo agus leanann an Grúpa ar aghaidh a theagmháil rialta leis an Fhiosrúchán a choinneáil leis an dul chun cinn a phlé.

Chosain an Fhiosrúchán thart faoi £52,000 go dtí seo, ach tá sé róluath go fóill áfach an costas iomlán a mheas. Ar 22 Márta d'iarr mé ar an Fhiosrúchán tuairisc a thabhairt domh faoi cheann dhá mhí dhéag.

Incidence of Cancer: 1995-97

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) the number of men and women diagnosed with cancer in each of the last three years, (b) the number of men diagnosed with (i) prostate cancer and (ii) testicular cancer, (c) what she is doing to promote awareness of men's health, especially of cancer and (d) what funding has been allocated to this promotion compared to other campaigns. (AQW 3245/00)

Ms de Brún: The most recent available information is as follows:

(a) Number of incidence cases of all cancers* diagnosed here in men and women between 1995 and 1997

	Males		Females	
	Incidence Cases	Crude Rate per 100,000	Incidence Cases	Crude Rate per 100,000
1995	4132	513	4320	512
1996	4303	527	4523	530
1997	4375	533	4604	539
Average (95-97)	4270	524	4482	527

* includes non-melanoma skin cancers

(b) (i) Number of incidence cases of prostate cancers diagnosed here in men between 1995 and 1999

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	Average 95-99
Incidence Cases	476	468	502	537	488	494
Crude Rate per 100,000	59	57	61	65	59	60

(b) (ii) Number of incidence cases of cancer of the testis diagnosed here in men between 1995 and 1999

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	Average 95-99
Incidence Cases	41	56	46	41	42	45
Crude Rate per 100,000	5	7	6	5	5	5

(c) Most of the major diseases in our community affect both men and women. Action to promote health continues through the implementation of food and nutrition, physical activity, smoking and alcohol strategies. In 1999 my Department issued a men's health booklet, which included a section on cancer.

(d) As health promotion campaigns are directed at both sexes it is not possible to determine the proportion of funding specifically allocated to men.

Figures provided by the Northern Ireland Cancer Registry. For all cancers the latest available figures are for 1997.

Seo a leanas an t-eolas is déanaí atá ar fáil:

(a) Líon na gcásanna de na hailsí uile* fáthmheasta i bhfir agus i mná anseo idir 1995 agus 1997.

	Fir		Mná	
	Cásanna Eachtra	Ráta Teagmhais an 100,000	Cásanna Eachtra	Ráta Teagmhais an 100,000
1995	4132	513	4320	512
1996	4303	527	4523	530
1997	4375	533	4604	539
Meán (95-97)	4270	524	4482	527

* ailsí neamh-mheileanóma craicinn san áireamh.

(b) (i) Líon na gcásanna d'aillsí próstatacha fáthmheasta i bhfir anseo idir 1995 agus 1999.

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	Meán 95-99
Cásanna Eachtra	476	468	502	537	488	494
Ráta Teagmhais an 100,000	59	57	61	65	59	60

(b) (ii) Líon na gcásanna d'aile uiríoch fáthmheasta i bhfir anseo idir 1995 agus 1999.

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	Meán 95-99
Cásanna Eachtra	41	56	46	41	42	45
Ráta Teagmhais an 100,000	5	7	6	5	5	5

(c) Tá an chuid is mó de na príomhghalair inár bpobal ar fhir agus ar mhná araon. Leanann gníomhú ar aghaidh le sláinte a chur chun cinn trí chur i bhfeidhm straitéisí bia agus cothaithe, gníomhaíochta fisiciúla, caithimh tobac agus alcóil. I 1999, chuir mo Roinn leabhrán ar Shláinte Fear amach, ina raibh mír ar aile.

(d) Mar go ndírítear feachtais chur chun cinn sláinte ar an dá inscne ní féidir coibhneas an mhaoinithe dailte ar fhir go háirithe a fháil amach.

Clárann Ailsí Thuaisceart Éireann a sholáthraigh na figiúirí. Do na hailsí uile is iad na figiúirí do 1997 na figiúirí is déanaí atá ar fáil.

Power Lines: Assessment of Health Risk

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to give her assessment of the risk to health from power lines and pylons.

(AQW 3253/00)

Ms de Brún: My Department relies on the advice of the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) and its scientific advisers in respect of electromagnetic fields. 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 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 NRPB recognises that the question of whether exposure to electromagnetic fields can influence the development of cancer cannot be completely resolved and I fully support the view that the

continuing research in relation to ELF exposure is important to our understanding of this issue.

Braitheann mo Roinn ar chomhairle an Bhoird Náisiúnta Chosanta Raideolaíoch (BNCR) agus a chomhairleoirí eolaíochta maidir le raonta leictreamhaighnéadacha. Ar 6 Márta, d'fhoilsigh an Grúpa Comhairleach ar Radaíocht Neamhianaithe (GCRN) tuairisc dar teideal 'RLM* Raonta Leictreamhaighnéadacha agus an Baol ó Ailse'. Ghlac an tuairisc réimse leathan staidéar, idir eolaíoch agus eipidéimeolaíoch, san áireamh. Mar gheall ar an tuairisc seo agus ar na cinn eile roimhe sin, ní chreideann an BNCR go bhfuil cúis ar bith le srianta cainníochtaithe maidir le nochtadh an phobail do raonta leictreamhaighnéadacha ó oslinte nó ó ghléasanna soláthair leictreachais eile.

Ag an am céanna, aithníonn an BNCR nach féidir Creatlach le haghaidh Gníomhaíochta ar Liostaí Feithimh' a d'eisigh mé agus tacaím go hiomlán leis an tuairim go bhfuil taighde leanúnach ar nochtadh RLM tábhachtach dár dtuiscint ar an cheist seo.

Area Children and Young People's Committee

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in respect of the Area Children and Young People's Committee in each of the four Board Areas, to detail (a) the number of representatives from the Voluntary sector, (b) the number of representatives from the community and (c) the number of representatives from statutory and Government bodies. (AQW 3263/00)

Ms de Brún: The numbers of representatives from the voluntary sector, the community and statutory bodies on the Area Children and Young People's Committees in each Health and Social Services Board are set out in the following table.

HSS Board	No of representatives from the voluntary sector	No of representatives from the community	No of representatives from Statutory and Government Bodies	Total membership
Eastern	1	0	15	16
Northern	2	0*	9	11
Southern	1	0	14	15
Western	1	0	11	12

* The community sector is represented on the Northern Board's Area Children and Young People's Committee through the locality pilot steering groups.

Leagtar amach sa tábla a leanas líon na n-iondaithe ón earnáil dheonach, ó fhorais an phobail agus reachtúla ar Choistí Páistí agus Ógánaigh an Cheantair ag gach Bord Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta.

Bord SSS	Líon na n-iondaithe ón earnáil dheonach	Líon na n-iondaithe ón phobail	Líon na n-iondaithe ó na Forais Reachtúla agus an Rialtais	Iomlán Ballraíochta
Oirthear	1	0	15	16
Tuaisceart	2	0*	9	11
Deisceart	1	0	14	15
Iarthar	1	0	11	12

* Déantar ionadaí don earnáil phobail ar Choiste Páistí agus Ógánaigh an Cheantair Bhord an Tuaiscirt trí ghrúpaí stiúrtha píolótach áitiúil.

Litigation Costs

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the amounts paid by each Board and Trust in litigation costs in each of the last three financial years for which figures are available. (AQW 3269/00)

Ms de Brún: The amount paid by each Board and Trust in litigation costs from 1997-98 to 1999-2000 is shown in the table below (figures are not yet available for 2000-01):

COST OF LEGAL SERVICES BY BOARD AND TRUST 1997/98 – 1999/2000

HSS BOARD	1997/98	1998/99	1999/2000
	£	£	£
Northern	77,272	82,250	74,142
Southern	71,659	65,000	48,000
Eastern	277,812	185,221	135,973
Western	80,000	80,000	86,000
Total:	506,743	412,471	344,115
HSS TRUST			
Belfast City Hospital	85,302	60,000	77,400
Royal Group Hospitals	136,647	212,824	170,475
Ulster Community & Hospitals	67,259	151,262	184,743
Down Lisburn	149,437	143,040	140,806
South & East Belfast	96,172	157,000	162,293
North & West Belfast	89,100	75,699	80,264
Craigavon & Banbridge	26,000	44,018	49,577
Craigavon Area Hospital	23,650	49,843	49,978
Newry & Mourne	30,400	34,376	36,000
Green Park	23,176	21,904	23,751
Mater Hospital	14,141	23,775	31,919
Causeway	95,632	168,925	79,500
NI Ambulance Service	19,924	23,773	67,616
Homefirst	126,828	91,600	154,833
Foyle	55,486	69,870	89,088
Sperrin Lakeland	55,257	63,954	89,323
Amagh & Dungannon	47,000	55,000	56,375

HSS BOARD	1997/98	1998/99	1999/2000
	£	£	£
Altnagelvin	9,000	29,000	38,934
United Hospitals	56,142	77,555	70,650
Total:	1,206,553	1,553,418	1,653,525

Léirítear an méid ad' íoc gach Bord agus Iontaobhas ar chostas dlíthíochta ó 1997/98 go dtí 1999/2000 sa tábla thíos (níl figiúirí réidh go fóill do 2000/01): Costais Sheirbhísí Dlí de réir Boird agus Iontaobhais 1997/98 – 1999/2000

COSTAIS SHEIRBHÍSÍ DLÍ DE RÉIR BOIRD AGUS IONTAOBHAIS 1997/98 – 1999/2000

Bord SSS	1997/98	1998/99	1999/2000
	£	£	£
Thuaisceart	77,272	82,250	74,142
Deisceart	71,659	65,000	48,000
Oirthear	277,812	185,221	135,973
Iarthar	80,000	80,000	86,000
Iomlán:	506,743	412,471	344,115
Iontaobhas SSS			
Otharlann Chathair Bhéal Feirste	85,302	60,000	77,400
Grúpa Ríoga na nOtharlanna	136,647	212,824	170,475
Pobal Uladh & Otharlanna	67,259	151,262	184,743
An Dúin/Lios na gCearrbhach	149,437	143,040	140,806
Béal Feirste Theas & Thoir	96,172	157,000	162,293
Béal Feirste Thuaidh & Thiar	89,100	75,699	80,264
Craigavon & Droichead na Banna	26,000	44,018	49,577
Otharlann Ceantair Craigavon	23,650	49,843	49,978
An tÚr & an Múrn	30,400	34,376	36,000
Páirc Ghlas	23,176	21,904	23,751
Otharlann an Mater	14,141	23,775	31,919
Causeway	95,632	168,925	79,500
Seirbhís Otharcharr Thuaisceart Éireann	19,924	23,773	67,616
Homefirst	126,828	91,600	154,833
An Feabhal	55,486	69,870	89,088
Speirín Tír na Lochanna	55,257	63,954	89,323
Ard Mhacha agus Dún Geanainn	47,000	55,000	56,375
Alt na nGealbhan	9,000	29,000	38,934
Otharlanna Aontaithe	56,142	77,555	70,650
Iomlán:	1,206,553	1,553,418	1,653,525

Industrial Tribunal Awards and Settlements

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the amounts paid out in tribunal costs by each Board and Trust since 31 March 2000. (AQW 3270/00)

Ms de Brún: The amount of money paid out by each Board and Trust as a result of Industrial Tribunal awards and settlements, for the range of cases shown, for the year ending on 31 March 2001 is shown below.

Employing Authority	Equal Pay / Equal Value		Sex		Race	
	IT Award	Settlement	IT Award	Settlement	IT Award	Settlement
	£	£	£	£	£	£
Altnagelvin Hospitals	0	0	0	0	0	0
Armagh and Dungannon	0	0	0	0	0	0
Belfast City Hospital	0	10,998	0	7,037	0	0
Causeway	0	*30,664	0	3,350	0	0
Craigavon and Banbridge Community	0	0	0	0	0	0
Craigavon Area Hospital	0	0	0	0	0	0
Down Lisburn	0	0	0	0	0	2,500
Foyle	0	*49,132	0	0	0	0
Green Park	0	0	0	0	0	0
Homefirst Community	0	*13,878	0	0	0	0
Mater Infirmorum Hospital	0	0	0	1,500	0	0
Newry and Mourne	0	0	0	0	0	0
North and West Belfast	0	0	0	0	0	0
Northern Ireland Ambulance Service	0	0	0	3,000	0	0
Royal Group of Hospitals and Dental Hospital	0	0	0	12,250	0	1,500
South and East Belfast	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sperrin Lakeland	0	9,802	0	350	0	0
Ulster Community Hospital	0	0	0	0	0	0
United Hospitals	0	0	0	0	0	0

Employing Authority	Equal Pay / Equal Value		Sex		Race	
	IT Award	Settlement	IT Award	Settlement	IT Award	Settlement
	£	£	£	£	£	£
Eastern HSS Board	0	0	0	0	0	0
Northern HSS Board	0	117,769	0	9,023	0	0
Southern HSS Board	0	*152,960	0	0	0	0
Western HSS Board	0	*35,951	0	**44,100	0	0

* Payments represent **national settlement** on Speech and Language Therapist cases

** 126 ancillary staff received payments of £350 each.

Employing Authority	Fair Employment		Disability	
	IT Award	Settlement	IT Award	Settlement
	£	£	£	£
Altnagelvin Hospitals	0	0	0	4,000
Armagh and Dungannon	0	0	0	0
Belfast City Hospital	0	0	0	2,250
Causeway	0	0	0	0
Craigavon and Banbridge Community	0	0	0	0
Craigavon Area Hospital	2,100	0	0	0
Down Lisburn	0	0	0	0
Foyle	0	0	0	0
Green Park	0	0	0	0
Homefirst Community	0	0	0	0
Mater Infirmorum Hospital	0	0	0	0
Newry and Mourne	0	0	0	0
North and West Belfast	0	0	0	0
Northern Ireland Ambulance Service	0	9,000	0	0
Royal Group of Hospitals and Dental Hospital	0	16,000	0	0
South and East Belfast	0	**52,500	0	0
Sperrin Lakeland	0	0	0	0
Ulster Community Hospital	0	0	0	0
United Hospitals	0	0	0	0
Eastern HSS Board	0	0	0	0
Northern HSS Board	0	0	0	0
Southern HSS Board	0	0	0	0
Western HSS Board	0	0	0	0

** £40,000 in one case and £12,500 in the other

Léirítear thíos méid an airgid a íochta ag gach Bord mar thoradh ar Chúiteamh Bhinse Tionsclaíocha agus socruithe, do réimse na gcásanna léirithe, don bhiain ag críochnú ar 31 Márta 2001.

Údarás Fostaithe	Pá Cothrom / Luach Cothrom		Gnéis		Cine	
	Cúiteamh TE	Socrú	Cúiteamh TE	Socrú	Cúiteamh TE	Socrú
	£	£	£	£	£	£
Otharlanna Alt na nGealbhan	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ard Mhacha agus Dún Geanainn	0	0	0	0	0	0
Otharlann Chathair Bhéal Feirste	0	10,998	0	7,037	0	0
An Clochán	0	*30,664	0	3,350	0	0
Pobal Craigavon & Dhroichead na Banna	0	0	0	0	0	0
Otharlann Cheantair Craigavon	0	0	0	0	0	0
An Dún/Lios na gCearrbhach	0	0	0	0	0	2,500
An Feabhal	0	*49,132	0	0	0	0
Páirc Ghlas	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pobal Homefirst	0	*13,878	0	0	0	0
Otharlann an Mater	0	0	0	1,500	0	0
An tIúr & an Múm	0	0	0	0	0	0
Béal Feirste Thuaidh & Thiar	0	0	0	0	0	0
Seirbhís Otharcharr Thuaisceart Éireann	0	0	0	3,000	0	0
Grúpa Rioga na nOtharlanna agus Otharlann Fiaclóireachta	0	0	0	12,250	0	1,500
Béal Feirste Theas & Thoir	0	0	0	0	0	0
Speirín Tír na Lochanna	0	9,802	0	350	0	0
Otharlann Phobal Uladh	0	0	0	0	0	0
Otharlanna Aontaithe	0	0	0	0	0	0

Údarás Fostaithe	Pá Cothrom / Luach Cothrom		Gnéis		Cine	
	Cúiteamh TE	Socrú	Cúiteamh TE	Socrú	Cúiteamh TE	Socrú
	£	£	£	£	£	£
Bord SSS an Oirthir	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bord SSS an Tuaiscirt	0	*117,769	0	9,023	0	0
Bord SSS an Deiscirt	0	*152,960	0	0	0	0
Bord SSS an Iarthair	0	*35,951	0	**44,100	0	0

* Seasann íocaíochtaí do **socrú náisiúnta** ar chásanna Teiripeoirí Urlabhra agus Teanga

** Fuair 126 foireann choimhdeach íocaíocht de £350 an duine.

Údarás Fostaithe	Fostaíocht Chothrom		Míchumas	
	Cúiteamh TE	Socrú	Cúiteamh TE	Socrú
	£	£	£	£
Otharlanna Alt na nGealbhan	0	0	0	4,000
Ard Mhacha agus Dún Geanainn	0	0	0	0
Otharlann Chathair Bhéal Feirste	0	0	0	2,250
An Clochán	0	0	0	0
Pobal Craigavon & Dhroichead na Banna	0	0	0	0
Otharlann Cheantair Craigavon	2,100	0	0	0
An Dún/Lios na gCearrbhach	0	0	0	0
An Feabhal	0	0	0	0
Páirc Ghlas	0	0	0	0
Pobal Homefirst	0	0	0	0
Otharlann an Mater	0	0	0	0
An tÍlur & an Múrn	0	0	0	0
Béal Feirste Thuaidh & Thiar	0	0	0	0
Seirbhís Otharcharr Thuaisceart Éireann	0	9,000	0	0
Grúpa Ríoga na nOtharlanna agus Otharlann Fiaclóireachta	0	16,000	0	0
Béal Feirste Theas & Thoir	0	**52,500	0	0
Speirín Tír na Lochanna	0	0	0	0
Otharlann Phobal Uladh	0	0	0	0
Otharlanna Aontaithe	0	0	0	0
Bord SSS an Oirthir	0	0	0	0
Bord SSS an Tuaiscirt	0	0	0	0

Údarás Fostaithe	Fostaíocht Chothrom		Míchumas	
	Cúiteamh TE	Socrú	Cúiteamh TE	Socrú
	£	£	£	£
Bord SSS an Deiscirt	0	0	0	0
Bord SSS an Iarthair	0	0	0	0

** £40,000 i gcás amháin agus £12,500 i gcás eile

Framework for Action on Waiting Lists

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the progress made on her action plan to reduce waiting lists.

(AQW 3271/00)

Ms de Brún: The Framework for Action on Waiting Lists, which I issued in September last, set out a strategic context for action to reduce waiting lists. As a result, comprehensive plans have been drawn up by Boards and Trusts covering the action they will be taking to tackle waiting lists. These include measures such as:

- the appointment of a senior officer with responsibility for waiting lists;
- waiting list target reductions;
- the provision of additional hospital inpatient procedures, particularly in relation to those patients who have been waiting longest;
- the validation of waiting lists; and
- the development of GP referral protocols.

An extra £5 million was allocated last year to support the implementation of these plans and an additional £8 million has been allocated for 2001-2002.

Leag an Chreatlach le haghaidh Gníomhaíochta ar Liostaí Feithimh' a d'eisigh mé i mí Mheán Fómhair anuraidh, comhthéacs straitéiseach amach do ghníomh le liostaí feithimh a laghdú. Mar thoradh ar sin, dhréachtaigh Boird agus Iontaobhais pleananna cuimsitheacha ag cur in iúl na gníomhaíochta a dhéanfaidh siad le tabhairt faoi liostaí feithimh. I measc na mbeart seo tá:

- Ceapadh oifigigh shinsearaigh le freagracht as liostaí feithimh;
- Sprioc do laghduithe i liostaí feithimh;
- Soláthar gnáthamh breise otharlainne d'othair chónaitheacha, go háirithe do na hothair sin a bhí ag fanacht níos faide;
- Daingniú liostaí feithimh; agus
- Forbairt prótacal atreoraithe gnáthdhochtúirí.
- Dáileadh £5 milliún breise anuraidh le tacú le cur i bhfeidhm na bpleananna seo agus dáileadh £8 milliún breise do 2001/2002.

Intensive Care Review: Recommendations

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 2922/00, to detail (a) the reasons why some of the recommendations are partially implemented, (b) the hospitals affected as a result of the recommendations not being fully implemented and (c) the proposed timescale for full implementation. (AQW 3274/00)

Ms de Brún:

- (a) Some of the recommendations made by the Chief Medical Officer in her report of February 2000 required longer-term actions which are still being implemented. In relation to the recruitment and retention of appropriately trained consultant and other medical and nursing staff, for example, some Trusts have experienced difficulties.
- (b) All hospitals providing intensive care and high-dependency services are affected.
- (c) All the recommendations made by the Chief Medical Officer are due to be fully implemented by March 2004.
- (a) Bhí gníomhartha níos fadtéarmaí atá á gcur i bhfeidhm go fóill de dhíth ar roinnt de na moltaí a mhol an Príomh-Oifigeach Leighis ina tuairisc i mí Feabhra 2000. Maidir le hearcú agus le coinneáil lianna comhairleacha agus foirne altrachta agus leighis eile oile i gceart, mar shampla, bhí deacrachtaí ag roinnt Iontaobhas.
- (b) Tá baint acu le gach uile otharlann ag soláthar seirbhísí dianchúraim agus ardspleáchais.
- (c) Tá na moltaí uile a rinne an Príomh-Oifigeach Leighis le cur i bhfeidhm faoi Mhárta 2004.

Specialty and Surgical Procedure

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the steps she is taking to reduce waiting times for each specialty and surgical procedure. (AQW 3275/00)

Ms de Brún: I refer the member to the answer for AQW 3271/00.

Tarraingim aird an Chomhalta ar an fhreagra a thug mé ar AQW 3271/00.

Cancer Research Campaign

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) what assessment she has made of the cancer research campaign, '21 Targets

for the 21st Century' and (b) which of the targets could reasonably be adopted immediately by her Department. (AQW 3277/00)

Ms de Brún: The Cancer Research Campaign's document '21 Targets for the 21st Century' will help to emphasise the continuing need for action to prevent cancer and the importance of the care and cure of people with cancer. Many of the targets, such as those on taxation, are outside the remit of my Department whilst action is already being taken on others to help prevent cancer, provide high quality cancer services and improve the survival rates for people with cancer. The document 'Priorities for Action' also sets out my planning priorities and objectives, including those on cancer prevention and cancer services, for the Health and Personal Social Services in 2001-02.

Cuideoidh cáipéis an Fheachtais ar Thaighde Ailse '21 Sprioc don 21ú Céad' leis an bhéim a chur ar an ghá leanúnach do ghníomhaíocht chun cosc a chur ar ailse agus ar thábhacht chúram agus leigheas daoine le hailse. Ní bhaineann cuid mhór de na spriocanna, amhail cánachas, le húdarás mo Roinne ach tá ghníomhaíocht á déanamh cheana féin ar spriocanna eile le cosc a chur ar ailse, seirbhísí ardcháilíochta ailse a sholáthar agus le rátaí marthanais do dhaoine le hailse a fheabhsú. Leagann an cháipéis 'Tosaíochtaí le hAghaidh ghníomhaíocht' mo thosaíochtaí agus chuspóirí pleanála amach fosta do na Seirbhísí Sláinte agus Sóisialta Pearsanta i 2001/02, iad siúd faoi chosc ar ailse agus faoi sheirbhísí ailse san áireamh.

Waiting Lists: Action Plans

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) what resources are available beyond the current financial year to implement her action plan to reduce waiting lists, (b) what initiatives her Department has encouraged Boards to take in tackling waiting lists and (c) whether all Boards have submitted waiting list action plans and how the Department proposes to evaluate them. (AQW 3278/00)

Ms de Brún:

- (a) For 2002-2003, my Department, in common with all others, has at this stage only an indicative allocation of its resources. The normal budgetary process for 2002-3, which is now getting under way, will determine precisely what the Department's overall provision is to be. In light of that, and of the balance of pressures across the HPSS, I shall then decide the level of funding that can be afforded to each priority area of the service.
- (b) The Framework for Action on Waiting Lists, which I issued last September, contained a comprehensive

range of clinical, managerial and efficiency measures to tackle waiting lists.

- (c) All Boards have submitted waiting list action plans. These are being considered in the context of the Boards' Service Investment Plans for 2001-02.
- (a) Cosúil leis na Ranna eile, níl ach comhartha do mo Roinn ar dháileadh a hacmhainní do 2002-03 faoi láthair. Socróidh an gnáthphróiseas buiséadach do 2002/3, atá ag dul ar aghaidh anois, go díreach ar sholáthar iomlán na Roinne. Mar gheall ar sin agus ar chothrom na mbrúnna ar fud na SSSP, cinntídh mé ansin ar leibhéal an mhaoinithe atá ar acmhainn a dháileadh ar gach réimse tosaíochta den tseirbhís.
- (b) Istigh sa' Chreatlach le hAghaidh Gníomhaíochta ar Liostaí Feithimh, a d'eisigh mé i mí Mheán Fómhair anuraidh, bhí réimse cuimsitheach beart clínicíúil, bainistíochta agus tiosach le tabhairt faoi liostaí feithimh.
- (c) Chuir gach uile Bhord gníomhphleananna ar liostaí feithimh isteach. Tá machnamh á dhéanamh orthu i gcomhthéacs Pleananna Infheistíochta Seirbhísí na mBord do 2001/2002.

Treatment of Inflammatory Arthritis: Remicade

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the new arthritis drug Remicade is available within the EHSSB and how much funding is required to provide the drug. (AQW 3280/00)

Ms de Brún: Remicade is one of two new biologic drug therapies used to treat severe inflammatory arthritis and there are currently service users within the EHSSB area receiving these drugs.

The annual cost of Remicade is in the region of £8,500 per patient. Costs vary depending on whether the treatment is initial or ongoing.

Is drúga é Remicade de dhá theiripe bhitheolaíochta a úsáidtear le géar-airtríteas athlastaithe a chóireáil agus tá úsáideoirí seirbhísí sa BSSSO atá ag fáil na ndrúgaí seo faoi láthair.

Tá costas bliainiúil Remicade thart faoi £8,500 an othar. Bíonn éagsúlacht costas ann ag brath ar cé acu cóireál tosaigh nó cóireál leanúnach a bhíonn ann.

Arthritis Treatment: Funding

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the funding made available for the treatment of arthritis in the EHSSB for the years 1999-2000 and 2000-01. (AQW 3282/00)

Ms de Brún: There is no specific allocation within the health and personal social services budget for the treatment of arthritis. However, in 2000-01 the EHSSB

provided Green Park Health Care Trust with £108,433 for rheumatological drugs such as Remicade and Enbrel. No such funding was provided for 1999-2000 as the drugs were not marketed until 2000.

Níl dáileadh ar leith sa bhuiséad sláinte agus seirbhísí sóisialta pearsanta do chóireál airtritis. I 2000-01, áfach, sholáthair an BSSSO £108,433 d'Iontaobhas na Páirce Glaise do dhrúgaí réamatóideach amhail Remicade agus Enbrel. Níor cuireadh maoiniú de chineál ar bith do 1999-2000 mar ní raibh margadócht déanta ar na drúgaí go dtí 2000.

Arthritis

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of people in the EHSSB area suffering from arthritis in the years 1999-2000 and 2000-01. (AQW 3283/00)

Ms de Brún: The information requested is not available.

Níl an t-eolas a iarradh ar fáil.

Connecting With Young People Conference

Dr Birnie asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to give her assessment of the likely success of the Connecting with Young People conference, to be held on 12 and 13 June in attracting participation from young people given that the registration fee is £175 and the concessionary fee is £90. (AQW 3284/00)

Ms de Brún: I understand that while the conference is aimed at policy makers and public sector providers, a number of young people, as well as organisations working with young people, have been involved in the planning, and will be participating in the conference. All young people are attending free of charge.

Tuigim cé go bhfuil an chomhdháil dírithe ar an lucht déanta polasaithe agus ar sholáthraithe ón earnáil phríobháideach, bhí baint ag líon de dhaoine óga, chomh maith le heagraíochtaí ag obair le daoine óga leis an phleanáil, agus beidh siad ag glacadh páirte sa chomhdháil. Tá gach uile dhuine óg ag freastal uirthi saor in aisce.

NI Health and Social Services Estates Agency: Performance Targets

Ms Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what performance targets have been set for the Northern Ireland Health and Social Services Estates Agency for 2001-02. (AQW 3285/00)

Ms de Brún: The targets, which have been set for 2001-02, are based on the corporate aims and objectives of the Agency as set out in Section 5 of its Corporate and Business Plan. A copy of the Corporate and Business Plan will be placed in the library.

The targets are as follows:

Quality

- The following percentage of external clients to regard the quality of the Agency's services as satisfactory or better:-

Client Support/Project Management	- 85%
Specialist Engineering Services	- 80%
Trust Consultancy Support	- 80%

Throughput/Service Delivery

- Complete seven Firecode audits on HSS Trusts by 31 March 2002.
- Advise on 65% of capital investment business case submissions within 20 working days. (Subject to a maximum of 24 business cases per annum).
- Initiate with the Department, a review of the strategy for the disposal of surplus estate in relation to both the HSS Trust lands and the Department's Retained Estate and respond speedily and effectively to any recommendation from the forthcoming Northern Ireland Audit Office Report with a view to optimising and quantifying the resources to be released over the next five years.
- Project manage the disposal of Retained Estate properties and realise £2.15 million in addition to the resources planned to be released from sales deferred from 2000-01.
- Complete testing and issue Test Reports to the Authorised Person in respect of 145 sterilizers and washer disinfectors by 31 March 2002.
- Respond to requests indicating a proposed programme for medical devices services within 10 working days of a receipt of written request.

Financial Management

- Ensure that the Agency lives within its running cost allocation and demonstrates that its full costs are recovered, on a notional basis, through Service Level Agreements with clients.

Tá na spriocanna a leagadh síos do 2001/2002 bunaithe ar aidhmeanna agus ar chuspóirí corparáideacha na Gníomhaireachta leagtha amach i Mír 5 dá Plean Corparáideach agus Gnó. Cuirfear cóip den Plean Chorporáideach agus Ghnó sa leabharlann.

Seo a leanas na spriocanna:

Cáilíocht

- Cuireann an céatadán seo a leanas de chliaint eachtracha in iúl go bhfuil cáilíocht sheirbhísí na Gníomhaireachta sásúil nó níos fearr:-

Tacaíocht do Chliaint/Bainistíocht Scéime	- 85%
Seirbhísí Sainiúla Innealtóireachta	- 80%
Tacaíocht Chomhairleach Iontaobhais	- 80%

Trídchur/Soláthar Seirbhísí

- Seacht n-iniúchadh Cóid Dóiteáin ar Iontaobhais SSS a chríochnú faoin 31 Márta 2002.
- Comhairle a thabhairt ar 65% de mholtaí do chásanna gnó infheistíochta caipitil laistigh de 20 lá oibre. (Faoi réir uasmhéid de 24 cás gnó in aghaidh na bliana).
- Tús a chur, i gcomhar leis an Roinn, le hathbheithniú ar an straitéis le fáil réidh le heastáit bhreise maidir le tailte an Iontaobhais SSS agus le hEastáit Choinneáilte na Roinne araon, agus le freagairt go gasta agus go héifeachtach ar mholadh ar bith ó Thuairisc Oifig Iniúchta Thuaisceart Éireann atá le teacht de gheall ar úsáid is fearr agus cainníochtú na n-acmhainní atá le cur ar fáil le linn na gcúig bliana seo chugainn.
- An scéim le fáil réidh le háitribh Eastát Coinneáilte a stiúradh agus £2.15m a réadú mar bharr ar na hacmhainní atá sé ar intinn a chur ar fáil ó dhíolacháin a coinníodh siar ó 2000-01.
- Trialacha a chríochnú agus Tuairiscí Trialach maidir le 145 steirileoir agus dífhachtán leicneán a sheoladh chuig an Duine Údarásaithe faoin 31 Márta 2002.
- Freagairt ar iarratais ag moladh cláir do sheirbhísí gaireas leighis laistigh de 10 lá oibre má fhaightear iarratas scríofa.

Bainistíocht Airgeadais

- Ag cinntiú go gcloíonn an Gníomhaireacht laistigh dá dáileadh costas reachtúil agus go léiríonn sí go bhfuil a costais iomlána faighte ar ais, ar bhonn nóiseanúla, trína h-Aontais Leibhéal Seirbhísí le cliaint.

'Facing the Future'

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what action has been taken as set out in 'Facing the Future' namely (a) to reduce the non-recurrent nature of additional funding; (b) to reduce the level of bed occupancy in intensive care units and high-dependence units; (c) to increase the recruitment of nursing staff and the retention of nurses; (d) to increase the number of community care packages; and (e) to reduce the number of staff absent through illness.

(AQW 3294/00)

Ms de Brún:

- (a) As part of the Spending Review settlement for the present financial year, an additional £31 million was secured to fund on a permanent basis those services which hitherto had relied on non-recurrent funding.
- (b) In line with the recommendations contained in 'Facing the Future', an additional 10 intensive care beds and 11 high-dependency beds have been brought on-stream, thereby increasing capacity in these key services.
- (c) A number of initiatives have been taken to enhance the supply of qualified nurses, including free training for nurses and midwives rejoining the HPSS, as well as an expansion in the number of available student nurse places.
- (d) An additional £2 million has been allocated in the current year to increase by 230 the number of community care packages to be provided.
- (e) 'Facing the Future' suggested that further research was needed on whether routine vaccination of staff would help to reduce staff sickness levels. My Department has undertaken this research and is satisfied that it would. Accordingly, in August 2000 my Department recommended that influenza immunisation should be routinely offered to all front-line staff working within the HPSS.
- (a) Mar chuid de shocrú an Athbhreithnithe ar Chaiteachas don bhliain reatha airgeadais seo, fuarthas £31 milliún breise leis na seirbhísí sin, a bhí orthu brath ar mhaoiniú neamhbhuan roimhe sin, a mhaoiniú ar bhonn buain.
- (b) De réir na moltaí i 'Ag Tabhairt Aghaidhe ar an Todhchaí', fuarthas 10 leaba breise dianchúraim agus 11 leaba breise ardspleáchais, ar an dóigh sin, ag méadú toillte sna heochairseirbhísí seo.
- (c) Rinneadh roinnt beart le cur le soláthar altraí cáilithe, oiliúint shaor d'altraí agus do mhná cabhrach ag dul sna SSSP, chomh maith le méadú i líon na n-áiteanna ar fáil d'ábhar altraí, san áireamh.
- (d) Dáileadh £2 milliún breise i mbliana le líon na bpacáistí cúram pobail atá le soláthar a mhéadú faoi 230.
- (e) Chuir 'Ag Tabhairt Aghaidhe ar an Todhchaí' in iúl go raibh tuilleadh taighde de dhíth le fáilamach an gcuideodh gnáthvacsaíniú na foirne le leibhéil tinnis na foirne a laghdú, nó nach gcuideodh. Thug mo Roinn faoin taighde seo agus tá sí sásta go gcuideodh sé leis. Mar sin de, i mí Lúnasa 2000 mhol mo Roinn go dtairgí imdhíonadh ulpóige go rialta don fhoireann thosach uile ag obair laistigh de na SSSP.

Framework for Action on Waiting Lists

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) what steps have been taken to ensure primary care practitioners are fully involved in addressing the waiting list problem, and how this is measured; (b) what targets have been set which address the waiting list problems in 2000-01 and beyond; and (c) to confirm if all Boards have developed waiting list action plans and how the Department measures their implementation. (AQW 3295/00)

Ms de Brún:

- (a) The Framework for Action on Waiting Lists, which I issued in September 2000, was issued to a wide range of HPSS interests, including GPs. Since then, Health and Social Services Boards and Trusts have been involving primary care practitioners closely in the planning and development of their waiting list action plans. In monitoring the implementation of these plans, my officials will be paying particular attention to the involvement of primary care practitioners.
- (b) Priorities for Action, which I issued in March 2001, set out targets for waiting list reductions in 2001-02 and beyond. These targets include the reduction of waiting lists to 48,000 by March 2002, as a first step to bringing them down to 39,000 by March 2004.
- (c) All Boards have developed Waiting List Action Plans. In addition to the normal process of accountability review, the implementation of these will be monitored through a range of measures, including quarterly reports submitted by the Boards, and regular meetings with my officials.
- (a) Seoladh an Chreatlach le haghaidh Gníomhaíochta ar Liostaí Feithimh' a d'eisigh mé i mí Mheán Fómhair 2000, chuig páirtithe leasmhara na SSSP, gnáthdhochtúirí san áireamh. Ó shin, bhí Boird agus Iontaobhais Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta ag tarraingt gnáthdhochtúirí príomhchúraim go dlúth isteach i bpleanáil agus i bhforbairt a ngníomhphleananna ar liostaí feithimh. Trí mhonatóireacht a dhéanamh ar chur i bhfeidhm na bpleananna seo, beidh mo chuid oifigeach ag tabhairt airde ar leith do tharraingt isteach gnáthdhochtúirí príomhchúraim.
- (b) Leag 'Tosaíochtaí le hAghaidh Gníomhaíochta', a d'eisigh mé i mí an Mhárta 2001, spriocanna amach do laghdúithe i liostaí feithimh i 2001/2002 agus níos faide anonn. Cuireann na spriocanna seo an laghdú i liostaí feithimh go 48,000 faoi Mhárta 2002 san áireamh, mar an chéad chéim dá laghdú go 39,000 faoi Mhárta 2004.
- (c) D'fhorbair gach uile Bhord Gníomhphleananna ar Liostaí Feithimh. Mar bharr ar an athbhreithniú ar an ghnáthphróiseas freagrachta, déanfar

monatóireacht ar a gcur i bhfeidhm trí réimse beart, mar aon le tuairiscí ráithiúla curtha isteach ag na Boird agus cruinnithe rialta le mo chuid oifigeach.

Patients Awaiting Discharge

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of patients awaiting discharge from each hospital into nursing/residential homes (a) by illness and (b) by age. (AQW 3298/00)

Ms de Brún:

- (a) This information is not available.
(b) This information for April 2001 (the latest date for which data are available) is detailed in the table below.

Hospital	Age Group	
Belfast City	60 to less than 65 years	1
	65 to less than 75 years	5
	75 years and over	9
	Less than 60 years	1
	Total	16
Musgrave Park	75 years and over	4
	Less than 60 years	1
	Total	5
Ulster	65 to less than 75 years	5
	75 years and over	22
	Less than 60 years	1
	Total	28
Royal Victoria	65 to less than 75 years	3
	75 years and over	3
	Less than 60 years	1
	Total	7
RVH Elderly	65 to less than 75 years	1
	75 years and over	13
	Total	14
Mater Infirmorum	65 to less than 75 years	1
	75 years and over	6
	Total	7
Lagan Valley	75 years and over	2
	Total	2
Coleraine	65 to less than 75 years	3
	75 years and over	13
	Less than 60 years	1
	Total	17
Robinson Memorial	65 to less than 75 years	1
	75 years and over	2
	Total	3

Hospital	Age Group	
Dalriada	75 years and over	4
	Total	4
Moyle	75 years and over	2
	Less than 60 years	1
	Total	3
Whiteabbey	75 years and over	1
	Total	1
Antrim	75 years and over	2
	Total	2
Braid Valley	75 years and over	3
	Total	3
South Tyrone	75 years and over	2
	Total	2
Loane House	75 years and over	5
	Total	5
Mullinure	75 years and over	5
	Total	5
Lurgan	75 years and over	14
	Total	14
Craigavon Area	75 years and over	3
	Total	3
Daisy Hill	60 to less than 65 years	1
	75 years and over	4
	Total	5
Altnagelvin	65 to less than 75 years	1
	75 years and over	5
	Less than 60 years	1
	Total	7
Erne	75 years and over	3
	Less than 60 years	1
	Total	4

- (a) Níl an t-eolas seo ar fáil.
(b) Tá an t-eolas d'Aibreán 2001 (an dáta is déanaí ar a bhfuil sonraí ar fáil) léirithe sa tábla thíos.

Otharlann	Aoisghrúpa	
Cathair Bhéal Feirste	60 go níos óige ná 65 bliain	1
	65 go níos óige ná 75 bliain	5
	75 bliain agus níos sine	9
	Níos óige ná 60 bliain	1
	Iomlán	16
Páirc Musgrave	75 bliain agus níos sine	4
	Níos óige ná 60 bliain	1
	Iomlán	5
Uladh	65 go níos óige ná 75 bliain	5
	75 bliain agus níos sine	22
	Níos óige ná 60 bliain	1
	Iomlán	28

Otharlann	Aoisghrúpa	
Ríoga Vichteoiria	65 go níos óige ná 75 bliain	3
	75 bliain agus níos sine	3
	Níos óige ná 60 bliain	1
	Iomlán	7
OVR do Sheandaoine	65 go níos óige ná 75 bliain	1
	75 bliain agus níos sine	13
	Iomlán	14
Otharlann an Mater	65 go níos óige ná 75 bliain	1
	75 bliain agus níos sine	6
	Iomlán	7
Gleann an Lagáin	75 bliain agus níos sine	2
	Iomlán	2
Cúil Raithin	65 go níos óige ná 75 bliain	3
	75 bliain agus níos sine	13
	Níos óige ná 60 bliain	1
	Iomlán	17
Cuimhneacháin Mhic Roibín	65 go níos óige ná 75 bliain	1
	75 bliain agus níos sine	2
	Iomlán	3
Dál Riada	75 bliain agus níos sine	4
	Iomlán	4
Mael	75 bliain agus níos sine	2
	Níos óige ná 60 bliain	1
	Iomlán	3
Mainistir Fhoinn	75 bliain agus níos sine	1
	Iomlán	1
Aontroim	75 bliain agus níos sine	2
	Iomlán	2
Gleann na Brád	75 bliain agus níos sine	3
	Iomlán	3
Deisceart Thír Eoghain	75 bliain agus níos sine	2
	Iomlán	2
Teach Uí Luain	75 bliain agus níos sine	5
	Iomlán	5
Muileann an Iúir	75 bliain agus níos sine	5
	Iomlán	5
An Lorgan	75 bliain agus níos sine	14
	Iomlán	14
Ceantar Craigavon	75 bliain agus níos sine	3
	Iomlán	3
Cnoc na Nóiníní	60 go níos óige ná 65 bliain	1
	75 bliain agus níos sine	4
	Iomlán	5
Alt na nGealbhan	65 go níos óige ná 75 bliain	1
	75 bliain agus níos sine	5
	Níos óige ná 60 bliain	1
	Iomlán	7
Éirne	75 bliain agus níos sine	3
	Níos óige ná 60 bliain	1
	Iomlán	4

Persons Waiting for Inpatient Treatment

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 3089/00, to detail the form in which the information is available. (AQW 3299/00)

Ms de Brún: My Department collects information on persons waiting for inpatient treatment in each quarter on the basis of specialty and Trust. Monthly waiting list information is also collected on the basis of specialty and Board – however, this information excludes private patients and patients from elsewhere.

Cruinníonn mo Roinn eolas ar dhaoine ag fanacht le cóireáil othair chónaithigh i ngach ráithe de réir speisialtachta agus Iontaobhais. Cruinnítear eolas ar liostaí míosúla feithimh fosta de réir speisialtachta agus Boird, ach ní chuireann an t-eolas seo othair phríobháideacha agus othair eile san áireamh áfach.

Accident and Emergency: Waiting Times

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) the average waiting time for treatment at the Ulster Hospital Accident and Emergency Department in May 2001, (b) how this compares with May 2000 and (c) what steps are being taken to reduce the waiting time for Accident and Emergency treatment at this hospital. (AQW 3309/00)

Ms de Brún: Information on the percentage of new patients seen by a doctor within specified time bands at the A&E Department of the Ulster Hospital for May 2000 and May 2001 is available and is detailed in the table below.

	May 2000	May 2001
% seen within 1 hour	50%	43%
% seen within 2 hours	78%	71%
% seen within 3 hours	89%	85%
% seen within 4 hours	93%	91%

The Ulster Community and Hospitals Trust has introduced a wide range of measures to help reduce the waiting time in the Accident & Emergency Department of the Ulster Hospital. These measures include increased elective day procedures to free up inpatient beds for emergency admissions, the appointment of 10 additional nursing staff, and an Emergency Nurse Practitioner service between 9 am and 10.30 pm to enable treatment of minor injuries and fast-track major injury patients.

Tá eolas ar fáil ar chéatadán na n-othar nua feicthe ag dochtúir laistigh de bhandaí ama ar leith i Roinn Timpistí agus Éigeandálaí Otharlann Uladh le linn mí na Bealtaine 2000 agus mí na Bealtaine 2001 agus mionléirítear sa tábla thíos é.

	Bealtaine 2000	Bealtaine 2001
% feicthe ag dochtúir laistigh de 1 uair	50%	43%
% feicthe ag dochtúir laistigh de 2 uair	78%	71%
% feicthe ag dochtúir laistigh de 3 uair	89%	85%
% feicthe ag dochtúir laistigh de 4 uair	93%	91%

Thug Iontaobhais Phobal Uladh agus Otharlann réimse leathan beart isteach le cuidiú le laghdú na n-amanna feithimh i Roinn Timpistí agus Éigeandálaí Otharlann Uladh. I measc na mbeart seo tá níos mó gnáthamh roghnach lae le leapacha othair chónaithigh a shaoadh do ghlacadh isteach éigeandála, ceapadh 10 oibrí altrachta breise, agus seirbhís Ghnáthaltra Éigeandála idir 9r.n. agus 10.30i.n. chun cur ar a gcumas mionghortuithe agus othair le gortuithe tromchúiseacha tús áite a chóireáil.

HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

Investment in Information Technology

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail the investment made in Information Technology in the Further Education sector. (AQO 1593/00)

The Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Dr Farren): In 1999 my Department committed to spend £10 million over three years under its ICT strategy for the Further Education Sector. This funding was spent as follows: £2 million in 1999-2000; £4 million in 2000-01 and £4 million is committed this year (2001-02). This funding has been complemented by significant investment by the Colleges from their own resources, amounting to approximately £3.5 million over the financial years 1999-2000 and 2000-01.

Tyrone Colleges Project

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail his plans to develop East Tyrone College of Further and Higher Education. (AQO 1599/00)

Dr Farren: The Outline Business Case for the Tyrone Colleges Project, which encompasses a new college for East Tyrone in Dungannon and a new college for Omagh, was presented to my Department on 7 March 2001. Clarification was sought on a number of issues and this was

provided to the Department on 31 May 2001. Departmental approval to proceed to the PFI procurement phase will be given if the assessment is positive. The Department has also agreed with East Tyrone that it should explore the feasibility of a joint Further Education / Library facility for East Tyrone's Cookstown provision.

Quality Assurance Agency

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail the cost of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in the Higher Education sector. (AQO 1579/00)

Dr Farren: The Quality Assurance Agency is an independent body funded by subscriptions from universities and colleges of higher education, and through contracts with the main UK funding bodies. Since the Agency's establishment in 1997 to the end of the 1999-2000 Academic Year, the combined cost to my Department and its predecessor, DENI, and the Northern Ireland universities was £485,190.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

District Councils: Additional Services

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail any plans he has to give additional responsibilities to district councils. (AQW 3255/00)

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Campbell): I have no plans to give additional services to district councils at present.

Ballywalter: Footpath Provision

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he has any plans to provide a footpath from Westland Drive to the graveyard in Ballywalter given the volume of traffic on this stretch of road. (AQW 3281/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service currently has no plans to provide a footway from Westland Drive to the graveyard in Ballywalter. I have, however, asked Roads Service to carry out a full assessment of such a scheme in order to determine its priority status in comparison with other proposals competing for inclusion in the programme of minor road works. The assessment, which will involve survey work among other things, will be carried out over the coming weeks and I hope to be in a position to advise you of the outcome before the end of August.

Newtownards: Traffic Congestion

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the steps he is taking to address the traffic congestion on the Portaferry Road, Newtownards on weekday mornings. (AQW 3291/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service is aware of the congestion that occurs at the junction of Portaferry Road and New Road during the morning rush hour. It is fairly typical of congestion that occurs at a number of key junctions in the Newtownards area during this period.

I understand that the problem is exacerbated by parents dropping off their children at the nearby Castle Gardens Primary School and, more recently, by road works associated with the laying of a new gas pipeline. The imminent closure of the school and completion of the road works should, however, improve traffic progression on Portaferry Road.

Following the closure of the school, Roads Service intends to carry out a study to determine the feasibility of introducing traffic management measures to improve traffic progression at this location.

Resurfacing: Inishargey Road, Kircubbin

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail when the Inishargey Road, Kircubbin will be resurfaced. (AQW 3293/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service has no plans to resurface Inishargey Road, Kircubbin. It hopes, however, to resurface a section of Kircubbin Road, Ballywalter within the next few weeks. Pending the resurfacing, a basecourse surface has already been laid on the stretch of road in question, where the Department's Water Service has recently installed a new water main.

Together, these two roads form the C257 route, which connects Kircubbin and Ballywalter.

Public Safety in Railway Stations

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail any plans he has to ensure both staff and public safety in railway stations. (AQW 3302/00)

Mr Campbell: Staff and public safety continues to be a priority for Translink. Meetings have been set up with staff representatives to look at issues of personal safety for staff both at stations and on trains. Staff have been issued with mobile phones for security and safety use. Translink are at present considering measures to enhance security for lone passengers at halts especially for women.

Translink are also implementing the recommendations in the W H Stephens & Sons report in relation to emergency lighting, external lighting, surfaces and paths, handrails and guard rails.

Road Traffic Accidents

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail, by constituency, the number of major and minor road traffic accidents in the years 1999-2000 and 2000-01. (AQW 3306/00)

Mr Campbell: The provision of information in relation to road accidents is a matter for the Northern Ireland Office.

Crawfordsburn Sewer Replacement

Mrs E Bell asked the Minister for Regional Development, in relation to the imminent Crawfordsburn Sewer Replacement, to detail (a) with whom he consulted; (b) what consideration was given to the possible consequences upon the Tourist Industry; (b) why the scheduled timetable was deemed to be necessary; and (d) why the replacement was not scheduled to give residents and businesses a reasonable period of notice. (AQW 3338/00)

Mr Campbell: Last year the existing trunk sewer in Crawfordsburn was irreparably damaged by landslides. In these circumstances there is no option but to lay a replacement sewer through the village. The scheme is estimated to cost £300,000 and will take 15 weeks to complete. In view of the scale of the construction work that is necessary the closure of Main Street to through traffic is unavoidable. However, local traffic will be allowed restricted access.

Initial consultations were held with a number of bodies (i.e. Roads Service, Translink, school authorities and Traffic Branch of the Royal Ulster Constabulary) about the timing of the scheme. The consensus was that the summer months of July and August were the least difficult time of the year to carry out the work. Indeed, school and commuter traffic is generally reduced and there is a longer working day for the contractors involved.

However, further consultations have been held with local residents, the owners of businesses in the village and their public representatives. I accept their view that the adverse impact of the work, particularly on tourism and businesses in the area, would be reduced if it were postponed until the autumn. I place great store in public consultation and I have decided to defer the start date of the scheme from 25 June to early September.

Local residents and their representatives are being informed.

Sewage Treatment: Ballymartin, County Down

Mr McGrady asked the Minister for Regional Development to state when the new sewage treatment works will be provided in Ballymartin, County Down.

(AQO 1608/00)

Mr Campbell: The Urban Waste Water Treatment Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995, which implement the EU Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive, require the provision of appropriate treatment for wastewater at locations, such as Ballymartin, by 31 December 2005.

A detailed appraisal has been carried out of the options for treating wastewater in the Mourne coastal area including Ballymartin. This has recommended that the best environmental option is to provide centralised treatment at Annalong. Wastewater from adjoining areas would be pumped to the existing Wastewater Treatment Works at Annalong, which would be upgraded.

Design work will start shortly. This will identify land requirements for pumping stations and pipelines and the detailed requirements for the new treatment facilities at Annalong.

It is estimated that the scheme will cost some £2 million and it is intended to commence construction in 2003.

M22: Extension

Mrs Courtney asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he has any plans to extend the M22 motorway to connect with Glenshane Road at the Castledawson roundabout.

(AQO 1623/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service has no plans at present to extend the M22 motorway to connect with Glenshane Road at the Castledawson roundabout.

I can, however, confirm that Roads Service is continuing to make good progress towards the scheme to construct a dual carriageway bypass of the village of Toome on this section of road. The Member may be aware that I have been successful in securing Executive Programme Funds for this scheme and, assuming a positive outcome to the vesting process, work could commence early next year.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Antisocial Behaviour Unit

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 3051/00, to confirm that the new Antisocial Behaviour Unit will be made aware of all complaints made at district office level. (AQW 3301/00)

The Minister for Social Development (Mr Morrow): The majority of complaints will continue to be dealt with by the district offices and the Antisocial Behaviour Unit will be made aware of the total number of complaints reported to district offices. The unit will provide advice and assistance, as necessary, and deal with the particularly problematic cases. In addition, the Unit will be standardising procedures and delivering appropriate training to district office staff.

Jobseekers Undertaking Voluntary Work

Ms McWilliams asked the Minister for Social Development to detail how he intends to remove the obstacles to those unemployed people who are on jobseeker's allowance and who want to contribute to community life and gain new skills through voluntary work. (AQO 1586/00)

Mr Morrow: There are no such obstacles. I am in no doubt of the important role that voluntary work can play in helping unemployed people to contribute to the community and keep in touch with the labour market, and to obtain skills and experience that may help them into work.

Under the current rules 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 re-arrange their voluntary work to enable them to start a job.

We are currently considering proposals to extend from 48 hours to one week the period of notice before such volunteers must be available to start work. Also, in order to ensure that they do not miss out on job opportunities, volunteers will be required to be available for a job interview at 48 hours notice. This measure should give additional flexibility to jobseekers who wish to undertake voluntary work whilst unemployed, helping them to gain experience and skills which may help them into work and helping to meet the needs of the community.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 29 June 2001

Written Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Civic Forum: Costs of Nomination Sectors

Mr Hussey asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQO 1444/00, to detail the costs of the “sectors” that nominated the Forum’s members. (AQW 3222/00)

Reply: The breakdown of the costs of the nominating sectors is as follows:

Advertising - £45,000
(which included £10,000 to advertise for the Chairperson)

Consultancy support to nominating sectors - £13,000

Travel expenses of consortium Members - £ 2,400

Since we wrote to Mr Berry on 14 May 2001, the voluntary and community sector has claimed a further £20,000 towards its cost for the nomination process. The claim is under consideration by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.

Definition of Indirect Discrimination

Mrs I Robinson asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister what assessment has been made of the Equality Commission recommendation that the definition of indirect discrimination contained in the EC Equal Treatment Directive should be adopted and whether this would have an adverse impact upon the protestant community. (AQW 3276/00)

Reply: The Equality Commission has recently recommended that the definition of indirect discrimination in the Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 should be the same as that contained in the recent EU Race Directive which requires the principle of equal

treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin to be implemented. A similar definition of indirect discrimination is used in the EU Framework Directive, which lays down a general framework for combating discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation as regards employment and occupation.

In order to comply with these Directives it will be necessary to amend the definitions in both the Race Relations and Fair Employment and Treatment Orders. It is planned to take this forward in the Single Equality Bill. An Equality Impact Assessment will be carried out on that Bill in order to identify any differential impact between any of the groups set out in section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, including persons of different religious belief.

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Soil Association Report

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to give her assessment of the findings of the Soil Association Report (published on 4 June 2001), ‘Too Hard to Swallow, the truth about drugs and poultry’; and to make a statement. (AQW 3288/00)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers): My Department has local responsibility for the testing for residues of veterinary drugs. It should be noted that of the 883 samples taken from poultry at slaughter in Northern Ireland in the year 2000 only 2 positives for nicarbazin and 1 for lasalocid were found. In addition a total of 146 local egg samples were taken. Of these, 21 eggs were tested for the presence of lasalocid and 3 were found to be positive. I understand, however, from my scientific advisors and those in the Food Standards Agency (FSA), that these positive results were well within safety limits and posed no threat to human health. While these results are reassuring I am arranging for an extensive survey for coccidiostats in Northern Ireland poultry and eggs.

The FSA has announced its intention to convene a meeting of interested parties to consider the issues raised in the report. The independent Veterinary Residues Committee which provides advice on such matters has established a sub-group to consider the findings of surveillance programmes on veterinary residues in poultry and eggs.

My Department will continue to work closely with the FSA to ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place to safeguard consumers from potentially harmful residues of medicines in poultry.

20-Day Standstill Period

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to give her assessment on the impact, on farming, of the 20-day standstill period on animals which have been purchased and to detail whether she has any plans to reduce this period in line with the Republic of Ireland. (AQW 3313/00)

Ms Rodgers: The 20-day standstill period is an EC control measure governing the movement of animals and is aimed specifically at inhibiting the spread of disease, specifically foot-and-mouth disease. In that respect I consider it has been successful in that Northern Ireland remains free of further outbreaks of the disease which can only be good for the farming industry. The standstill period also provides additional welfare benefits by preventing the repeated movement of animals from mart to mart over a short timescale. However, in overall terms it provides greater benefits to a greater number within the farming industry.

The Republic of Ireland used to operate for cattle a 30-day standstill system prior to movement, coupled with no inward movements of susceptible animals onto the holding within seven days prior to movement. However, the ROI authorities removed the "seven day" rule on 18 June and their 30 day holding period now applies to sales through marts and for farm-to-farm movements but not to cattle going for export through assembly centres.

I am reviewing the situation here in Northern Ireland with a view to bringing forward proposals which are aimed at providing adequate protection against the threat of contagious diseases. I will be consulting on these proposals in due course.

Restrictions on Cattle Exports

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to give an update on the restrictions on cattle exports as a result of BSE. (AQW 3315/00)

Ms Rodgers: The current position is that no live cattle may be exported from Northern Ireland, or other parts of the UK, to another Member State or third country.

I remain fully committed to a relaxation of the ban but a decision to submit a case to the European Commission will only be taken when the Commission and Member States are receptive. It is not appropriate, and could be counterproductive, to proceed with a case at this time as there is a real risk of rejection.

BSE: Reported Incidents

Mr Clyde asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of reported incidents of BSE in Northern Ireland from 1 January

2001 - 31 May 2001 and the number of similar cases reported in the Republic of Ireland for the same period. (AQW 3324/00)

Ms Rodgers: There were 26 reported incidents of BSE in Northern Ireland between 1 January 2001 and 31 May 2001 and, at 14 June 2001, a published figure of 183 reported incidents in 2001 in the Republic of Ireland. Of the reported incidents, 6 in Northern Ireland have been confirmed as BSE cases and 56 have been confirmed in the ROI.

Greenmount College: Postponed Courses

Mr Kane asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to make a statement on the postponement of NVQ courses at Greenmount College during the foot-and-mouth restrictions. (AQW 3346/00)

Ms Rodgers: Following the initial outbreak of FMD, Greenmount College closed from Monday 26 February 2001. Delivery of part-time courses, including the NVQ courses, ceased from that date.

Resumption of courses has been kept under continuous review and assessed in light of the risks involved. All full-time courses (excluding farm-based agriculture skills training and practical work) recommenced from 20 March 2001 and part-time courses, including NVQ courses, in 'non-agriculture' disciplines delivered within college campus recommenced from 9 April 2001.

Before resumption of the theory-only components of part-time agriculture NVQ courses, which are delivered at out-centres, could be fully implemented from 9 April 2001, the second FMD out-break occurred and part-time agriculture courses had to be suspended again. Delivery of the theory components of the NVQ courses has been gradually resuming since 15 June 2001.

All aspects of the FMD situation continue to be kept under review and the resumption of the skills training and the on-farm assessment components of the agriculture NVQ programme will be approved as soon as possible. This will enable trainees taking an NVQ as part of DHFETE-funded Jobskills programme to receive the full balance of their funded training.

Early Retirement Schemes for Farmers

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail her policy in respect of the introduction of early retirement schemes for farmers and when an announcement is likely to be made. (AQW 3412/00)

Ms Rodgers: One of the central objectives of any early retirement scheme is to bring about structural change within the agricultural industry. This is a subject to which I attach considerable importance and it is essential

that any investment of public money to bring about this change is focused on the right target.

One of the criticisms of such schemes as exist in other countries at the moment is that they do not provide good value for money. I have, therefore, asked my officials to carry out the necessary work to establish if, and how, a scheme could be developed which would provide a satisfactory return on the taxpayers' investment. Early in the new year, my Department commissioned a desk study of early retirement and entrants schemes and I have now received the final report from the consultants. While it recommended a targeted early retirement scheme, the evidence presented was not conclusive. One of the difficulties with assessing schemes such as they is that there is a lack of empirical research and investigation in this area.

In the light of this, I have now commissioned a research study by the Department of Agricultural Food Economics at Queen's University Belfast, in association with researchers at a University in the Republic of Ireland. As this is a full research study, I expect it to take at least nine months of work but, when it is finished, it will probably be the first really substantive piece of work on this topic.

Given that the process of obtaining EU Commission approval, and the build up of modulation and match funding, would not allow us to introduce a scheme much before the second half of 2002 or early 2003 anyway, it is sensible to seek robust evidence on value for money before committing ourselves.

Rural Proofing

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the progress made in implementing Rural Proofing. (AQW 3414/00)

Ms Rodgers: I remain wholly committed to the principle of rural proofing. The outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease has, however, required considerable resources in my Department to be diverted from other duties to deal with the crisis. Progress to establish the machinery necessary to ensure that all developing policies are adequately rural proofed has therefore been slower than I would have wished. I am nevertheless confident that an inter-Departmental Group under my chairmanship will be established shortly.

Rural Proofing

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to make it her policy to establish a Ministerial-led group to proof all government policies in respect of their rural impact. (AQW 3425/00)

Ms Rodgers: As the Executive Programme for Government makes clear, it is already my policy to

establish a Ministerial-led group to proof all government policies in respect of their rural impact.

CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Budget Impact on Arts Sector

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to give his assessment on whether the budget will have an impact on performing arts industries; and to make a statement. (AQW 3307/00)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McGimpsey): There were some tax concessions in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget statement of 7 March 2001 but it is too early to assess the impact on the arts sector. There were for instance, tax relief measures on employee training which, could include those working in the creative industries.

The Treasury also announced that individuals employed in the sector such as those working in publishing, theatre and film will be able to spread tax payments over a longer period in order to reflect the unpredictable nature of the industry. Otherwise there were few benefits to the performing arts, or indeed, to artists generally.

Creative Industries

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to give his assessment on the contribution of creative industries to the cultural and economic performance of Northern Ireland. (AQW 3310/00)

Mr McGimpsey: The creative industries are now recognised as being a key sector in the new knowledge based economies at a time when traditional sectors of industry are either in decline or becoming increasingly mobile and vulnerable. The creative industries build on indigenous talent and skills and are characterised by rapid expansion, high added value and positive social inclusion. It is, therefore, essential that we develop for Northern Ireland strategies and policies which will accelerate the growth of the sector in Northern Ireland and which will build on the talents and skills of our people.

We are currently working with Queen's University to define and measure the creative industries sector in Northern Ireland and initial findings suggest that up to 20,000 people could be employed in industries that fall within the generally accepted sector definition. It is, however, important to recognise that the sector is wide-ranging and it will be necessary to develop strategies that will recognise and respond to the challenges and opportunities faced by sub-sectors ranging from crafts through to film production.

One of my Department's key tasks has been the development, in co-operation with the DETI, DE and DHFETE, of a strategy to unlock the creativity of the people of Northern Ireland and to accelerate the growth of the creative industry sector in the Province. As a first step my Department launched a wide-ranging consultation exercise aimed at helping us identify the most effective strategies with which to develop and implement policy. The purpose and thrust of the consultation process was to be as inclusive as possible and I am delighted to be able to say that the response to the exercise was extremely positive and constructive. On 27 June 2001, I will launch, together with the Ministers of Education, Enterprise Trade and Investment, and Higher and Further Education and Training, 'Unlocking Creativity – making it happen', a new strategic document which takes full account of the views and suggestions of all those consulted and which also aims to translate our broad strategic aims and objectives into a plan for action. In the coming months, we will roll out a series of new initiatives aimed specifically at helping Northern Ireland realise its creative potential.

I am confident that Northern Ireland can and will benefit significantly from the growth of the creative industry sector, in terms of both economic and cultural development, and I shall be working in co-operation with DETI, DE, and DHFETE to ensure that we maximise the employment which the sector can offer.

Creating a Soccer Strategy for Northern Ireland

Mrs Nelis asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure following the PricewaterhouseCoopers report, "Creating a Soccer Strategy for Northern Ireland, to detail (a) the steps he has taken to address the sectarian issues contained in the report and (b) if he has any plans to re-structure the organisation of soccer. (AQW 3394/00)

Mr McGimpsey: The report, 'Creating a Soccer Strategy for Northern Ireland, Views of the Stakeholders', which was published on 5 February, was the outcome of a consultation exercise commissioned by my Department and was a key stage of the process in working towards a strategy for the sport. It provided an agenda for a conference workshop held on 10-12 February at which representatives of the key stakeholders debated the issues facing soccer and developed ideas for the future development of the game.

The advisory panel, which I established to guide and advise on the process, is currently at the critical stage of working on recommendations. I anticipate that these recommendations will address, among others, issues surrounding sectarianism and the structure and administration of the game. I expect to receive the panel's report by the end of the summer and I intend to publish this for consultation, probably in September. The consultation exercise will contribute to the development

of a strategy for soccer in Northern Ireland, which I hope to launch before the end of the year.

I also met with the Sports Council for Northern Ireland and the Irish Football Association (IFA) to review the events surrounding the international match between Northern Ireland and Norway on 28 February. You may recall that I publicly expressed my deep disgust at the sectarian behaviour of a minority of spectators during the game. Since that meeting the IFA have put in place a range of new measures to help them combat the problem and, to date, these appear to have had a positive effect.

Maritime and Industrial Heritage

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (a) his plans to develop our maritime and industrial heritage and (b) if the water based tourism programme has been finalised.

(AQW 3396/00)

Mr McGimpsey:

- (a) MAGNI's corporate plan identifies the establishment of a maritime and industrial museum as one of its leading priorities for development. It is absolutely essential that we capitalise on the economic and educational potential of this country's maritime and industrial heritage and invest in the development of cultural tourism. I am therefore fully behind MAGNI's proposals and my officials are working with MAGNI and others to identify how best to establish a museum.

A major constraining factor is finance - the maritime museum will cost an estimated £30 million to develop. My Department does not have the resources to allow this project to proceed, and while we will have to be imaginative and creative in identifying sources of funding, I will inevitably have to ask the Assembly for additional resources. I hope that I can count on your support in this.

- (b) The monitoring committee recently agreed details of the complements for all the Peace II measures and these have been formally submitted to the European Union for their comments. The internal mechanisms for the implementation of the measures under Peace II are presently being drawn up. With regard to the Water Based Tourism Measure it is planned to launch an Angling Development Programme in early autumn that will assist in the development of game, coarse and sea angling, improve fisheries habitat and offer assistance to those involved in angling tourism. Simultaneously and under the same measure, the Department intends launching a programme to grant aid the provision of facilities for the development of water-based recreational tourism.

Sports Institute

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 3146/00, to detail his plans to ensure that those individuals from a disadvantaged background in the west have equality of access to the Sports Institute given the travel distance involved in getting to and from the Jordanstown campus.

(AQW 3406/00)

Mr McGimpsey: It is anticipated that all athletes in receipt of Sports Council Lottery Revenue support through either 'Talented Athlete' or 'Talented Athlete – Next Generation' programmes will be eligible for a contribution towards travel costs for specialised approved training at the Sports Institute. Access to the Institute will be determined on the basis of sporting ability/achievement.

EDUCATION

Carrickfergus College: Post of Principal

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education whether the NEELB Teaching Appointments Committee considered the minutes of the Carrick College Board of Governors meeting of 24 January 2001 as part of their decision making process; and to make a statement. (AQW 3231/00)

The Minister of Education (Mr M McGuinness): I have been informed by the North-Eastern Education and Library Board that its Teaching Appointments Committee received an extract from the minutes concerned before they conducted the interviews for the post of principal at Carrickfergus College. I have been assured by the Board that the procedures of its Teaching Appointments Scheme were followed in making this appointment.

Annual Review of Special Educational Needs Statements

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Education to detail, pursuant to AQW 2987/00, what safeguards are in place to ensure that annual reviews of special educational needs statements are carried out. (AQW 3337/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Under special education legislation statements of special educational needs must be reviewed annually. The Education and Library Boards have put arrangements in place to ensure that this happens. They normally inform schools, parents and educational psychologists in the first term of the date by which annual reviews should be carried out. Psychologists or Board Officers attend appropriate review meetings. Reminders are issued to those schools which have not returned their annual review reports by the due date. Reports are monitored for evidence of need for further action.

Grant-Aided Schools: Common Formula

Mr McHugh asked the Minister of Education to ensure, with respect to the current consultation on a common formula for grant-aided schools, that schools with a relatively high proportion of pupils suffering from socio-economic disadvantage will incur no loss of funding under whatever common formula is agreed.

(AQO 1637/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Given the differences which exist in current LMS formulae in terms of the both the amount distributed and the means by which it is distributed, it would not be possible to safeguard the position of any school in the move to a common funding formula. Indeed to do so would run counter to the broad thrust of the formula and the key principles on which our proposals have been formulated.

However, insofar as schools with large numbers of pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds are concerned I am particularly anxious that the formula provides as much support as possible to these needy schools. I have therefore proposed an increase in the share of total funding allocated to TSN from 5% to 5.5%, which will provide a further £4 million to help schools provide additional educational support to pupils performing below the expected level while maintaining existing levels of support to schools with substantial numbers of socially disadvantaged pupils. This measure should ensure that schools with a high percentage of socially disadvantaged pupils have the funding they need to meet the needs of those pupils.

Schools will also benefit from transitional funding arrangements which will limit any reduction in per capita funding.

Threshold Assessment for Teachers

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail the exact criteria required to qualify for the £2000 threshold payment to teachers. (AQO 1651/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Teachers who were on point 9 of the teachers' payscale at 1 September 1999 based on their qualifications and experience are eligible to apply for threshold assessment from September 2000. They must then show on their application form how they meet the four professional standards of:

- Core values, Understanding of the Curriculum and Professional Knowledge;
- Teaching and Assessment of Learning;
- Contribution to raising Standards through Pupil Achievement; and
- Effective Professional Development.

Inspectorate's Asperger Survey Report

Mr C Murphy asked the Minister of Education, in view of the findings of the Report on a Survey of Pupils with Asperger Syndrome in Primary and Secondary Schools in Northern Ireland 1999-2000, to detail his plans to ensure that additional resources are directed to meet the requirements of all children with special education needs including the requirements of teachers who work with them. (AQO 1639/00)

Mr M McGuinness: I have noted the findings of the Inspectorate's Asperger Survey Report and its very useful recommendations. Before taking further action, however, I would wish also to consider the report of the Task Group on Autism which was set up by my Department in the Autumn to advise on the range of provision for autistic children across the Education and Library Boards. The Group is due to report shortly and will make recommendations about exemplars of good practice, about training needs and about future provision to help promote consistency of approach to identification and service delivery across all ELBs.

Targeting Social Need Spending

Ms Ramsey asked the Minister of Education to detail (a) the research he has undertaken to assess the impact of Targeting Social Need spending since 1993; and (b) the steps he is taking to ensure that New TSN funding is directed to where it is most urgently needed and most effectively deployed. (AQO 1636/00)

Mr M McGuinness: My Department published a report on 14 June 2001, which for the years 1994/95 onwards outlines participation in education by children of pre-school age, explores the academic achievements of school leavers and considers outcomes for school leavers in terms of their first destination on leaving school.

Whilst the report does not attempt to isolate the effects of Targeting Social Need spending it does indicate the progress that has been made and the scale of what still has to be done.

As part of a research project funded by the Department on the Impact of Formula Funding and Local Management of Schools, schools were asked what proportion of their budget was spent tackling problems of social/educational disadvantage, and what specific action the school had taken to deal with problems relating to social deprivation.

In addition there has been research into a range of policy initiatives which impact on children from disadvantaged backgrounds. This includes a value added analysis of pupils and schools performance under the Raising School Standards Initiative, an evaluation of the impact of the first two years of Reading Recovery, a longitudinal evaluation of Reading Recovery and evaluations of

pilots of summer literacy and numeracy schemes in 1998 and 1999.

The steps that my Department are taking in relation to targeting social need are set out in the recently published New TSN Annual Report "Making it Work". Progress towards the actions and targets contained in the report are monitored quarterly and a progress report on key actions points is forwarded to the Executive Committee through the Office of First Minister/Deputy First Minister. The action plan covers all of my Department's business areas and demonstrates that the education service already targets social need in a range of ways.

LMS formulae continue to be one of the most significant mechanisms for distributing TSN funding to school budgets. It is essential however that resources are directed where they are most needed. In April I published a consultation document in which I set out proposals for a Common LMS Formula for Grant Aided Schools and included in these were several relating to New TSN.

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Foot-and-Mouth Disease: Impact on Tourism

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether any further assessment has been made on the effects of the foot-and-mouth outbreak on tourism. (AQW 3312/00)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Sir Reg Empey): No further information on the effects of the foot and mouth outbreak on tourism is available since my response to Assembly Written Question No: 3250/00 on 19 June 2001. A number of measures are, however, in place to assess the impact of Foot and Mouth Disease.

Textile and Clothing Industry: Electricity Price Increases

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail his response to the Director of the Northern Ireland Textiles Association concerning increasing electricity costs to the textile and clothing industry. (AQW 3340/00)

Sir Reg Empey: I fully understand the concerns of the Northern Ireland Textiles and Apparel Association Ltd about the implications of recent electricity price increases for the textiles and clothing industry, and have written in some detail to the Association describing a

number of ongoing measures aimed at bringing about reductions in these costs.

For the benefit of MLAs, I am arranging for copies of this correspondence to be placed in the Assembly Library.

Trading Difficulties: North Belfast

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to take urgent action to address the plight of traders on or about the Crumlin Road, Belfast who have been adversely affected by the recent disturbances in North Belfast; and make a statement.

(AQW 3512/00)

Sir Reg Empey: I recognise the difficulties faced by traders and SMEs based in and around the Crumlin Road, particularly at this time.

LEDU has helped fund economic development officer posts at the North Belfast Partnership Board and there are a number of other economic development officers employed by other organisations working in the area. There are also 2 Local Enterprise Agencies, Brookfield and North City, operating in the North Belfast area. LEDU will be contact with these organisations reminding them of the need to maintain contact at grass root level with the traders and their organisations to help identify the issues facing the businesses at this sensitive time. If there is a need for business advice these organisations will be able to sign post the individual businesses to LEDU, ASPIRE and other appropriate services.

I am aware of difficulties in a number of interface areas in North Belfast and LEDU will be monitoring the situation closely. Should the situation deteriorate LEDU and other Departments have continuity plans where those businesses experiencing severe difficulties will be able to make contact with the appropriate Department.

ENVIRONMENT

“The Sly Fox”: Extension

Mrs Carson asked the Minister of the Environment to explain, pursuant to AQW 2710/00, why the extension to “The Sly Fox”, Moy, County Tyrone “did not make an undue impact on the scale or proportions of the existing property” given that the licensed allowable capacity of the premises rose from 115 persons to 350 persons.

(AQW 3316/00)

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Foster): The increase in the floor area of the original building, approved under the planning permission which issued in March 1999, has allowed an increase in the licensed capacity of the premises. However, a large increase in

the floor area and the capacity of a premises does not necessarily result in an unacceptable impact on the existing property, i.e. the original building.

The development takes the form of a two storey rear extension to an existing three storey property. When viewed from the front of the property at The Diamond / Killyman Street, the extension is largely hidden from view and does not have any significant visual impact on the original building. It is therefore judged as having no undue impact.

My Department’s Historic Monuments and Buildings Branch consented to the granting of Listed Building Consent for the extension to this listed building. Such consent would not have been given to a development which had an undue impact on the existing property.

Telecommunications Equipment: Planning Policy

Mr Carrick asked the Minister of the Environment if he has any plans to introduce precautionary planning criteria in respect of potential health hazards associated with the erection of telecommunication masts/antennae.

(AQW 3317/00)

Mr Foster: The health issues arising from telecommunications equipment are a matter for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. Their advice is taken into account when planning policy is framed. Following recent consultation, that Department confirmed that, as regards individual masts, where the emissions from the mast are within the International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation Protection guidelines, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety would not raise any further questions in regard to health. This is on the basis that exposures to radio frequency radiation would be small fractions of those permitted by the International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation Protection Guidelines.

However, you will be aware that my Department is in the process of preparing legislation to give effect to the Executive Committee’s recent decision that full planning permission should be introduced for all new masts. It is anticipated that this legislation will be introduced later this year.

Planning Guidance: Public Houses

Mrs Carson asked the Minister of the Environment to give his assessment of planning guidance relating to public houses and night-clubs and to detail the steps he is taking to protect nearby residents from an unacceptable increase in noise, disturbance and anti-social behaviour; and to make a statement. (AQW 3318/00)

Mr Foster: Planning guidance for public houses is contained in my Department's development control advice note 7 (DCAN 7), which is designed to provide advice on the planning criteria to be applied when an application for this form of development is being considered. This guidance has been used extensively by my Department in determining such applications since its introduction in 1983.

My Department is currently carrying out a review of its existing development control advice notes, and DCAN 7 will be included as part of this exercise. Preliminary work on revising DCAN 7 will commence towards the end of this financial year, and will involve a process of public consultation.

"The Sly Fox": Noise Report

Mrs Carson asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 2710/00, to indicate what account he took of the Principal Environmental Health Officer's response to the Planning Office on 7 August 1998 in relation to the application for an extension to "The Sly Fox", Moy, County Tyrone. (AQW 3319/00)

Mr Foster: Following receipt of the Principal Environmental Health Officer's comments of 7 August 1998, officials advised the applicant's agent on 11 September 1998 of the need to submit a noise report on the basis of the Principal Environmental Health Officer's understanding that the extension was to be used for entertainment purposes.

Discussions subsequently took place between the Environmental Health Office and the applicant on this matter. The discussions concluded with the submission of a letter by the applicant's agent to the Divisional Planning Office on 8 October 1998 which confirmed that there would be no change to the existing entertainment arrangements in the original bar. The area for live music in the original premises would continue to be used, and the new areas within the extended premises would be used for bar/restaurant purposes. This situation is confirmed on the approved drawings. In the circumstances, officials were satisfied that a noise report was not necessary.

The Member will be aware that Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council is the responsible authority for the control of any potential noise nuisance associated with entertainment within the premises.

Reducing River Pollution

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment to detail his plans to reduce the risk of river pollution. (AQW 3347/00)

Mr Foster: The Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) of my Department pursues a policy of pollution

prevention which aims to reduce the number of river pollution incidents.

The current target is to reduce the number of high and medium severity incidents by 20% over the period 1996 to 2003.

A number of approaches to this are being undertaken, including:

- education, for example through pollution prevention guidelines at appropriate seminars;
- industrial estate surveys to undertake risk assessments with the aim of reducing industrial pollution;
- surveys of oil depots;
- surveys of timber treatment premises;
- the promotion of sustainable urban drainage systems;
- river corridor surveys, targeting catchments where river quality is impaired or fails to comply with water quality standards;
- input to development planning proposals to protect river quality during the construction stage and post development;
- working in close co-operation with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to produce codes of good agricultural practice; and
- working closely with the Department of Regional Development's Water Service to control intermittent sewage discharges through the application of Urban Pollution Manual (UPM) procedures.

Extra powers to prevent pollution will become available to the Department under the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999. These will include the power to serve enforcement notices on industry and the introduction of Regulations to control the storage of slurry, silage and agricultural fuel oil.

Inver River: Vegetation Damage

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment to detail what action is being taken to limit the damage to bank side vegetation as a result of the recent pollution incident on the Inver River, Larne. (AQW 3348/00)

Mr Foster: A fish kill in the Inver River was reported to the Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) of my Department on Sunday 27 May 2001. The incident was investigated by staff from EHS and the Fisheries Conservancy Board.

The source of the pollution was identified on Sunday 27 May and by that stage was no longer causing a polluting discharge to the river. The damage to the bank side vegetation had already occurred at the time of investigation. With the polluting discharge having stopped, no further damage is anticipated.

The Chief Environmental Health Officer of Larne Borough Council was informed about the incident and the Council initiated the appropriate warnings for members of the public to keep away from the river.

Inver River: Fish Kill

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the damage caused to fish and invertebrate life as a result of the recent pollution incident on the Inver River, Larne. (AQW 3349/00)

Mr Foster: A fish kill on the Inver River was reported to Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) of my Department on Sunday 27 May 2001. The incident was investigated by staff from EHS and the Fisheries Conservancy Board.

The dead fish were counted, and assessed by age, on Sunday 27 May. A preliminary count of fish indicated that approximately 1500 brown trout and sea trout were killed ranging in age from last years fry up to fish of 5 years old. The results of this survey will be used to establish the numbers of fish required to restock the river. Restocking also has to take into account expected survival rates of hatchery-reared fish.

A biological survey was also undertaken on behalf of EHS to assess the impact on the invertebrate life within the river. There was a clear impact at the point of entry to the tributary via which the pollution entered the river, but the impact on the Inver River itself appears to be slight. The full results of the survey are currently being collated.

The source of the pollution was traced and statutory samples were lifted with a view to prosecution. A file is being prepared for submission to the Department of Public Prosecutions Office. It is therefore inappropriate for me to comment further at this stage on the specific details of this particular investigation.

Driving Tests: People With Reading Difficulties

Mr Bradley asked the Minister of the Environment to make it his policy to introduce special driving test rules for people with reading difficulties. (AQW 3366/00)

Mr Foster: For the practical driving test, a candidate must be able to read a vehicle number plate from a distance of 20.5 metres in good daylight. If a candidate needs glasses or contact lenses to do this, they must be worn throughout the test and at all times whilst driving. I have no plans to change this requirement.

As regards the driving theory test, special facilities are available to ensure that candidates with reading difficulties are not disadvantaged. The theory test is now delivered via a touchscreen computer system. People

with dyslexia or with literacy or learning disabilities are allowed extra time to complete the test, if they require it. An audio voice-over is also available to assist comprehension of on-screen material.

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Aggregate Levy

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail what meetings have taken place with the Chancellor of the Exchequer regarding the proposed aggregate levy. (AQW 3304/00)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan): I would refer to the answer on this subject that I gave on 7 June 2001.

Peace II: Intermediary Funding Bodies

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to make a statement on the outcome of the tendering procedure for intermediary funding bodies under the Peace II Operational Programme. (AQW 3339/00)

Mr Durkan: The outcome of the tendering procedure for Intermediary Funding Bodies under PEACE II was announced on Friday 8 June 2001 by the Special EU Programmes Body, which is responsible for the overall management of the Operational Programme. Contract negotiations will now begin between the recommended organisations/consortia and the Programmes Body, in consultation with the relevant lead Government Departments. Final decisions on appointments will depend upon the outcome of these detailed contract negotiations.

The areas of activity of PEACE II which were put out to tender, the amounts of funding allocated and the recommended organisations / consortia are set out below:-

PEACE II: APPOINTMENT OF INTERMEDIARY FUNDING BODIES (IFBS) TENDER EVALUATIONS – RECOMMENDATIONS (A) NORTHERN IRELAND

Area of Activity	Approximate Budget £M (Incl Match Funding)	Recommended Organisation/ Consortium
1. Childcare and Family Support	£9.10 million	Northern Ireland Pre-schools Playgroups Association (NIPPA)

Area of Activity	Approximate Budget £M (Incl Match Funding)	Recommended Organisation/ Consortium
2. Victims and Survivors of Violence	£6.67 million	1. NI Voluntary Trust (Lead Organisation) 2. NI Committee ICTU 3. Community Relations Council 4. Eastern Health Board Trauma Advisory Panel 5. Southern Health Board Trauma Advisory Panel 6. Western Health Board Trauma Advisory Panel 7. Northern Health Board Trauma Advisory Panel
3. Educational Initiatives (Schools and Youth Sector)	£15.0 million	1. SELB (Lead Organisation) 2. YOUTHNET 3. Belfast Education & Library Board 4. North Eastern Education & Library Board 5. South Eastern Education & Library Board 6. Western Education & Library Board 7. Council for Catholic Maintained Schools 8. Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta 9. Governing Bodies Association 10. Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education 11. Youth Council for NI 12. NI Youth Forum
4. Pathways to Inclusion, Integration and Reconciliation including Groups or Areas Emerging from the Conflict	£6 million	1. NIVT (Lead Organisation) 2. Northern Ireland Committee ICTU 3. Community Relations Training and Learning Consortium 4. Social Economy Agency
5. Developing Community Infrastructure	£6.2 million	1. NIVT (Lead Organisation) 2. YOUTHNET 3. Community Technical Aid

Area of Activity	Approximate Budget £M (Incl Match Funding)	Recommended Organisation/ Consortium
6. Promoting Active Citizenship	£1.72 million	1. NIVT (Lead Organisation) 2. YOUTHNET 3. Volunteer Development Agency
7. Women Entering or Progressing in the Labour Market	£4.30 million	Training for Women Network (TWN)
8. Creating New Skills in A Modern Economy	£5.20 million	PROTEUS
9. Bringing Self-sufficiency to the Playclub Initiative	£3.00 million	Playboard (NI) Ltd
10. Adult Literacy and Numeracy – Pre-vocational and Early Vocational Training Activity	£5.20 million	Educational Guidance Service for Adults (EGSA)
11. Innovative Vocational Training Activities for Disadvantaged Groups	£0.86 million	PROTEUS
12. Rural Development	£5.25 million	NI Rural Development Council (Lead Organisation) 1. Rural Community Network
13. Reconciliation for Sustainable Peace	£9.00 million	NI Community Relations Council

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Health and Personal Social Services (NI) Order 1972

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail whether she has any plans to repeal Article 100 of The Health and Personal Social Services (NI) Order 1972. (AQW 3321/00)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms de Brún): I do not have any plans at present to repeal Article 100 of The Health and Personal Social Services (NI) Order 1972.

Níl pleananna agam faoi láthair chun Airteagal 100 den Ordú 1972 Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta Pearsanta (TÉ) a aisghairm.

Improving Services for Children and Their Families

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the steps she is taking to ensure parity of spend on family and childcare services in Northern Ireland compared to England and Wales.

(AQW 3325/00)

Ms de Brún: In 2000/01 my Department was able to make an extra £10 million available to Health and Social Services Boards to continue the development of children's services. In 2001/02 so far, a further £5.3 million has been secured for these services and more is being sought.

My Department has also been successful in securing a total of £15.5 million over the three years 2001/02 to 2003/04 from the Executive Programme Funds for a variety of initiatives aimed at improving services for children and their families.

To achieve parity with the level of spend in England and Wales considerable additional resources will be required and I will continue to do all I can to secure the necessary resources to provide the best possible level of services here.

I 2000/01 bhí an Roinn s'agamsa ábalta £10 milliún breise a chur ar fáil do Bhoird Shláinte agus Sheirbhísí Sóisialta le forbairt seirbhísí páistí a leanstan ar aghaidh. I 2001/02, fuarthas £5.3 milliún breise go dtí seo do na seirbhísí seo agus tá tuilleadh eile á iarraidh.

D'éirigh leis an Roinn s'agamsa £15.5 milliún san iomlán a fháil fosta do na trí bliana ó 2001/02 go 2003/04 ó Chistí Chlár an Fheidhmeannais le haghaidh scéimeanna éagsúla dírithe ar fheabhsú seirbhísí do pháistí agus dá dteaghlach.

Leis an chomhleibhéal caiteachais i Sasana agus sa Bhreatain Bheag a bhaint amach, beidh cuid mhór acmhainní breise de dhíth agus leanfaidh mé ar aghaidh ar féidir liom a dhéanamh a dhéanamh leis na hacmhainní a bheas riachtanach leis an leibhéal seirbhísí is fearr agus is féidir a sholáthar anseo a chinntiú.

Child Abuse Strategy: Support for Parents

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to make it her policy that the components of any strategy on child abuse should include substantial investment in supporting parents and in the promotion of parenting.

(AQW 3326/00)

Ms de Brún: I agree that support for parents is an important element of a child abuse strategy. My Department has consistently promoted the need for parental support and the promotion of good parenting. This is demonstrated by the funding provided for a number of organisations, programmes and initiatives, including the Sure Start

programme and the Parents Advice Centre (PAC) which provides a confidential advice and counselling service to parents. Alongside the four Boards, my Department also provides funds to Gingerbread, Homestart and Lifestart all of which provide support for parents. In total, some £278,000 has been made available in the current year to assist in supporting parents and promoting parenting skills.

Aontaím gur gné thábhachtach de straitéis drochíde ar pháistí í tacaíocht do thuismitheoirí. Chuir an Roinn s'agamsa an gá le tacaíocht do thuismitheoirí agus cur chun cinn tuismíochta maithe chun cinn i gcónaí. Léirítear seo tríd an mhaoiniú tugtha do roinnt eagraíochtaí, clár agus tionscnamh, ina measc an clár Sure Start agus Ionad Comhairle na dTuismitheoirí (ICT) a thugann comhairle rúnda agus a sholáthraíonn seirbhís chomhairle do thuismitheoirí. Mar aon leis na ceithre Bhord, tugann an Roinn s'agamsa maoinithe fosta do Gingerbread, Homestart agus do Lifestart a sholáthraíonn uile tacaíocht do thuismitheoirí. Cuireadh thart faoi £278,000 san iomlán ar fáil sa bhliain reatha airgeadais chun cuidiú le tacaíocht do thuismitheoirí agus le cur chun cinn scileanna tuismíochta.

Child Abuse Strategy: Child Deaths Review Team

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to make it her policy that the components of any strategy on child abuse should include a Child Deaths Review Team.

(AQW 3327/00)

Ms de Brún: I am very concerned about child abuse and I attach the highest priority to improving safeguards for children.

I am aware of the NSPCC recommendation for the establishment of child death review teams in the Society's 'Out of Sight' report. My Department will be studying the report and its recommendations very carefully and will consider this particular recommendation.

Tá mé iontach buartha faoi dhrochíde ar pháistí agus is rithábhachtach liom mar thosaíocht í feabhsú i gcosaint páistí.

Tá moladh an CNCCP i dtuairisc 'As Amharc' an Chumainn go gcuirfí foirne athbhreithithe ar bhásanna páistí ar bun ar eolas agam. Beidh an Roinn s'agamsa ag scrúdú na tuairisce agus a moltaí go han-chúramach agus déanfaidh sí machnamh ar an mholadh ar leith seo.

Child Abuse Strategy: A&E Staff Training

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to make it her policy that the components of any strategy on child abuse should include protocols and robust training for all A&E staff in assessing suspicious child injuries.

(AQW 3328/00)

Ms de Brún: The issues of staff training and Trust protocols are dealt with in the draft Departmental child protection guidance 'Co-operating to Safeguard Children' which is due to be issued for equality impact assessment consultation shortly. The draft guidance makes specific reference to staff in hospital accident & emergency departments who have a vital role to play in the detection of child abuse.

There is already an onus on every hospital Trust to put protocols in place which enable staff to act appropriately when faced with a child that may have been abused. These must include the designation of senior medical and nursing personnel with distinct child protection responsibilities and effective communication channels within the Trust and between the Trust and other agencies including social services. Staff training in abuse detection and in child protection procedures generally, particularly in an accident & emergency setting, is essential. Child protection training is the responsibility of the designated child protection doctor and/or nurse.

Déileáiltear le ceisteanna oiliúna na foirne agus prótacal Iontaobhas i ndrúacht-threoir na Roinne ar chosaint páistí 'Ag Comhoibriú le Páistí a Chosaint' atá le cur amach le haghaidh comhairlithe ar mheasúnú éifeachta comhionannais ar ball. Déanann an drúacht-threoir tagairt ar leith do na foirne i ranna timpistí agus éigeandálaí otharlann a bhfuil ról tábhachtach acu i bhfáil amach drochíde ar pháistí.

Is ar gach otharlann atá an fhreagracht cheana féin le prótacail, a chuidíonn leis an fhoireann an gníomh ceart a dhéanamh agus iad ag déileáil le páiste arbh fhéidir go ndearnadh drochíde air, a chur i bhfeidhm. Caithfidh siad seo ainmniú foirne sinsearaí leighis agus altrachta le freagrachtaí ar leith acu as cosaint páistí, agus bealaí éifeachtacha cumarsáide laistigh den Iontaobhas agus idir an tIontaobhas agus gníomhaireachtaí chomh maith le seirbhísí sóisialta, a ghlacadh san áireamh. Tá oiliúint na foirne i bhfáil amach drochíde agus i ngnáthaimh chosaint páistí i gcoitinne riachtanach, go háirithe i suíomh timpistí agus éigeandálaí. An gnáthdhochtúir agus/nó an t-altra chosaint páistí ainmnithe atá freagrach as oiliúint ar chosaint páistí.

Child Abuse Strategy: Quality Protects Initiative

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to make it her policy that the components of any strategy on child abuse should include the implementation and funding of a Quality Protects initiative. (AQW 3329/00)

Ms de Brún: My Department is currently developing a consultation paper on the future of child care services, as part of the creation of a child care strategy. Consultation on the children's services strategy will begin later this

year. The strategy will address the broad range of issues in Quality Protects while looking at the National Children's Strategy in the South.

It will draw on work in hand or already completed for example in relation to residential care, fostering, adoption and leaving and after care.

Tá an Roinn s'agamsa ag forbairt páipéir chomhairlithe ar thodhchaí seirbhísí cúram páistí faoi láthair, mar chuid de chruthú straitéise cúram páistí. Tosóidh comhairliú ar straitéis sheirbhísí páistí níos moille i mbliana. Tabharfaidh an straitéis faoi réimse leathan ceisteanna i gCosnaíonn Cáilíocht agus í ag amharc ar Straitéis Náisiúnta na bPáistí sa Deisceart.

Bainfidh sí úsáid as obair atá idir lámha nó obair atá déanta cheana féin, mar shampla, i dtaca le Cúram Cónaithe, altramas, uchtúil agus fágáil agus le hiarchúram.

Child Abuse Strategy: Co-operation of Professionals and Agencies

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to make it her policy that the components of any strategy on child abuse should include regulations to ensure all department disciplines, including GP's, co-operate with Section 12 reviews under Co-operating to Protect Children. (AQW 3330/00)

Ms de Brún: The co-operation of professionals and agencies involved in a case, which has resulted in the death or serious injury of a child, is imperative. If a case management review cannot be successfully completed because of lack of co-operation on the part of any individual or organisation, the Department has the power to instigate an enquiry under Article 152 of the Children Order.

Tá comhoibriú gairmithe agus gníomhaireachtaí a bhfuil baint acu le cás ar tháinig bás nó gortú tromchúiseach páiste as, práinneach. Munar féidir athbhreithniú ar láimhseáil cháis a chur i gcích go rathúil de dheasca easpa comhoibrithe duine aonair nó eagraíochta, tá sé ar chumas mo Roinne tús a chur le fiosrúchán faoi Alt 152 den Ord Páistí.

Child Abuse: Strategy

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 2995/00, to make it her policy to introduce a comprehensive and detailed strategy to deal with the complex issue of child abuse in Northern Ireland. (AQW 3331/00)

Ms de Brún: I refer the member to the Answer to AQW 3329/00

Luaim don Bhall an freagra a thug mé ar AQW 3329/00.

Child Abuse Strategy: Education Programme for Parents

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to make it her policy that the components of any strategy on child abuse should include an education programme for parents on keeping their children safe in the community and be designed to dispel myths surrounding registered sex offenders.

(AQW 3332/00)

Ms de Brún: I firmly believe that a child abuse strategy must be underpinned by a programme of education both for parents and the wider community. My Department currently funds the 'Our Duty to Care' project within the Volunteer Development Agency. One of the project's most recent initiatives was the production of a parent leaflet – 'Have Fun & Be Safe' - which was distributed widely through the schools network. The leaflet offers guidance to parents and carers to help them choose children's activities in a way which maximises their safety. In addition, my Department has contributed to a guidance manual for the assessment and management of risk of sex offenders issued by the NIO.

Creidim go daingean go gcaithfidh straitéis drochíde ar pháistí bheith neartaithe trí chlár oideachais do thuismitheoirí agus don ghnáthphobal araon. Faoi láthair, maoiníonn an Roinn s'agamsa an scéim 'Ár nDualgas le hAire a Thabhairt' laistigh den Gníomhaireacht Forbartha Saorálaithe. Ba é ceann de na tionscnaimh is déanaí de chuid na scéime ná an bhileog - 'Déan Spraoi agus Bí Slán' a chur amach do thuismitheoirí - a scaipeadh go forleathan tríd an ghréasán scoileanna. Tugann an bhileog treoir do thuismitheoirí agus d'fheighlithe chun cuidiú leo gníomhaíochtaí páistí a roghnú ar dhóigh a uasmhéadaíonn a sábháilteacht. Ina theannta sin, chuir an Roinn s'agamsa le lámhleabhar treorach curtha amach ag OTÉ do mheasúnú agus do láimhseáil an bhaoil ó choirigh ghnéis.

Child Abuse Strategy: Statistical Information

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to make it her policy that the components of any strategy on child abuse should include a more comprehensive provision of statistical information on children's lives and well being.

(AQW 3333/00)

Ms de Brún: The draft inter-agency child protection guidance 'Co-operating to Safeguard Children' sets out a comprehensive list of statistical information which should be collected and published in the form of an annual report. Any further gaps which may exist in the capture of good quality statistical data will be considered in the context of an overall children's services strategy.

Leagann an dréacht-threoir idirghníomhaireachta ar chosaint páistí 'Ag Comhoibriú le Páistí a Chosaint' liosta cuimsitheach eolais staitisticiúil amach a ba chóir a bhailiú agus a fhoilsiú i bhfoirm tuairisce bliantúla. Déanfar machnamh ar thuilleadh bearnaí ar bith eile ann go fóill i bhfáil sonraí staitisticiúla de cháilíocht mhaith i gcomhthéacs straitéise iomláine seirbhísí páistí.

Child Abuse Strategy: Vetting

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to make it her policy that the components of any strategy on child abuse should include robust arrangements in the vetting of those who work with children that go beyond the provision of the Protection of Children Act in England. (AQW 3334/00)

Ms de Brún: My Department currently operates a vetting service, the Pre-employment Consultancy Service (PECS), to voluntary and statutory organisations seeking to employ individuals to work with children and adults with a learning disability. We intend to place the service on a statutory basis. Proposals for a Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults Bill will be put forward for public consultation shortly and we will be interested to hear views as to how we might improve current vetting arrangements

Tá seirbhís chigireachta, an tSeirbhís Chomhairleach Réamhfhostaíochta (CSRF), i bhfeidhm ag an Roinn s'agamsa faoi láthair thar ceann eagraíochtaí deonacha agus reachtúla ag iarraidh daoine a fhostú le hobair le páistí agus le daoine fásta le míchumas foghlama. Tá sé ar intinn againn na seirbhísí a sholáthar ar bhonn reachtúil. Molfar moltaí le haghaidh Bille Cosaint Páistí agus Daoine Leochaileacha do chomhairliú phoiblí ar ball agus beidh suim againn na tuairimí ar an dóigh arbh fhéidir linn socruithe reatha cigireachta a fheabhsú a chluinstin.

IVF Treatment

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) if IVF treatment is currently available in Northern Ireland; and (b) on which date it became available. (AQW 3335/00)

Ms de Brún: None of the Health and Social Services Boards commissions IVF services at present. Treatment is available only on a private patient basis. I announced on 24 April that sub-fertility services, including in-vitro fertilisation (IVF) treatment, would be the subject of a consultation exercise later this year. The consultation will address issues such as the cost of IVF and the eligibility for access to treatment. I also announced that an interim service, including the provision of a limited number of full treatment cycles of IVF, would be put in place while longer-term issues were being considered.

The development of this service is now being addressed and I hope that it will become operational later this year.

Ní choimisiúnaíonn Bord Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta ar bith seirbhísí TIV i láthair na huaire. Níl cóireáil ar fáil ach ar bhonn othair phríobháidigh. D'fhógair mé ar an 24 Aibreán go mbeadh seirbhísí fothoircithe, cóireáil thoirchiú in-vítrea (TIV) san áireamh, faoi réir cleachtaidh chomhairlithe níos moille i mbliana. Rachaidh an comhairliú i gceann ceisteanna amhail costas TIV agus teideal cóireáil a fháil. D'fhógair mé fosta go gcuirfí seirbhís eatramhach, soláthar roinnt tréimhsí teoranta cóireála iomláine TIV san áireamh, i bhfeidhm agus machnamh á dhéanamh ar cheisteanna fadtéarmacha. Táthar ag dul i gceann forbairt na seirbhíse seo anois agus tá súil agam go mbeidh sí ag feidhmiú níos moille i mbliana.

IVF Treatment: Criteria

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the criteria required to receive IVF treatment. (AQW 3336/00)

Ms de Brún: I refer the Member to my answer to AQW 3335/00.

Luaim don Bhall an freagra a thug mé ar AQW 3335/00.

Mileage Allowances: Social Workers/Health Visitors/Community Nurses

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) what assessment she has made of payments to health visitors and community nurses for the use of private cars on health service business (b) the mileage allowance for (i) social workers (ii) health visitors (iii) community nurses and (c) what steps she is taking to ensure equality of payment for mileage allowances between these vocations. (AQW 3344/00)

Ms de Brún:

- (a) I have examined the arrangements for payment of mileage allowances and the amounts paid to health visitors and community nurses who use their cars on health service business. Under the Health Services Agreement contained in the Finance Act 1971 such staff are required to be paid in parity with the rates of pay and conditions of service applied to their counterparts in the NHS.
- (b) The pay and terms and conditions of service, including mileage allowances, payable to social work staff are linked to those of similar staff employed in local authority services in GB. The essential user rates are paid to those staff whose duties are of such a nature that it is essential for them to have a motor car at their disposal whenever required.

THE ESSENTIAL USER RATES ARE:

Engine Capacity	451-999cc	1000-1199cc	1200-1450cc
Lump sum per year	£609	£702	£906
Per mile (first 8,500 miles)	27.5p	31.2p	37.8p
Per mile (after 8,500 miles)	10.7p	11.9p	12.9p

Casual user rates are payable to social work staff where it is merely desirable that a car should be available when required.

THE CASUAL USER RATES ARE:

Engine Capacity	451-999cc	1000-1199cc	1200-1450cc
Per mile (first 8,500 miles)	34.6p	39.5p	48.5p
Per mile (after 8,500 miles)	10.7p	11.9p	12.9p

The terms and conditions of service of health visitors and community nurses provide that an employing authority may offer an official vehicle to an employee whom they require to be mobile and where they deem it is in the interest of the service to do so. Where an employing authority deems that it is uneconomic or is unable to offer a vehicle the employee may be paid a regular car users allowance if defined criteria in relation to distance and time spent travelling are met. Certain long serving staff have the option of an official vehicle or to continue being paid the regular user rates.

THE REGULAR USER RATES ARE:

Engine Capacity	501-1000cc	1001-1500cc	Over 1500cc
Lump sum per year	£508	£626	£760
Up to 9,000 miles	27.0p	33.5p	40.0p
Thereafter	16.2p	18.3p	20.5p

Health visitors and community nurses who are not classified as "Regular Car Users" but use their car in the course of their employment are entitled to standard mileage rates.

THE STANDARD MILEAGE RATES ARE:

Engine Capacity	501-1000cc	1001-1500cc	Over 1500cc
Up to 3,500 miles	34.0p	43.0p	53.0p
Thereafter	16.2p	18.3p	20.5p

A Public Transport Rate of 23p per mile is payable to those health visitors and community nurses who refuse the offer of an official vehicle.

- (c) The terms and conditions of service of all staff will be the subject of discussions my Department and

representatives of employers and staff organisations will be having on the implications for the HPSS arising out of *Agenda for Change-Modernising the NHS pay system*.

- (a) Scrúdaigh mé na socruithe d'íocaíocht liúntas míleáiste agus na suimeanna íoctha do chuartheoirí sláinte agus d'altraí pobail a úsáideann a ngluaisteáin agus iad i mbun gnó seirbhíse sláinte. Faoin Aontú Seirbhísí Sláinte san Acht Airgeadais 1971 ní mór an fhoireann sin a íoc cothrom le rátaí íocaíochta agus le coinníollacha seirbhíse a gcomhghleacaithe sa SNS.
- (b) Tá pá, téarmaí agus coinníollacha seirbhíse, liúntais mhíleáiste san áireamh, íoctha d'oibrithe sóisialta ceangailte le pá, téarmaí agus coinníollacha foirne cosúla eile fostaithe i seirbhísí údaráis áitiúil sa Bhreatain Mhór. Íoctar na rátaí úsáideoirí riachtanacha don fhoireann sin ar gné riachtanach ar leith dá ndualgais i gluaisteán a bheith acu nuair atá sé de dhíth.

SEO A LEANAS NA RÁTAÍ ÚSÁIDEOIRÍ RIACHTANACHA:

Cumas Innill	451-999cc	1000-1199cc	1200-1450cc
Cnapshuim an bhliain	£609	£702	£906
An míle (an chéad 8,500 míle)	27.5p	31.2p	37.8p
An míle (i ndiaidh 8,500 míle)	10.7p	11.9p	12.9p

Íoctar rátaí úsáideoirí ócáideacha d'oibrithe sóisialta nuair nach bhfuil sé ach inmhiannaithe go gcuirfí gluaisteán ar fáil nuair a bheadh sé de dhíth.

SEO A LEANAS NA RÁTAÍ ÚSÁIDEOIRÍ ÓCÁIDEACHA:

Cumas Innill	451-999cc	1000-1199cc	1200-1450cc
An míle (an chéad 8,500 míle)	34.6p	39.5p	48.5p
An míle (i ndiaidh 8,500 míle)	10.7p	11.9p	12.9p

I dtéarmaí agus i gcoinníollacha seirbhíse cuairteoirí sláinte agus altraí pobail tá foráil ann go dtairgfeadh an t-údarás fostaithe feithicil oifigiúil d'fhostaí a n-iarrann siad air/uirthi le bheith gluaisteach agus a síleann siad go bhfuil sí ar mhaithe leis an tseirbhís sin a dhéanamh. Áit a síleann údarás fostaithe go bhfuil sé neamheacnamaíoch nó neamhábaltá feithicil a thairiscint don fhostaí, d'fhéadfaí liúntas úsáideoirí rialta gluaisteáin a íoc don fhostaí má chomhlíontar critéir áirithe maidir le fad agus le ham caite ag taistil. Tá rogha ag foireann fhadfhostaithe áirithe feithicil oifigiúil a bheith acu nó íocaíocht ar rátaí úsáideoirí rialta a fháil go fóill.

SEO A LEANAS NA RÁTAÍ ÚSÁIDEOIRÍ RIALTA:

Cumas Innill	501-1000cc	1001-1500cc	Níos mó ná 1500cc
Cnapshuim an bhliain	£508	£626	£760
Suas go 9,000 míle	27.0p	33.5p	40.0p
As sin amach	16.2p	18.3p	20.5p

Tá cuairteoirí sláinte agus altraí pobail, a úsáideann a ngluaisteáin le linn a bhfostaíochta agus nach rangaítear mar “Úsáideoirí Rialta Gluaisteáin”, i dteideal rátaí caighdeánacha míleáiste.

SEO A LEANAS NA RÁTAÍ CAIGHDEÁNACHA MÍLEÁISTE:

Cumas Innill	501-1000cc	1001-1500cc	Níos mó ná 1500cc
Suas go 3,500 míle	34.0p	43.0p	53.0p
As sin amach	16.2p	18.3p	20.5p

Íoctar Ráta Iompair Phoiblí de 23p an míle do na cuairteoirí sláinte agus do na haltraí pobail sin a dhiúltaíonn tairiscint feithicil oifigiúla.

- (c) Beidh téarmaí agus coinníollacha seirbhíse gach foireann ábhar na gcaibidlí a bheas an Roinn s'agamsa chomh maith le hionadaithe eagraíochtaí fostóirí agus oibrithe ag déanamh ar na himpleachtaí do na SSSP de bharr *Clár d'Athrú – Ag Tabhairt Chóras Íocaíochta na SNS Suas Chun Dáta*.

Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre Statistics

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) the incidence rate for each of the following in the last five years (i) methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) (ii) necrotising fasciitis (iii) Streptococcus A; (b) which Trusts have been affected by these diseases over the same period (c) what steps are being taken to eradicate them and (d) what guidelines have been issued to Trusts in respect of these diseases. (AQW 3345/00)

Ms de Brún:

- (a) The positive laboratory isolates for MRSA and Streptococcus A reported to the Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre (CDSC) for each of the last five years were as follows:-

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
MRSA	26	29	52	68	130
Streptococcus	11	16	16	12	22

Necrotising fasciitis is an extremely rare condition. It is not notifiable and data is not recorded routinely.

(b) These figures are reported on a hospital laboratory basis and not on a hospital of origin basis. The laboratories reporting these infections during the year 2000 were as follows: Altnagelvin, Antrim, Belfast City, Causeway, Craigavon, Erne, Mater, Musgrave Park, Royal Victoria Bacteriology Laboratory and The Ulster.

(c&d) It would be virtually impossible to eradicate these diseases as they are almost an integral part of the human flora of bacteria. Both staphylococcus A and streptococcus A are carried in the noses and throats of a significant proportion of the general population without causing any symptoms of illness. The Department's primary concern is, therefore, to minimise hospital acquired infection and the development of antimicrobial resistance. To this end in 1997 detailed guidance on hospital infection control was issued by the Clinical Resource Efficiency Support Team (CREST). In April 2000 my Department, in a circular to the HPSS, set out a programme of action to be undertaken by the HPSS in the area of infection control, surveillance and antimicrobial prescribing. The present reporting of MRSA and Streptococcus A is done on a voluntary basis but in line with the Department's "Priorities for Action", Trusts are now required, from this year, to report on Bacteraemia rates, including MRSA, in acute facilities.

From this year, 2001/2002, funding is being made available to the CDSC and the Royal Group of Hospitals to carry out increased surveillance of antimicrobial resistance and hospital infection on a regional basis. The Department is also presently working on preparation of guidance to go out to the HPSS about standards of environmental cleanliness which will focus on the need for strict standards of hygiene and infection control.

(a) Seo a leanas aonaránuithe deimhneacha saotharlainne do MRSA agus Streipteacocas A a tuairiscíodh don Ionad Airdeallach Galar Teagmhálach (IAGT) do na cúig bliana deireanacha:-

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
MRSA	26	29	52	68	130
Streipteacocas	11	16	16	12	22

Is fíorannamh a thagtar ar Necrotising fasciitis. Ní gá é a chur in iúl agus ní dhéantar taifead ar shonraí go rialta.

(b) Tuairiscítear na figiúirí ar bhonn saotharlann otharlainne agus ní ar bhonn otharlainne as ar tháinig sé. Seo a leanas na saotharlanna a thuairiscigh na galair seo le linn na bliana 2000:- Alt na nGealbhan, Aontroim, Cathair Bhéal Feirste, An Clochán, Craigavon, An Éirne, Mater, Páirc Musgrave, Saotharlann Baictéiríocha Otharlann Ríoga Vichteoiria agus Otharlann Uladh.

(c&d) Is ar éigean a thiocfadh deireadh iomlán a chur leis na galair seo mar tá siad a bheag nó a mhór mar pháirt chomhtháite den fhásra duine de bhaictéir. Iompraítear stafalacocas A agus Streipteacocas A araon i ngaosán agus sceadamán líon suntasach den daonra ginearálta gan chomhartha tinnis a léiriú. Is í príomhaidhm na Roinne, mar sin de, galar faighte in otharlann agus forbairt friotaíochta frithmhiocróbaí a íoslághdú. Chuige sin d'éisigh an Fhoireann Tacaíochta Eifeacht Achmainní Cliniciúla (FTÉAC) miontreoir ar shrianadh ionfhabhtú otharlainne. I Mí Aibreáin 2000 leag an Roinn s'agam, in imlitir do na SSSP, clár gníomhaíochta amach a bhí le tabhairt faoi ag an SSSP sa réimse srianta ionfhabhtaithe, in airdeallach agus ordú frithmhiocróbach. Tuairiscítear MRSA agus Streipteacocas A ar bhonn deonaigh ag teacht le 'Tosaíochtaí le hAghaidh Gnímh' na Roinne, is gá d'Iontaobhais, ón bhliain seo, rátaí Baictéaraemachta, MRSA san áireamh, a thuairsciú i ngearacmhainní.

Ón bhliain seo, 2001/2002, cuirfear maoiniú ar fáil don IAGT agus don Ghrúpa Ríoga Otharlann chun tuilleadh airdill a dhéanamh ar fhriotaíocht frithmhiocróbach agus ionfhabhtú otharlainne ar bhonn reigiúnach. Tá an Roinn faoi láthair ag obair ullmhúchán comhairle le dul amach chuig na SSSP faoi chaighdeáin ghlaineachta sa timpeallacht a dhíreofar ar an ghá do ghéarchaighdeáin shláinteachais agus shrianta ionfhabhtaithe.

HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

Graduate Employment in Northern Ireland

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail the steps he is taking to encourage our most talented students to continue their careers within Northern Ireland. (AQW 3320/00)

The Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Dr Farren): The best and most obvious way to encourage the graduates of our Higher and Further Education system to continue their careers in Northern Ireland is to provide them with the jobs and post graduate opportunities which best engage their skills. Those issues are addressed in Programme for Government and in Strategy 2010. For those who do not immediately progress into employment or post graduate places my Department provides a range of opportunities most notably 250 places on an ICT conversion programme 'Rapid Advancement Programme' and 250 places on a management training programme 'Premier'.

Labour Relations Agency: Review

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment if has any plans to carry out a review of the Labour Relations Agency.

(AQW 3395/00)

Dr Farren: The second Quinquennial Review of the Labour Relations Agency is now due. Consultation will begin shortly, with the review planned to start in September, after the consultation period has ended.

Taskforce on Employability and Long Term Unemployment

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment whether the task force on employability and long term unemployment has been set up and to detail its membership, remit and funding arrangements.

(AQW 3399/00)

Dr Farren: The Taskforce to date has met on three occasions and includes senior representation from across Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Office and the Equality Commission for NI. It aims to prepare an Action Plan, integrating actions across Government departments and agencies, by 31 March 2002. Where resources are needed I hope that we can work in a collaborative way, accessing available resources to achieve common objectives.

New Deal 25+: Targets

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to state which of the New Deal 25+ targets have actually been met, as set out in the Programme for Government for achievement by April 2001.

(AQW 3411/00)

Dr Farren: In the Programme for Government there are three targets relating to the New Deal 25+ all of which have been achieved. The programme is tailored to the needs of Northern Ireland in that it has early entry provision for certain groups including lone parents; it provides for up to 26 weeks work experience/training; and the Employer Subsidy is now available at any stage.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Planning Applications: Transportation Aspects

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail what standard requirements exist for the

provision of parking facilities when additional shops are planned in an established development. (AQW 2991/00)

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Campbell): The Department of the Environment's Planning Service consults my Department's Roads Service regarding transportation aspects of all planning applications. The requirements for car parking provision for an extension to an existing development or for a change of use within an existing development are generally the same as for a new development. Each application is considered on an individual basis, in conjunction with Planning Service, taking into account;

- the current level of parking and the use that is made of existing parking provision;
- the type of development and whether it will generate new/extra trips (including the likely time of day); and
- transportation policy with specific reference to availability of public transport in the area.

Repairs to Bridges 60181 and 61369

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 869/00 and AQW 870/00, to detail when repair work to bridges 60181 and 61369 will commence now that the replacement of the twin bridge culvert on the B72 is complete.

(AQW 3147/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service has advised that repair work to Bridges 60181 and 61369 has been delayed because of precautionary measures that were introduced to prevent the spread of Foot and Mouth disease. These measures restricted entry onto agricultural land, which is necessary to carry out the bridge repairs. Following a recent relaxation in these measures, Roads Service hopes, subject to the consent of the landowners concerned, to commence the repair work within the next few weeks.

Woodburn Road/Ellis Street: Traffic Management

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 3019/00 and AQW 3020/00, to consider a major reassessment of traffic management on Woodburn Road/Ellis Street in view of the significant number of planning applications on this stretch of road in the last five years.

(AQW 3289/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service report that it is satisfied that the current road layout in Woodburn Road and Ellis Street copes adequately with local traffic flows. Consequently, there are no current plans to carry out a major assessment of traffic management in the area.

I am informed that the majority of planning applications in the Woodburn Road/Ellis Street area over the last

five years have been for changes of use and alterations to existing dwellings. Each application was assessed to evaluate its impact on the surrounding road network and none of the applications necessitated planning conditions requiring applicants to fund any improvements to the road system.

Roads Service has, however, recently been consulted about a planning application for 150 houses in the area. The developer has been asked to carry out a Transportation Impact Assessment. This will determine the effect the proposed development will have on the road network and what improvements the developer may be asked to fund.

Completion of Roads to Adoption Standards

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to consider introducing legislation whereby timescales would be set for developers to bring roads up to appropriate standard for adoption by Roads Service.

(AQW 3290/00)

Mr Campbell: Where completion of roads to adoption standards is not effected by developers within a reasonable period from the date of occupation of houses, the Private Streets (NI) Order 1980, as amended, enables my Department's Roads Service to complete the necessary work at the developers' expense. Such action is normally only initiated after efforts to persuade the developers to meet their obligations have proved unsuccessful, each case being considered on its merits.

It should be recognised, however, that there are many variables that dictate the progress of housing developments and have a direct effect on their completion and, therefore, on the adoption of roads and services.

My Department has no plans, currently, to introduce further legislation on this issue. I can assure you, however, that Roads Service is committed to the prompt adoption of all private streets that have been properly provided by developers and will continue to work closely with developers to bring outstanding sites to adoption standards.

Vehicle Damage Claims

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the target times for settling public liability claims for vehicle damage caused by poor road surfaces.

(AQW 3292/00)

Mr Campbell: Not all claims made against the Department are eligible for settlement by way of compensation. The target time to conclude the investigation of a vehicle damage claim and advise a claimant of the outcome of their claim is 6 months from receipt of the claim. The conclusion of a claim may be to reject it, to refer it to another body or to make an offer of compensation.

The timescale of 6 months represents an average period. It has been arrived at by taking account of the process involved within the Central Claims Unit and also the investigation process

Road Accidents: Hamilton's Corner (A5)

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of major and minor road traffic accidents at Hamilton's Corner on the A5 between Sion Mills and Strabane in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 3356/00)

Mr Campbell: The provision of information in relation to road accidents is a matter for the Northern Ireland Office.

Public Transport: Carrickfergus to Mallusk Service

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 1194/00, to detail what progress has been achieved regarding the proposed public transport service between Carrickfergus and Mallusk.

(AQW 3378/00)

Mr Campbell: Translink have advised that a shortage of drivers has delayed the start of the Carrickfergus to Mallusk service. Translink have also advised that currently they have a major driver recruitment programme under way which they hope will resolve this problem.

Classification of Roads

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Regional Development to give his Department's definition of (a) A class roads (b) B class roads (c) C class roads (d) unclassified roads and (e) other carriageways.

(AQW 3391/00)

Mr Campbell: Road classifications in Northern Ireland were established during the time when local councils were responsible for local roads ie prior to the 1973 Local Government reorganisation. At that time, councils received grants for maintenance of roads and they were determined by road classification.

Road classification is currently limited to route identification. Any new route outside a motorway would be classified on the basis of the comparable route classification in the area.

Regional Transportation Strategy

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development whether the 10 year Regional Transportation Strategy will be ready by Autumn 2001.

(AQW 3400/00)

Mr Campbell: The Programme for Government includes a target to produce a draft Regional Transportation Strategy by autumn 2001. The Department is still aiming to meet this target.

A working conference for key stakeholders will be held at the end of September/beginning of October 2001 and feedback from this event will be used to inform the final draft of the strategy.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

NIHE:

Waiting Lists for Accommodation

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 3184/00, to detail, by district council area, the number of people currently waiting for (a) three bedroom ground floor accommodation and (b) two bedroom ground floor accommodation.

(AQW 3350/00)

The Minister for Social Development (Mr Morrow): The information requested is as follows.

Council Area	2 Bed Ground Floor Accommodation	3 Bed Ground Floor Accommodation	Total
Belfast	608	92	700
North Down	87	14	101
Ards	46	19	65
Castlereagh	128	8	136
Lisburn	130	13	143
Down	65	19	84
Banbridge	26	7	33
Newry + Mourne	42	19	61
Armagh	35	15	50
Craigavon	84	15	99
Dungannon	34	9	43
Fermanagh	40	12	52
Ballymena	45	9	54
Antrim	46	8	54
Newtownabbey	173	13	186
Carrick	104	13	117
Larne	23	4	27
Moyle	8	1	9
Ballymoney	27	5	32

Council Area	2 Bed Ground Floor Accommodation	3 Bed Ground Floor Accommodation	Total
Coleraine	28	4	32
Derry	204	88	292
Limavady	24	4	28
Magherafelt	15	3	18
Strabane	35	11	44
Omagh	15	13	28
Cookstown	21	3	24
Total	2093	421	2514

Strabane 2000 Pride in Our Town Sub-Committee

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail his officials' contact with the divisional commander of the RUC Strabane district command unit regarding an incident at a Strabane 2000, pride in our town sub-committee meeting on 5 April 2001.

(AQW 3355/00)

Mr Morrow: No officials of my Department have been in contact with the divisional commander of the RUC regarding an incident at a Strabane 2000 Pride in Our Town sub-committee meeting on 5 April 2001.

NIHE Property: Anti-Social Behaviour

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of complaints relating to anti-social behaviour in Housing Executive property in the constituency of Strangford in the years 1999-00 and 2000-01.

(AQW 3370/00)

Mr Morrow: Information over the last two years is not available because all Housing Executive District Offices have only been required to collect and report on incidences of anti-social behaviour since late last year. The first return available covers for the period 1 January 2001 to 31 March 2001 and shows that there have been 146 complaints of anti-social behaviour. These range from noise (26), rubbish dumping (35), damage to property (52), harassment and intimidation (33). These figures are not exclusive to your constituency as the area covered by the 3 District Offices, Ards, Castlereagh and Downpatrick extend beyond its boundaries.

I can confirm that during the quarter there has been one eviction on the grounds of anti-social behaviour and in 2 cases the Housing Executive has taken Notice Seeking Possession action which involves asking the Courts for Orders for possession.

Gap Funding: Interim Funding Applications

Mrs Nelis asked the Minister for Social Development to detail, by name and ward, those applicants in the Foyle constituency who were awarded gap funding under the interim funding arrangements and the criteria on which the awards were judged. (AQW 3387/00)

Mr Morrow: Details of the successful applicants for gap funding in the form requested are appended. The applications were assessed in accordance with selection criteria for Measures for which DSD has lead responsibility. These included the extent to which they met the project activities and selection criteria of the Measure and the distinctiveness criteria for Peace II. Distinctiveness criteria for Peace II included the extent to which the projects address the legacy of the conflict and/or take opportunities arising from peace. Other criteria applied were evidence of insufficient resources, whether the projects have a strategic role in relation to other groups and the extent of adverse impact on the community were the projects to end including New Targeting Social Need and Equality considerations.

INTERIM FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS SUCCESSFUL APPLICANTS: FOYLE CONSTITUENCY

Name of Organisation	Ward	Amount Awarded £
Creggan Neighbourhood Partnership	Creggan South	27,644
Ulster Prisoners' Aid	Ebrington	11,220
Epic North-West	Ebrington	8,184
Bogside and Brandywell Initiative	Brandywell	10,367
Tullyally Co-ordinator/Administrator	Faughan	12,002
Family Information Group	Westland	7,600
North-West Community Network	The Diamond	25,229
Cathedral Youth Club	The Diamond	14,425
Restorative Justice Training Officer	The Diamond	15,000
Resource Centre	Carnhill	11,475.32
Western Area Legal Advice Service	Strand	25,970
Outreach Development Project	Strand	9,120

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 6 July 2001

Written Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Continuous Improvement of Public Services

Mr Gibson asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail its proposals to ensure the continuous improvement of public services; and to make a statement. (AQW 3173/00)

Reply: The Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister places a high priority on the continuous improvement of public services and we have given responsibility for implementing this priority to the Public Service Improvement Unit (PSIU). The approach which the Unit brings to the task is centred upon promoting and supporting the use of a range of Quality schemes which are aimed at ensuring better delivery of services:-

The European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Excellence Model has been adopted as the primary vehicle for focusing improvement effort. It is expected that use of the Model will be enhanced by the introduction in November 2000 of the 'Steps to Excellence' scheme, which is an award scheme for public sector organisations achieving specific standards against the criteria of the Model. To date 14 public sector organisations have elected to submit for the STEPS scheme. The development of this scheme in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Quality Centre is unique to Northern Ireland and is raising interest in other administrations.

Charter Mark focuses on results in terms of the service which customers receive and Northern Ireland has been particularly successful within the Scheme. The award which is firmly part of the public service culture will continue to be promoted.

Virtually all of the Northern Ireland Civil Service has now achieved IIP accreditation and the current focus of PSIU attention is on giving support and advice to those organisations which are seeking re-accreditation within recently revised guidelines.

The Balanced Scorecard is finding increased public sector use as a business planning tool which helps organisations achieve a sharpened focus on key objectives and measures.

The approach of the PSIU to promoting and supporting these schemes includes providing advice, running seminars and a range of awareness events, facilitating workshops and giving continued support to those within public sector organisations who are driving improvement efforts.

In addition to these Quality approaches, our Department, in conjunction with the Department of Finance and Personnel, will take the lead in the Executive's quest to continuously improve the quality and accountability of public services and maximise the output from the public sector. We are specifically seeking to:

- Establish an effective system of regularly reviewing all major policy areas within Departments.
- Build on the success of the Executive Agencies in service delivery by maintaining a system of fundamental reviews in order to establish the "Best Supplier" and using the same principles to equally ensure the effective provision of services by all Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs).
- Modernise government services through the use of Information and Communications Technology and the promotion of electronic service delivery.
- Introduce Departmental Service Delivery Agreements to underpin the objectives and key targets set out in the Public Service Agreements.

We will continue to review these arrangements for continuous improvement to ensure that they remain effective in bringing about changes which will result in constantly improving services for all our citizens.

The Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey

Mrs I Robinson asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to give an assessment of the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey and to detail what steps are being taken to ensure men are not portrayed in a negative way in the media and that the equality agenda eliminates any bias against men. (AQW 3243/00)

Reply: The Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (NILT), launched in 1998, is an independent social survey carried out annually by a team of academics from Queen's University Belfast and University of Ulster. The survey aims to monitor the attitudes and behaviours of people living in private households in Northern Ireland. The survey provides a time-series of how attitudes and behaviours develop, and change, on a wide range of social policy issues.

The Statutory Equality Obligation under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act requires Departments, in

carrying out their functions in Northern Ireland, to promote equality of opportunity between, among other categories, men and women. The Sex Discrimination Order (1976), makes it unlawful to discriminate against an individual on the grounds of his or her sex in the fields of employment, training and related matters, the provision of goods, facilities and services or the disposal and management of premises.

The portrayal of men in the media is a matter for newspapers and broadcasting organisations to determine.

Children's Fund: Steering Group

Mrs Carson asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister for an assurance that the steering group for the Children's Fund will not be a Quango.

(AQW 3322/00)

Reply: At present no formal structures have been established for the Children's Fund. An inter-departmental group led at official level by the Department of Finance and Personnel and the Economic Policy Unit has been tasked with bringing forward proposals on the criteria for future allocations from the Children's Fund and the structures that might be put in place to manage the allocation process and ensure that appropriate accountability mechanisms exist. These proposals will be considered shortly by the Executive and will then be subject to full consultation over the coming months. As part of this process, Assembly Committees and individual MLAs will have an opportunity to make known their views.

In reaching final decisions on arrangements, our priority will be to ensure that the funding available from the Children's Fund goes directly to projects that support children in need and young people at risk.

Children's Fund

Mrs Carson asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail what input elected representatives will have into the Children's Fund.

(AQW 3323/00)

Reply: The amount of funding available from the Children's Fund is decided as part of the overall budgetary process which is subject to Assembly approval.

As we said in our answer to AQW3322, the Executive will shortly consider proposals on the criteria for future allocations from the Children's Fund and the structures that might be put in place to manage the allocation process. These proposals will then be subject to widespread consultation over the coming months. As part of the consultation process, we will be writing to all MLAs to seek their views. We will also be writing to the Chairpersons of the relevant Assembly Committees to ask them to consider the proposals and how they might impact on

the elements of the work of their Departments that relate to children.

IFI: Programmes of Funding

Mr McGrady asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail what recent discussions have been held with the International Fund for Ireland concerning their programmes of funding; and to make a statement.

(AQO 1607/00)

Reply: We have not formally met the International Fund for Ireland, however our officials maintain regular contact with the Board of the Fund through the Advisory Committee meetings.

At the most recent meeting of the Advisory Committee, held on 12 June 2001, a range of matters relating to the Fund were discussed. The Committee advises the Board of the Fund on all matters, including its Programmes of funding. Senior officials from those Departments which help to administer, and in some cases jointly support, the various IFI Programmes attend the Advisory Committee meetings. The next meeting of the Advisory Committee is due to be held on 4 September 2001.

The Fund's most recent Annual Report was published earlier this year and we understand a copy was issued to all Assembly Members. This Report provides a very useful insight into the range of activities undertaken by the Fund as well as recording the important contribution which the Fund has made to developments including providing assistance of over £3.8 million to some 4,600 projects involving a total investment of over £1 billion.

CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Ulster Scots Language

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail what key information is available in the Ulster Scots language as stated in the Programme for Government.

(AQW 3397/00)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McGimpsey): In the Programme for Government my Department has made the commitment to make key information available in languages other than English.

The Department currently has available in the Ulster-Scots language copies of the DCAL Corporate Strategy, the DCAL Equality Scheme and a summary of the New TSN report. It is intended that the DCAL revised Action Plan will also be made available in the Ulster-Scots language.

My Department takes a view on a case by case basis, regarding what information should be provided in languages

other than English. We consider making available specific documents which may be of particular relevance to a certain section of the community.

Marching Season

Mrs Nelis asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline how his policy takes account of the marching season in promoting a positive image at home and abroad. (AQW 3401/00)

Mr McGimpsey: It is my firm belief that the marching season has the potential to contribute positively to the image of Northern Ireland. It is clear that the vast majority of marches represent colourful celebrations of culture and heritage which bring an immense amount of enjoyment to local communities across the Province. They have a valuable part to play in a society which recognises and respects cultural diversity.

However, I appreciate that a minority of marches have been associated with an image of conflict, division, and disputes over competing rights. It does not have to be that way. The efforts of, for example, the Apprentice Boys of Derry have shown how an imaginative approach in partnership with the local community can help to defuse potential conflict by placing marches within their wider cultural context. The Maiden City Festival has broken new ground in shifting the focus beyond marches alone to incorporate a week of celebrations which include several events with cross-community appeal.

Last year I attended the pageant at Guildhall Square and was impressed by the widespread community representation and the reception the event received. The Maiden City Festival has helped to show the entire city in a good light and is just one example of the potential for promoting a positive image through high quality cultural events.

I intend to support this year's festival and hope that others can learn from the positive lessons of this experience.

Programme for Government: Audit Targets

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (a) what progress has been made in his target of auditing 40 culture, arts and leisure venues by May 2001 and (b) his assessment of these audits. (AQW 3413/00)

Mr McGimpsey: Audits have been carried out on 40 venues. These covered a variety of large and small, old and new, indoor and outdoor amenities, each with a cultural programme and included theatres, community centres, hotels, recreational and fishing outlets.

It was found that a large majority of the premises audited needed considerable improvements to meet the requirements of current legislation. These included a

number of new buildings that were disappointing in the level of universal accessibility provided.

Leisure Facilities: Twinbrook, Poleglass and Lagmore

Ms Ramsey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether he has any plans for a leisureplex, including a swimming facility, for the Twinbrook, Poleglass and Lagmore areas of Belfast. (AQW 3417/00)

Mr McGimpsey: Statutory responsibility for leisure and recreational provision at local level rests, not with me, but with the relevant district council. I would therefore encourage you to take these matters up with Lisburn Borough Council in the first instance. You may also find it useful to contact Belfast City Council to see what facilities they may be planning to provide close by the Twinbrook, Poleglass and Lagmore estates.

Leisure Facilities: Twinbrook, Poleglass and Lagmore

Ms Ramsey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail his plans to meet the play needs of children within the Twinbrook, Poleglass and Lagmore areas of Belfast. (AQW 3420/00)

Mr McGimpsey: I refer you to the answer I gave to your Assembly Question AQW 3417/00.

Fisheries Conservancy Board: Grant Aid

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail grant-aid schemes to the Fisheries Conservancy Board for the conservation and protection of fish stocks. (AQW 3424/00)

Mr McGimpsey: The total grant-aid available to the Fisheries Conservancy Board in 2001/02 is £150,000. This allocation is intended to cover a number of initiatives to be taken forward by the Board. Those concerned with the conservation and protection of fish stocks are the introduction of a salmon carcass tagging scheme, the appointment of technical staff to implement the Salmon Management Plan and to fulfil new obligations related to the control of the removal of material from river beds, and the recruitment of additional staff to monitor fishery protection measures at water abstraction sites.

Diversity 21 Initiative

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail whether the Diversity 21 initiative has been extended, as stated in the Programme for Government,

and to give his assessment as to whether it has achieved its aims. (AQW 3429/00)

Mr McGimpsey: Diversity 21 was a programme originally devised and implemented by the Northern Ireland Millennium Company. It was included within the Agenda for Government and launched in October last year. Fourteen separate programmes were included within the initiative which aims to promote and celebrate all cultures in Northern Ireland; the seven criteria or 'keys' to Diversity 21 are: location, inclusion, participation, variety, opportunity, visible diversity and sustainable legacy.

I was delighted with the progress made during the initial start up phase, which resulted in Diversity 21 continuing to be funded through the Programme for Government and now being supported directly by my Department. A progress report on each of the programmes developed during the initial phase of Diversity 21 is attached for your information and a copy will be placed in the Assembly Library. I am also enclosing copies of some of the material produced through the Keynotes competition, Intercom, and, of course, what was undoubtedly the highlight of the initial phase, the Northern Odyssey Gala, which I was delighted to see televised recently and hope will be broadcast shortly through the Public Service Network in the USA.

As Diversity 21 has been in operation for less than a year, it would be unrealistic to claim that it has achieved all its aims; I am confident, however, that it has made an excellent start, and the number of people who have participated, in the region of 120,000, has greatly exceeded our expectations. I am particularly pleased that the exhibitions and workshops have attracted so many people throughout Northern Ireland and that we are now receiving requests from the Republic of Ireland.

The Department will continue to support and develop the Diversity 21 programme through the Programme for Government, using the main themes of language, history, music, sport, storytelling, faith, film and consider initiatives in other areas not previously covered such as drama and dance.

Guidance given to Voluntary and Community Sector

Ms Morrice asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the guidance his Departments and its NDPBs give to voluntary and community bodies on accessing, using and accounting for grants from public monies. (AQW 3484/00)

Mr McGimpsey: I undertook in the official response to write separately to you providing more details on the various forms of advice provided by my Department and its NDPBs to voluntary and community bodies on accessing, using and accounting for grants and public monies.

Core Department

Finance and Accountability Branch does not normally provide guidance and advice directly to voluntary and community groups. It does however provide all of DCAL's Heads of Divisions, Agencies and NDPBs with up to date guidance and advice. This is usually in the form of DAO (DFP) letters and other directives received from DFP, but on some occasions it is in the form of internal guidelines or advice. They are advised that they may copy any of these, where appropriate, to any of the bodies that they fund.

Sports & Sports Lottery

As far as Exchequer Funding is concerned, applicants are issued with a "Heads of Agreement" which details the terms and conditions under which grants are applied.

Advice and guidance offered to potential and actual applicants from the Sports Council Lottery Fund is as follows:

- Newsletter 2001 – detailing all programmes and eligibility.
- Information and guidance booklets for all programmes.
- Guide to preparing a business plan.
- Technical Guidance Notes.
- Site Visits.
- "What Happens Next" guidance note.
- Meetings with applicants to assist in completing claims and monitoring returns.
- Roadshows to answer customers' queries and give information on funding programmes.

Museums

The Northern Ireland Museums Council occasionally gives grants to voluntary and community bodies for the production of feasibility studies.

A copy of the Council's guidance on accessing, using and accounting for grants and public monies is attached for information.

Arts

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland is the statutory body through which public funding for arts in Northern Ireland is channelled. It is the Council's statutory duty to advise the Department and other government departments, district councils and other bodies on matters relating to the arts.

Accessing of Council grants is via an application process. Guidance given to applicants is detailed in the guidance notes attached to each programme sent out with each application form. These notes detail what applicants will be expected to give the Council in terms of accounting for the funds, ie invoices, receipts, mid-term report and how they will be monitored. The letter of offer for

Lottery grants, for example, also details what, how and when payments should be made.

The Department does not as a rule directly fund voluntary or community bodies as part of its Arts Programme. However, on those few occasions where there is a direct funding relationship, guidance on the use of resources and accounting procedures is contained in a letter of offer, which is effectively a contract that the body must agree to be bound by before any monies are paid over.

Others

A pilot scheme to assist **Cultural Diversity** projects or events has just been established and a copy of the Application Form and Guidance Notes which accompany the form are attached, together with a specimen of the formal letter of offer, the acceptance form and Standard Conditions of Grant attached to the offer.

With awards exceeding £10,000, the process of agreeing an application form will include a meeting with the applicant to agree dates for staged payments.

The **Northern Ireland Events Company** follow a similar procedure, and a copy of their application form, and Guidance notes are attached. Northern Ireland Events Company staff would normally have meetings with applicants at various stages of the grant process.

I hope you find this information helpful. This letter and the attachments has been copied to the Business Office and to the Assembly Library.

Grants to Voluntary and Community Sector

Ms Morrice asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail all grants of £100,000 or more made by his Department and its NDPBs to voluntary and community bodies in the financial year 2000-01.

(AQW 3516/00)

Mr McGimpsey: My Department and its NDPBs have made two grants in excess of £100, 000 to voluntary and community bodies in the financial year 2000-01, they are:-

Holy Family Boxing Club	£100, 000
Dungannon Rifle and Pistol Club	£110, 000

EDUCATION

Ballymena Academy: TSN Funding

Mr Leslie asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 3209/00, to detail the amounts due to Ballymena Academy under the proposals for TSN funding in the consultation document “A Common Funding Formula for Grant Aided Schools”.

(AQW 3426/00)

The Minister of Education (Mr M McGuinness):

The amounts due to Ballymena Academy under the proposals for TSN funding contained in the consultation document “A Common Funding Formula for Grant Aided Schools” are as follows:-

Social Deprivation:	£8,845
Special Educational Need:	£NIL

I must however stress that these figures are subject to the constraints set out in Section 18.2 of the Consultation Document and could change should the various assumptions made in the model require revision.

Proposed Common Funding Formula: Ballymena Academy

Mr Leslie asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to “A Common Funding Formula for Grant- Aided Schools”, to detail the figures used in the formula to calculate the impact of high and low ASB for Ballymena Academy.

(AQW 3427/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The table below details the figures used in the proposed common funding formula for Ballymena Academy:

Factor	Figures used in Formula Calculation
Age Weighted Pupil Units	23.87 Prep Pupils @ 0.32 = 7.64 1,506.66 Year 8 - 12 Pupils @ 1.675 = 2,523.66 690.56 Year 13 - 14 Pupils @ 2.25 = 1,553.76
Premises	8714 sq. metres 1281 pupils
TSN - Social Deprivation	32 pupils
TSN - Special Educational Need	Zero (Key Stage results all above Level 3)
Sports Factor	Band 3 for Post-Primary Schools

I must however stress that these figures are subject to the constraints set out in Section 18.2 of the Consultation Document and could change should the various assumptions made in the model require revision.

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Tourism Ireland Limited: Promoting Country Sports

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether Tourism Ireland Limited will promote country-sports on a pro-active basis given that

the Irish Tourist Board has stated that it will not promote shooting sports. (AQW 3361/00)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Sir Reg Empey): While Tourism Ireland Limited has yet to submit its marketing strategy for consideration by the North South Ministerial Council, it will be the Company's responsibility to market the island of Ireland as a holiday destination. It will also undertake regional and special interest product marketing on behalf of both tourist boards. There are a small number of providers in Northern Ireland who offer packages for field sports enthusiasts. NITB has always facilitated distribution of their packages and would be expected to continue to do this through the new arrangements.

Government Buildings: Crown Immunity

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether he has any plans to remove crown immunity that extends to Government Buildings insofar as health and safety legislation is concerned. (AQW 3408/00)

Sir Reg Empey: At present all the relevant provisions of Northern Ireland health and safety legislation apply to the Crown with the sole exception of those which enable prosecution and other statutory enforcement proceedings to be taken. The Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland is to examine these issues as part of its association with the Great Britain "Revitalising Health and Safety" strategic initiative.

Programme for Government: Inward Investment Targets

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail what progress he has made in achieving inward investment and the associated marketing initiatives as set out in the Programme for Government. (AQW 3410/00)

Sir Reg Empey: The year to 31 March 2001 was a record year for new inward investment. 16 new projects were secured and these are expected to create 3,085 new jobs, almost all in the knowledge based sectors, and generate an investment of £48 million. In addition, 14 of the 16 new projects, involving 2,715 (88% of total) new jobs promoted were in areas designated by Government as being disadvantaged.

IDB has developed new branding for inward investment, following extensive research in the target markets of North America, Great Britain, Republic of Ireland, Germany and Asia/Pacific regions. The branding more effectively communicates Northern Ireland's unique proposition of a ready supply of creative and innovative talent to companies in the knowledge-based sectors. This refreshed

presentation of Northern Ireland as an investment location was introduced across promotional vehicles such as literature, advertising and website. The website – www.investni.com – has been significantly improved in terms of design and functionality to enhance its capabilities as a powerful marketing tool. The new branding was launched in IDB's main market, the US, in mid-June and will be rolled out in other key markets over the coming months.

Textile and Clothing Sector

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (a) his assessment of the current state of the textile and clothing sector (b) what visits or meetings he has had with B H McCleery & Co Ltd over the past 12 months and whether he plans to visit in the near future and (c) what further financial help can be given to the company. (AQW 3430/00)

Sir Reg Empey: The Northern Ireland Textiles and Clothing Industry has experienced several years of competitive pressure from manufacturers in low cost economies. The recent re-structuring within the UK retail sector has added to these pressures. Significant job losses have resulted.

The recently prepared Kurt Salmon Associates (KSA) Action Plan for the Industry identifies 5 key themes to take the industry forward. These are to develop unique and desirable products, to introduce a balanced sourcing policy, to create strategic alliances, to take full advantage of the new economy and to grow brands.

There are many good companies in the industry which are already addressing a number of these themes. The Industrial Development Board has several initiatives in place to develop these themes further and is working closely with the appropriate industry bodies.

The future lies in these added value areas. The outcome could see further job losses but an increase in the quality of remaining and new jobs.

I am assuming that the company referred to in the question is McCleery Yarns located in Killinchy. B H McCleery & Co Ltd which had two manufacturing locations, Ballygowan and Killinchy, ceased to trade with the closure of the Ballygowan premises in June 2000. The Killinchy factory was acquired in a Management Buy Out from the parent company Lamont Holdings plc and the new company renamed McCleery Yarns. I have not had the opportunity to visit the factory or had any meetings with the management of the company.

In December 2000, LEDU provided a package of assistance to McCleery Yarns and would be happy to discuss any future development plans with the company.

Teleworkers

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 2976/00, to detail the minimum required threshold level for accuracy.

(AQW 3434/00)

Sir Reg Empey: The minimum required accuracy threshold level for the Northern Ireland quarterly Labour Force Survey (LFS) (from which the information given in answer to AQW 2976 was taken) is 8,000 cases. The criterion used in determining this level is the same as that adopted by the Office for National Statistics for the UK LFS, namely that the maximum relative standard error (the standard error as a percentage of the estimate) should be 20%. As a consequence the requested data on the number of teleworkers could not be released at Parliamentary Constituency level.

Power Disruptions: NIE's Response

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if he could outline when he expects to announce the results of the review into NIE's response to the widespread power disruptions in late February 2001.

(AQW 3575/00)

Sir Reg Empey: I have now completed my review of NIE's response to the late February power disruptions. The review was in two parts. Firstly I visited the NIE Incident Centre in Craigavon on 28 March where I met the Duty Incident Team, call handlers and repair engineers involved in the restoration of supplies to customers during very difficult weather conditions. Secondly I met NIE senior management, the electricity regulator and the Chairman of the Northern Ireland Consumer Committee for Electricity on 26 June to consider the conclusions and recommendations contained in both the NIE report on its response to the February disruptions and the separate report commissioned by the regulator.

Our consideration of the NIE response covered a number of aspects, including customer communications and public relations; network performance and damage; special arrangements for critical care customers; goodwill payments; NIE resources for dealing with future emergency situations; and arrangements for NIE obtaining external assistance in such situations.

The consensus of the meeting on 26 June was that the additional measures put in place by NIE following the last major weather related power disruptions in December 1998 had resulted in a marked improvement in the company's performance in restoring supplies in February. However there were a number of areas – particularly in the provision of accurate and timely information to customers – where the company has identified the need

for further improvements. All parties agreed to give further collective thought to the issue of ensuring supplies to critical care customers during emergency situations. This is not simply a matter for NIE to deliver but will require the active involvement and support of Departments and Agencies and the voluntary and community sector.

NIE has drawn up, on the basis of its experiences in February, a detailed Action Plan with the aim of improving further its arrangements for dealing with future weather related disruptions. The regulator plans to monitor the implementation of the NIE Action Plan. I have asked him to keep me informed of progress.

Harland and Wolff

Mr Neeson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail his plans to assist Harland and Wolff in view of the protracted legal considerations in the company's dispute with Global Marine.

(AQO 1663/00)

Sir Reg Empey: Following the recent decision of the Court of Appeal Harland and Wolff has now received the money associated with the final delivery instalment for the Global Marine drillship. Payment of the money will strengthen Harland's position and help re-establish customer confidence as they seek out new orders.

ENVIRONMENT

District Councils: Waste Management Plans

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 1120/00, to detail which district councils have a strategy to reduce industrial and commercial wastes placed in landfill to 85% of its 1998 level by 2005.

(AQW 3376/00)

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Foster): The target to reduce industrial and commercial wastes placed in landfill sites is contained in the Northern Ireland Waste Management Strategy published by my Department in March 2000.

District Councils are required to prepare Waste Management Plans to show how they propose to meet this target. The Plans are being prepared by three sub-regional groups covering all 26 District Councils. All three groups submitted blueprints of their Plans to my Department on Friday 29 June. My officials will be examining the proposals in these blueprints against the 85% target and the other requirements of the Waste Management Strategy.

Market Development Plan: Recycled Products

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 1120/00, to detail how advanced is the market development programme in stimulating demand for recycled products. (AQW 3377/00)

Mr Foster: The response to AQW 1120/00 on 18 January 2001 indicated that the independent Advisory Board, being set up at that time, would play a key role in promoting the Market Development Programme.

Since then the new Board has been appointed.

The Board comprises 16 members including a Chairperson and represents the interests of all key stakeholder groups throughout Northern Ireland.

The Board includes members from the waste management industry, District Councils and the Department of the Environment (see attached details of members).

Its inaugural meeting was held on 6 June. The next step is for the Board to establish a Reduction, Recycling and Recovery Group, which will assess opportunities for the marketing of recyclates. This matter will be discussed at the Board's next meeting in August.

Glenavy Sewage Works

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister of the Environment, given that the expected start date on Glenavy sewage works is March 2002, to make it his policy to introduce a moratorium on planning applications until the sewage issue has been addressed. (AQW 3386/00)

Mr Foster: I cannot place a moratorium on planning applications in the Glenavy area until the sewage issue has been addressed, as my Department has a statutory duty to process and determine any valid planning application which it receives. However, each planning application is considered on its individual merits. In processing applications in the Glenavy area, my Department consults with the Water Service, the Environment and Heritage Service and the Environmental Health Department of Lisburn Borough Council, with regard to sewage disposal and the discharge of water. Applications are determined after full consideration of these and other consultation responses, plus any other representations received.

Glenavy: New Incinerator

Mr Davis asked the Minister of the Environment to explain why, despite significant opposition from residents and local borough councils, Planning Service granted planning approval to construct an incinerator in Glenavy without holding further consultation or a public inquiry; and to make a statement. (AQW 3422/00)

Mr Foster: My Department granted planning approval for an incinerator, with an energy recovery plant, to dispose of meat, bonemeal and tallow at 29 Ballyvannon Road, Glenavy on 7 June 2001. The approval was subject to a number of conditions designed to protect the environment and mitigate any impact caused by the operation of the plant.

During the course of processing the application opposition to the proposal was articulated in the form of letters and petitions. Antrim, Craigavon and Lisburn Borough Councils made a request for the proposed development to be the subject of a public inquiry.

At an early stage in the processing of the application my Department determined that it should be designated as "major" under Article 31 of the Planning Order (NI) 1991, on the grounds that it would, if permitted, affect the whole of a neighbourhood.

In processing the application, my Department undertook an extensive round of consultation, and took full account of the concerns expressed by the public. This resulted in the submission, by the applicant, of an addendum to the environmental statement, which provided additional information.

My Department decided that it was appropriate to determine the application by way of a notice of opinion to approve. In arriving at this decision, my Department was satisfied that the consultation process already undertaken had provided sufficient basis for the full consideration of all material issues, including relevant policies, without the need for a public inquiry.

Road Safety Strategy

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment whether a new road safety strategy will be published by summer 2001. (AQW 3423/00)

Mr Foster: On 2 May 2001 I published a new road safety strategy for consultation. A copy of the consultation document was issued to all members and further copies are available in the Assembly Library.

The document invites constructive views and comments on long term casualty reduction targets and the measures and activities required to achieve further significant reductions in deaths and serious injuries on Northern Ireland's roads.

The closing date for responses is 27 July 2001 following which careful consideration will be given to the views and comments received in consultation with other departments and agencies involved in road safety. Thereafter, I intend to publish a new Strategic Road Safety Plan for Northern Ireland by the end of March 2002.

General Exchequer Grant to District Councils

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment, in relation to Objective 4 in the Programme for Government (page 123), to detail (a) the current formula for the calculation of the resources element of the General Exchequer grant to district councils (b) what recommendations were made following his review and (c) which councils will benefit having taken account of relative socio-economic disadvantage. (AQW 3437/00)

Mr Foster: The Department has a commitment, included in the Programme for Government, to review the formula for the calculation of the resources element of the General Exchequer Grant to district councils to take account of relative socio-economic disadvantage. The review is not yet complete.

The current formula for calculation of grant payable to individual district councils is contained in the Local Government &c (NI) Order 1972, Articles 3, 4, 5 and Schedule 1. It is a complex methodology which incorporates valuation, population and expenditure data relating to district councils. Based on these figures, and taking account of the funds available, (£19 million 2001-02), a standard is struck by the Department. Any council whose position lies below that standard qualifies for a share of the grant.

No recommendations have been made to date. Initial consultation with district councils and other interested parties has taken place, as a result of which some adjustment has been made to the proposed formula. A second consultation paper, which will include the outcome of an Equality Impact Assessment, is due to issue shortly.

Since further consultation is required, the impact of the new formula cannot be defined at this stage. An indication of the distribution of the grant will, however, be included in the consultation paper.

Cellular Base Stations: Database

Mr M Murphy asked the Minister of the Environment to undertake to establish a public database, as recommended in the Stewart Report, giving the location of all operating cellular base stations and detailing the strength of their emissions. (AQW 3453/00)

Mr Foster: A number of the recommendations of the Report by the Independent Expert Group on Mobile Phones, chaired by Sir William Stewart (the Stewart Report) related to reserved matters whereas others, such as planning, related to matters which are the responsibility of the devolved Administrations. Responsibility for Telecommunications is a reserved matter.

In response to the recommendations of the Stewart Report, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has

tasked the Radio Communications Agency (an Executive Agency of the Department of Trade and Industry) to develop and maintain a public database giving details on all operating cellular base stations in the UK and their emissions.

The Radiocommunications Agency (RA) has been making steady progress in implementing this recommendation. It is developing an Internet based solution known as "Sitefinder". Sitefinder will employ a map-based facility indicating the location of cellular phone base stations. More information on a particular base station will be available by simply clicking on the position indicator for the base station in question.

The mobile phone companies have been consulted during the development of this resource and have voluntarily agreed to disclose information on their respective base stations. The RA has been formatting the data received from the cellular operators to make it compatible with the database software.

"Sitefinder" is currently undergoing strenuous system and user acceptance testing. It is hoped that "Sitefinder" should be made publicly available via the RA's website later this summer.

The initial launch may not include Northern Ireland but I am advised that access to the Northern Ireland part of the database will be available later this year.

Planning Applications: Variation in Fees

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of the Environment to explain the variation in costs to statutory bodies of making planning applications. (AQW 3510/00)

Mr Foster: The level of Planning Fees is prescribed in the Planning (Fees) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 as amended by the Planning Fees (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001.

Under those Regulations the scale of fees does not apply to certain statutory bodies. Instead they pay a flat rate fee, currently £35, designed to cover only the cost of advertising the application.

The bodies to which the scale of fees does not apply are –

- District councils;
- the Northern Ireland Housing Executive;
- Education and Library Boards;
- the Fire Authority for Northern Ireland; and
- the Police Authority for Northern Ireland.

The reason for this is historical. When Planning Fees were introduced in 1981, the scale of fees paralleled that in Great Britain. In GB local authorities were the planning authorities, and they could not charge themselves.

It was decided therefore that the principle of not applying scale fees to local authorities should also apply in NI

and also be extended to cover the bodies described above, whose functions would be carried out by the local authority in GB.

It was decided that a concession for the bodies listed was appropriate and would not cause any net loss in revenue, since, if planning fees were imposed for these services, the authorities would seek to recover the additional expenditure through grants from Government funds.

“Ribbon Development”

Mr Dalton asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (a) any fixed criteria used in determining what amounts to ‘Ribbon Development’ within the policy paper “A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland Policy DES 7” (b) where such criteria can be found and (c) in the event that the Department does not apply fixed criteria, how does it maintain a consistent and uniform approach to the application of this policy.

(AQW 3513/00)

Mr Foster: Ribbon development is defined in policy DES 7 of “A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland” which was published by my Department in 1993. It is defined as a line of buildings, served by individual accesses, extending along a road, without accompanying development of the land to the rear. A ribbon does not necessarily have a continuous or uniform building line. Buildings sited from the road, staggered or at angles to the road and with gaps between them can represent ribbon development, if they have a common frontage to the road and are visually linked when viewed from the road. This criterion is applied across all planning divisions.

“Common Frontage”

Mr Dalton asked the Minister of the Environment to define the term “common frontage” as used in paragraph 1 line 5 in the policy document “Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland policy DES 7” and (b) where is this definition published.

(AQW 3514/00)

Mr Foster: My Department has never published a precise definition of the term “common frontage”. However, the term applies to circumstances where buildings front a road whether in a continuous building line or a broken staggered building line.

“Visually Linked”

Mr Dalton asked the Minister of the Environment to define the term “visually linked” as used paragraph 1 line 5 in the policy document “Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland policy DES 7” and (b) where is this definition published.

(AQW 3515/00)

Mr Foster: My Department has never published a precise definition of the term “visually linked”. However this refers to situations where a row of buildings, whether in a continuous line or in a broken staggered line, are visible all or in part when viewed from the road.

Road Fatalities and Injury Statistics

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (a) the number of road fatalities and injuries in 2001 to date (b) how this compares with the same period for each of the last five years and (c) what assessments have been carried out on the impact of advertising on reducing road traffic accidents.

(AQW 3536/00)

Mr Foster: The number of road fatalities for the period from 1 January to 30 June and of road injuries for the period from 1 January to 30 April (the latest available for 2001) for this year and each of the previous five years are as follows:

	Fatalities	Injuries		Total
		Serious	Slight	
2001 (provisional)	67	519	3874	4393
2000	81	545	4092	4637
1999	64	448	3672	4120
1998	79	501	3619	4120
1997	67	537	3695	4232
1996	64	517	3349	3866

More detailed information on road casualty statistics is published annually in the RUC Chief Constable’s Annual Report. I understand that copies have been sent to Assembly Members.

It is not possible to measure directly the impact of advertising on reducing road traffic collisions. However research is conducted before and after each campaign to establish to what extent attitudes have changed.

For example research carried out after the launch in 2000 of the anti-speeding campaign ‘Slowdownboys’ showed nearly half of all drivers and over 40% of 17-24 year olds surveyed indicated they had changed their driving behaviour as a direct result of the commercial;

50% of 17-24 year old male drivers (up from 45%) said that speeding is never a risk worth taking; and

32% of 17-24 year old male drivers (up from 23%) claimed that they personally could not exceed the speed limit at all on country roads while driving safely.

Research has shown that since 1995, my Department’s anti-drink drive campaigns have contributed to a decrease in the percentage of drinking-drivers who believe that they can drink one or more units of alcohol without affecting their driving, from 60% to 33%.

Malone Conservation Area: Demolition of 29 Windsor Park

Ms Hanna asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the reasons behind the decision by the Planning Service to agree to the demolition of 29 Windsor Park within the Malone Conservation Area. (AQW 3561/00)

Mr Foster: The decision to give Conservation Area Consent for the demolition of 29 Windsor Park was taken in light of the previous history existing on the site and on the basis of legal opinion from the Departmental Solicitors at that time.

The planning history was that permission already existed for the site prior to designation of the Malone Conservation Area on 3 August 2000.

Planning Permission for the erection of 5 no. apartments and involving the demolition of 29 Windsor Park was granted on 30 May 2000.

A new planning application (ref: Z/2000/2831/F) for the demolition of 29 Windsor Park and replacement with 5 no. apartments was submitted on 30 November 2000 and granted planning permission on 29 May 2001. This application was a revised scheme which was considered to be of better design, and more sympathetic than the project originally approved. An application for Conservation Area Consent to demolish (ref: Z/2001/0318/DCA) was also granted permission on 29 May 2001. In both cases the Council agreed with the Department's opinion to approve.

A material consideration was the fact that an extant planning approval existed for the site, and the legal opinion received was that there was nothing preventing the applicant from implementing that approval. The fact that the new scheme was considered to be more in keeping with the Conservation Area was also a contributing factor in determining these applications.

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Index of Deprivation

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail what progress has been made on publishing a new Index of Deprivation for Northern Ireland electoral wards. (AQW 3398/00)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan): The final report on the Measures of Deprivation in Northern Ireland will be released on 5 July. Initially the report will be available from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency website (www.nisra.gov.uk). Hard copy reports are expected to be available by the end of July.

Grants to Voluntary and Community Sector

Mr Close asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail all current schemes under which grants are paid by his Department and its NDPBs to the voluntary and community sector. (AQW 3447/00)

Mr Durkan: The Department of Finance and Personnel does not operate any schemes under which grants are paid directly by it to the voluntary and community sector. However, the Department has a responsibility for overseeing implementation of EU Programmes, which fund grants to the voluntary and community sector.

Grants Paid to Voluntary and Community Sector

Mr Close asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail all grants of £100,000 or more made by his Department and its NDPBs to voluntary and community bodies in 2000-01. (AQW 3448/00)

Mr Durkan: The Department of Finance and Personnel did not operate any schemes under which grants were paid directly by it to the voluntary and community sector in 2000-01.

Guidance given to Voluntary and Community Sector

Mr Close asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the guidance his Department and its NDPBs give to voluntary and community bodies on accessing, using and accounting for grants from public monies. (AQW 3450/00)

Mr Durkan: The Department of Finance and Personnel does not operate any schemes under which grants are paid directly by it to the voluntary and community sector.

However, the Department assumed responsibility on 12/4/2001 for overseeing disbursement of EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation monies under partnership arrangements. Guidance on the disbursement of these funds is provided by the Northern Ireland Partnership Board. Accounting for the use of these funds is subject to audit by the Departmental Internal Audit, the Northern Ireland Audit Office and the European Commission.

Grants Paid to Voluntary and Community Sector

Mr Close asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail all grants paid to voluntary and community bodies by his Department and its NDPBs in the 2000-01 financial year. (AQW 3451/00)

Mr Durkan: The Department of Finance and Personnel does not operate any schemes under which grants are paid directly by it to the voluntary and community sector. No grants were therefore made to voluntary and community bodies in 2000/01.

Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency: Performance Targets 2001-02

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail what performance targets have been set for the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency in 2001-02. (AQW 3594/00)

Mr Durkan: For 2001-2002 the following key performance targets have been set for the Agency.

- 95-100% of surveyed key public service users of the Agency rating the service they received as satisfactory or better, with 55-60% rating it as very satisfactory.
- 95-100% of surveyed users of the Agency outside the public service rating the service they received as satisfactory or better, with 55-60% rating it as very satisfactory.
- To produce no fewer than 68 statistical publications and 21 ad hoc research publications during 2001/02.
- 95-100% of NISRA readers rating key publications as satisfactory or better, with 50-55% rating them as very satisfactory.
- To process 98% of postal and personal applications for General Register Office certificates within 8 and 3 working days respectively.
- To carry out the 2001 Census of Population on 29 April 2001.
- To achieve Census enumeration for 2001/02 within the financial target.
- To achieve a minimum 3% efficiency saving.
- To maintain expenditure within cash limits and approved budgetary plans.

Full details are set out in the Agency's Corporate and Business Plans, copies of which will be placed in the Assembly library.

Government Purchasing Agency: Performance Targets 2001-02

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail what performance targets have been set for the Government Purchasing Agency in 2001-02 and what arrangements have been made for publication of this year's plans. (AQW 3595/00)

Mr Durkan: As an Executive Agency within the Department of Finance and Personnel, the Government Purchasing Agency provides a professional procurement

service to all the Northern Ireland Departments and an increasing number of other public sector bodies.

The following key performance targets were set for the Agency in 2001-2002.

- Maintain expenditure within cash limits.
- Secure sufficient funding from customer Departments to meet the costs of the Agency.
- Increase the total value of contracts awarded by 5% on the 2000-2001 outturn.
- Have 90% of the Agency's call-off contracts available to customers on an e-commerce platform by March 2002.
- Reduce the unit cost per £ of value of contracts awarded by 3% on the 2000-2001 outturn.
- Achieve purchasing savings equivalent to 3% of the value of contracts awarded.
- Achieve a 92% level of satisfaction amongst customer organisation.
- Achieve a 92% level of satisfaction amongst suppliers.

Background information is given in the Agency's Corporate and Business Plans, copies of which will be placed in the Assembly Library.

Construction Service: Performance Targets 2001-02

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail what performance targets have been set for Construction Service in 2001-02. (AQW 3596/00)

Mr Durkan: For 2001-02, the following performance targets have been set for Construction Service.

Quality of Service

- To achieve a 92% compliance in customer assessments of Agency performance against Service Level Agreements.
- To obtain a 95% satisfaction rate in customer assessments of project work.
- To place 85% of orders in response to requests for reactive maintenance work within 7 days and to place 95% within 14 days.
- To place 85% of orders in response to requests for supplies work within 7 days and to place 95% within 14 days.
- To respond to 90% of customer advisory enquiries within 6 weeks and to respond to 97% within 10 weeks.

Efficiency

- To ensure that actual costs as a percentage of agreed target costs on project work do not exceed the agreed percentage.

- To ensure that staff costs as a percentage of construction spend for maintenance work do not exceed the agreed percentage.
- To ensure that staff costs as a percentage of construction spend for supplies work do not exceed the agreed percentage.

Financial Performance

- To maintain expenditure within cash limits and to approved budgetary plans.
- To recover the full cost of Agency Operations from customers with a tolerance of 100%+/-2%.

Valuation and Lands Agency: Performance Targets 2001-02

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail what performance targets have been set for the Valuation and Lands Agency in 2001-02.

(AQW 3598/00)

Mr Durkan: For 2001/2002 the following key targets have been set for the Valuation and Lands Agency.

Revaluation

- To have, by March 2002, achieved all 2001/2002 Non Domestic Revaluation Project milestones.

Rating Revision Casework

- To complete 89% of rating revision casework within 3 months of receipt.

Rating Unit Cost

- To achieve a Rating Unit Cost of £245 which represents no increase in real terms on projected outturn of £239 for 2000/2001.

Rating Valuation Standards

- To achieve a standard in all rating valuations such that 90% of those determined on appeal are within plus or minus 10% of the initial assessment.

Rating Backdated Certificates

- To issue 93% of certificates for continuous revision cases which are subject to retrospective backdating, within 12 months of the revision event.

Rating Appeal Timeliness

- To achieve a turnaround of 13 weeks on average for all rating appeals.

Client Service Level Agreement

- To achieve at least 80% satisfaction rating from respondents to a Client Satisfaction Survey.

Financial Performance

- To maintain expenditure within cash limits and budgetary plans.

- To demonstrate the ability to achieve full cost recovery in respect of Client Services.

Full details are given in the Agency's Corporate and Business Plan, copies of which have been made available to the Printed Paper Office.

Business Development Service: Performance Targets 2001-02

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail what performance targets have been set for the Business Development Service in 2001-02.

(AQW 3617/00)

Mr Durkan: To ensure at least 95% of customers are satisfied with the services they receive.

- To ensure at least 95% of customers are satisfied with the way in which services are provided to them.
- To maintain a level of people development which is consistent with the principles of Investors In People.
- To secure, on a notional basis and within the context of Service Level Agreements (where they apply), 90% recovery of the cost of its operation from its customers.
- To demonstrate an efficiency saving of 3%.

Full details are set out in the Agency's Strategic and Business Plans, copies of which have been placed in the Assembly Library.

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Special Educational Needs: Joint Working Group

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 2893/00, to detail what progress has been made by the joint working group.

(AQW 3359/00)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms de Brún): Progress on the key issues identified by the joint working group is as follows:

Needs assessment My Department is preparing a questionnaire, designed to identify any individual unmet therapy need for issue to Health and Social Services Boards and Trusts prior to the start of the incoming school year. Information provided will be collated to produce a regional picture.

Annual School Census This is being taken forward by the Department of Education.

Reviewing the future role and remit of the Health and Social Services/Education and Library Boards Regional Review Group (RRG) Proposals are being developed by the joint working group and will be put to the RRG when it next meets in September.

Joint working Existing models of joint working in schools are being examined with a view to initiating one or two local pilot projects.

Parents' survey This is being taken forward by the Department of Education.

Guidance to schools on dealing with medical needs This is being taken forward by the Department of Education.

Seo a leanas an dul chun cinn atá déanta ar na heochaircheisteanna aitheanta ag an chomhghrúpa oibre:

Measúnú Riachtanas Tá an Roinn s'agamsa ag ullmhú ceistiúcháin, leagtha amach le riachtanas ar bith do theiripe nár riaradh air a aithint, le heisiúint chuig Boird agus Iontaobhais Shláinte agus Sheirbhísí Sóisialta roimh thús na scoilbhliana úire. Baileofar eolas tugtha le léargas réigiúnach a thabhairt.

Daonáireamh Bliantúil Scoileanna Tá seo á dhéanamh ag an Roinn Oideachais.

Ag athbhreithniú róil agus freagrachtaí na Seirbhísí Sláinte agus Sóisialta/Ghrúpa Réigiúnach Athbhreithnithe na mBord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne (GRA) sa todhchaí. Tá moltaí á bhforbairt ag an chomhghrúpa oibre agus cuirfear faoi bhráid an GRA iad ag a chéad chruinniú eile i mí Mheán Fómhair.

Comhoibriú Tá na creatlacha comhoibrithe atá ann faoi láthair i scoileanna á scrúdú de gheall ar thoiseacht tionscadail phíolótaigh áitiúil nó dhó.

Suirbhé Tuismitheoirí Tá seo á dhéanamh ag an Roinn Oideachais.

Treoir do scoileanna ar dhéileáil le riachtanais leighis Tá seo á déanamh ag an Roinn Oideachais.

Special Educational Needs: Joint Working Group

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 2893/00, to detail the number of key issues identified by the joint working group. (AQW 3360/00)

Ms de Brún: I refer the Member to my answer to Question AQW 3359/00.

Luaim don Bhall an freagra a thug mé ar Cheist AQW 3359/00.

Social Workers: Family and Childcare Programmes

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail her plans to address the high turnover of staff resultant from the stressful nature of the work in which social work staff in family and childcare programmes are engaged and as identified by the Western Area Child Protection Committee.

(AQW 3371/00)

Ms de Brún: In October 2000, the Foyle HSS Trust employed additional social workers and support staff to help deal with the pressures of work in relation to family and childcare programmes. In addition, the Western HSS Board commissioned an Independent Review in December 2000 to examine the Foyle Trust Family and Child Care Programme's ability to meet its statutory functions. As a result of this Review, the Trust in conjunction with Sperrin Lakeland HSS Trust and the Board are now at the stage of devising a rigorous prioritisation package for Family and Child Care, coupled with the development of a caseload weighting formula. It is expected that these developments will help address the pressures within the programme. My Department will be monitoring the outcome of this exercise.

I mí Dheireadh Fómhair 2000, d'fhostaigh Iontaobhas SSS an Fheabhail oibrithe breise sóisialta agus foireann bhreise tacaíochta chun cuidiú le déileáil le brúnna oibre ag baint le cláir teaghlaigh agus chúram leanaí. Ina theannta sin, choimisiúnaigh Bord SSS an Iarthair Athbhreithniú Neamhspleách i Nollaig 2000 le cumas Chlár Teaghlaigh agus Cúram Leanaí Iontaobhas an Fheabhail a fheidhmeanna reachtúla a chomhlíonadh a scrúdú. Mar thoradh ar an Athbhreithniú seo, tá an tIontaobhas i gcomhar le hIontaobhas Shliabh Speirín agus Thír na Lochanna ag cumadh pacáiste dhéin tosaíochta anois don Chlár Teaghlaigh agus Cúram Leanaí chomh maith le forbairt foirmle tomhas oibre. Táthar ag súil go rachaidh na forbairtí seo i gceann na mbrúnna laistigh den chlár. Beidh an Roinn s'agamsa ag déanamh monatóireachta ar thoradh an chleachtaidh seo.

Resourcing Training Initiatives

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail her plans for resource training initiatives in light of a rapidly changing agenda as new issues arise in relation to the personal social services training strategy, the establishment of a social care council and the whole equality and human rights agenda in the Northern Ireland context. (AQW 3372/00)

Ms de Brún: Resourcing training initiatives is an ongoing process within my Department. The Social Services Inspectorate engages in an annual process with both statutory and voluntary sectors to agree plans for social services training and the associated resourcing to

implement these. The Personal Social Services Training Strategy, which has recently been revised, has taken account of the advent of the Social Care Council and the need for improvements in the qualifications and competence of the whole social care workforce. The new Social Care Council includes within its responsibilities the duty of developing and promoting appropriate training. There will, therefore, be close links between the requirements of the Social Care Council in its function of registering and regulating the workforce and its functions of developing and promoting appropriate training.

My Department and its associated bodies have undertaken to ensure that the necessary resources are made available to meet our human rights and equality obligations. Training programmes are under way and we will report annually to the Equality Commission on the training completed.

Is próiseas atá ag dul ar aghaidh go fóill laistigh den Roinn s'agamsa é maoiniú tionscnamh oiliúna. Bíonn Foireann Chigireachta na Seirbhísí Sóisialta i mbun próisis bhliantúil leis na hearnálacha reachtúla agus deonacha chun pleananna d'oiliúint sheirbhísí sóisialta agus don mhaoiniú bainteach leo seo a chur i bhfeidhm a chomhaontú. Ghlac Straitéis Oiliúna na Seirbhísí Sóisialta Pearsanta, a athbhreithníodh ar na mallaibh, toiseacht na Comhairle Cúraim Shóisialta, agus an gá le feabhsuithe i gcáilíochtaí agus i gcumas na meithle iomláine oibre sóisialta, san áireamh. I measc cúraimí na Comhairle nua Cúraim Shóisialta tá forbairt agus cur chun cinn oiliúna cirte. Mar sin de, beidh dlúthnaisc ann idir riachtanais na Comhairle Cúraim Shóisialta ina cúram leis an mheitheal oibre a chlárú agus a rialú, agus a cúraimí i bhforbairt agus i gcur chun cinn oiliúna cirte.

Chuaigh an Roinn s'agamsa agus a comhfhórais i mbun oibre le cinntiú go gcuirfí na hacmhainní atá riachtanach le riar ar ár gcearta daonna agus lenár ndualgais chomhionannais a chomhlíonadh a chur ar fáil. Tá cláir oiliúna ar siúl agus tabharfaimid tuairisc go bliantúil don Choimisiún Comhionannais ar an oiliúint déanta.

Western Health Board Area: Training Overload

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail her plans to deal with "training overload" where it has become increasingly difficult to release staff for training in view of operational demands in the Western Health Board area.

(AQW 3373/00)

Ms de Brún: The Western Health and Social Services Board in common with other Health and Social Services Boards and relevant voluntary organisations began a substantial programme of training in the late 1990s following the introduction of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order and the substantive policies, procedures

and guidance which flowed from this. This particular training programme was in addition to the existing training programmes to meet identified training needs across the full range of service provision in the Personal Social Services.

While it is clearly essential to ensure that staff are fully and properly trained, it is acknowledged that this has at times created the phenomenon of "training overload". The Board are aware of this and are taking a number of measures to alleviate it, including prioritising training needs, offering staff greater flexibility in choosing where and when to have their training and ensuring that the training courses are properly focused on the key training issues.

Thosaigh Bord Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta an Iarthair, mar aon le Boird Shláinte agus Sheirbhísí Sóisialta agus eagraíochtaí deonacha cuí eile, clár substaintiúil oiliúna sna 1990í déanacha i ndiaidh tabhairt isteach an Oird Páistí (Tuaisceart Éireann) agus na bpolasaithe, teorach substaintiúla agus na ngnáthamh substaintiúil a tháinig as. Bhí an clár oiliúna áirithe seo mar bharr ar na cláir oiliúna atá ann faoi láthair le riar ar riachtanais aitheanta oiliúna ar fud an réimse iomláin soláthair sheirbhísí sna Seirbhísí Sóisialta Pearsanta.

Cé gur léir go bhfuil sé riachtanach le cinntiú go n-oiltear an fhoireann go hiomlán agus go ceart, glactar gurb í seo is cúis le "barraíocht oiliúna" uaireanta. Tá a fhios ag an Bhord uirthi seo agus tá siad ag déanamh roinnt beart léi seo a mhaolú, mar shampla, tosaíocht a thabhairt do riachtanais oiliúna, bheith níos solúbtha leis an fhoireann agus iad ag roghnú na háite agus na huairé ar mhain leo a n-oiliúint a dhéanamh agus ag cinntiú go ndíríonn na cúrsaí oiliúna ar na heochaircheistanna oiliúna, mar is ceart.

Improving Social Work Training

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to ensure that qualifying/awarding bodies include children's services planning issues and child protection matters specifically in their curriculum for all caring professionals working in this area.

(AQW 3374/00)

Ms de Brún: I am committed to improving social work training. The Northern Ireland Social Care Council, which will assume responsibility for regulating professional social work training, will be established in October. In addition my Department issued a consultation paper '*Reforming Professional Social Work Training*' in October 2000. The paper makes a number of proposals, one of which deals with the need for better curriculum, specification. Social work with children, including protection of children, would be regarded as an essential part of the curriculum.

My Department is also proposing improvements to post qualifying education and training to build on recent developments such as the post-qualifying award in child care. While assessment and planning in all aspects will be covered in the core curriculum, it is likely that children's services planning will be dealt with in greater depth at post-qualifying level.

Tá mé geallta d'fheabhsú oiliúna oibre sóisialta. Bunófar Comhairle Chúraim Shóisialta Thuaisceart Éireann, a ghlacfaidh le freagracht as rialú oiliúna oibre gairmiúla sóisialta, i mí Dheireadh Fómhair. Ina theannta sin, chuir an Roinn s'agamsa páipéar comhairlithe '*Ag Leasú Oiliúna Oibre Gairmiúla Sóisialta*' amach i nDeireadh Fómhair 2000. Molann an páipéar roinnt moltaí, ina measc ceann a dhéileálann leis an ghá le sonrú curaclaim níos fearr. Mheasfaí obair shóisialta le páistí, cosaint páistí san áireamh, mar chuid riachtanach den churaclam.

Tá an Roinn s'agamsa ag moladh feabhsuithe in oideachas agus in oiliúint iarcháilíochta le cur leis na forbairtí déanacha amhail an duais iarcháilíochta i gcúram leanaí. Cé go gcumhdófar measúnú agus pleanáil i ngach uile ghné sa phríomhchuraclam, is dócha go ndéileáilfear le pleanáil seirbhísí páistí níos mine ag leibhéal iarcháilíochta.

Childcare Services in Northern Ireland

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to give her assessment of the "child care services in Northern Ireland in 2000 - a four board perspective" paper, specifically the argument that there have been significant funding deficits alongside increased areas of responsibility arising from the implementation of the Children Order. (AQW 3375/00)

Ms de Brún: I accept the general point put forward in the Four Board Perspective Paper on Family and Child Care Services that expenditure on these services here in recent years has not compared favourably with that in England and Wales. I have made it clear to the Assembly Committee for Health Social Services and Public Safety on a number of occasions that I shall be doing all that I can to raise the present level of funding for family and child care services.

A good start in redressing the balance was made in 2000-01 during which my Department was able to make an extra £10 million available to the Health and Social Services Boards to continue with the development of children's services. So far in 2001/02, a further £5.3 million has been secured. This includes £0.5 million to finance the cost of an additional 40 foster care places and £3.8 million extra for Sure Start, two aspects of children's services which are addressed in the recommendations of the Four Board Paper.

My Department has also been successful with a number of bids to the Executive Programme and has secured a

total of £15.5 million from various Programme Funds over the three years 2001-02 to 2003-04. Included in this sum is £9.3 million for improving residential child care services.

Finally, the issue of parity of resource allocations with England and Wales is being addressed at present through the Needs and Effectiveness Evaluation work commissioned by the Executive.

Glacaim leis an tuiscint ghinearálta i bPáipéar Peirspictíochta na gCeithre Bhord ar Sheirbhísí Cúram Teaghlaigh agus Leanaí nach raibh an caiteachas ar na seirbhísí seo sna blianta deireanacha ar chomhchéim leis an chaiteachas i Sasana agus sa Bhreatain Bheag. Chuir mé in iúl go soiléir don Choiste Sláinte, seirbhísí agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí an Tionóil go minic go ndéanfainn arbh fhéidir liom a dhéanamh leis an leibhéal maoinithe atá ann faoi láthair do sheirbhísí cúram teaghlaigh agus leanaí a ardú.

Cuireadh tús maith le cúrsaí a cheartú i 2000-01 nuair a bhí an Roinn s'agamsa ábalta £10 milliún breise a chur ar fáil do na Boird Shláinte agus Sheirbhísí Sóisialta le seirbhísí páistí a fhorbairt ar aghaidh. Fuarthas £5.3 milliún breise go dtí seo i 2001-02. Cuimsíonn seo £0.5 milliún le costas 40 áit bhreise chúram altrama a mhaoiniú agus £3.8 milliún breise do Sure Start, dhá ghné de sheirbhísí páistí a dtugtar fúthu i moltaí Pháipéar na gCeithre Bhord.

D'éirigh leis an roinnt tairiscintí a rinne an Roinn s'agamsa do Chlár an Fheidhmeannais agus fuair sí £15.5 milliún san iomlán ó Chistí éagsúla Cláir do na trí bliana 2001-02 go 2003-04. Cuimsítear £9.3 milliún d'fheabhsú seirbhísí cónaithe cúram leanaí sa tsuim seo.

Ar deireadh, táthar ag tabhairt faoi cheist dháileadh acmhainní ar chomhchéim le Sasana agus leis an Bhreatain Bheag faoi láthair trí obair an Mheasúnaithe Riachtanas agus Éifeachta coimisiúnaithe an Fheidhmeannais.

Programme for Government: Objective 1 Targets

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) which targets, as set out under objective 1 in the Programme for Government, have been achieved and (b) which targets are on line for achievement. (AQW 3383/00)

Ms de Brún: The Programme for Government shows seven targets under Objective 1 for my Department. Of these, one target on fulfilling the Department's statutory equality obligations has already been achieved. The remaining six targets have either been partly achieved or are on course to be achieved. These cover the financial arrangements for HPSS expenditure; strengthening performance management for the HPSS; putting in place a framework to raise quality of service; the development

of New TSN Action Plans by HSS Boards, Trusts and Councils; agreement for a new strategy for the use of Information and Communication Technologies in the HPSS and implementation of the recommendations of the Capitation Formula Review Group

Léiríonn Clár um Rialtais seacht sprioc faoi Chuspóir 1 don Roinn s'agamsa. Díobh seo, cuireadh sprioc amháin ar chomhlíonadh dualgas reachtúil comhionannais na Roinne i gcrích cheana féin. Cuireadh cuid de na sé sprioc eile i gcrích nó ar bhealach a gcur i gcrích. Cumhdaíonn siad seo na socruithe airgeadais do chaiteachas na SSSP; neartú bainistíochta cleachtaidh do na SSSP; cur i bhfeidhm creatlaí le cáilíocht na seirbhíse a ardú; forbairt Gníomhphleananna Nua RSA ag Boird, Iontaobhais agus ag Comhairlí SSS; comhaontú do straitéis nua d'úsáid Teicneolaíochtaí Eolais agus Cumarsáide sna SSSP agus cur i bhfeidhm moltaí an Ghrúpa Athbhreithnithe ar Fhoirmle Cheannsráithe.

Report of the Inquiry into Residential and Secure Accommodation for Children

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) which of the 36 recommendations made by the Health Committee Report "Inquiry into Residential and Secure Accommodation for Children in Northern Ireland" have been accepted and implemented and (b) the funding arrangement for their implementation. (AQW 3384/00)

Ms de Brún: I wrote to the Chair of the Assembly's Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety on 17 May 2001 with detailed comments on the 36 recommendations in the Report of the Inquiry into Residential and Secure Accommodation for Children.

A number of the recommendations have been addressed in the Report by the Children Matter Task Force on Phase 1 of its Regional Plan for the Development of Residential Child Care. A copy of this report was also sent to the Committee Chair in May. The report sets out proposals for the development of 22 new facilities which will provide 77 additional child care residential places and 70 places which will replace some of the present accommodation which is regarded as unsuitable or sub-standard. These are seen as the first steps towards an expansion of 155 places by the end of 2004-05.

Capital costs for the projects in the Phase 1 report will be met fully from a combination of my own Department's resources and the funds obtained for the development of residential child care places from the Executive Programme's Infrastructure Fund. This year's additional revenue costs, about £300,000, will be met from the additional resources available for children's services. I am hopeful that the revenue costs for the extensive development programme scheduled for 2002-03, estimated at about £2.8 million, can be secured. The Task Force will

ensure that resources earmarked for residential services are appropriately applied.

A human resources sub-group of the Children Matter Task Force is addressing a number of the Committee's recommendations in relation to staffing issues.

A preliminary examination of the use of secure accommodation including human rights issues was undertaken by the Social Services Inspectorate in January and a fuller inspection is planned for the autumn. The Task Force will be monitoring the use of secure accommodation and seeking to promote alternatives; one such facility opened in April.

My Department has also been consulting on proposals for new legislation to strengthen leaving and aftercare services.

Further recommendations in the Inquiry's Report will be addressed as part of the Task Force's work in developing Phase 2 of the Regional Plan. A number of the Committee's recommendations, such as those relating to child and adolescent psychiatry, where funding has been secured for the provision of 10 extra beds, and the development of a strategic plan for children's services, are being taken forward in the context of wider work in my Department.

Scríobh mé chuig Cathaoir Choiste Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí an Tionóil ar an 17 Bealtaine 2001, ag miontrácht ar na 36 moladh i dTuirisc an Fhiosrúcháin ar Chóiríocht Chónaithe agus Dhaingean do Pháistí.

Thug an Tascfhórsa Children Matter faoi roinnt de na moltaí sa Tuirisc ar Chéim 1 dá Phlean Réigiúnach d'Fhorbairt Chúram Cónaithe Páistí. Cuireadh cóip den tuairisc seo chuig Cathaoir an Choiste i mí na Bealtaine. Leagann an tuairisc moltaí amach do thógáil 22 áis nua a sholáthróidh 77 áit chúram cónaithe breise do pháistí agus 70 áit a ghlacfaidh ionad na roinnte cóiríochta atá ann faoi láthair a mheastar mífhóirsteanach nó fóchaighdeánach. Meastar iad seo mar an chéad chéim chuig méadú go 155 áit faoi dheireadh 2004-05.

Seasfar costais chaipitil do na tionscadail i gCéim 1 den Tuirisc go hiomlán ó acmhainní mo Roinne féin agus ó mhaoinithe faighte ó Chiste Bonneagair Chlár an Fheidhmeannais le haghaidh forbairt áiteanna cúram cónaithe páistí. Seasfar costais bhreise ioncaim na bliana seo, thart faoi £300,000, ó na hacmhainní breise ar fáil do sheirbhísí páistí. Tá súil agam gur féidir linn na costais ioncaim don chlár leathan forbartha socraithe do 2002/03, agus measta ar thart faoi £2.8 milliún, a fháil. Déanfaidh an Tascfhórsa cinnte go n-úsáidfear mar is ceart na hacmhainní curtha i leataobh do sheirbhísí cónaithe.

Tá fo-ghrúpa acmhainní daonna den Tascfhórsa Children Matter ag tabhairt faoi roinnt de mholtaí an Choiste maidir le ceisteanna foirne.

Rinne Foireann Chigireachta na Seirbhísí Sóisialta réamhscrúdú ar úsáid cóiríochta daingne móide ar cheisteanna cearta daonna i mí Eanáir, agus tá cigireacht níos iomláine socraithe don Fhómhar. Beidh an Tascfhórsa ag déanamh monatóireachta ar úsáid cóiríochta daingne agus ag iarraidh áiseanna eile a chur chun cinn; d'oscail a leithéid d'áis seo in Aibreán.

Bhí an Roinn s'agamsa ag dul i gcomhairle fosta ar mholtaí le haghaidh reachtaíochta nua chun seirbhísí imeachta agus iarchúraim a neartú.

Rachfar i gceann tuilleadh moltaí i dTuirisc an Fhiosrúcháin mar chuid d'obair an Tascfhórsa i bhforbairt Céime 2 den Phlean Réigiúnach. Tá roinnt de mholtaí an Choiste amhail iad siúd a bhaineann le síciatracht pháistí agus ógánach a bhfuarthas maoiniú le haghaidh soláthar 10 leaba breise di, agus a bhaineann le forbairt plean straitéise do sheirbhísí páistí, á gcur i bhfeidhm i gcomhthéacs oibre níos fairsinge sa Roinn s'agamsa.

Fertility Treatments

Ms Lewsley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) what fertility treatments are available on the National Health Service in each Health Board in Northern Ireland (b) the waiting time for an initial fertility clinic consultation in each Health Service Board in Northern Ireland and (c) the waiting time for each type of fertility treatment in each Health Service Board in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 3385/00)

Ms de Brún: All four Health and Social Services Boards commission oral ovulation induction and ovulation induction by injection services; artificial insemination by husband/partner; and tubal surgery. In addition, the Eastern, Southern and Western Boards commission intra-uterine insemination and the Eastern, Northern and Southern Boards also provide reversal of female sterilisation services.

(b) The waiting time for initial consultations varies between approximately 2-4 months, depending on the consultant.

(c) This information is not routinely collected.

Coimisiúnaíonn na ceithre Bhord Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta uile ionduchtú béil ubhsceite agus ionduchtú ubhsceite déanta ag seirbhísí insteallta, ionsíolrú saorga déanta ag fear céile nó ag ceile; agus máinliacht fheadánach. Ina theannta sin, coimisiúnaíonn Boird an Oirthir, an Deiscirt agus an Iarthair ionsíolrú iontra-bhroinne agus soláthraíonn Boird an Oirthir, an Tuaiscirt agus an Deiscirt seirbhísí le haimridiú ban a mhalartú.

(b) Athraíonn an t-am feithimh do chéad chomhairlithe ó 2 go 4 mí, ag brath ar an lia comhairleach.

(c) Ní bhailítear an t-eolas seo go rialta.

Kidney Dialysis Treatment: Foyle Constituency

Mrs Nelis asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the steps she is taking to avoid the need for people in the Foyle constituency having to travel to Omagh for kidney dialysis; and to make a statement. (AQW 3416/00)

Ms de Brún: I refer the Member to my answer to AQW2990/00

Treoraím an Ball do mo fhreagra ar AQW2990/00

IVF Treatment

Ms Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) when patients in the Eastern Health and Social Services Board will no longer have to pay for IVF medication and (b) an update on the new criteria for free IVF treatment. (AQW 3418/00)

Ms de Brún:

(a) I announced on 24 April that sub-fertility services, including in-vitro fertilisation (IVF) treatment, would be the subject of a consultation exercise later this year. In the meantime, an interim sub-fertility service is being developed and I hope that it will become operational later this year. It will provide a limited IVF service and patients eligible for it will have their fertility drugs prescribed by clinicians at the Regional Fertility Centre.

(b) I have announced today that the eligibility criteria for access to the interim service will be those recommended in the Advisory Report *"Improving Sub-fertility Services in Northern Ireland"* prepared by a Steering Group of the Regional Medical Services Consortium. Copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

(a) D'fhógair mé ar an 24 Aibreán go mbeadh seirbhísí fothorthúlachta, cóireáil toirchiú invítrea (TIV) san áireamh, faoi réir cleachtaidh chomhairlithe níos moille i mbliana. Idir an dá linn, tá seirbhís eatramhach fhothorthúlachta á forbairt agus tá súil agam go mbeidh sí i bhfeidhm níos moille i mbliana. Soláthróidh sí seirbhís theoranta TIV agus ordóidh dochtúirí san Ionad Réigiúnach Torthúlachta drugaí torthúlachta othar atá i dteideal na seirbhíse.

(b) D'fhógair mé inniu gurb iad na critéir theidil leis an tseirbhís eatramhach a fháil a mholfar sa Tuirisc Chomhairleach *"Ag Feabhsú Seirbhísí Fothorthúlachta i dTuaisceart Éireann"* ullmhaithe ag Grúpa Stiúrtha an Chuibhreannais Sheirbhísí Réigiúnacha Leighis. Cuireadh cóipeanna den tuairisc sa Leabharlann.

Patients Sent Outside NI for treatment

Ms Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) the number of patients that have been sent to hospitals outside Northern Ireland for operations (b) for what reasons and (c) at what cost. (AQW 3419/00)

Ms de Brún: Information is not readily available in the form requested and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Níl eolas ar fáil go réidh san fhoirm iarrtha agus ní fhéadfai é a fháil ach ar chostas díréireach.

Mobile Chiropody Service: Greyabbey

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 3211/00, to detail (a) whether the mobile chiropody service has resumed following the vehicle test which was to be carried out on 21 June and (b) what steps she will take to ensure that a mobile chiropody service is provided for the people of Greyabbey in the event that the vehicle is not roadworthy. (AQW 3431/00)

Ms de Brún: The vehicle used to provide the mobile chiropody service passed the vehicle test on 21 June 2001. Since that date it has not been used to provide a mobile chiropody service as all patients requiring chiropody service have availed of the appointments offered in a range of clinical settings.

These patients will not require intervention from the Chiropody service until September 2001.

In the hope of improving Chiropody services to patients in the Greyabbey area, the Ulster Community and Hospitals HSS Trust is entering into negotiations with the Eastern Health & Social Services Board to relocate the service to a GP practice in the Greyabbey area.

D'éirigh leis an fheithicil, a úsáidtear leis an tseirbhís ghluaiasteach chosliachta a sholáthar, sa scrúdú feithicle ar an 21 Meitheamh 2001. Níor úsáideadh í le seirbhís ghluaiasteach chosliachta a sholáthar ón dáta sin mar go ndeachaigh gach uile othar a bhfuil seirbhís chosliachta de dhíth orthu chuig na coinní a socraíodh dóibh i réimse suíomh cliniciúil éagsúil.

Ní bheidh seirbhís Chosliachta de dhíth ar na hothair seo go dtí Meán Fómhair 2001.

Agus an dóchas ann go dtiocfaidh feabhas ar sheirbhísí Cosliachta ar fáil d'othair i gceantar na Mainistreach Léithe, tá Iontaobhas SSS Phobal Uladh agus Otharlann i mbun idirbheartaíochta le Bord Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta an Oirthir leis an tseirbhís a athlonnú go clinic Gnáthdhochtúirí i gceantar na Mainistreach Léithe.

Acute Hospital Development in the South West

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail DOE Planning Service's input, including its recommendations, to the Hayes Commission in regard to a location for an Acute Hospital in the South West. (AQW 3433/00)

Ms de Brún: I understand that the Acute Hospitals Review Group had one meeting with the Planning Service of the Department of the Environment, about the general planning implications of a new hospital development in the South West. The Planning Service did not make any recommendations about the location of a new hospital.

Tuigim go raibh cruinniú amháin ag an Ghrúpa Athbheithnithe ar Ghéarocharlanna le Seirbhís Pleanála na Roinne Comhshaoil faoi impleachtaí ginearálta pleanála tógáil otharlainne nua san Iardheisceart. Níor mhol an tSeirbhís Pleanála moltaí ar bith faoi láthair otharlainne nua.

Central Register for Diabetes Sufferers

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 3150/00, to make it her policy to establish a central register of diabetes sufferers. (AQW 3436/00)

Ms de Brún: Diabetes care is provided in primary care, in secondary care or both. However, current information and communication technology (ICT) arrangements do not facilitate the easy transfer and collation of this information to create a diabetic register. Work is underway on an ICT strategy for the Health and Social Services, which will improve communication systems between primary and secondary care and will provide an infrastructure to enable a composite view of patient care to be developed. Any further consideration of a central register of diabetes sufferers will have to await these developments.

Soláthraítear cúram diaibéitis i bpríomhchúram, i gcúram tánaisteach nó iontu araon. Ní réitíonn na socruithe reatha teicneolaíochta eolais agus cumarsáide (TEC) d'aistriú agus do bhailiú réidh eolais seo áfach chun clár diaibéiteach a chruthú. Tá obair ar siúl ar straitéis TEC do na Seirbhísí Sláinte agus Sóisialta, a fheabhseoidh córais chumarsáide idir príomhchúram agus cúram tánaisteach, agus a sholáthróidh bonnagar chun cur ar a gcumas léargas cumaisc de chúram othar a fhorbairt. Déanfar tuilleadh machnaimh ar bith eile ar lárchlár fulangaithe diaibéitis i ndiaidh na bhforbairtí seo.

Tyrone County Hospital: Ward Closures

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the reasons for the

closure of two wards at Tyrone County Hospital; and to make a statement. (AQW 3562/00)

Ms de Brún: I am informed by Sperrin Lakeland Health and Social Care Trust that eight medical beds were closed at Tyrone County Hospital with effect from 30 June 2001. These beds opened during the winter of 2000 to cope with the additional demand for hospital services. I am also informed that there will be a reduction of surgical beds, from 38 to 26, at Tyrone County Hospital.

It is the responsibility of Boards and Trusts to keep their services under constant review in light of demand. The demands are generally lower during the summer months, allowing services to be reduced and resources to be re-allocated later in the year, when demand for services tends to be higher.

Chuir Iontaobhas Cúram Sláinte agus Sóisialta Shliabh Speirín agus Thír na Lochanna in iúl dom gur druideadh ocht leaba leighis in Otharlann Chontae Thír Eoghain ar an 30 Meitheamh agus as sin amach. Cuireadh na leapacha seo ar fáil le linn an gheimhridh 2000 le déileáil leis an éileamh breise ar sheirbhísí otharlainne. Cuireadh in iúl dom fosta go mbeadh laghdú sna leapacha máinliachta, ó 38 go 26, in Otharlann Chontae Thír Eoghain.

Boird agus Iontaobhais atá freagrach as athbhreithniú rialta ar a gcuid seirbhísí de réir éilimh. Bíonn na héilimh níos lú le linn míonna an tsamhraidh de ghnáth, ag feiliúint do laghdú i seirbhísí agus d'athdháileadh acmhainní níos moille sa bhliain, nuair a bhíonn an t-éileamh níos airde de ghnáth.

Criteria for IVF Treatment

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) if she has recently agreed criteria with the four Boards in respect of the provision of IVF treatment in Northern Ireland (b) whether such criteria were discussed with the Human Rights Commission; and to make a statement. (AQW 3588/00)

Ms de Brún:

- (a) I have announced today that the eligibility criteria for access to the interim service will be those recommended in the Advisory Report *"Improving Sub-fertility Services in Northern Ireland"* prepared by a Steering Group of the Regional Medical Services Consortium, which commissions services on behalf of the four Boards.
- (b) No discussions have taken place with the Human Rights Commission. The criteria for access to sub-fertility services will be the subject of public consultation later this year.
- (a) D'fhógair mé inniu gurb iad na critéir theidil leis an tseirbhís eatrachach a fháil a mholfar sa Tuairisc Chomhairleach *"Ag Feabhsú Seirbhísí Fothorthúlachta*

i dTuaisceart Éireann" ullmhaithe ag Grúpa Stiúrtha an Chuibhreannais Sheirbhísí Réigiúnacha Leighis a choimisiúnaíonn seirbhísí thar ceann na gCeithre Bhord.

- (b) Ní raibh caibidlí ar bith ann leis an Choimisiún Cearta Daonna. Beidh na critéir le seirbhísí fothorthúlachta a fháil faoi réir comhairlithe phoiblí níos moille i mbliana.

HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

Union Learning Representatives

Ms McWilliams asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to introduce proposals which will give Union Learning Representatives official recognition that would afford them paid time off to perform their union duties as envisaged in the white paper "Opportunity for All in a World of Change".

(AQW 3454/00)

The Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Dr Farren): I have asked my officials to keep close contact with officials in GB dealing with the ongoing public consultation there, and in light of the responses, to consider and bring forward appropriate proposals for Northern Ireland.

"Opportunity For All in a World of Change"

Ms McWilliams asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail how he intends to implement the recommendations in the white paper "Opportunity for All in a World of Change".

(AQW 3455/00)

Dr Farren: This White Paper is a wide-ranging and comprehensive review of the steps needed to secure economic success for the United Kingdom as a whole over the next decade. In Northern Ireland the key themes and actions are being taken forward under the Programme for Government and my Department's new Strategic Plan.

Union Learning Fund for Northern Ireland

Ms McWilliams asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to establish a Union Learning Fund for Northern Ireland and say whether the increase in funding available in England will be reflected in the Northern Ireland budget.

(AQW 3456/00)

Dr Farren: Encouraging more workplace learning is an important part of the strategy for lifelong learning. I

wish to consider an inclusive approach that draws upon the experience gained from the Union Learning Fund, but also engages other relevant organisations as well as the trade union movement. The resources that can be directed to such an initiative will depend on all other priorities.

Needs Assessment

Ms E Bell asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail the current position in regard to the needs and effectiveness evaluation for training and vocational education needs; and to make a statement. (AQO 1666/00)

Dr Farren: The Needs and Effectiveness Evaluation of Training and Vocational Education is still in the early stages. My Department has agreed terms of reference and a project plan with DFP and EPU. One part of the exercise is the preparation of a Needs Assessment by September that compares needs and provision locally with that in England. The other part is a series of programme evaluations over the next 12 to 18 months.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Traffic Congestion: Strangford

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (a) what changes he will implement to the road infrastructure to remove traffic congestion caused by traffic using the Strangford Lough ferry service (b) what assessment he has made of the volume of traffic using the ferry service for access to local tourist facilities and (c) will he make it his policy to ensure that the road infrastructure is adequate to cope with the increased volume of traffic. (AQW 3341/00)

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Campbell): My Department's Roads Service has advised me that there is generally no traffic congestion associated with the operation of the ferry service between Portaferry and Strangford and it has therefore no plans to implement any road infrastructural improvements. Traffic queues do, however, occur during busy holiday periods such as Easter, July bank holidays and occasional summer weekends. During these busy periods, Roads Service staff will continue to direct vehicles queuing to use the ferry service into the marshalling areas at both Strangford and Portaferry.

While Roads Service keep records of vehicles and passengers that use the ferry service, it has not made any assessment of the volume of traffic using this ferry service for access to local tourist facilities. Roads Service will, of course, continue to monitor the situation to ensure that

the road infrastructure is adequate to cope should there be any significant increase in traffic volumes.

Strangford Ferry: Weather Restrictions

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (a) his plans to enable ferries on Strangford Lough to operate in high winds in order to maintain a service to the local community and (b) why users are not notified when the ferry service is suspended. (AQW 3342/00)

Mr Campbell: In operating the ferry service between Portaferry and Strangford, the safety of passengers and other lough users is of paramount importance to my Department's Roads Service. The ferry vessels are licensed to sail in sheltered waters only and the licence requires that they may not sail when mean wave heights exceed 1.2 m. On occasions the ferry service is suspended by a combination of wind and tidal conditions, for example, where a strong southerly wind and a flood tide might prevent the vessels from docking at Portaferry.

When the service is suspended, local radio stations, schools and bus companies are notified. Where there is a prolonged suspension, signs are erected at designated locations on roads approaching Portaferry and Strangford. Outside normal office hours an answering machine service provides relevant information. Within the next year Roads Service hopes to provide an electronic messaging sign facility which will provide up to date information at the slipways and on selected approach routes.

Adopted Roads: Castlederg

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 3120/00, to identify those developers that Road Service will contact. (AQW 3353/00)

Mr Campbell: Mr Mervyn Hamilton and Mr Kieran Houston are the respective developers of the Hazelgrove and Dergvale developments in Castlederg.

For your information, my Department's Roads Service has recently written to both developers to remind them of their obligations under the Private Streets (Northern Ireland) Order 1980 and to ask them to submit details of their programmes for completion of the works necessary to bring the private streets within their developments up to adoption standards.

Disused Halt: Barn, Carrickfergus

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 3140/00, to detail what steps Translink are taking to improve the appearance of the disused halt at Barn, Carrickfergus. (AQW 3357/00)

Mr Campbell: Translink has advised that, as the disused halt at Barn, Carrickfergus has been sealed off and secured in safety terms and is not causing any problems in relation to the safe operation of rail services, it has no plans to carry out additional work there. The limited funds available for rail services are required for higher priority safety related work.

Translink: Staff and Passenger Safety

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 3108/00, to detail what precautions are being taken to ensure staff and passengers are not subjected to physical attack. (AQW 3358/00)

Mr Campbell: I would refer the member for East Antrim to my previous answer to AQW 3302/00 on this subject and stress that staff and public safety continues to be a priority for Translink. Translink is at present considering measures to enhance security for lone passengers at halts by installing CCTV and call points. Translink also work closely with the RUC, regular meetings take place at Chief Constable level and between local Translink station managers and district commanders.

Rural Transport Schemes: Simplified Guidelines

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to make it his policy to introduce new simplified guidelines for the development of Rural Transport Schemes. (AQW 3364/00)

Mr Campbell: When the Rural Transport Fund was introduced in 1998, clear and comprehensive guidelines were published to help Rural Community Transport Partnerships apply for funding. The procedures for the funding of rural transport schemes are necessarily robust to ensure that public expenditure is properly applied. However, I am always open to suggestions to improve Departmental processes and my officials will be consulting the Community Transport Association on what further refinements or simplifications can be made in the arrangements for funding partnerships.

Road Classification

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the total length of each classification of road in each district council area. (AQW 3393/00)

Mr Campbell: The information requested can be found in a joint Department for Regional Development/ Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency publication entitled, 'Northern Ireland Transport Statistics 1999-2000'. Copies of this publication are available in the Assembly Library.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Town Centre Regeneration

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 1158/00, to detail any progress towards a strategy for the regeneration of town centres. (AQW 3379/00)

The Minister for Social Development (Mr Morrow): A strategy for the regeneration of town centres has been developed by officials, following widespread consultations with a range of interested parties. Further consultations will take place as soon as possible with appropriate Ministers, the DSD Committee, the Executive and, if appropriate, the Assembly. In accordance with the Department's Equality Scheme an Equality Impact Assessment is being prepared and will involve consultations with other interested parties.

In accordance with the Department's Corporate Plan it is hoped this process can be completed by the end of this calendar year.

"Living Over The Shop" Pilot Project

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the timescale for the "Living Over The Shop" (LOTS) initiative pilot project. (AQW 3402/00)

Mr Morrow: The "Living Over The Shop" pilot project is due to end in March 2002. Following this it will be subject to an evaluation to determine its success.

"Living Over The Shop" Pilot Project

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development to state how widely the "Living Over The Shop" initiative might be applied if the pilot project is assessed as appropriate. (AQW 3403/00)

Mr Morrow: The aim of the "Living Over The Shop" pilot is to determine the potential for encouraging landlords to bring vacant properties above shop premises into use by raising awareness of the arrangements introduced in the last budget. If the pilot project is successful then the initiative could be applied widely throughout Northern Ireland.

Review of Housing Adaptations Service

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail progress to date on his fundamental review of housing adaptations. (AQW 3404/00)

Mr Morrow: The fundamental review of the housing adaptations service is being carried out jointly by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Department

of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. The preliminary report on the review was released for consultation in February 2001 and the final date for comments was 31 March 2001. The comments have now been considered by the Steering Group for the review and, where appropriate, will be incorporated into a final report, which the Steering Group expects to produce in the Autumn. This report will include a full update on the implementation of the review's recommendations and an action plan.

A number of action points set out in the review have already been or are being implemented. The assessment of applications for changes in heating for people with disabilities living in Housing Executive dwellings was transferred in March 2001 from the Health and Social Services Trusts to the Housing Executive, which is using a simplified assessment method. A total of nearly 2000 requests for change of heating have been handed over to the Housing Executive.

- The Housing Executive is also now able to carry out an extended range of minor works to its dwellings without the need for an Occupational Therapist's recommendation.
- New information has been drafted to explain the adaptation service to all interested parties and it is proposed to develop a web site to provide information and advice for people requiring adaptations.
- A joint Information Technology proposal is being drafted to better manage the requests for adaptations and improve communication between the Health Trusts and the Housing Executive.
- A Housing Adaptations Liaison Officer has been appointed for a two year period by the Housing Executive and the DHSSPS to help implement the review recommendations.
- DHSSPS has taken steps to increase the number of Occupational Therapists in post in the Health Trusts, with the aim of reducing waiting lists for assessments for adaptations.

Building Capacity in Rural Areas Project

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 3043/00, whether the comprehensive profiling exercise has commenced in relation to the building capacity in rural areas project and to outline his time-table for completion of the exercise.

(AQW 3405/00)

Mr Morrow: Mapping work has commenced to identify areas where existing community capacity may be low ie estates which have no direct community development support or activity in the last three years. It is anticipated that this exercise will be completed during the summer months at which time a more detailed selection will take place based on the indicators outlined in my reply to AQW 3043 and, as already indicated in AQW 3044,

the first stage of local engagement, with District Councils and Rural Networks to develop partnerships, is expected to take place by the autumn.

Following this stage of the process it will be possible to develop a longer term timetable for the project.

Charities Commission

Ms Morrice asked the Minister for Social Development to make it his policy to establish a Charities Commission to oversee the operation of charitable organisations given the recent events surrounding the Northern Ireland Children's Hospice. (AQW 3409/00)

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. Given that the recent events surrounding the Northern Ireland Children's Hospice appear to be primarily employment-related, it is by no means obvious that the existence of a Northern Ireland Charity Commission would have had any effect on the course of events.

Disability Living Allowance: Arthritis

Ms Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of people receiving Disability Living Allowance or related benefits as a result of rheumatoid arthritis. (AQW 3439/00)

Mr Morrow: As at 31 May 2001 there were 28,013 people receiving Disability Living Allowance and 16,717 in receipt of Attendance Allowance for arthritic conditions. There are no separate figures for rheumatoid arthritis available.

The Welfare Reform and Modernisation Programme

Ms E Bell asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (a) what progress has been made in the welfare modernisation programme; (b) whether the findings will be made public; and to make a statement. (AQO 1667/00)

Mr Morrow: The Welfare Reform & Modernisation Programme comprises a series of major change initiatives designed primarily to improve customer service. Progress to date includes:

- creating a partnership between the Social Security Agency and the Training & Employment Agency to provide a joined up benefit and job broking service for people claiming Jobseekers Allowance;

- implementing a “ONE” service, which combines welfare services provided by a number of Agencies; and
- establishing a partnership with a private sector consortium, to modernise benefits processing through improved Information Technology.

Progress will be reported against the success measures and targets set out in the Programme for Government and the Department’s Public Service Agreement. The Social Security Agency also publishes an annual report which details performance against Ministerial targets and progress in all business areas.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 27 July 2001

Written Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Review of Public Administration

Mrs Carson asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail when the review into Public Bodies or Quangos will begin and when its first report is expected. (AQW 3367/00)

Reply: The Executive gave a commitment in the Programme for Government to undertake a Review of Public Administration in Northern Ireland. While decisions have yet to be taken on detailed aspects of the Review, it is expected to be a comprehensive and strategic examination of all aspects of the public sector, not just quangos.

The Executive are still considering arrangements for the review, and hope to make a statement on these as soon as possible.

Appointment to Public Bodies

Mrs Carson asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail (a) those persons sitting on (i) two (ii) three (iii) four (iv) five and (v) six or more Quangos; (b) what salary and/or allowance each receives; and (c) by what means each was appointed. (AQW 3368/00)

Reply:

(a) Details of those persons sitting on more than one public body to which appointments are made by Northern Ireland Ministers have been placed in the Assembly Library. 114 people hold 2 appointments, 15 hold 3 and 4 hold 4. There are no persons holding more than 4 appointments on bodies for which Northern Ireland Ministers are responsible.

(b) Information on the salary and/or allowances payable to those holding public appointments in Northern Ireland is available in Volume 2 of the Central Appointments Unit's 1999/2000 Annual Report on Public Appointments, a copy of which is available in the Assembly Library.

(c) Northern Ireland Ministers make public appointments to bodies for which they are responsible in accordance with the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Public Appointments' guidance. That guidance lays considerable emphasis on the need for all public 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; and for information to be published about appointments made.

Before offering an appointment to an individual who already holds a public appointment, departments should be satisfied that the person will be able to devote sufficient time and commitment to the new appointment.

Programme for Government: Targets Achieved

Mrs I Robinson asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail which targets, as set out in the programme for government, have been achieved to date. (AQW 3382/00)

Reply: The following targets contained in the Programme for Government have been achieved to date. The targets are shown against the Departments responsible.

Department	Target
Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister	By June 2001, bring forward and consult on proposals for the establishment of a Commissioner for Children as part of a strategy for children.
Department of Culture Arts and Leisure	By June 2001, establish a forum to co-ordinate and promote the cultural arts and leisure dimension to the "Cultural Quarter" concept of designated areas for locating cultural activity with a view to creating synergy and co-operation.
	By June 2001, carry out a review of community-based arts and work with District Councils to enable them to develop integrated local plans for culture, arts and leisure.
	From April 2001, extend the interim Safe Sports Grounds scheme to improve the physical infrastructure of sporting facilities.
	By May 2001, make key information available in languages other than English including the development of services for Irish and Ulster Scots in support of the Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

Department of Culture Arts and Leisure (Continued)	From April 2001, extend the Diversity 21 initiative to promote greater respect and understanding of our cultural diversity and shared heritage through cultural and leisure activities and facilities.
	By May 2001, audit an initial 40 culture, arts and leisure venues and, by October 2001, develop a programme to improve accessibility to culture and leisure facilities, in particular for people with disabilities or who are socially disadvantaged.
	By June 2001, develop a programme to enhance the range and quality of culture and leisure facilities, including our maritime and industrial heritage.
	From April 2001, ensure the conservation and protection of fish stocks by providing grant-aid to the Fisheries Conservancy Board to enable the Board to carry out effectively its statutory conservation functions.
Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment	Enhance the inward investment brand for Northern Ireland and, from June 2001 onwards, roll it out with agreed new marketing initiatives.
Department of the Environment	By summer 2001, publish for consultation a new road safety strategy for the next decade.
Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment	By June 2001, establish a Task force on Employability and Long Term Unemployment. This task force will focus on the factors that make people employable: not just knowledge, skills and motivation but also considerations such as childcare and readiness or ability to travel to find work.
	From April 2001, bring into operation an enhanced New Deal 25+ which will contain specific Northern Ireland provision allowing early entry to the scheme for those returning to the labour market and lone parents.
Department for Social Development	From April 2001, introduce an enhanced training and work experience period as part of New Deal 25+ which will last for up to 26 weeks.
	From April 2001, provide greater scope within New Deal 25+ for employers to avail of the Employer Subsidy at any stage in the programme.
	From April 2001, introduce a new energy efficiency grant scheme to address fuel poverty in the private housing sector, providing insulation and heating improvements for householders on income and disability based benefits.
	From April 2001, encourage and support greater community participation, particularly from those groups under-represented in volunteering activities, to increase the number of active community groups and volunteers.
	From April 2001, increase the programme of grant aid to the Housing Rights Service and the Northern Ireland Tenants' Action Project to provide advice, support, information and training on a wide range of housing issues which will help strengthen the areas of weakest community infrastructure across Northern Ireland.

The three actions listed below were achieved after the target date.

Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister
"In April 2001, initiate consultation on a Single Equality Bill, to be introduced in 2002, harmonising anti-discrimination law as far as practicable and extending it into new categories, including age and sexual discrimination."
A consultation exercise was launched on 8 May 2001.
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety
"Ensure that, from April 2001, Health and Social Services Boards implement New TSN Action Plans which include measures for tackling inequalities in areas of accidents, cancers, circulatory diseases, diabetes, immunisation, infant mortality, nutrition, smoking, physical activity and alcohol consumption."
ustright Action plans were implemented from May 2001
Department of Finance and Personnel
"By June 2001, publish a new Index of Deprivation for Northern Ireland's electoral wards."
The new Index was published on 5 July 2001.

Research into Services Provided to Victims

Mrs Nelis asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail the cost of commissioning Deloitte and Touche to undertake a study of services provided to victims; and to make a statement.(AQW 3388/00)

Reply: The cost of commissioning the research is £34,950.

The research is seeking views on the needs of victims of the conflict in Northern Ireland and the range and quality of services provided to them. Views are being sought from victims and survivors groups, and individuals who define themselves as victims or survivors but who are not associated with any group. The study will provide baseline information about the services provided, indicate where gaps exist and assist in determining the priority areas for improvement.

The final report is expected to be available in July 2001. It is proposed that a summary of the findings and an action plan of how the findings will be taken forward will be issued to all those who took part in the research.

Schemes under which Grants are paid to Voluntary and Community Bodies

Mr Carrick asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail all current schemes under which grants are paid by the office and its NDPBs to the voluntary and community sector. (AQW 3442/00)

Reply: The Office funds community and voluntary organisations in the community relations field under the authority of the Community Relations (Amendment) (NI) Order 1975.

The Community Relations Unit administers a small capital programme and provides funding to a very few groups and projects which do not fall within the remit of the Community Relations Council.

The Community Relations Council, although not an NDPB, is the main channel for community relations funding to the voluntary and community sector. From funding provided through the Community Relations Unit, the Community Relations Council makes grants to various voluntary and community sector bodies under the following schemes:

- Core Funding
- Development
- Development Support
- Inter Community
- Cultural Diversity
- Media
- Publications
- EU Special Support Programme for Peace & Reconciliation.

The Race Equality Unit in the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister is responsible for the management of a newly created funding scheme to support minority ethnic voluntary organisations and projects. The scheme provides core and innovative project funding from a budget of £400,000; the core aim is the promotion of good relations between different ethnic groups.

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland provides financial assistance to other bodies for the purposes of education and research under Article 55 of Sex Discrimination (NI) Order 1976 and Article 44 of the Race Relations (NI) Order 1997. The Commission also gives financial or other assistance to organisations appearing to the Commission to be concerned with the promotion of equality of opportunity, and good relations, between persons of different racial groups under Article 43 of the Race Relations (NI) Order 1997.

Finally, the office is currently operating interim funding arrangements under two measures of the European Union Peace II Programme, namely 'Reconciliation for sustainable peace' and 'Integration and reconciliation of victims'. The purpose of this scheme is to provide interim funding to sustain projects that are considered likely to be eligible for funding under the Programme paper.

Grants paid to Voluntary and Community Bodies

Mr Carrick asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail all grants paid by the office and its NDPBs to voluntary and community bodies in the financial year 2000-01. (AQW 3443/00)

Reply: The following grants were paid to Voluntary and Community bodies by the Community Relations Unit during 2000/01.

Community Relations Council	£2,758,038
Chinese Welfare Association	£86,864
Co-Operation Ireland	£200,000
Ulster People's College	£69,981
Encounter	£5,000
Multi-Cultural Resource Centre	£49,324
FAIT	£10,206
Counteract	£37,937
Somme Heritage Centre	£15,000
Forbairte Feirste	£3,548
Ultach Trust (Columba Initiative)	£25,000
Corrymeela Community	£25,000
Clooney Hall Centre, Londonderry	£33,264
Tara Counselling & Personal Development Centre, Omagh	£87,596
WAVE Trauma Centre	£1,900

In addition the following were paid by Community Relations Unit under the European Union Physical & Social Environment Programme.

Newtownstewart Community Development Association	£12,294
Dooneen Community Association	£30,842

The main channel for the provision of Community Relations funding to the community and voluntary sector is the Community Relations Council, which is an independent voluntary organisation supported by Government. From funding provided by the Department and the European Union, it paid out some £3.3m in grants to over 400 groups and projects in 2000/2001. Details of those will be published in the Council's annual report due later in the year.

The Victims Unit paid the following grants:

Widows Against Violence Empower	£3,000
Holywell Trust	£13,000
NI Victims' Memorial Fund	£340,710

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland made the following grants to community and voluntary sector bodies in the financial year 2000/01:

UNDER ARTICLE 55 OF THE SEX DISCRIMINATION (NI) ORDER 1976

Belfast Women Training Service	£500
Women Resource and Development Centre	£600
Women Together	£250
Windsor Women Centre	£250
Queens Student Union	£250
NI Women's Euro Platform	£250

Inter-agency Group Addressing Gender Equality	£500
Women's Support Network	£500
Parents Advice Centre	£1,650
Greenway Women's Group	£1,150
Business and Professional Women's Group	£600
Vital Voice	£500
Northern Ireland Pre-school Playgroups Association	£1,738
NI Childminding Association	£2,280
Sole Purpose Partnership	£565
Short Strand Partnership	£1,000
Nexus Institute	£500
Federation of Women's Institutes	£500
Newry and Mourne Women's Group	£1,180
QUB – School of Politics	£350
Craigavon Asian Women and Children's Group	£500
Falls Woman Centre	£750
Lesbian Line	£600
Women's Information Group	£500
Foyle Friends	£665

UNDER ARTICLES 43 AND 44 OF THE RACE RELATIONS (NI) ORDER 1997

Sikh Community Project	£620
Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities	£1,500
Law Centre (NI)	£825
Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities	£5,000
Children's Law Centre	£4,000
Chinese Welfare Association	£8,500
Parent Advice Centre	£2,500
Belfast Travellers' Education	£4,794
Newtownabbey Community Relations Group	£600
Belfast Islamic Centre	£5,500
Belfast Travellers	£8,062
Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities	£1,100
Multi-Cultural Resource Centre	£6,585
Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities	£5,000
Mandarin Speakers Association	£2,000
Housing Rights	£1,056
Belfast Travellers' Support	£3,001

Guidance given to Voluntary and Community Bodies in respect of Grants

Mr Carrick asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail the guidance given by the office and its NDPBs to the voluntary and community bodies, on accessing, using and accounting for grants from public monies. (AQW 3446/00)

Reply: The Race Equality Unit published Notes of Guidance to assist applicants in making a claim against a fund established in support of minority ethnic organisations.

The Community Relations Unit and the Victims Unit provide oral or written advice as appropriate in response to any approach from a voluntary or community body regarding financial assistance for a project aimed at promoting better community relations or assistance for victims.

The main channel for community relations funding to voluntary and community bodies and the centre of expertise on community relations practice is the Community Relations Council. Guidance notes including eligibility criteria are available in relation to each of its schemes of assistance and, in addition, Council staff are available to provide advice with regard to developing a project proposal.

In the case of Community Relations Unit, Victims Unit and Community Relations Council, the formal letters of offer which make available grants to successful applicants contain relevant information about the use for which the assistance is provided, how it may be drawn down and accounting requirements.

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland offers guidance on the availability of grants under anti-discrimination legislation in the form of explanatory leaflets and other printed materials. These materials explain the requirements to be met by applicants and the basis on which a determination will be made in relation to an application. When grants are approved, the receiving body is required to provide the Commission with evidence of expenditure of the grant in relation to the project for which it was awarded.

Grants paid to Voluntary and Community Bodies

Mr Carrick asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail all grants of £100,000 or more made by the office and its NDPBs to voluntary and community bodies in the financial year 2000-01. (AQW 3460/00)

Reply: The Community Relations Unit paid two grants of over £100,000 to Voluntary and Community bodies in 2000/01.

Community Relations Council	£2,758,038
Co-Operation Ireland	£200,000

The Victims Unit paid a grant of £340,710 to the Northern Ireland Victims Memorial Fund.

The Community Relations Council is the main channel for the provision of Community Relations funding to the voluntary and community sector. It is not however an NDPB. From funding provided by Community Relations

Unit, Community Relations Council made two grants over £100,000 in 2000/01 –

Corrymeela	£168,843
Mediation Network NI	£120,418

Structure of Whitehall Departments

Dr Birnie asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister whether it has considered any implications of the recent changes to Whitehall Departments for the structures of Departments here.

(AQW 3554/00)

Reply: We note the recent changes to the structure of Whitehall Departments made by the Prime Minister following his re-election on 8 June. These have no direct implications for the structures of Departments here which were agreed by the Assembly in February 1999. However, under the terms of the Memorandum of Understanding agreed between the four administrations last July, amendments may be required to bilateral concordats agreed between Northern Ireland and Whitehall Departments to properly reflect such structural change and revised responsibilities in Whitehall Departments.

Director of Communication: Length of Contract

Mr Poots asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail the length of contract of the newly appointed Director of Communications.

(AQW 3560/00)

Reply: The contract for the post is to be offered as a permanent appointment.

Victims

Mr P Robinson asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to define who may or may not be described as a victim and whether there is a statutory or other provision regarding this definition.

(AQW 3623/00)

Reply: The definition of victims as stated in the Programme for Government as endorsed by the Executive and Assembly includes,

“The surviving injured of violent, conflict-related incidents and the close relatives or partners who care for them along with those close relatives and partners who mourn their dead.”

The word “injured” refers to both physical and psychological injury and this clarification will be made in the consultation paper on a victims’ strategy.

There is no statutory definition of a victim.

Payments to Victims

Mr P Robinson asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail how much has been paid out to victims through funds made available from the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.

(AQW 3624/00)

Reply: During the 2000/2001 financial year a total of £420,000 was allocated to a variety of initiatives relating to victims. In particular, over one third of a million was paid to the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund, which operates a variety of schemes that assist individual victims in a practical way.

Funding of £650,000 for the current year has not yet been allocated. A victims measure with funding of approximately £6.67 million will be available under the Peace II programme. £1.67 million of this has come from Executive funds.

Access to Polling Stations

Ms Morrice asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, with regard to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, to detail what facilities are available in respect of access to polling stations.

(AQW 3642/00)

Reply: The arrangements for access to Polling Stations are not a matter for the devolved administration. While OFMDFM has responsibility for disability discrimination policy and legislation, each employer or service provider is responsible under the legislation for the provision of facilities or for making reasonable adjustments to existing facilities. While the arrangements in respect of polling stations are a matter for the Secretary of State, we agree that the provision of accessible facilities for disabled people should be in place.

Economic Policy Unit

Mr Hussey asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to outline the arbitration carried out by the Economic Policy Unit on competing fund demands and final determinations that were necessary to be reached by EPU within the June monitoring round.

(AQW 3663/00)

Reply: The Economic Policy Unit (EPU) worked closely with the Department of Finance and Personnel to draft agreed advice on the strategic considerations, options, and approach to the June Monitoring round. EPU also expressed views on the extent to which all bids from Departments took account of the priorities and objectives set out in the Programme for Government.

Economic Policy Unit

Mr Hussey asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail the Economic Policy Unit's current evaluation of the effectiveness of government programmes and policies. (AQW 3664/00)

Reply: In March the Executive agreed the Terms of Reference for five Needs and Effectiveness Evaluations. The five areas chosen for evaluation are housing, education, training, industrial development and health, which together account for 70% of planned public spending. Project plans have been drawn up to identify the objectives of the evaluations, the outputs that can be expected, and the timescales involved. The Economic Policy Unit, working in conjunction with the Department of Finance & Personnel and the relevant departments, leads each of the reviews.

Economic Policy Unit

Mr Hussey asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail progress within the Economic Policy Unit on the effective co-ordination and development of cross-cutting policies. (AQW 3665/00)

Reply: The Economic Policy Unit (EPU) has co-ordinated development of the Programme for Government, the Executive's principal means of promoting cross-cutting policy-making. The Executive Programme Funds provide a financial mechanism to encourage cross-Departmental working to deliver the Executive's Priorities under the Programme for Government.

EPU has also initiated a programme of cross-cutting Performance and Innovation studies. It participates in several Inter-Departmental Groups on cross-cutting issues and is leading the administration's response to a number of UK-wide cross-cutting initiatives.

Northern Ireland Block Grant

Mr Hussey asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail the negotiations that have been undertaken by the Economic Policy Unit, together with the relevant Northern Ireland Minister and the Secretary of State, with HM Treasury on the size of the Northern Ireland block grant. (AQW 3666/00)

Reply: The Economic Policy Unit, together with the Department of Finance and Personnel, advised Ministers on negotiations on the size of the Northern Ireland block grant during the 2000 Spending Review. These negotiations included a meeting on 28 June 2000 between the First Minister, Deputy First Minister, Minister of Finance and Personnel, the Secretary of State and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

Modernising Government Strategy

Mr Hussey asked the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to detail progress by the Public Service Improvement Unit on the development of an overall strategy for modernising government in Northern Ireland. (AQW 3667/00)

Reply: A Modernising Government Group was established on 8 May 2001, comprising representatives from each Department at Senior Civil Service level. The Group has now met on two occasions and is working to the following Terms of Reference:-

Against the background of "The Creating and Delivering Modern Government Services in NI" paper and the commitments given in the Programme for Government (particularly chapter 7 - "Working Together") the Modernising Government Group should examine and report upon:

- the contribution to be made by Departments and Agencies towards the delivery of appropriate high-quality customer-focussed public services;
- the opportunities for greater co-operation and the establishment of joined-up public services;
- the arrangements to facilitate innovative approaches to service delivery including maximising the use of IT solutions;
- mechanisms to be adopted to increase efficiency and effectiveness so that resources can be best used to serve the public; and
- how appropriate, supportive personnel policies can be put in place.

The Group has been asked to produce, by 30 November 2001, an agreed action plan for submission to Ministers and the Executive.

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Maintenance on Watercourses

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail at what periods does the Rivers Agency carry out maintenance on designated watercourses. (AQW 3473/00)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Rodgers): The Rivers Agency carries out maintenance works on designated watercourses all year round. In the case of watercourses with fishery interest, channel works are restricted during the spawning season (November to March).

Works on urban watercourses are generally concentrated in the late Autumn, early Winter period in anticipation of high Winter flows, to alleviate potential flooding risks.

Importation of German Cattle

Mr Clyde asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (a) the number of cattle of German origin imported into Northern Ireland since 1 Jan 2001 (b) where they were slaughtered and (c) where the remainder of the cattle are currently located.

(AQW 3481/00)

Ms Rodgers: A complete ban on the import of pigs, sheep, goats and cattle into Northern Ireland, was imposed on 21 February 2001, with the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in the United Kingdom.

Prior to the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease, 31 cattle for breeding were imported from Germany on 1 January 2001. None of the cattle have been slaughtered. Thirty of these cattle remain in a herd in Co Down and one animal has since died.

Rural Proofing

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail progress on the co-ordination of executive policy on rural proofing. (AQW 3503/00)

Ms Rodgers: My executive colleagues and I remain firmly committed to the policy of rural proofing. The Member will nevertheless understand that because of the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease, resources within my Department have had to be diverted from other duties. As a result, progress to establish the machinery necessary to implement rural proofing has been slower than I would have wished. The Ministerial led inter-departmental group to oversee the process will, however, be established shortly.

Guidance given to Voluntary and Community Bodies

Ms Morrice asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the guidance her Department and its NDPBs give to voluntary and community bodies on accessing, using and accounting for grants from public monies. (AQW 3517/00)

Ms Rodgers: The Department and its NDPBs offer guidance on accessing, using and accounting for grants from public monies in a number of formats including specific one-to-one advice from Department officials, site visits, information booklets, guidance notes, workshops and 'grant information evenings'.

The guidance is designed to support voluntary and community groups in the planning, managing and monitoring of projects and budgets.

Grants paid to Voluntary and Community Bodies

Ms Morrice asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail all grants paid to voluntary and community bodies by her Department and her NDPBs in the financial year 2000-01. (AQW 3518/00)

Ms Rodgers: The total grants paid under the Rural Development Programme 1994-1999 amounted to £8.5m.

Within the Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation, grants of £2.7m were paid under the community-based actions measure.

Forest Service Grants amounted to £76,948 and grants paid to Local Shows, the Young Farmers' Clubs of Ulster and the Rural Stress Action Fund amounted to £100,884.

Schemes under which grants are paid to Voluntary and Community Bodies

Ms Morrice asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail all current schemes under which grants are paid by her Department and its NDPBs to the voluntary and community sector. (AQW 3519/00)

Ms Rodgers: The current schemes under which grants are paid are:-

- The Woodland Grant Scheme.
- The Farm Woodland Premium Scheme annual premia.
- Grants for Agriculture and Horticulture Shows (1949 Agriculture Act)
- The Rural Stress Action Fund (Prime Minister's Action Plan for Farming) announced March 2000.

Grants paid to Voluntary and Community Bodies

Ms Morrice asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail all grants of £100,000 or more made by her Department and its NDPBs to voluntary and community bodies in the financial year 2000-01.

(AQW 3520/00)

Ms Rodgers: The Department did not make any individual grants of £100,000 or more in the financial year 2000-2001.

Cattle Tested for TB and Brucellosis

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (a) the percentage of

cattle tested for tuberculosis and brucellosis for the year 1999-2000 and were subsequently found to be positive reactors to either disease and (b) the amount of compensation paid as a result. (AQW 3528/00)

Ms Rodgers: The information requested is as follows:-

- (a) the percentage of cattle tested for TB for the year 1999-2000 and subsequently found to be positive reactors to the disease was 0.4% and the percentage of cattle tested for Brucellosis for the year 1999-2000 and subsequently found to be positive reactors to the disease was 0.11%; and
- (b) the amount of compensation paid as a result was £5,549,116 for Tuberculosis and £272,398 for Brucellosis.

Lamb Collection Centre System

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail when the lamb collection point system will commence and who will monitor and regulate the system. (AQW 3531/00)

Ms Rodgers: The lamb collection centre system is already in place. The approval of the local Divisional Veterinary Officer must be obtained for both the centre and the centre protocols. The running of the centres is on a self regulatory basis, with responsibility lying with Lamb Group Managements. Reconciliation of numbers of lambs presented is undertaken at Meat Plants.

Export of Livestock to the Republic of Ireland

Mr O'Neill asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, following her discussions with her counterpart in the Dail, to detail her plans for re-opening trade from Northern Ireland to the Republic for the immediate slaughter of animals. (AQW 3581/00)

Ms Rodgers: Under regionalisation the export of livestock to the Republic has been allowed and indeed the conditional export of pigs has re-commenced. However, the authorities in the Republic have not yet agreed the arrangements under which the importation of sheep can proceed.

My officials have met with their counterparts in the Republic on this issue and the latter have undertaken to progress this matter so that exports from Northern Ireland can recommence in the near future.

Lamb Collection Centres

Mr O'Neill asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail any plans to open evaluation centres or safeguards in South Down where

lambs can be taken prior to transportation to the Republic of Ireland. (AQW 3582/00)

Ms Rodgers: The provision of lamb collection centres is a matter for the industry and some are already in existence for lambs going to slaughter within Northern Ireland. Collection centres are subject to approval by the Department.

As you are aware the export of sheep to the Republic has not yet re-commenced. I am not aware of any plans by the industry to establish collection centres whether in South Down or elsewhere to deal with lambs for export to the Republic when that trade re-opens.

Fencing of Farmland: Financial Assistance

Mr O'Neill asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she has any plans to provide financial assistance to farmers to improve the fencing of farmland in order to help prevent the spread of communicable diseases. (AQW 3583/00)

Ms Rodgers: I will answer AQW 3583 and AQW 3584 together as they are both similar in nature. Provision of fencing of farmland, cattle crush and sheep dip facilities are all the responsibility of individual farmers. While capital grant assistance for items such as these could have been considered under the SPARD scheme, which operated in the previous EU approved Single Programme, no such scheme is currently in operation and there are no plans at present to introduce one.

Crushes and Sheep Dip Facilities: Grant Aid

Mr O'Neill asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she has any plans to grant aid crushes and sheep dip facilities on farms in order to help prevent the spread of communicable disease. (AQW 3584/00)

Ms Rodgers: I will answer AQW 3583 and AQW 3584 together as they are both similar in nature. Provision of fencing of farmland, cattle crush and sheep dip facilities are all the responsibility of individual farmers. While capital grant assistance for items such as these could have been considered under the SPARD scheme, which operated in the previous EU approved Single Programme, no such scheme is currently in operation and there are no plans at present to introduce one.

Removal of Safeguards

Mr O'Neill asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail when she will announce the removal of safeguards in Northern Ireland in respect of the sale of livestock. (AQW 3585/00)

Ms Rodgers: As you may be aware I have announced that livestock marts may reopen from 30 July for sales of store cattle, breeding cattle, bulls, drop calves, pigs and pedigree ewes and rams.

I will review the resumption of sheep sales (other than of pedigree stock) towards the end of August. I will also keep under review the re-commencement of sales of sheep direct from farms (as distinct from their sale through a recognised mart) although it appears unlikely that these will resume before the end of this year.

EU Conservation Regulations

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she intends to provide assistance to the Fishing Industry in light of the new EU conservation regulations. (AQW 3633/00)

Ms Rodgers: Since both questions refer to the same subject matter, I will answer both together. The latest conservation regulations which has been introduced by the EU are those establishing measures for the recovery of hake stock. It is considered that these will have a limited impact on local fishermen. For example they do not extend to the Irish Sea. It is not therefore my intention to provide assistance to the industry to take particular account of these regulations.

EU Conservation Regulations

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to give her assessment of the new EU conservation regulations upon fishing; and to make a statement. (AQW 3634/00)

Ms Rodgers: Since both questions refer to the same subject matter, I will answer both together. The latest conservation regulations which has been introduced by the EU are those establishing measures for the recovery of hake stock. It is considered that these will have a limited impact on local fishermen. For example they do not extend to the Irish Sea. It is not therefore my intention to provide assistance to the industry to take particular account of these regulations.

Oyster Production: Strangford Lough

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she is aware of any proposals made by private firms to increase the oyster production in the Strangford Lough area. (AQW 3636/00)

Ms Rodgers: Yes. There are currently 2 commercial private enterprises cultivating both Pacific and Native oysters at 8 licensed sites in Strangford Lough. Whilst one is currently producing oysters the other has not yet reached the commercial production stage. A further 2

applications, including one which also involves the cultivation of scallops, are under consideration. The total area licensed and under application to private firms for oyster cultivation is approximately 345 and 215 hectares respectively.

Forest Service: Performance Targets 2001-02

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the performance targets that have been set for the Forest Service for the financial year 2001-02. (AQW 3679/00)

Ms Rodgers: The following Key Targets have been set for the Forest Service for 2001-2002:

- To achieve 700 hectares of new planting in public and private sectors combined.
- To offer for sale 360,000 m³ of timber.
- To achieve 440,000 paying visitors.
- To maintain the forest estate under sustainable management.
- To approve (or reject) 90% of applications under the Woodland Grant Scheme and Farm Woodland Premium Scheme within 8 weeks of receipt of a properly completed application form.
- To pay, following planting, 90% of grant claims within 8 weeks of receipt of a properly completed claim form.
- To publish a NI Forestry Strategy.
- To achieve an out-turn which meets the targeted net cost of the forestry programme.
- To achieve 3% efficiency gains.
- To control DRC and programme expenditure to within 1% shortfall of the final control totals.
- The Forest Service Business Plan for 2001-2002 will be placed in the Assembly Business Office at a later date.

Rivers Agency: Performance Targets 2001-02

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the performance targets that have been set for the Rivers Agency for the financial year 2001-02. (AQW 3680/00)

Ms Rodgers: The following Key Targets have been set for the Rivers Agency for 2001-2002:

- To construct or refurbish 2.25 km of urban flood defences.
- To accommodate increased storm run-off from 77 hectares of development land.
- To replace /refurbish 2.9 km of dangerous culverts.
- To complete identified maintenance works on 960 of the 1187 designated open watercourses included

in the Notice of Annual Maintenance as part of a 6-year scheduled maintenance programme.

- To issue substantive replies to 80% of written enquiries within 15 working days of receipt.
- To respond to 98% of Schedule 6 applications within 3 months.
- To control programme expenditure to within 0.5% shortfall of the final control total.
- To control DRC expenditure to within 1% shortfall of the final control total.
- The Rivers Agency Business Plan for 2001-2002 will be placed in the Assembly Library at a later date.

CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Grants to the Voluntary and Community Bodies

Ms Morrice asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail all grants paid to voluntary and community bodies by his Department and its NDPBs in the financial year 2000-01. (AQW 3485/00)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McGimpsey): The information needed to respond to these questions adequately is not readily available and is currently being sought from our NDPBs. I therefore propose to respond fully to you as soon as the information becomes available.

I trust you find this acceptable.

Grants to the Voluntary and Community Bodies

Ms Morrice asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail all current schemes under which grants are paid by his Department and its NDPBs to the voluntary and community sector. (AQW 3486/00)

Mr McGimpsey: The information needed to respond to these questions adequately is not readily available and is currently being sought from our NDPBs. I therefore propose to respond fully to you as soon as the information becomes available.

I trust you find this acceptable.

Soccer Strategy

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to the Creating a Soccer Strategy for Northern Ireland report, to give his assessment of the implications for intermediate, junior and youth football in Northern Ireland. (AQW 3586/00)

Mr McGimpsey: The 'Creating a Soccer Strategy for Northern Ireland' initiative, which I announced last October, has been guided by an Advisory Panel made up of expertise covering a broad range of football interests. I expect to receive the Advisory Panel's report in September, and this report will form the basis of a draft Soccer Strategy for Northern Ireland which I will publish for widespread consultation.

Before receiving the Panel's report, I am not in a position to give an assessment of its implications. I fully expect, however, that the report will be a comprehensive one, dealing with all issues affecting all levels of the game.

As you know from my answer to AQW 1479, all football interests have been involved in the Soccer Strategy process, including the consultation exercise at the outset.

Strangford Lough Angling

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the steps being taken to provide angling guides and courses in the area of Strangford Lough. (AQW 3632/00)

Mr McGimpsey: Your question touches on a number of departmental responsibilities, principally the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, but as angling falls loosely within my remit I have accepted it for reply.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) produces separate Game and Coarse Angling Guides for Northern Ireland. (Copies of these are available on request). In addition NITB is also acting as facilitator in the development of four regional angling guides which will cover game, coarse and, where applicable, sea angling in the four regions South East, South West, North East and North West. The existing and proposed guides are and will be marketed extensively by NITB.

I have no plans to introduce angling courses as this does not fall within my Department's remit. Nevertheless I will investigate whether it would be possible to run angling or ghillie training courses at schools or colleges.

Soccer Strategy Review

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to give his assessment of the impact the Soccer Strategy Review will have on the quality of football throughout Northern Ireland. (AQW 3656/00)

Mr McGimpsey: The 'Creating a Soccer Strategy for Northern Ireland' initiative, which I announced last October, has been guided by an Advisory Panel made up of expertise covering a broad range of football interests. I expect to receive the Advisory Panel's report in September, and this report will form the basis of a draft Soccer Strategy for Northern Ireland which I will publish for widespread consultation.

The aim of producing the soccer strategy is to put in place a plan for the future development of the game in Northern Ireland. It is intended that the Strategy will help to address the difficulties facing the game, particularly at senior level, and restore it to a successful and thriving sport, having regard to modern ideas and standards. I believe that by planning now for the future, we can expect to see improvements in the quality of the game, at all levels throughout Northern Ireland.

EDUCATION

Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships Plan

Mr Gibson asked the Minister of Education if, at the forthcoming Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers, he will put forward proposals to increase the funding of the Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships Plan. (AQW 806/00)

The Minister of Education (Mr M McGuinness): I have no responsibility for the Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships Plan. This is a matter for the Ministers responsible for the Department for International Development and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London who jointly fund the scheme which is managed by the Commonwealth Scholarships Commission and administered by the Association of Commonwealth Universities.

Administrative Data Sets

Dr O'Hagan asked the Minister of Education to list the administrative data sets held by the department and its Agencies and detail whether these data sets provide qualitative data at enumeration district, electoral ward level, by District Council area or by Parliamentary Constituency. (AQW 1239/00)

Mr M McGuinness: All Northern Ireland Civil Service Departments maintain a range of records on their staff for the purposes of carrying out their functions as employers. Many of the records for individual members of staff are held on computerised systems which are managed by the Department of Finance and Personnel on behalf of Departments and their respective Agencies. These records include personnel, payroll and training records, applicant records for recruitment competitions and superannuation records for retired civil servants. Such records are not managed in a way which routinely provides data sets by enumeration district, electoral ward, District Council or Parliamentary Constituency.

Teachers Branch/Teachers Superannuation Branch maintain a teachers/retired teachers database on behalf

of the employers, namely ELBs and CCMS. These records include personnel, payroll and superannuation records for retired teachers. Up-to-date home address details are held for all teachers/pensioners currently on the payroll (except for Voluntary Grammar school teachers). Such records are not managed in a way which routinely provides data sets at the levels referred to above.

However, the following data sets are held in such a way as to enable the production of qualitative data at enumeration district, electoral ward level, by District Council area or by Parliamentary Constituency.

- Pre-School Education Expansion Programme
- Annual School Census
- Annual School Leavers' Survey
- Annual School Performance Survey
- Transfer Procedure results
- Key stage Assessment results
- Data sources which include post codes as part of the address can be aggregated to all specified geographical units subject to the requirement to respect the confidentiality of the data subject.

“Moving On” Programme

Ms McWilliams asked the Minister of Education to give his assessment of European funded programmes such as Youth Action Northern Ireland's Moving On and to confirm if it is his intention to adopt similar programmes here. (AQW 1492/00)

Mr M McGuinness: I understand that the “Moving On” programme run under the auspices of Youth Action Northern Ireland provided assistance to young mothers to encourage and support them in returning to training or employment. I would support any programme which assists those disadvantaged in our society but the adoption of such programmes is not a matter within the responsibility of my Department.

Pre-School Cohort: Finvoy and Ballymoney

Mr Leslie asked the Minister of Education to detail (a) the estimated size of the pre-school cohort in the area between Finvoy and Ballymoney (b) the proportion of this cohort for whom pre-school facilities are being provided in the current school year and (c) the proportion of this cohort for whom pre-school facilities are expected to be provided in the next school year.

(AQW 3428/00)

Mr M McGuinness: This area lies within the North-Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB). The NEELB Pre-School Education Advisory Group's method-

ology for allocating additional places under the Pre-School Education Expansion Programme involves the clustering of electoral wards and the area between Finvoy and Ballymoney falls into two separate ward clusters. These are the Dunloy, Cloughmills, Vow, Killoquin Lower and Killoquin Upper ward cluster and the Fairhill, Seacon, Route, Dervock, Benvardin and Newhill ward cluster. It is not, therefore, possible to provide the information on the basis requested.

However, in the first ward cluster the pre-school cohort is 135. In the current school year places are available for 50% of the cohort and this will rise to 89% in the 2001-02 academic year. In the second ward cluster the pre-school cohort is 168 and in the current school year places are available for 84%. In 2001-02 this level will rise to 90%.

Non-Attendance Data

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail (a) the number of persistent non-attendance pupils in primary and post primary schools (i) per Board area (ii) per school for each of the last five academic years and (b) what steps he is taking to achieve a 50% reduction in these figures. (AQW 3438/00)

Mr M McGuinness: My Department does not have the information sought. Data about non-attendance will be collected in aggregated form from the Education and Library Boards starting with the 2000/01 school year. Schools refer pupils who are persistent non-attenders to the Education and Library Board for follow up by the Education Welfare Service. The action taken will depend on the individual circumstances of the pupil.

My Department's current New Targeting Social Need Action Plan contains a target to have reduced by 30%, at the end of the 2002/2003 school year, the number of pupils identified as persistent non-attenders compared to the number in 1998/99.

Administration Costs

Mr M Murphy asked the Minister of Education to detail what financial and other support is available for small schools to assist with administration. (AQW 3452/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The cost of administration in schools is met from each school's delegated budget. Formulae contain a specific 'small schools' factor which provides a lump sum allocation for such schools to use as they wish. In some cases, schools use such resources to provide teaching cover to release the Principal from a full-time teaching commitment in order to undertake activities associated with the management of the school.

Killard House Special School

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of children from the SEELB area who were unsuccessful in obtaining places for special needs education at Killard House Special School in Newtownards. (AQW 3474/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Initially there were no places for eight children at Killard House Special School, Newtownards, in September 2000 but two of these obtained places in the school later in the year. At the moment the school does not have places for four children in September 2001. The needs of those children unable to obtain places are catered for by the provision of classroom assistance and additional support by peripatetic teachers in mainstream schools until a place becomes available.

Children Excluded from School

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of looked after children excluded from school in the year 2000-01. (AQW 3475/00)

Mr M McGuinness: My Department does not collect information about the number of looked after children excluded from school.

Children Excluded from School

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of children excluded from school in the year 2000-01. (AQW 3476/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The information sought will not be available until the end of September but will be sent to the member at that time.

Guidance to Voluntary and Community Sector Regarding Grants

Mr B Bell asked the Minister of Education to detail the guidance his Department and its NDPBs give to voluntary and community bodies, on accessing, using and accounting for grants from public monies. (AQW 3477/00)

Mr M McGuinness: I will arrange for information in respect of all current schemes and guidance to be placed in the Assembly library.

Grants to the Voluntary and Community Bodies

Mr B Bell asked the Minister of Education to detail all grants paid to voluntary and community bodies by his Department and its NDPBs in the financial year 2000-01. (AQW 3478/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Grants paid by my Department and its NDPBs to voluntary and community bodies in the financial year 2000-01 are as detailed below:-

1. GRANTS PAID BY THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Downpatrick Scout Hall	£1,588.82
Omagh Boys and Girls Club	£300,000.00
Long Tower Centre	£48,509.09
Holy Family Youth Club	£4,693.72
St Bernadette's Scouts/Guides	£168.75
Boys' Brigade Belfast Battalion	£4,010.78
Pushkin Prizes Trust	£25,000
All Set	£4,000
Brownlow	£11,239
Bryson House	£21,421
Challenge for Youth	£57,655
Children's Project NI	£17,287
Christian Education Movement	£27,182
Churches Peace Education Programme	£59,660
Co-operation Ireland	£16,343
Community Relations in Schools	£61,329
Corrymeela Community for Reconciliation	£44,648
Council for Education in World Citizenship	£32,521
Harmony Community Trust	£81,584
History Makers	£8,469
Horizon Project	£5,400
Kilbroney Centre	£21,940
Kilcranny	£29,334
Lurgan YMCA	£29,620
National Trust	£88,000
National Union of Students/Union of Students Ireland	£67,596
Navan Centre	£35,000
Northern Ireland Children's Enterprise	£12,500
Northern Ireland Children's Holiday Scheme	£67,720
Northern Ireland Youth Forum	£20,000
Parents and Kids Together	£12,247
Peace People	£20,833
Positive Ethos Trust	£61,053
Reach Across	£9,224
School Aid Romania	£10,000
Speedwell Trust	£80,949
Warrington Project	£55,497
Workers' Education Association	£36,000
YMCA - Belfast	£36,343
Youth Sport Omagh	£187,280
JEDI	£61,742
YMCA Ireland	£11,140

2. GRANTS PAID BY THE EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARDS

- Youth Service Grants: These are too numerous to list here. I will arrange for the information to be placed in the Assembly Library.
- Community Relations Grants: The information is not yet available. It will be provided as soon as possible.

3. GRANTS PAID BY YOUTH COUNCIL FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Army Cadet Force Association	£1,445
Boys' & Girls' Clubs NI	£54,568
Boys' Brigade NI	£75,293
Catholic Guides of Ireland	£28,408
Church Lads & Girls' Brigade	£3,180
Contact Youth	£21,156
Corrymeela	£20,851
Duke of Edinburgh's Award	£23,597
Girls' Brigade NI	£66,833
Guide Association	£55,050
International Voluntary Service	£23,819
Mencap	£26,862
Nat Council YMCA	£94,287
NI Deaf Youth Association	£3,662
NI Scout Council	£61,225
Youth Forum	£72,668
Ocean Youth Club	£9,256
PHAB	£45,125
Play Resource Warehouse	£12,713
Playboard	£51,873
St John Ambulance	£10,016
Scouting Ireland (CSI)	£34,975
Share	£33,533
Voluntary Service Belfast	£18,310
Young Farmers' Clubs Ulster	£51,913
YouthAction NI	£183,407
Youthlink NI	£83,933
YouthNet	£72,503
Church of Ireland Youth Dept	£4,800
Girls' Brigade	£4,000
Guide Association	£1,500
International Voluntary Service	£5,000
Public Achievement	£3,500
Scout Association	£5,000
UNESCO	£3,000
NI Scout Council	£15,000
YouthAction NI	£28,000
Youth Initiatives	£18,000
NI Youth Forum	£12,875
Church of Ireland Youth Council	£18,000
Voluntary Service Belfast	£12,500
IMAYC	£14,000
Contact Youth	£15,000

YouthNet	£10,000
Youthlink NI	£8,000
Gingerbread NI	£9,000
Cathog	£5,000
Share Discovery '80 Ltd	£4,000
Mencap	£15,000
Peace People	£15,000
Children's Law Centre	£15,000
YMCA	£15,000
Young Farmers	£10,000
Future Voices	£10,000
Girls' Brigade	£4,000
Childline	£15,000
Action Mental Health	£5,000
Play Resource Warehouse	£10,000
Nexus Institute	£15,000
PHAB	£15,000
Facelift	£90,000
Boys' Brigade	£3,000
Boys' & Girls' Clubs	£4,775
VSB Young Citizens in Action	£4,978
YMCA	£4,300
Young Farmers' Clubs of Ulster	£7,400
Youth Action NI	£8,800
Youth Initiatives	£3,000
Youth Link NI	£14,617
Youth Net NI	£12,000

4. GRANTS PAID THROUGH THE ARTS COUNCIL FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Drama and Dance	
Reply Theatre Company	£95,000
Big Telly Theatre Company	£43,500
Youth Drama	£18,000
The Dance Collective	£11,000
Dance Incentive Scheme	£4,000
Scottish Ballet Masterclass Series	£2,000
Music and Opera	
Performance by young persons	£5,000
Traditional Arts	
The Armagh Rhymers	£43,000
Traditional Dance	£7,000
Literature	
Verbal Arts Centre	£3,500
Ulster Scots Youth Project	£4,000

5. GRANTS PAID UNDER THE EUROPEAN PROGRAMME FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION - PEACE 1

A. GRANTS PAID DIRECTLY BY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Caengael	£10,000
Camogie	£4,516

Cinemagic Children's Film Unit	£10,336
Counselling in Schools	£13,552
Counselling Outreach to Schools	£9,239
CPNI Follow-up Project	£1,800
Faith in Schools' Web Site	£5,505
Falls Women's Centre	£1,500
Gaeloiliuint	£12,250
Guides - Peace House Programme	£5,000
Harmony Community Trust	£17,400
Simon Community	£12,016
Speedwell - School's Liaison Project	£25,661
Verbal Arts - Artemis Project	£18,000
Verbal Arts Language Enhancement Programme	£13,172
Vine Study Support Centre	£14,250
VINE Summer School and Beyond	£7,652
Vision 2000	£9,660
Wheelworks	£24,000
Youth Initiatives	£14,862
Bowtown Community Youth Club	£22,500
Dromore Inter-Church Drop-in Centre	£14,209
Dunamanagh Youth Centre	£66,307
Guides - Peace House Programme	£8,265
Holy Trinity Youth Centre	£26,747
Larne YMCA	£106,793
5th Portadown BB	£10,241
The Prince's Trust Volunteers	£6,354
Rosario Youth Club	£351,502
Scout Council	£118,096
Verbal Arts Centre	£27,697
Vision 2000	£1,199

B. GRANTS PAID THROUGH YOUTHNET

Belfast United FC	£1,408.00
Canopy	£27,592.13
CBSI	£5,936.96
Culterann McAdam Ofiaich	£13,862.68
Irvinestown Drama	£228.00
NI Forum	£900.00
Ozone Unattached Youth Project	£2,321.27
Springhill Community Assoc	£1,240.99
St James Forum	£2,420.00
St John Bosco Regional Club	£200.00
Trinty Church Youth Club	£4,200.00
Winsor Womens Group	£21,964.00
Modern Arts Co-Operative	£3,166.00
Suffolk Strategy Group	£900.92
123 House	£10,084.79
Ardmonagh	£7,791.30
Ardoyne	£600.00
Armoy	£12,352.72
Ballynafeigh	£14,711.57
Bangor YMCA	£9,156.65

Beechmount	£6,659.24
Boys' & Girls' Clubs	£13,769.91
Boys' Brigade	£2,527.00
Bridge Monkstown	£2,960.00
C'Fergus YMCA	£682.05
Carntogher	£168.29
CBSI	£2,545.91
Centre Care	£222.40
Chinese Welfare	£4,322.04
Cullybackey	£3,000.00
Cumann Larscoile	£13,443.57
Derry Travellers	£1,452.76
Drumcree	£11,291.45
Dundrum	£4,530.22
Eglinton	£6,000.00
Fermanagh Shadow	£2,707.70
First Step	£5,516.60
Fountain Street	£13,059.00
GFI Wah Hep	£450.14
GFI Warehouse	£1,790.16
GFI YouthQuest	£600.00
Glen Parent	£10,065.00
Holy Trinity	£125.50
Include Youth	£4,116.55
Intercomm	£16,459.00
Kaiors D	£2,000.00
KGm	£7,334.10
LL&T	£6,194.05
Larne YMCA	£2,060.85
Learmount	£1,402.14
Ligoniel	£6,455.00
Link	£904.87
Lisanelly	£20,975.85
Loughshore	£5,523.85
Markethill	£13,474.75
Methodist Church	£10.00
Moyola	£8,454.56
Newhill	£15,866.43
NI Deaf	£16,764.01
Niacro	£5,964.18
NICE	£2,720.90
North Belfast	£1,310.42
North Lurgan	£3,200.00
Oasis	£5,000.00
Off the Street	£7,000.00
Old Warren	£390.00
Omagh Boys & Girls	£15,205.95
Ozone	£4,766.00
Peace People	£9,000.00
Powerhouse	£13,942.36
Shankill Y Womens	£4,321.00
South Armagh	£10,161.49

Sparks in the Dark	£3,000.00
Sprit of Enniskillen	£12,232.27
St James' Forum	£5,799.26
Stadium	£5,643.02
Star Neighbourhood	£725.76
Streetbeat	£9,284.18
Taughmonagh	£6,226.68
Thematics YouthAction	£18,860.75
Thematics Rural	£4,000.00
Tidy Theatre	£1,887.00
Townsend Street	£15,750.00
Tullyalley	£6,041.30
Upper Andersonstown	£18,145.00
Vine	£13,491.78
Wave	£3,374.62
Westrock	£8,154.56
Woodvale	£2,000.00
YouthAction	£12,078.30
Youthlink	£8,692.02

Grants paid to Voluntary and Community Sector

Mr B Bell asked the Minister of Education to detail all current schemes under which grants are paid by his Department and its NDPBs to the voluntary and community sector. (AQW 3479/00)

Mr M McGuinness: I will arrange for information in respect of all current schemes and guidance to be placed in the Assembly library.

Grants paid to Voluntary and Community Sector

Mr B Bell asked the Minister of Education to detail all grants of £100,000 or more made by his Department and its NDPBs to voluntary and community bodies in the financial year 2000-01. (AQW 3480/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The following grants of over £100,000 have been made by my Department:-

Youth Action	£211,407
Omagh Boys' and Girls' Club	£300,000
Poleglass Youth Centre	£172,191
Larne YMCA	£106,793
Rosario Youth Club	£351,502
Scout Council	£118,096

Graduates gaining employment in Teaching

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of new graduates coming from teaching

related degrees or courses and who successfully went on to gain jobs in the year 1999-2000 at (a) primary school level and (b) secondary school level. (AQW 3526/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The data for 1998/99 BEd and Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) graduates are not yet available. The latest year for which data are available is 1997/98. For that year, of those for whom information was available, 91.9% found employment as follows:

- 235 in the primary sector
- 298 in the post primary sector
- 7 in further education
- 7 in special education
- 4 teaching English as a foreign language abroad
- 3 in study centres and peripatetic teaching
- 1 in a university
- 42 in institutions of unknown type.

At May 2001 Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment statistics show that 23 newly qualified teachers were registered as seeking teaching posts.

Ratio of Computers to Pupils

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister of Education to list, by constituency, the ratio of computers to students at both primary and secondary level education and to distinguish them as being either controlled, maintained or integrated schools. (AQW 3527/00)

Mr M McGuinness: As the current level of provision of computers for students is a matter for individual schools the information requested is not held centrally.

The Classroom 2000 project will, by March 2003, provide for all primary and secondary schools a managed service comprising computer infrastructure, connectivity and educational content. The ratio of computers to pupils provided by Classroom 2000 will be as follows:

Key Stage 1	1:14
Key Stage 2	1:10
Key Stage 3	1:9
Key Stage 4	1:7
Years 13 & 14	1:6.5
Special Schools	1:5

Employment Data on Teachers

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of full-time male and female teachers, by constituency, currently teaching and the age brackets to which they belong, differentiating between controlled, maintained and integrated systems at both (a) primary school level and (b) secondary school level. (AQW 3530/00)

Mr M McGuinness: I have arranged for the information requested to be placed in the Assembly Library.

Payment of Threshold Allowances

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education to give his assessment as to whether the scheme for the payment of threshold allowances to teachers is best funded centrally. (AQW 3547/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Teachers who pass the threshold assessment move onto a new upper pay scale giving an immediate pay increase. Pay increases relating to the 2000-01 and 2001-02 financial years are being centrally funded. Consideration is being given to the most appropriate funding mechanisms for future years and no decisions have yet been reached.

Central Funding of Teaching Costs

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education to give his assessment of the benefits to schools if teacher costs were to be funded centrally. (AQW 3548/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Comments have been invited on this issue as part of the consultation on the LMS common funding formula.

If teacher costs were funded centrally this would be likely to require a return to a centralised staffing formula and development of arrangements for determining the organisational structure within each school.

In such a situation the Board of Governors would no longer have responsibility for determining staffing complements and would have less flexibility in terms of the organisational structure. Some schools may view this as a benefit but, undoubtedly, others would take the contrary view.

Payment of Threshold Allowances

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education to make it his policy that teacher threshold payments will continue to be centrally funded beyond this current financial year. (AQW 3549/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Teachers who pass the threshold assessment move onto an upper pay scale with a consequent pay increase. Those pay increases are being centrally funded in the 2000-01 and 2001-02 financial years. Consideration is being given to the most appropriate funding mechanisms for future years and no decisions have yet been reached.

Teacher Redundancies

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of teacher redundancies over the last two years that were directly linked to a budgetary shortfall in schools. (AQW 3550/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Decisions on redundancies are made by the relevant employing authorities. The Department of Education subsequently processes redundancy payments at the request of the Education and Library Boards and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools. During the 1999/2000 financial year the Department processed a total of 274 redundancy payments to teachers. In 2000/2001 this figure was 360. As the Department is not given the reasons for these redundancies it is not possible to say if any were directly linked to schools' annual budget allocations.

Reading Recovery

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education what assessment he has made in relation to the recent research into longitudinal evaluation of reading recovery in Northern Ireland conducted by the Department of Primary Education, University of Strathclyde, and whether he could confirm that schools are in a position to maximise the benefits of this scheme. (AQW 3557/00)

Mr M McGuinness: This research, together with earlier research, provides a full evaluation of the impact of Reading Recovery. The detailed findings on how the delivery of Reading Recovery can be improved will be considered as part of a review of the literacy strategy currently being implemented. The finding that schools have difficulty funding Reading Recovery will be

directly addressed by the injection of £6.3 million of Executive Programme Funds over the next three years.

Killard House Special School

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education to ensure that children within the SEELB area can receive their special-needs education at Killard House Special School in Newtownards. (AQW 3567/00)

Mr M McGuinness: As I explained to you in my letter dated 6 July, following the Supply Debate, this school has accommodation problems which cannot easily be rectified. However, places are available at Longstone Special School, Dundonald, for secondary school age pupils with moderate learning difficulties, unable to obtain a place in Killard. Those primary school age pupils with speech and language difficulties in a similar position, receive classroom assistance and outreach teaching from Killard in primary schools until places become available in the school.

Unsatisfactory Teaching Reports: Secondary Level Teachers

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of secondary level teachers who received unsatisfactory teaching reports from the Education and Training Inspectorate in each of the last five years for which figures are available, and to provide a breakdown of the figures for each year by subject taught in each Board area. (AQW 3587/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The table below sets out the information requested.

	1996/97	1997/98	1998/99	1999/2000	2000/2001
BELB		1 English 1 Geography 1 Irish			1 Technology and Design 1 English
SELB	1 English 1 Geography 1 Technology and Design	2 Technology and Design	1 Technology and Design 1 Science 1 History	1 Technology and Design	1 Science
WELB	1 Home Economics	1 Science 1 Technology and Design	1 English/RE	2 Science 1 Technology and Design 1 Art and Design	1 Science 1 Geography 2 Technology and Design
SEELB			1 Art and Design 1 Physical Education 1 Technology and Design	1 Special Needs	1 History
NEELB	1 Technology and Design 1 Art and Design	1 Science	1 Art and Design	3 Science 1 Mathematics 1 English	1 History 1 Art and Design
Total	6	8	8	11	10

Capital Expenditure on Schools

Ms McWilliams asked the Minister of Education to detail the level of capital expenditure on schools in each of the last five years. (AQW 3625/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Capital expenditure on schools by Education and Library Boards and capital grants paid to voluntary and grant-maintained integrated schools in each of the last five years is set out below.

1996/97	1997/98	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01
£64.201m	£68.177m	£80.291m	£76.004m	£96.264m

Castle Gardens School, Newtownards: Traffic Control Measures

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education to detail what traffic control measures the SEELB will be taking to ensure the safety of children at the new Castle Gardens School in Newtownards. (AQW 3650/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The South-Eastern Education and Library Board has assessed the need for a School Crossing Patrol at or on the route to the new Castle Gardens school and concluded that there is no requirement at this time. This assessment was carried out in consultation with the Department of the Environment, who have agreed that there are no exceptional road safety hazards. The Board will, however, monitor the situation in the new school term to assess the traffic flow and the possible future need for a School Crossing Patrol.

Special Educational Need Funding

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Education to give his assessment of the current special needs component within the overall funding allocation to schools. (AQW 3674/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The Special Needs component is a key element in my Department's Targeting Social Need policy. None of the existing means of allocating Special Educational Need funding is suitable for use within the proposed common funding formula for schools and I have set out a number of proposals for change in my consultation document on the Common Funding Formula which was published on 5th April. I am proposing that funding allocations should take account of educational need as measured by Key Stage 2 results but I hope that all interested parties will take the opportunity to contribute to this important aspect of the debate.

Special Educational Support Services

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Education to give his assessment of the effectiveness of special educational support services to assist individual pupils and schools

that must be accommodated within the overall resources available to each education board. (AQW 3675/00)

Mr M McGuinness: The Education and Training Inspectorate is responsible for assessing the effectiveness of teaching in the Education and Library Boards' special education support services (Peripatetic Teaching Services and Outreach Services from special schools) through the normal inspection arrangements. Inspections have taken place in recent years on the Belfast, North Eastern and Southern Boards' Peripatetic and Western Board's Outreach Services. I will place a copy of these inspection reports in the Assembly Library.

Educational Psychologists

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Education to detail his plans to increase the provision of educational psychologists within the education system. (AQW 3676/00)

Mr M McGuinness: Prior to the 1999/2000 academic year my Department had transferred funds to the Education and Library Boards to enable them to support five teachers on the M Sc in Educational Psychology course at Queen's University, Belfast, each year. From 1999/2000 additional funding was allocated to the Boards to enable eleven teachers per year to be trained and to increase the level of support available to each trainee. My Department will be discussing the future demand for educational psychologists with the Boards in the Autumn.

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Grants to the Voluntary and Community Sector

Mr Carrick asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail all current schemes under which grants are paid by his Department and its NDPBs to the voluntary and community sector. (AQW 3444/00)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Sir Reg Empey): NITB operates a number of financial assistance schemes which are open to applicants across Northern Ireland including the voluntary and community sector. At present the only schemes currently being administered are; the Tourism Development Scheme (TDS), the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) and the NITB Events Support Scheme.

LEDU's primary involvement in the community sector is through the funding of the Community Business Programme. Total investment in this during the year 2000-2001 was £1.03 million.

Grants to the Voluntary and Community Sector

Mr Carrick asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail all grants of £100,000 or more made by his Department and its NDPBs to voluntary and community bodies in the financial year 2000-01.

(AQW 3445/00)

Sir Reg Empey: In the financial year 2000-2001 3 grants of £100,000 or more administered by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) were offered to voluntary and community bodies amounting to £944,200.00. A schedule of these is detailed at Annex A.

In the financial year 2000-2001 the Ulster Community Investment Trust (UCIT) was provided with £1 million of LEDU funding.

DFP on how they (UCIT) can use and account for the money received. They also have an operating plan giving procedures for monitoring and clawback. LEDU have also recently had an evaluation of their (UCIT) activities carried out which has provided recommendations for operational enhancements. These have been adopted by the UCIT Board.

In terms of the Community Business Programme (funded by LEDU) there is a community business operations manual which provides guidance on eligibility criteria, and establishes accounting requirements.

Grants paid to Voluntary and Community Bodies

Ms Morrice asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade

NITB SELECTIVE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE AWARDED TO VOLUNTARY/COMMUNITY SECTOR PROJECTS 2000/2001

Project Title	Fund	Project Cost	Eligible Cost	Grant	Offer Issued	Sector
Giant's Causeway and Bushmills Railway	TDS	£1,500,000.00	£935,000.00	£105,000.00	23-Oct-00	Community/Voluntary
Bushmills Hostel	SSPPR	£1,143,500.00	£1,143,500.00	£325,000.00	05-Apr-00	Community/Voluntary
Belfast Youth Hostel Extension	TDS	£1,454,393.00	£1,354,318.00	£514,200.00	14-Apr-00	Community/Voluntary
Total				£944,200.00		

TDS - Tourism Development Scheme

SSPPR - Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation

Guidance to Voluntary and Community Bodies regarding Grants

Ms Morrice asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the guidance his Department and its NDPBs give to voluntary and community bodies, on accessing, using and accounting for grants from public monies.

(AQW 3482/00)

Sir Reg Empey: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) operates a number of financial assistance schemes which are open to applicants across Northern Ireland including the voluntary and community sector. At present the only schemes currently being administered are the Tourism Development Scheme (TDS), and the NITB Events Support Scheme. When an applicant is applying for financial assistance the NITB provides them with the necessary Guidelines and application form before the formal process begins. Each individual case for financial assistance is assessed, considered and approved/rejected against this published criteria.

Ulster Community Investment Trust (UCIT) have a Financial Memorandum drawn up by the Local Enterprise Development Unit (LEDU) and agreed with

and Investment to detail all grants paid to voluntary and community bodies by his Department and its NDPBs in the financial year 2000-01.

(AQW 3483/00)

Sir Reg Empey: In the financial year 2000-2001 of the schemes administered by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) a total of thirty grants amounting to £634,274.32 were paid to voluntary and community groups. These are detailed in Annex A.

The Local Enterprise Development Unit's (LEDU) primary involvement in the community sector is through the funding of the Community Business Programme. Total investment in this during the year 2000-2001 was £1.03 million. The programme is provided on LEDU's behalf by a managing agent, and delivered by six delivery agents across Northern Ireland. A breakdown is attached in Annex B.

In addition, the Ulster Community Investment Trust (UCIT) was established to fund community based projects. LEDU investment in this during 2000-2001 was £1million.

The Department's Energy Division paid a total of £210,406.00 in the financial year 2000 – 2001. These are detailed in Annex C.

ANNEX A: PAYMENTS ISSUED TO VOLUNTARY/COMMUNITY SECTOR PROJECTS 2000-2001

Project Title	Amount Paid	Fund	Sector
An Creggan Visitor Centre	£40,819.65	TDS	Voluntary/Community
Giant's Causeway & Bushmills Railway	£88,288.05	TDS	Voluntary/Community
Carrickfergus Gasworks Development	£33,548.91	EU TSP	Voluntary/Community
Downpatrick Railway Museum	£3,287.16	EU TSP	Voluntary/Community
Giant's Causeway/Bushmills Railway	£314,993.45	EU TSP	Voluntary/Community
RPSI – Steam Locomotive Restoration	£4,533.95	EU TSP	Voluntary/Community
Kingfisher Trail Marketing	£13,647.47	Interreg II	Voluntary/Community
Mourne Activity Breaks	£37,638.43	Interreg II	Voluntary/Community
Ti Chulainn – Marketing	£6,851.92	Interreg II	Voluntary/Community
Ti Chulainn Cultural Activity Centre	£29,636.33	Interreg II	Voluntary/Community
55 th Battle of the Atlantic Millennium Commemorations	£1,000.00	Events	Voluntary/Community
Ballymena International Schoolboys Soccer Tournament	£1,529.00	Events	Voluntary/Community
Belfast City Cup	£700.00	Events	Voluntary/Community
Belfast Festival at Queen's	£15,000.00	Events	Voluntary/Community
Belfast Open House Festival	£1,000.00	Events	Voluntary/Community
Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival	£1,500.00	Events	Voluntary/Community
Cinemagic 2000	£4,700.00	Events	Voluntary/Community
Donaghadee Festival	£800.00	Events	Voluntary/Community
Feile an Phobail	£20,000.00	Events	Voluntary/Community
Fila Foyle Cup	£1,500.00	Events	Voluntary/Community
Lady of the Lake Festival	£500.00	Events	Voluntary/Community
Millennium Celebrations	£5,000.00	Events	Voluntary/Community
Newtownabbey Millennium Cup Challenge	£300.00	Events	Voluntary/Community
Northern Ireland Milk Cup	£3,500.00	Events	Voluntary/Community

Project Title	Amount Paid	Fund	Sector
O'Dochartaigh Reunion	£500.00	Events	Voluntary/Community
St Patrick's Carnival	£2,000.00	Events	Voluntary/Community
Tommy Makem International School of Song	£1,500.00	Events	Voluntary/Community
Total	£634,274.32		

TDS - Tourism Development Programme

EU TSP - European Union Tourism Sub Programme

Interreg II - European Union Programme Money

Events - Northern Ireland Tourist Board Events Support Scheme

ANNEX B: COMMUNITY BUSINESS PROGRAMME

Programme Management Fee	£ 70k
Delivery Agent Fees:	£440k
External Programme Appraisal	£ 15k
Payments to Community Businesses	£504K

ANNEX C

Project Title	Amount Paid	Fund	Sector
The Women's Centre	£17,250.00	Energy Challenge	Community/Voluntary
Castlewellan Regeneration Ltd	£10,980.00	Energy Challenge	Community/Voluntary
Regeneration of South Armagh	£3,500.00	Energy Challenge	Community/Voluntary
Loughgiel Community Association	£93,018.00	Energy Challenge	Community/Voluntary
Greysteel Community Enterprises	£24,085.00	Energy Demonstration Scheme	Community/Voluntary
Derry Theatre Trust	£42,587.00	Energy Demonstration Scheme	Community/Voluntary
Devenish Partnership Forum	£18,986.00	Energy Challenge	Community/Voluntary
Total	£210,406.00		

Competition Policy

Dr Birnie asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if he will be consulted as part of the UK wide changes to consumer and competition policy recently announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

(AQW 3553/00)

Sir Reg Empey: Competition policy is a reserved matter, on which the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) leads for the UK as a whole. My officials are in contact with DTI and have been advised that DTI will be consulting fully with the devolved administrations

about the range of measures announced by the Chancellor on 18 June.

Invest Northern Ireland (INI)

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the benefits of a Single Development Agency in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 3608/00)

Sir Reg Empey: There are two aspects to the benefits which will be derived from the setting up of Invest Northern Ireland (INI). First, it is acknowledged that there are areas of duplication of functions and services between the existing agencies. Setting up a new single agency will lead to more clarity and easier access for customers and the provision of services more efficiently.

Secondly, the needs of the Northern Ireland economy and the demands of the global economy have changed significantly in recent years. In keeping with Strategy 2010 and consultation feedback on my proposals, a new approach to economic development is required. Invest Northern Ireland will be a more focused and nimble organisation, with an ethos which draws on the best of the public and private sector approaches. As a board with executive authority, it will be able more quickly and efficiently to adapt its services to the needs of the local business community and of the ever-more-rapidly-changing global marketplace.

Action Plan for the Textiles and Clothing Industry

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 3430/00, whether the Kurt Salmon Associates (KSA) Action Plan for the Textiles and Clothing Industry is available to the general public and what action will be taken in each constituency as a result of this Report.

(AQW 3668/00)

Sir Reg Empey: The Kurt Salmon Associates (KSA) Action Plan for the Textiles and Clothing Industry was presented to senior industry managers, support organisations and academia on 26 January 2001. The launch of the Action Plan followed a series of workshops and consultation meetings with industry representatives. As part of this process copies of the KSA presentation were given to all attendees and additional copies have been provided by e-mail on request to interested parties.

The Action Plan emphasised the industry's need to work closely with Government, through the Industrial Development Board, and support agencies, including NITA, the Northern Ireland Textiles and Apparel Association. IDB has facilitated a team of industrialists, legal and banking representatives to take forward the establishment of an industry-led company as set out in the KSA Action Plan.

IDB continues to work closely with textile and clothing companies and the industry bodies to implement the recommendations of the KSA Report. IDB already has a number of initiatives in place, which are not specific to any geographic area of Northern Ireland, to develop the five key themes outlined in the KSA Report.

Shankill Task Force

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail how many people have been appointed to the Shankill Taskforce which his Department is jointly sponsoring.

(AQW 3669/00)

Sir Reg Empey: The Minister for Social Development, Maurice Morrow, and myself announced the setting up of Task Forces for West Belfast and the Greater Shankill areas of Belfast.

This action was taken in response to the continued high levels of unemployment that continue in both areas in spite of their proximity to areas of economic growth.

The Task Forces' role is to focus on economic issues although we recognise the social impact of unemployment. It is important that the Task Force is action focussed therefore the membership needs to be manageable and represent the key economic sectors.

The Terms of Reference identified membership of between 12 - 15 people and the Shankill Task Force consists of 13 people along with local political representatives.

If in the future development of the Task Force important gaps are identified the Chairmen and our officials will make representation to the Minister for Social Development and myself for further nominees for the Task Force.

Shankill Task Force

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail how many people have been submitted for membership of the Shankill Taskforce and on which a decision is yet to be taken on whether they will or will not be appointed.

(AQW 3670/00)

Sir Reg Empey: Officials from the two departments, local politicians and the Chairmen approached a number of people representing the sectors identified in the Terms of Reference as having the most impact on the economic problems of the area.

All of those nominated for the Task Forces have been appointed.

Shankill Task Force

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail how many people have been

submitted for membership of the Shankill Taskforce and have been rejected by his Department. (AQW 3671/00)

Sir Reg Empey: None

ENVIRONMENT

Grants paid to Voluntary and Community Sector

Mr Carrick asked the Minister of the Environment to detail all grants paid to voluntary and community bodies by his Department and its NDPBs in the financial year 2000-01. (AQW 3461/00)

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Foster): The details are as follows:

IN 2000/2001 THE FOLLOWING GRANTS WERE PAID: -

1. Road Safety	
Road Safety Council of Northern Ireland	£76,000
Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents	£50,000
Disability Action	£20,000
Total	£146,000
2 Environment & Heritage Service	
Ulster Wildlife Trust	£137,167
Conservation Volunteers (NI)	£72,664
NSPB	£47,648
Wild Fowl and Wetlands Trust	£35,824
N.I Environment Link	£37,920
Woodland Trust	£30,000
NI2000	£10,000
Fieldfare Trust	£12,500
NI Bat Group	£2,026
Creggan Education Research Ltd	£13,919
Mourne Heritage Trust*	£39,233
Forest of Belfast	£8,000
Countryside Recreation	£6,000
Countryside Activities and Access Network*	£50,025
South Lough Neagh	£4,287
Regeneration Association	
Butterfly Conservation (NI)	£223
Copeland Bird Observatory	£250
Byword Communications	£2,000
Bat Conservation Trust	£1,500
NI Countryside Staff Association	£92
Various Schools	£6,594
National Trust	£519,085
Total	£1036,957

3 Planning

The Planning Service made grants to voluntary and community bodies during 2000/01 as follows:

Disability Action	£152,940
Community Technical Aid	£120,000
Downpatrick Property Trust (Saintfield)	£43,501
Downpatrick Property Trust (Downpatrick)	£100,282
Caledon Regeneration Partnership	£69,170
The Palatine Trust	£75,110
Omagh Heritage Initiative	£40,000
Lisburn Development Ltd	£60,000
Draperstown Partnership Ltd	£19,793
Randalstown Arches Association	£21,645
Newtownstewart Development Association	£20,000
Total	£722,442
Overall Total	£1905,379

Guidance to Voluntary and Community Sector regarding Grants

Mr Carrick asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the guidance his Department and its NDPBs give to voluntary and community bodies, on accessing, using and accounting for grants from public monies.

(AQW 3462/00)

Mr Foster: The details are as follows:

1. Road Safety

(a) Road Safety Council of Northern Ireland

Each year the Department sets measurable objectives and invites the Council to submit estimates to enable it to achieve them. In considering the estimates provided, the Department takes account of the Council's progress in achieving the previous year's objectives together with the audited accounts detailing how the previous year's grant was spent. The Council is also required to provide to the Department a detailed report of the number of competitors and people attending the various competitions and events held. In keeping with the Department's commitment to policy review, the work of the Road Safety Council is reviewed every 4/5 years to ensure that the Council's activities enhance the work of the Department and represent value for money.

(b) Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA)

The Department's annual grant to RoSPA is to provide administrative support for the Road Safety Council of Northern Ireland. The Agreement between the Department and RoSPA requires that at least 85% of road safety staff time be spent supporting the work of the Council while the remaining time

may be spent promoting RoSPA's other road safety interests in Northern Ireland. The support is monitored and reviewed in conjunction with the Road Safety Council of Northern Ireland.

(c) Disability Action

Each year, Disability Action is required to provide to the Department audited accounts and a report detailing how the previous year's grant was spent and its proposals for the incoming year's grant.

2. Environment & Heritage Service (EHS)

Information on grant-aid is available on the EHS web site and grant packs are available on request. Some potential recipient organisations have grant- applications on disk. Staff are also available to give advice in person, by telephone, or in writing.

In some cases the organisations' annual work programme is discussed with them and grant-aid is paid on the basis of an agreed programme. Information on grants paid by EHS is included in our Annual Report.

3. Planning

Disability Action and Community Technical Aid receive funding on an annual basis and have done so for many years. Consequently they need no guidance on "accessing" their grants. Their letters of offer stipulate the type of expenditure which the funding is permitted to cover and also sets out what they must provide by way of accounting for grants (e.g. payslips, P11s budgets, annual accounts, rental agreements etc.).

The main funder of Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) grants is the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) (at least 50%). Groups who qualify for THI grant aid from HLF then apply to DOE Planning Service for up to 25% funding. HLF supply a "Monitoring Document and Procedural Guide" to assist groups in applying for, drawing down, and monitoring funding. In addition to this, Planning Service advises groups of the necessary evidence to support payments by way of a letter of indicative offer issued to each group at the start of the financial year.

Schemes under which grants are paid to Voluntary and Community Sector

Mr Carrick asked the Minister of the Environment to detail all current schemes under which grants are paid by his Department and its NDPBs to the voluntary and community sector. (AQW 3463/00)

Mr Foster: The details are as follows:

1. Road Safety

The Department makes an annual grant to the Road Safety Council of Northern Ireland. The grant enables

the Council and its 31 affiliated road safety committees to encourage, promote and facilitate road safety activities at local/community level and thereby enhance the road safety activities of the Department. In addition, the Department makes an annual grant to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA), a registered charity, which provides the Secretariat to the Council.

An annual grant is also made to Disability Action, a registered charity, to part fund its Mobility Centre. The Centre provides driver assessment for elderly and disabled people and advice on how vehicles might be adapted to meet impaired capabilities.

2. Environment & Heritage Service

Grants are paid to Voluntary Bodies under the following Legislation:

- Natural Heritage Grants: paid under the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (NI) Order 1985 for running costs, research, publications, equipment, species management, and habitat improvements.
- Access to the Countryside Grants: to improve public access for enjoyment of the countryside under the Access to the Countryside (NI) Order 1983, mainly paid to District Councils.
- Historic Buildings Grants: grants for the repair and maintenance of listed buildings under the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991, mainly paid to individual owners.

3. Planning

Grants are paid to the community sector under the Townscape Heritage Initiative and to Disability Action and Community Technical Aid in the voluntary sector.

Grants paid to Voluntary and Community Bodies

Mr Carrick asked the Minister of the Environment to detail all grants of £100,000 or more made by his Department and its NDPBs to voluntary and community bodies in the financial year 2000-01. (AQW 3464/00)

Mr Foster: In 2000-01 the following grants of £100,000 or more were paid:

ROAD SAFETY

Nil

2. ENVIRONMENT & HERITAGE SERVICE

Ulster Wildlife Trust	£137,167
National Trust	£519,085
Total	£656,252

3. PLANNING

The Planning Service made grants to voluntary and community bodies during 2000/01 as follows:

Disability Action	£152940
Community Technical Aid	£120000
Downpatrick Property Trust (Downpatrick)	£100,282
Total	£373,222
Overall Total	£1029,474

Article 31 of the Planning (NI) Order 1991

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of applications under Article 31 of the Planning (NI) Order 1991 that have been lodged by developers in the Ards Borough Council area in each of the last three years. (AQW 3470/00)

Mr Foster: Applications are not submitted under Article 31 of the Planning (NI) Order 1991. It is the role of my Department to determine whether the development for which approval is being sought satisfies any of the criteria described in Article 31 (1) of the Order, and if so, to apply the special procedure described in the Article for processing the application.

The number of applications lodged to which my Department has applied the Article 31 procedure in each of the last three years in the Ards Borough Council area is as follows:

1998/99	10
1999/2000	6
2000/2001	3

Article 31 of the Planning (NI) Order 1991

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of developers who have submitted applications under Article 31 of the Planning (NI) Order 1991 in the east of Newtownards town in each of the last three years. (AQW 3471/00)

Mr Foster: Applications are not submitted under Article 31 of the Planning (NI) Order 1991. It is the role of my Department to determine whether the development for which approval is being sought satisfies any of the criteria described in Article 31 (1) of the Order, and if so, to apply the special procedure described in the Article for processing the application.

The number of developers who have submitted applications to which my Department has applied the Article 31 procedure in each of the last three years, in the east of Newtownards Town, is as follows

1998/1999	2
1999/2000	2
2000/2001	2

Both applications submitted in 1998/1999 have since been withdrawn. East of Newtownards Town has been defined as from Bangor Road, Newtownards to Portaferry Road, Newtownards.

Display of Election Posters

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to a letter, REF PLA 1/2/198/99, issued by Planning Service on 22 June 2001, to detail what actions he has taken against those in breach of regulation 4(2) and schedule 2 class F of the Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations (NI) 1992.(AQW 3559/00)

Mr Foster: My Department first wrote to political parties on 5 June 2001, 2 days before the 7 June elections. This letter set out the statutory regulations for the display of election posters, including the requirement that they must be removed within 14 days of the close of the relevant poll, in this case 21 June 2001. Further reminders were sent out on 22 June and 2 July. Most posters would now appear to have been removed, but there are still some remaining. Experience has shown that the best way to proceed in this area is by seeking the co-operation of the various parties, instead of resorting to formal enforcement action. I am very hopeful that the remaining posters will be removed, but my officials will continue to monitor the situation.

Article 31 of the Planning (NI) Order 1991

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (a) the time-scale for the processing of applications under Article 31 of the Planning (NI) Order 1991, and (b) how pressure groups can have representation at appeals. (AQW 3571/00)

Mr Foster:

- (a) For those planning applications to which Article 31 of the Planning (NI) Order 1991 has been applied and which reached a final decision during the 2000 – 2001 financial year, the average time taken to process applications from applying Article 31 to a formal decision was 141 weeks.

However, the Member will wish to note this figure needs to be interpreted with care, as it includes a wide range of variation in the processing times of these complex and often, by their very nature, contentious planning applications. There are 3 different routes for progressing these major applications, namely a Public Inquiry; a Notice of Opinion (NOP) to approve; or NOP to refuse.

The majority of Article 31 applications are determined by the NOP route. Of the 27 decisions reached during 2000-2001, 12 proceeded by an NOP to approve and took 135 weeks on average to process; 7 followed an NOP to refuse, taking an average 137 weeks to reach a final decision. The remaining 8 applications required a Public Inquiry and took on average 189 weeks to be determined.

If a Public Inquiry or a Hearing on a NOP to Refuse is required, the Department requests the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) to undertake them and to provide a report. The time taken between a request to the PAC for an inquiry or hearing and receipt of the PAC report, can range from 36 – 64 weeks.

Another important factor influencing the timescale for determining major applications is the time taken by applicants to submit outstanding information necessary to determine the application, including Retail and Traffic Impact Assessment. Other factors which affect performance include the timely submission of environmental information, public consultation and consideration by key consultees, which is generally outside my Department's control. Judicial review proceedings also lead to delay in the issue of decisions, which again is outside the control of my Department.

As indicated in the Programme for Government I have asked Planning Service to review systems for operational planning policy, development planning and development control. This includes the Article 31 process.

- (b) As with all planning applications my Department alerts local residents of the proposed development by advertising in the local newspapers and through the neighbour notification scheme. Concerns raised are fully considered prior to deciding the best way forward either by public inquiry or the notice of opinion route. Interested parties are also informed when applications are designated under Article 31 and are again invited to comment at that stage.

Those parties who have made representations on Article 31 applications are notified by the PAC of the Public Inquiry or Hearing into Notice of Opinions and have the opportunity to make representations. The PAC will consider all such representations made to it before reporting and making recommendations to my Department.

Planning Service: Backlog of Planning Applications

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment to detail what money has been spent on the additional staff overtime in the Planning Service to deal

(a) with the backlog of planning applications and (b) with the backlog of applications which require a Public Inquiry under Article 31 of the Planning (NI) Order 1991. (AQW 3576/00)

Mr Foster: It is estimated that £152K of additional overtime was worked on the backlog of planning applications in 2000/01.

The Planning Service's financial systems do not, however, separately record the overtime worked specifically on applications to which Article 31 of the Planning (NI) Order 1991 is applied or on any other type of application.

Abandoned Vehicles

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of vehicles that were (a) abandoned in each district council area; and (b) served with a seven day notice in 1999-00 and 2000-01. (AQW 3601/00)

Mr Foster: This information is not held centrally by my Department since responsibility for dealing with abandoned vehicles is a matter for district councils. While there is no statutory duty on councils to maintain records relating to abandoned vehicles, I understand that some councils do keep such records which can be made available.

Abandoned Vehicles

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of vehicles that were removed and disposed of following the receipt of a seven day notice in each district council area in 1999-00 and 2000-01. (AQW 3602/00)

Mr Foster: This information is not held centrally by my Department since responsibility for dealing with abandoned vehicles is a matter for district councils. While there is no statutory duty on councils to maintain records relating to abandoned vehicles, I understand that some councils do keep such records which can be made available.

Abandoned Vehicles

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has any plans to amend the current procedures relating to abandoned vehicles. (AQW 3603/00)

Mr Foster: I have no plans at present to amend the current legislation in relation to abandoned vehicles.

However, I am aware that some councils do have concerns about some aspects of the current procedures and would be happy to consider any representations which may be made to me on the matter. Any proposal for

changes in the legislation would, of course, be subject to the availability of resources in my Department, to securing a place in the Executive's legislative programme and to the other demands on legislative time in the Assembly.

Lapwing Park, Newtownards

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the steps being taken to preserve the woodland directly behind Nos 33-55 Lapwing Park, Teal Rocks, Newtownards. (AQW 3635/00)

Mr Foster: The woodland, to the rear of Nos 33 – 55 Lapwing Park, is part of a larger site that is the subject of two planning applications, currently under consideration by my Department. Both planning applications have been accompanied by an Environmental Statement and Concept Plan. The Concept Plan provides for the retention of the woodland. In this context the woodland is not perceived to be under threat and it would be Planning Service's intention, if the applications are to be approved, to attach a condition which would ensure the retention of the woodland.

Policy CC12: Belfast Urban Area Plan 2001

Dr Birnie asked the Minister of the Environment to explain how Policy CC12, High Buildings (Belfast Urban Area Plan 2001) has been applied in the case of recent and forthcoming developments in the Waterfront and Victoria Square areas. (AQW 3643/00)

Mr Foster: The Planning Service applies Policy CC12 – High Buildings (Belfast Urban Area Plan 2001) to all major city centre developments.

Regular discussions take place between Planning Service officials and developers to ensure that the city centre is protected from inappropriate development, sometimes resulting in amended proposals to reduce the height of proposed buildings.

As regards proposed development in the Waterfront area, there is close liaison between the Planning Service and Laganside Corporation. In the case of the applications close to the Waterfront Hall, there has been considerable consultation with the developers to ensure that the significant buildings in the area, namely the Royal Courts of Justice and the Waterfront Hall, are not overwhelmed.

The application for Victoria Square is at a very early stage, and the details of the scheme have yet to be fully considered. The impact that the new development might have on surrounding buildings and streets will be a material planning consideration.

Architectural Design

Dr Birnie asked the Minister of the Environment to explain how his Department acts to promote the highest quality of architectural design in new building.

(AQW 3644/00)

Mr Foster: The appearance of proposed development in relation to its surroundings is a matter to which my Department gives very careful consideration when determining planning applications.

The purpose of the Belfast Urban Area Plan 2001, 'Policy CC4-City Centre Heritage', is to conserve the architectural heritage and historic townscape of the Belfast Urban Area. In addition, Policy SP18 of 'A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland' states that "Proposals for development should respect their character and sense of place" and "New development should be well designed and relate satisfactorily to the townscape setting".

My Department has recently published Planning Policy Statement 6, entitled "Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage". This sets out the purpose and policies of Conservation Areas and Areas of Townscape Character, and also, the current policies for the conservation of the built heritage. Any new building in these areas must be of high quality design, taking account of its surrounding context.

Outside these designated areas, my Department does not wish to be too prescriptive about architectural style, as it is important to allow for individual expression. Here my Department is concerned more with contextual concerns regarding height and massing of buildings, and the relationship between buildings and the general public realm.

As part of the preparation of the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan, which covers Belfast, Carrickfergus, Castlereagh, Lisburn, Newtownabbey and North-Down Council Areas my Department will soon be employing consultants to prepare an Urban Design Strategy. The purpose of this study will be to provide:

Strategic design guidance with particular emphasis on key and /or sensitive parts of each area. The guidance will include recommendations on height and massing of buildings, building lines, the relationship between buildings and the relationship between buildings, streets, open space and the general public realm. It will also include advice on the appropriateness of high buildings in identified areas; and

An analysis of local character making reference to historical context, urban grain, street pattern, building blocks, height and massing of buildings, architectural style, building lines, views, public space, patterns of movement, landscape, topography and nature of uses and activities.

Belfast City Centre: Traditional Buildings Materials

Dr Birnie asked the Minister of the Environment to explain how planning policy ensures that the materials used in new Belfast city centre developments (including colour and texture) are in sympathy with the traditional materials used in older buildings. (AQW 3645/00)

Mr Foster: Belfast City Centre possesses a substantial heritage of Victorian and Edwardian buildings, the retention and promotion of which is an important planning aim. The Belfast Urban Area Plan 2001 contains 'Policy CC4-City Centre Heritage' the purpose of which is to conserve this architectural heritage and historic townscape.

In addition, my Department recently published Planning Policy Statement 6, "Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage". This sets out the policies of Conservation Areas and Areas of Townscape Character, and also, the current policies for the conservation of the built heritage. Any new building in these areas must be of high quality design, taking account of its surrounding context.

Within Belfast City Centre, three Conservation Areas have been designated. They are 'The City Centre', 'The Linen Area' and 'The Cathedral Area'. Any new building proposals in these areas must be of high quality design, requiring external materials to respect those of existing buildings.

Preparatory work has also begun on the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan, which covers Belfast City Centre. This process will provide an opportunity for a review of existing Conservation Areas and Areas of Townscape Character, and also for new designations.

Outside these designated areas, my Department does not wish to be too prescriptive about architectural style, as it is important to allow for individual expression. Here my Department is concerned more with contextual concerns regarding height and massing of buildings, and the relationship between buildings and the general public realm.

As part of the preparations of the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan, which covers Belfast City Centre, my Department will soon be employing consultants to prepare an Urban Design Strategy for this area. The purpose of this study will be to provide:

Strategic design guidance with particular emphasis on key and /or sensitive parts of each area. The guidance will include recommendations on height and massing of buildings, building lines, the relationship between buildings and the relationship between buildings, streets, open space and the general public realm. It will also include advice on the appropriateness of high buildings in identified areas; and

An analysis of local character-making reference to historical context, urban grain, street pattern, building

blocks, height and massing of buildings, architectural style, building lines, views, public space, patterns of movement, landscape, topography and nature of uses and activities.

Planning Service: Acute Hospitals Review Group

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of the Environment pursuant to AQW 3433/00, to detail the input of Planning Service to the Acute Hospitals Review Group concerning the general planning implications of a new hospital development in the South West. (AQW 3677/00)

Mr Foster: Following a request from the Acute Hospitals Review Group, a meeting was held with Planning Service staff in March 2000. The Group was seeking views regarding the development of a new acute hospital facility in Irvinestown, County Fermanagh, to serve the needs of the South West. Subsequent to this meeting a report was forwarded by Planning Service to the Group on the planning implications of this proposal.

This report highlighted that the following matters would be pertinent considerations in assessing such a proposal: the local development plan; other planning documents such as the Regional Development Strategy and Planning Policy Statements; the health case associated with development at this location; equality issues, human rights and new TSN; and other matters such as infrastructure, and the views inter alia of the local district councils and the general public.

The report by Planning Service did not make any recommendation regarding this or any other location for the siting of a hospital to serve the needs of the South West.

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Comparative Productivity Levels

Dr Birnie asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to give his assessment of current productivity levels (output per worker) in manufacturing and other sectors in Northern Ireland compared to the rest of the UK and other parts of the western world.

(AQW 3552/00)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan): The most appropriate measure for assessing comparative productivity levels is Gross Domestic Product per hour. Up-to-date sectoral measures of productivity by region are not readily available. Therefore, the data presented here refer to all sectors of the economy. Table 1 shows, for 1999, the relative position of Northern Ireland compared to the UK and other GB

regions. Table 2 shows, for 1999, the position of the UK relative to a number of other countries.

TABLE 1 PRODUCTIVITY MEASURES BY REGION (1999)

GDP per total hours worked (UK=100)	
United Kingdom	100.0
North East	93.7
North West	94.6
Yorkshire and the Humber	92.3
East Midlands	95.3
West Midlands	90.3
East	107.1
London	116.7
South East	106.5
South West	90.4
Wales	92.8
Scotland	100.9
Northern Ireland	83.5

Source: Office for National Statistics

TABLE 2 INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS OF PRODUCTIVITY¹

GDP per hour worked (UK=100)	
United Kingdom	100
Italy	132
USA	126
France	123
Germany	114
Canada	114*
Japan	93*

Source: Department of Trade & Industry; 1999 figures except * where 1998

¹ Data on hours worked for European countries are taken from the Spring European Labour Force Survey. To improve comparability the methodology takes usual hours worked and adjusts for time off due to sickness, training, industrial disputes, and other non-holiday reasons for time-off. A further adjustment is then made on the amount of holiday taken by employees using information available from Eurostat. For non-EU countries, the hours worked data are sourced from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Quarterly Labour Force Surveys (QLFS).

Departmental Running Costs

Dr Birnie asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to give his assessment of the impact on total Departmental running costs of the new Departmental structure created in 1999. (AQW 3555/00)

Mr Durkan: The last full year for which information is held for the pre-devolution departmental structure is 1998-99. In that year departmental running cost (DRC) provision was £585.2m. The comparable planning figure for the new structures for 2000-01 was £628.4m, and we provided £681.0m for 2001-02 in the Budget as approved in December 2000.

The bulk of the difference between the figures for 1998-99 and 2000-01 represents uplifts to cover pay increases over the gap of two years. The larger increase in 2001-02 also reflects the growing workload that is being taken forward by departments to fulfil the objectives of the Programme for Government, and to service fully the new institutions.

NICS Expenditure

Ms McWilliams asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the total expenditure by the Northern Ireland Civil Service in 2000-01 on (a) air fares and (b) subsistence expenses. (AQW 3621/00)

Mr Durkan: The total expenditure by the Northern Ireland Civil Service in 2000-01 on air fares and subsistence expenses was as follows:-

Air fares	£3,245,677
Subsistence expenses	£2,447,366

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Bids Lodged

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to confirm if any bids from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety were received for (a) a new maternity hospital (b) £12m for the strategic development of the Ulster Hospital Trust and (c) cancer services. (AQW 3627/00)

Mr Durkan: In relation to 2002/3 a bid of £8m has been lodged to cover a range of regional services including cancer services. A bid of £10m has also been lodged in respect of capital expenditure including the redevelopment of the Ulster Hospital. Specific bids were also received for 2001/2 as follows:-

- No bids were received for a new maternity hospital.
- Under the Executive Programme Funds a bid of £11/11/10m to cover the years 2001/02 to 2003/04 was lodged for the redevelopment of the Ulster Hospital. A total of £0.5/3/6.5m was allocated.
- In the 2000 Spending Review, a bid of £11/14/16m for cancer services (again for 2001/02 to 2003/04) was lodged of which £6/7.1/8.2m was successful. Under the Executive Programme Funds a bid of £0.27/0.14/0.04m was also made for an Information Sharing System for cancer services of which all but £50k administration costs in the first year were met.

Regional Rate Revenue 2000-01

Ms McWilliams asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the sum raised by the regional rate in

2000-01 and how much extra would be raised in 2001-02 if the following percentage increases had been applied to domestic and commercial properties in each of the following NAV quartiles: lowest quartile - 3%, second quartile - 6%, third quartile - 12% and top quartile - 20%.

(AQW 3628/00)

Mr Durkan: The estimated regional rate revenue to be raised in 2000-01 was £292m.

It is not possible to detail the exact sum raised by the regional rate until the total rate revenue raised has been apportioned between the regional rate element and the district rate element in the course of the current year. If the following regional rate percentage increases had been applied in 2001-02 to domestic and non-domestic properties in each of the following NAV quartiles: lowest quartile - 3%, second quartile - 6%, third quartile - 12% and top quartile - 20%, an additional £7.2m approximately would have been raised by the domestic regional rate and £29.2m approximately by the non-domestic regional rate.

Gap Funding Applications

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of successful Gap funding applications per constituency. (AQW 3638/00)

Mr Durkan: On the basis of the information supplied to me by SEUPB and Departments, the number of successful Gap Funding applications to date per constituency is as follows:-

Constituency	No of Approved Applications
Belfast East	29
Belfast North	69
Belfast South	58
Belfast West	84
East Antrim	23
East Londonderry	19
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	38
Foyle	73
Lagan Valley	16
Mid Ulster	27
Newry and Armagh	39
North Antrim	22
North Down	6
South Antrim	13
South Down	18
Strangford	15
Upper Bann	23
West Tyrone	34

The process is still ongoing and decisions remain to be taken on a number of the applications received.

Executive Office in Brussels

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to state the source of the £300,000 capital funding which was made available to the Executive Office in Brussels. (AQW 3646/00)

Mr Durkan: In the course of the June Monitoring round additional allocations, including the capital funding for the Executive Office in Brussels, in the amount of £63m were made. These allocations were funded from a number of sources – End Year Flexibility from 2000-01, additional resources from the Treasury and savings declared by departments. It is not possible to link individual allocations to specific sources.

Civil Servants: Absenteeism

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the average levels of absenteeism within each of the NICS Departments. (AQW 3658/00)

Mr Durkan: The information sought is only readily available for non-industrial civil servants. The table below reflects the actual percentage rate of absence for non-industrial civil servants in terms of available working days lost for the 2000/2001 financial year. Comparable statistics for industrial civil servants are not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

2000/ 2001 Financial Year	
Department	Percentage of Available Working Days Lost
DSD	8.4
DHFETE	8.1
DOE	6.6
DHSSPS	5.8
DARD	5.5
DE	7.1
DETI	5.6
DCAL	6.7
DRD	5.5
DFP	5.8
OFMDFM	4.4

Rates of Absenteeism in Public and Private Sector

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the average level of absenteeism within (a) the public sector and (b) the private sector

during each of the last five years for which figures are available. (AQW 3659/00)

Mr Durkan: The Department of Finance and Personnel holds figures relating to the Northern Ireland Civil Service only. I have provided you with details relating to the NICS – please see AQW 3658/00.

Gap Funding

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number and amount of Gap funding that has been awarded by district council area and the nature of the award. (AQW 3662/00)

Mr Durkan: On the basis of information supplied to me by the SEUPB and Departments, the number and amount of Gap Funding that has been awarded to date by District council area is as follows:-

Council Area	Number of Applications Approved	Amount Approved
Antrim	3	£59,605.20
Ards	12	£90,416.00
Armagh	19	£324,487.08
Ballymena	9	£75,680.16
Ballymoney	7	£43,156.00
Banbridge	4	£61,660.00
Belfast	227	£3,624,371.76
Carrickfergus	7	£102,796.97
Castlereagh	5	£112,102.60
Coleraine	7	£74,592.40
Cookstown	14	£811,255.38
Craigavon	21	£300,837.90
Derry	72	£1,091,966.15
Down	15	£151,053.04
Dungannon	12	£215,816.00
Fermanagh	22	£305,946.42
Larne	11	£144,046.00
Limavady	12	£147,890.00
Lisburn	25	£325,076.13
Magherafelt	14	£99,189.80
Moyle	9	£95,257.23
Newry & Mourne	26	£381,692.15
Newtownabbey	11	£104,319.50
North Down	6	£80,008.13
Omagh	18	£238,204.97
Strabane	18	£235,299.50

The process is still ongoing and decisions remain to be taken on a number of the applications received. To detail the nature of each individual award is an extensive exercise and outweighs the result. However,

the overall nature of all the awards for Gap Funding is directly related to the Aims and Objectives, of the new PEACE II Programme.

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Drugs: Enbrel and Remicade

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 3199/00, to define (a) what is meant by a “gradual introduction” of these drugs and (b) what is the cut off point which determines “moving beyond gradual introduction”.

(AQW 3457/00)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms de Brún):

- (a) As further studies are required to ascertain the efficacy of these drugs in the longer term, it is essential that their use is strictly monitored and controlled. The decision to promote a cautious approach to the introduction of the drugs, and to have their introduction carefully monitored and controlled, of necessity means that some patients have commenced treatment with the drug while some have not. As such, their introduction is gradual.
 - (b) Any decision to move beyond the gradual introduction of these drugs will take account of emerging evidence of efficacy and available resources.
- (a) Mar go bhfuil tuilleadh staidéir de dhíth le héifeachtacht na ndrugaí seo a fháil amach san fhadtéarma, tá sé riachtanach go ndéantar monatóireacht ar agus go stiúrtar a n-úsáid go docht. Ciallaíonn an cinneadh le cur chuige cúramach do thabhairt isteach na ndrugaí seo a chur chun cinn, go ndéantar monatóireacht ar agus go stiúrtar a n-úsáid go docht, gur thosaigh roinnt othar cóiréail leis na drugaí seo agus roinnt othar eile nár thosaigh. Mar sin de, tá a dtabhairt isteach céimseach.
- (b) Glacfaidh cinneadh ar bith le dul chun cinn níos mó ná tabhairt isteach chéimseach na ndrugaí seo, fianaise éifeachtachta ag teacht astu agus acmhainní ar fáil, san áireamh.

Drugs: Enbrel and Remicade

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 3199/00, to detail (a) from whom she is awaiting expert advice and (b) what steps have been taken to promote the introduction of Enbrel and Remicade. (AQW 3458/00)

Ms de Brún:

- (a) My Department is continually assessing the published evidence on these new drugs and has also recently received evidence jointly submitted by rheumatologists and Arthritis Care. My senior officials are maintaining regular contact with specialists in this field and with the Health and Social Services Boards and will take account of any guidance produced by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) later this year.
- (b) Approximately £500,000 is currently being invested in these drugs in this financial year. All rheumatologists here have had an opportunity to introduce some service users to these drugs.

There have been a number of meetings held here recently to discuss this issue. These have highlighted the need to continue to promote a gradual introduction of these new therapies and I understand that a working group is to be convened in the near future to address some of the issues raised. I am advised that rheumatologists here are participating in an audit of the use of these drugs and my Department will take account of all additional information on effectiveness, including the results of this audit.

- (a) Déanann mo Roinn measúnú leanleannach ar an fhianaise a foilsíodh ar na drugaí nua seo, agus le deireannas fuair sí comhfhianaise a chuir réamaiteolaithe agus Cúram Airtritis faoina bráid. Coinníonn mo chuid feidhmeannach sinsearach I dteagmháil rialta le saineolaithe san ábhar seo agus leis na boird sláinte agus seirbhísí sóisialta; cuirfidh mo chuid feidhmeannach sinsearach san áireamh treoir ar bith a fhoilseoidh an Institiúid Náisiúnta um Fheabhas Cliniciúil níos moille i mbliana.
- (b) Tá thart faoi £500,000 á infheistiú sna drugaí seo sa bhliain airgeadais seo. Bhí deis ag gach uile réamaiteolaí anseo roinnt úsáideoirí seirbhísí a chur ar an eolas faoi na drugaí seo.

Bhí roinnt cruinnithe anseo ar na mallaibh leis an cheist seo a phlé. Chuir siad seo béim ar a thábhachtaí atá sé na teiripí nua seo a thabhairt isteach de réir a chéile, agus tuigim go gcuirfear grúpa oibre le chéile ar ball le dul i gceann cuid de na hábhair a tarraingeadh anuas. Cuireadh in iúl domh go bhfuil réamaiteolaithe anseo ag glacadh páirte in iniúchadh ar úsáid na ndrugaí seo agus glacfadh mo Roinn s'agamsa gach uile eolas breise ar a n-éifeacht chomh maith le torthaí an iniúchta seo san áireamh.

Orthopaedic Waiting List

Mrs Carson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the steps she is

taking to alleviate the Orthopaedic waiting list, currently standing at two and a half years, at Musgrave Park Hospital. (AQW 3487/00)

Ms de Brún: The *Framework for Action on Waiting Lists*, which I issued in September last, set out a strategic context for action on waiting lists. As a result, Boards and Trusts have developed comprehensive action plans which contain a range of measures aimed at improving the efficiency of all stages in the process of hospital treatment.

Additional resources have also been provided and, in the current year, a total of £8 million is available for action on waiting lists. I hope that these measures will have a direct impact on waiting lists for orthopaedic surgery.

Leag An Chreatlach le hAghaidh Gníomhaíochta ar Liostaí Feithimh amach, a d'eisigh mé i Meán Fomhair anuraidh, comhthéacs straitéiseach le haghaidh Gníomhaíochta ar liostaí feithimh. Mar thoradh uirthi seo, d'fhorbair Boird agus Iontaobhais pleananna cuimsitheacha gníomhaíochta ina bhfuil réimse beart dírithe ar fheabhsú éifeachtacht gach céim sa phróiseas cóireála otharlainne.

Soláthraíodh acmhainní breise fosta agus tá £8 milliún san iomlán ar fáil i mbliana le haghaidh Gníomhaíochta ar liostaí feithimh. Tá súil agam go mbeidh tionchar díreach ag na bearta seo ar liostaí feithimh do mháinliacht ortaipéideach.

Qualified Orthopaedic Surgeons

Mrs Carson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of surgeons currently qualified to perform Orthopaedic surgery in Northern Ireland. (AQW 3488/00)

Ms de Brún: Currently, there are 33 consultant orthopaedic surgeons in post here. In addition, there are 18 specialist registrars and 13 senior house officers who may undertake orthopaedic procedures under consultant supervision.

Faoi láthair, tá 33 máinlia ortaipéideach comhairleach ag obair anseo. Ina theannta sin, tá 18 sainchláraitheoir agus 13 oifigeach sinsearach tí ann arbh fhéidir leo modhanna ortaipéideacha a dhéanamh faoi mhaoirseacht lia chomhairligh.

Paramilitary Attacks: Impact on Waiting Lists for Orthopaedic Surgery

Mrs Carson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail whether paramilitary punishment beatings and shootings have had an adverse impact on waiting lists for orthopaedic surgery. (AQW 3489/00)

Ms de Brún: Information is not collected under this category.

Ní bhailítear eolas ar an chatagóir seo.

Breastfeeding Strategy

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the steps she is taking to progress (a) the implementation of the Breastfeeding Strategy for Northern Ireland (b) how many of the recommendations have been implemented (c) what guidance has been issued to Boards and Trusts and (d) what assessments have been carried out regarding its success. (AQW 3490/00)

Ms de Brún: My Department has recently established a Implementation Group to progress the Strategy. It is also intended to appoint a Regional Breastfeeding Co-ordinator to promote and assist in its implementation and to take forward the recommendations. The majority of the 28 recommendations have been implemented or are in the process of implementation. No specific guidance has been issued to Boards or Trusts about the Strategy's recommendations however the Implementation Group comprises representatives from these bodies, as well as from the voluntary sector. The Implementation Group and the Breastfeeding Co-ordinator will assess and monitor progress on the implementation of the recommendations in the Strategy.

Bhunaigh mo Roinn Grúpa Feidhmithe ar na mallaibh leis an Straitéis a chur chun cinn. Táthar ag brath Comhordaitheoir Réigiúnach ar Bheathú Cíche a cheapadh le cuidiú lena cur i bhfeidhm agus lena cur chun cinn chomh maith leis na moltaí a fhorbairt. Cuireadh formhór na 28 moladh i bhfeidhm sin nó tá siad á gcur i bhfeidhm i láthair na huaire. Níor tugadh treoir ar leith do Bhoird nó d'Iontaobhais faoi mholtaí na Straitéise, ach ar an Ghrúpa Feidhmithe tá ionadaithe ó na forais seo agus ón earnáil dheonach chomh maith. Measúnóidh agus déanfaidh an Grúpa Feidhmithe agus an Comhordaitheoir ar Bheathú Cíche monatóireacht ar dhul chun cinn chur i bhfeidhm na moltaí sa Straitéis.

Strategy for Reducing Alcohol Related Harm

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the steps she is taking to progress (a) the implementation of the strategy for reducing alcohol related harm (b) which targets have been met and (c) the cost of such implementation to date. (AQW 3491/00)

Ms de Brún: To ensure coherent and consistent delivery of the aims of the Strategy for Reducing Alcohol Related Harm and the Drug Strategy priority has been given to establishing appropriate implementation structures. Good progress has been made and the Executive recently

approved my proposals for the joint implementation of the two strategies.

The joint model will necessitate a change to the membership and remit of structures such as the Drug Co-ordination Teams. I have already announced that resources will be made available in the current year to enable each of the Teams to recruit an additional worker to help carry the increased workload arising from the alcohol strategy. Qualitative research has also been taken forward among adults who binge drink. The results of this research are being used by the Health Promotion Agency to develop proposals for an information campaign in the current year.

Work towards all of the targets will progress rapidly now that the joint approach has been agreed and once the implementation structures are in place.

The qualitative research was carried out at a cost of £18,000. The main resource implication has been the time commitment, not only from officials, but also by representatives from the voluntary, community and statutory sectors.

Le cinntiú go mbainfí aidhmeanna na Straitéise le Dochar Bainteach le hAlcól a Laghdú agus na Straitéise Drugaí amach go leanúnach agus go rialta, tugadh tosaíocht do bhunú struchtúr fóirsteanach feidhmithe. Rinneadh dul chun cinn maith agus ar na mallaibh, cheadaigh an Feidhmeannas mo mholtaí do chomhchur i bhfeidhm an dá straitéis.

Athróidh an chomhchreatlach ballraíocht agus freagracht struchtúr amhail Foirne Comhordaithe Drugaí. D'fhógair mé cheana féin go gcuirfí acmhainní ar fáil i mbliana le cur ar chumas gach Foireann oibrí breise a earcú le cuidiú leis an ualach oibre breise a iompar a bhéas ann de bharr na straitéise alcóil. Rinneadh taighde cáilíochtúil fosta ar dhaoine fásta a ólann barraíocht. Tá torthaí an taighde seo á n-úsáid ag an Ghníomhaireacht um Chur Chun Cinn Sláinte le moltaí d'fheachtas eolais a fhorbairt sa bhliain reatha.

Rachaidh obair ar bhaint amach na spriocanna ar aghaidh go gasta agus an comhchur chuige anois agus nuair a chuirfear na struchtúir fheidhmithe i gcrích.

Rinneadh an taighde cáilíochtúil ar chostas £18,000. Ba é an phríomhimpleacht acmhainne an tiomantas ama ní amháin ó oifigigh ach ó ionadaithe ó na hearnálacha deonacha, pobail agus reachtúla.

Relenza

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) whether Relenza is available on the Health Service (b) the number of prescriptions issued for its use and (c) the cost to date. (AQW 3492/00)

Ms de Brún: Relenza is available on the Health Service. Since the drug was licensed for use in the treatment of influenza in September 1999 until February 2001, the last date for which information is available, fourteen prescriptions issued by GPs have been dispensed at a cost of £336.

Tá Relenza ar fáil ar an tSeirbhís Sláinte. Ó ceadúnaíodh an druga d'úsáid i gcóireáil ulpóige i Meán Fómhair 1999 go dtí Feabhra 2001, an dáta is déanaí dá bhfuil eolas ar fáil, dáileadh ceithre oideas déag, ordaithe ag Gnáthdhochtúirí, ar chostas £336.

Consultation Documents in the Public Domain

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail those consultation documents issued by her Department that are currently in the public domain. (AQW 3493/00)

Ms de Brún: The following documents are currently in the public domain for consultation:

Report of the Acute Hospitals Review Group

Best Practice, Best Care (A Framework for setting standards, delivering and improving monitoring and regulation in the HPSS)

Tá na cáipéisí seo a leanas faoi bhráid an phobail do chomhairliú faoi láthair:

Tuairisc an Ghrúpa Athbhreithnithe ar Ghéarotharlanna

Sárchleachtadh, Sárchúram (Creatlach do leagan síos caighdeán, do dhéanamh agus d'fheabhsú monatóireachta agus rialacháin sna SSSP).

Public Consultation on Health Services

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) the steps she is taking to ensure that the public is not confused over the number of consultation documents currently in the public domain in relation to the Health Service and (b) what policy is in place to ensure that whatever recommendations arise from consultation documents such as Best Practice - Best Care, and Building the Way Forward in Primary Care, will be fully implemented.

(AQW 3494/00)

Ms de Brún:

- (a) I want to see communities given real opportunities to shape and influence the decisions taken about their services. Involving the public through consultation is therefore key to the future development of those services.

I am unaware of any public confusion over the issues currently being consulted upon in the HPSS.

However, my Department's aim when producing consultation documents is to ensure that they make transparent what issues are being consulted upon; are written in plain language; are clearly set out; and give contact points where people who are unsure can get advice or help in making their views known. My officials also meet with communities to outline what the consultation is about and how the process for responding works.

- (b) As Minister responsible, I must make decisions on whether, and to what extent, proposals arising from consultation procedures should be implemented. In coming to those decisions I take fully into account the views of service users, interested parties and communities at large.

- (a) Is mian liom go dtabharfar deiseanna do phobail tionchar a bheith acu ar na socrúithe déanta ar a seirbhísí, agus iad a bheartú fosta. Mar sin de, tá rannpháirtíocht an phobail trí chomhairliú barrthábhachtach d'fhorbairt na seirbhísí sin sa todhchaí.

Ní fios domh aon mhearbhall bheith ar an phobal faoi na hábhair atá faoi chomhairliúcgán sa tSeirbhís Sláinte. Is í aidhm mo Roinne áfach agus í ag cumadh cáipéisí le haghaidh comhairlithe, le cinntiú go gcuireann siad na ceistanna a bhfuiltear ag dul i gcomhairle orthu in iúl go soiléir, go bhfuil siad scríofa i dteanga shoiléir, leagtha amach go soiléir, agus go dtugann siad eolas ar phointí teagmhála lenar féidir le daoine nach bhfuil cinnte fúthu comhairle agus cuidiú a fháil lena gcuid tuairimí a chur in iúl. Buaileann mo chuid oifigeach le pobail fosta le hachóimre a dhéanamh ar chuspóirí an chomhairlithe agus ar an dóigh a bhfeidhmíonn an próiseas freagartha.

- (b) Ós mé an tAire atá freagrach astu, caithfidh mé cinnidh a dhéanamh ar cé acu a ba chóir nó nár chóir, agus ar a mhéad a ba chóir na moltaí ag teacht as gnáthaimh chomhairlithe a chur i bhfeidhm. Nuair a dhéanfaidh mé na cinnidh sin, glacfaidh mé tuairimí úsáideoirí seirbhísí, páirtithe leasmhara agus pobal i gcoitinne, go hiomlán san áireamh.

Grants paid to Voluntary and Community Bodies

Ms Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail all grants of £100,000 or more made by her Department and its NDPBs to voluntary and community bodies in the financial year 2000-01. (AQW 3497/00)

Ms de Brún: The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety made grants totalling £100,000 or more to the following organisations in 2000/01:

Main Grants Programme	
	£
Northern Ireland Women's Aid Federation	184,665
Relate NI	220,930
Northern Ireland Community Addiction Services	106,093
Northlands	134,943
Blind Centre for Northern Ireland	106,795
Disability Action	129,310
tright Parents and Professional and Autism	126,850
Age Concern	147,685
Northern Ireland Hospice	104,059
Family Care Society	231,012
Gingerbread	112,244
Northern Ireland Pre-school Playgroup Association	239,750
Parents Advice Centre	121,989
Northern Ireland Volunteer Development Association	164,066
Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health	166,950

EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation	
Harpurs Hill Community Early Years Project	259,250
Omagh Early Years Project	192,898

In addition, the Eastern Health and Social Services Board awarded Belfast Healthy Cities a grant totalling £100,000 in 2000/01. No other grants of £100,000 or more were awarded by NDPBs to voluntary or community bodies in that year.

Thug an Roinn Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí deontais de £100,000 san iomlán nó níos mó do na heagraíochtaí seo a leanas i 2000/01:

An Clár Príomhdheontas	
	£
Cónaidhm Chúnaimh Bhan Thuaisceart Éireann	184,665
Relate TÉ	220,930
Seirbhísí Andúile Pobail Thuaisceart Éireann	106,093
Na Tailte Thuaidh	134,943
Ionad Thuaisceart Éireann do Dhaoine Dalla	106,795
Gníomhú ar Mhíchumas	129,310
Tuismitheoirí agus Gairmithe agus Uathachas	126,850
Age Concern	147,685
Ospís Thuaisceart Éireann	104,059
An Cumann Cúraim Teaghlaigh	231,012
Gingerbread	112,244
Cumann Náiolann Réamhscoile Thuaisceart Éireann	239,750
Ionad Comhairle Tuismitheoirí	121,989
Cumann Fhorbairt Saorálaithe Thuaisceart Éireann	164,066

Cumann Thuaisceart Éireann um Shláinte Meabhrach	166,950
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Clár Speisialta Tacaíochta an AE um Shíocháin agus Athmhuintearas	
Tionscadal Túsblhianta Phobal Chnoc Harpur	259,250
Tionscadal Túsblhianta na hÓmaí	192,898

Ina theannta sin, thug Bord Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta an Oirthir deontas de £100,000 san iomlán do Chathracha Sláintiúla Béal Feirste i 2000/01. Níor thug NDPB deontais ar bith eile de £100,000 nó níos mó d'fhorais dheonacha nó phobail sa bhliain sin.

Grants to the Voluntary and Community Sector

Ms Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail all current schemes under which grants are paid by her Department and its NDPBs to the voluntary and community sector.
(AQW 3498/00)

Ms de Brún: There are two main funding schemes through which the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety supports the voluntary and community sector. The Department's main grants programme provides core funding to support the regional infrastructure of a number of voluntary organisations that work in the area of health and social care. The programme can also be used to support these organisations on a project basis. In relation to support for the community activity, EU Structural Funds represent the Department's main channel for supporting the sector.

In addition, Health and Social Services Boards and Trusts provide support to a wide range of local organisations which provide services similar, or related to, the health and personal social services.

Tá dhá phríomhscéim mhaoinithe ann trína thacaíonn an Roinn Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí leis an earnáil dheonach agus phobail. Soláthraíonn príomhchlár deontas na Roinne príomh-mhaoiniú le tacú le bonneagar réigiúnach roinnt eagraíochtaí deonacha a oibríonn sa réimse sláinte agus cúraim shóisialta. Is féidir an clár a úsáid fosta le tacú leis na heagraíochtaí seo ar bhonn scéime. Maidir le tacaíocht do ghníomhaíocht phobail, is iad Cistí Struchtúrtha an AE an príomhbhealach trinar féidir leis an Roinn tacaíocht a thabhairt don earnáil.

Ina theannta sin, tugann Boird agus Iontaobhais Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta tacaíocht do réimse leathan eagraíochtaí áitiúla a sholáthraíonn seirbhísí cosúil leis, nó bainteach leis na seirbhísí sláinte agus sóisialta pearsanta.

Grants paid to Voluntary and Community Bodies

Ms Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail all grants paid to voluntary and community bodies by her Department and its NDPBs in the financial year 2000-01.

(AQW 3499/00)

Ms de Brún: The attached schedule details the grants paid by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to voluntary and community groups in 2000/01.

Details of all grants paid by the Department's NDPBs can only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

DHSSPS GRANTS TO VOLUNTARY & COMMUNITY BODIES 2000/2001

Organisation	Total
Main Grants Programme	
Accord	72,431
Aids Council for Education and Training	44,170
Action Mental Health	86,581
Adopt	4,687
Age Concern	17,500
Age Concern	147,685
Aids Helpline	500
Aids Helpline (NI)	92,325
Alzheimer's Society	33,458
owidctIparAnon Testing	15,677
Association for Residential Care (ARC)	13,800
Aware Defeat Depression	60,000
Away from Home & Safe	8,000
Belfast Carers Centre	25,000
Blind Centre for NI (BCNI)	106,795
British Epilepsy Association (BEA)	9,460
British Fluoridation Society	2,213
British Red Cross	1,761
British Red Cross	2,830
Cara-friend	9,368
Carers National Association	36,000
Cause	15,000
Cedar Foundation	71,070
Challenge	31,652
Child Accident Prevention Trust	28,240
Child Care NI	99,070
Childline	66,650
Children's Law Centre	59,770
Church of Ireland Board of Social Responsibility	33,150
Community Development & Health Network	30,000
Council for Advancement of Communication with Deaf People (CACDP)	21,695
Crossroads	50,921
Cruse	41,000

Organisation	Total
Disability Action	129,130
Down's Syndrome Association (DSA)	30,299
Europe Against Cancer	3,300
Family Care Society	231,012
Family Planning Association	62,491
First Key	32,690
Gingerbread	112,244
Haemophilia Association	8,000
Harmony Community Trust	25,220
Headway	20,000
Help the Aged	21,033
Homestart	21,033
Include Youth	41,634
Institute for Counselling and Personal Development (ICPD)	10,810
LIFE(NI)	16,832
Lifestart	15,000
ME Association	13,838
Mencap	86,100
Meningitis Research	15,000
Mucopolysaccharide	3,075
Multi-Cultural Resource Centre	7,500
Multiple Sclerosis Society	17,670
National Aids Helpline	30,000
National Aids Trust	1,900
National Schizophrenia Fellowship (NSF)	69,585
Neighbourhood Energy Action (Keep Warm Keep Well)	9,750
Nexus	70,443
NI Association for Mental Health (NIAMH)	166,950
NI Chest Heart & Stroke Association	13,000
NI Chest, Heart and Stroke Association	780
NI Community Addiction Services	106,093
NI Council for Ethnic Minorities	1,000
NI Hospice	104,059
NI Music Therapy	16,506
NI Retirement Fellowship	1,445
NICSSA	6,000
Northern Ireland Childminding Association	57,603
Northern Ireland Foster Care Association	69,085
Northern Ireland Pre-school Playgroup Association	239,750
Northern Ireland Women's Aid Federation	184,665
Northlands	134,943
Order of Malta	1,761
Parents and Professionals and Autism	101,450
Parenting Matters	12,000
Parents Advice Centre	121,989
Play Resource Warehouse	14,303
Playboard	40,000
Presbyterian Board of Social Witness	38,699
Rainbow	25,240
Rape Crisis & Sexual Abuse Centre	43,591

Organisation	Total
Relate	220,930
Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents	52,080
Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID)	23,000
Samaritans	12,915
SENSE	19,550
Speechmatters	30,132
St John's Ambulance	1,760
St Vincent de Paul Society	65,586
Twins and Multiple Births Association	12,300
The Male Link	1,000
Threshold	87,085
Traveller Movement Northern Ireland	36,527
justright United Response	75,000
Volunteer Development Agency	164,066
Westcare Business Services	500
Women's Information Group	18,664
Women's Resource & Development Agency	41,854
EU Special Support Programme for Peace & Reconciliation	
Home-Start	15,000
NIPPA Information Unit	12,270
Gaeloiliuint	15,400
Ballybeen Women's Centre, Good Practice Network	29,680
The Dry Arch Centre, Good PracticeNetwork	29,595
Zero-8-Teen	9,158
Clogher Valley Play Group	11,000
Fivemiletown Play Group	8,000
Dara Play Group	5,828
Harpurs Hill Community Early Years Project	259,250
Cloughreagh Play Group, Bessbrook	11,828
Caledon Playgroup	7,473
St. Bernadette's Play Group	5,271
Meigh Play Group, Newry	7,537
Kilrea Play Group	10,000
Little Villagers, Parent & Toddler	176
O'Faich Playgroup, Armagh	5,000
The Earlybird Play Group, Armagh	828
Clady, Tiny Tots Group, Armagh	3,637
Annadale Crescent Residents Association	24,918
Falls Women's Centre	2,942
Green Elves Play Group, Greencastle	59,000
Claudy Community Playgroup	15,000
Rainbow Community Play Group	93,489
Footprints	79,283
Omagh Early Years Project	192,898
Early Years Development Fund	
National Deaf Children's Society	35,250
It's a Start, NICOD	3,000
IYMCA Ireland (Parents and Kids Together)	15,000
Parent's Education as Autism Therapists	25,000
Parents and Professionals and Autism	25,400
Lifestart	46,000

Mionléiríonn an sceideal faoi iamh na deontais íoctha ag an Roinn Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí do ghrúpaí deonacha agus pobail i 2000/01.

Ní féidir sonraí na ndéontas uile íoctha ag NDPBs na Roinne ach ar chostas dhíreireach.

DEONTAIS RSSSP D'FHOAIS DHEONACHA AGUS PHOBAIL 2000/2001

Eagraíocht	Iomlán
Príomhchlár Deontas	
Accord	72,431
Comhairle SEIF um Oideachas agus Oiliúint	44,170
Gníomhú Sláinte Meabhrach	86,581
Uchtú	4,687
Age Concern	17,500
Age Concern	147,685
Líne Chabhrach SEIF	500
Líne Chabhrach SEIF (TÉ)	92,325
An Cumann Alzheimer	33,458
Tástáil Anon	15,677
An Cumann Cúraim Chónaithe (CCC)	13,800
Eolas ar Lionn Dubh agus a Chliseadh	60,000
As Baile agus Slán	8,000
Ionad Feighlithe Bhéal Feirste	25,000
Ionad Daoine Dalla TÉ (IDDTÉ)	106,795
Cumann Titimis na Breataine (CTB)	9,460
Cumann Fluaírinthe na Breataine	2,213
Cros Dhearg na Breataine	1,761
Cros Dhearg na Breataine	2,830
Cara-friend	9,368
An Cumann Náisiúnta Feighlithe	36,000
Cúis	15,000
Fondúireacht Céadair	71,070
Dúshlán	31,652
Iontaobhas Chosc ar Thimpistí Páistí	28,240
Cúram Leanaí TÉ	99,070
Childline	66,650
Ionad Dlí Páistí	59,770
widctparBord Freagrachta Sóisialta Eaglais na hÉireann	33,150
An Gréasán Forbartha Pobail agus Sláinte	30,000
An Chomhairle um Chur Chun Cinn Cumarsáide le Daoine Bodhra (CCCDB)	21,695
Crosbhóithre	50,921
Cruse	41,000
Gníomhú ar Mhíchumas	129,130
Cumann Siondróm Down (CSD)	30,299
An Eoraip in Éadan Ailse	3,300
An Cumann Cúraim Teaghlaigh	231,012
An Cumann Pleanála Teaghlaigh	62,491
First Key	32,690
Gingerbread	112,244

Eagraíocht	Iomlán
An Cumann Haemaifilia	8,000
Iontaobhas Phobal Harmony	25,220
Headway	20,000
Help the Aged	21,033
Homestart	21,033
An Óige San Áireamh	41,634
An Institiúid um Chomhairliú agus um Fhorbairt Phearsanta (ICFP)	10,810
SAOL (TÉ)	16,832
Lifestart	15,000
An Cumann ME	13,838
Mencap	86,100
Taighde Meiningitis	15,000
Mucopolysaccharide	3,075
An tIonad Acmhainní Ilchultúrtha	7,500
An Cumann Ilscéaróise	17,670
Líne Náisiúnta Chabhrach SEIF	30,000
Iontaobhas Náisiúnta SEIF	1,900
An Cumann Náisiúnta Scitsifréine (CNS)	69,585
Gníomhú Comharsanachta Fuinnimh (Coinnigh Te Coinnigh Slan)	9,750
Nexus	70,443
Cumann TÉ um Shláinte Meabhrach (CSMTÉ)	166,950
Cumann Cléibh, Croi agus Stróic TÉ	13,000
Cumann Cléibh, Croi agus Stróic TÉ	780
Seirbhísí Andúla Pobail TÉ	106,093
Comhairle TÉ um Mionlaigh Eitneacha	1,000
Ospís TÉ	104,059
Teiripe Cheoil TÉ	16,506
Cumann Scoir TÉ	1,445
NICSSA	6,000
Cumann Feighle Páistí Thuaisceart Éireann	57,603
Cumann Cúraim Altrama Thuaisceart Éireann	69,085
Cumann Naíolann Réamhscoile Thuaisceart Éireann	239,750
Cónaidhm Chúnaimh Bhan Thuaisceart Éireann	184,665
Na Tailte Thuaidh	134,943
Ord Mhála	1,761
Tuismitheoirí agus Gairmithe agus Uathachas	101,450
Cúrsaí Tuismíochta	12,000
Ionad Comhairle Tuismitheoirí	121,989
Stóras Acmhainní Súgartha	14,303
Playboard	40,000
An Bord Preispitéireach Fianaise Sóisialta	38,699
Tuar Ceatha	25,240
An tIonad Éignithe agus Mí-úsáid Gnéis	43,591
Relate	220,930
An Cumann Ríoga um Chosc ar Thimpistí	52,080
An Institiúid Náisiúnta Ríoga um Dhaoine Bodhra (INRDB)	23,000
Na Samáraigh	12,915
SENSE	19,550
Speechmatters	30,132

Eagraíocht	Iomlán
Seirbhís Otharcharr Naomh Eoin	1,760
Cumann Naomh Uinseann de Phól	65,586
An Cumann Cúplaí agus Ilbhreitheanna	12,300
An Nasc Fireann	1,000
Threshold	87,085
Gluaiseacht Lucht Taistil Thuaisceart Éireann	36,527
Freagra Aontaithe	75,000
An Ghníomhaireacht Forbartha Saorálaithe	164,066
Seirbhísí Gnó Westcare	500
Grúpa Eolais na mBan	18,664
An Ghníomhaireacht Acmhainní agus Forbartha Ban	41,854
Clár Tacaíochta Speisialta an AE um Shíocháin agus Athmhuintearas	
Home-Start	15,000
Ionad Eolais NIPPA	12,270
Gaeloiliúint	15,400
Ionad Mhná Bhaile Bín, Gréasán Dea-Chleachtaidh	29,680
Ionad Dry Arch, Gréasán Dea-Chleachtaidh	29,595
Zero-8-Teen	9,158
Naíolann Ghleann an Chlochair	11,000
Naíolann Bhaile na Lorgan	8,000
Naíolann Dharach	5,828
Scéim Thúsbhlíanta Phobal Chnoc Harpur	259,250
Naíolann na Cloiche Riabhaí, An Sruthán	11,828
Naíolann Chionn Aird	7,473
Naíolann Naomh Bearnairdín	5,271
Naíolann na Maighe, An tIúr	7,537
Naíolann Chill Ria	10,000
Muintir Bheag an tSráidbhaile, Tuismitheoirí agus Tachráin	176
Naíolann O'Fiaich, Ard Mhacha	5,000
Naíolann Earlybird, Ard Mhacha	828
Grúpa Patairí Bídeacha, Baile an Mhuilinn, Ard Mhacha	3,637
Cumann Chonaitheoirí Chorrán Annadale	24,918
Ionad Mhná na bhFál	2,942
Naíolann Chluatharachán Glas, Chloch Mhic Choisteala	59,000
Naíolann Bhaile an Mhuilinn	15,000
Naíolann Phobal Rainbow	93489
Footprints	79,283
Scéim Thúsbhlíanta na hÓmaí	192,898
Ciste Forbartha Túsbhlíanta	
An Cumann Náisiúnta Páistí Bodhra	35,250
Tús atá Ann, NICOD	3,000
YMCA Éireann (Tuismitheoirí agus Páistí le Chéile)	15,000
Oideachas Tuismitheoirí mar Theiripithe Uathachais	25,000
Tuismitheoirí agus Gairmithe agus Uathachas	25,400
Lifestart	

Guidance given to Voluntary and Community Bodies regarding Grants

Ms Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the guidance her Department and its NDPBs give to voluntary and community bodies, on accessing, using and accounting for grants from public monies. (AQW 3500/00)

Ms de Brún: Guidance to voluntary and community groups in relation to grants is contained in DHSSPS: Grants for Voluntary and Community Organisations – Notes of Guidance for Applicants 2001/02 and Guidance on the Commissioning and Conduct of Evaluations of Voluntary Organisations by NI Government Departments. A copy of each document has been deposited in the Assembly Library.

Tá treoir do ghrúpaí deonacha agus pobail maidir le deontais i RSSSP: Deontais d'Eagraíochtaí Deonacha agus Pobail – Nótaí Treorach d'Iarratasóirí 2001/02 agus i Treoir ar Choimisiúnú agus ar Iompar Measúnuithe ar Eagraíochtaí Deonacha ag Ranna Rialtais TÉ. Cuireadh cóip de gach cáipéis i Leabharlann an Tionóil.

Inpatient Treatment

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail, by Trust, the percentage change between 30 March 2000 and 31 March 2001 in the number of persons awaiting inpatient treatment. (AQW 3502/00)

Ms de Brún: This information is detailed in the table below.

	% change between
Trust	March 2000 and March 2001
Belfast City Hospital	16.5
Green Park Healthcare	2.7
Ulster Community & Hospitals	10.4
Royal Group	16.9
Mater	25.0
Down Lisburn	-33.4
Causeway	18.5
United Hospitals Group	-9.8
Armagh & Dungannon	-100.0
Craigavon Group	24.9
Newry & Mourne	1.8
Altnagelvin Group	3.5
Sperrin Lakeland	32.1
Total	9.9

Tá an t-eolas seo léirithe sa tábla thíos.

	athrú i % idir
Iontaobhas	Márta 2000 and Márta 2001
Otharlann Chathair Bhéal Feirste	16.5
Cúram Sláinte na Páirce Glaise	2.7
Pobal Uladh & Otharlanna	10.4
Grúpa Ríoga	16.9
An Mater	25.0
An Dún/Lios na gCearrbhach	-33.4
An Clochán	18.5
Grúpa Otharlann Aontaithe	-9.8
Ard Mhacha & Dún Geanainn	-100.0
Grúpa Craigavon	24.9
An tIúr & Múrn	1.8
Grúpa Alt na nGealbhan	3.5
Speirín Tír na Lochanna	32.1
Iomlán	9.9

Zyban

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the anti-smoking drug Zyban is available on the National Health Service and to detail the occurrence of negative side effects which have been reported. (AQW 3532/00)

Ms de Brún: Zyban is available on the National Health Service. Reports of suspected adverse drug reactions are collected centrally for England, Scotland, Wales and here by the Medicines Control Agency. Up until 19 June 2001, a total of 6,110 reports have been received, of which 46 had a fatal outcome, one of which occurred here. The suspected adverse reactions are not necessarily caused by the drug and may relate to other factors such as nicotine withdrawal, other illnesses or other medicines taken concurrently.

Additional advice has been issued recently to the HPSS to highlight changes to the prescribing schedule of Zyban and to strengthen warnings for prescribers in order to minimise the risk of adverse effects.

Tá Zyban ar fáil ar an tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Sláinte. Bailítear tuairiscí ar fhrithghníomhartha dochracha measta drugaí go lárnach i Sasana, in Albain agus sa Bhreatain Bheag agus ag an Ghníomhaireacht um Stiúradh Drugaí anseo. Faoi 19 Meitheamh 2001, fuarthas 6,110 tuairisc san iomlán agus i 46 cás díobh fuair daoine bás, ina measc, duine amháin anseo. Ní gá gurb é an druga is cúis leis na frithghníomhartha dochracha measta agus is féidir go mbainfidh sé le fachtóirí eile amhail tarraingt siar nicitín, tinnis eile nó cógais eile caite ag an am céanna.

Tugadh comhairle bhreise do na SSSP ar na mallaibh, le béim a chur ar na hathruithe déanta ar sceideal ordaithe Zyban agus leis na rabhaidh tugtha don lucht

ordaithe cógas a neartú leis an bhaol ó éifeachtaí dochracha a íoslaghdú.

Occupational Therapy Housing Adaptation Assessments

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail progress towards her priority for action target of a 20% reduction in numbers waiting for occupational therapy housing adaptation assessments in the Sperrin, Lakeland and Altnagelvin Group Trust areas. (AQW 3538/00)

Ms de Brún: Implementation of the recommendations in the Preliminary Report of the joint Housing Executive/Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety review of the housing adaptations service commenced in March. Sperrin Lakeland and Foyle HSS Trusts are recruiting 2 additional occupational therapists each to be deployed on housing adaptation assessments.

Thosaigh cur i gcrích na moltaí i Réamhthuirisc Chomhathbhreithniú an Fheidhmeannais Tithíochta/na Roinne Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí ar an tseirbhís oiriúnuithe tithíochta i mí an Mhárta. Tá Iontaobhais SSS Shliabh Speirín agus Thír na Lochanna ag earcú 2 teiripí saothair breise le hobair a dhéanamh ar mheasúnuithe ar oiriúnú tithíochta.

Personal Expenses

Mr Adams asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the amount of personal expenses claimed by Health Trust Chief Executives by Trust Board area in each of the last four years for which figures are available. (AQW 3540/00)

Ms de Brún: The amount accrued by way of personal expenses over the financial years 1997/98, 1998/99, 1999/00 and 2000/01 by the Chief Executive and funded by the Trust is shown in the table below.

HSS Trust	1997/ 1998 £	1998/ 1999 £	1999/ 2000 £	2000/ 2001 £
Altnagelvin Hospitals	25	Nil	Nil	Nil
Armagh and Dungannon	Nil	Nil	Nil	350.00
Belfast City Hospital	42	98	60	374.55
Causeway	275	535	338	825.96
Craigavon and Banbridge Community	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Craigavon Area Hospital	Nil	Nil	Nil	490.00
Down Lisburn	910	1,007	928	1177.53
Foyle	90	80	30	Nil
Green Park	N/k	N/k	422	263.00

Homefirst Community	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Mater Infirmorum Hospital	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Newry and Mourne	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
North and West Belfast	86	536	1,277	538.48
Northern Ireland Ambulance Service	918	720	682	251.88
Royal Group of Hospitals	595	88	210	658.61
South and East Belfast	914	498	717	742.00
Sperrin Lakeland	250	200	250	144.39
Ulster Community & Hospitals	1,207	2,118	1,385	393.45
United Hospitals	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil

Léirítear sa tábla thíos an méid a charn an Príomhfheimeannach trí chostais phearsanta thar na blianta airgeadais 1997/98, 1998/99, 1999/00 agus 2000/01 a mhaoinigh an tIontaobhas.

Iontaobhas SSS	1997/ 1999 £	1998/ 1999 £	1999/ 2000 £	2000/ 2001 £
Otharlanna Alt na nGealbhan	25	Neamhní	Neamhní	Neamhní
Ard Mhacha agus Dún Geanainn	Neamhní	Neamhní	Neamhní	350.00
Otharlann Chathair Bhéal Feirste	42	98	60	374.55
An Clochán	275	535	338	825.96
Pobal Craigavon & Dhroichead na Banna	Neamhní	Neamhní	Neamhní	Neamhní
Otharlann Ceantair Craigavon	Neamhní	Neamhní	Neamhní	490.00
An Dún/Lios na gCearrbhach	910	1,007	928	1177.53
An Feabhal	90	80	30	Neamhní
Páirc Ghlas	G/f	G/f	422	263.00
Pobal Homefirst	Neamhní	Neamhní	Neamhní	Neamhní
Otharlann an Mater	Neamhní	Neamhní	Neamhní	Neamhní
An tÍúr & Múrn	Neamhní	Neamhní	Neamhní	Neamhní
Béal Feirste Thuaidh & Thiar	86	536	1,277	538.48
Seirbhís Otharchair Thuaisceart Éireann	918	720	682	251.88
Grúpa Ríoga Otharlann	595	88	210	658.61
Béal Feirste Theas & Thoir	914	498	717	742.00
Speirín Tír na Lochanna	250	200	250	144.39
Pobal Uladh & Otharlanna	1,207	2,118	1,385	393.45
Grúpa Otharlann Aontaithe	Neamhní	Neamhní	Neamhní	Neamhní

“Out of Pocket” Expenses: Health Trust Chief Executives

Mr Adams asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the amount of ‘out

of pocket' expenses claimed by Health Trust Chief Executives by Trust Board area in each of the last four years for which figures are available. (AQW 3541/00)

Ms de Brún: Information on 'out of pocket' expenses is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate costs.

Níl eolas ar chostais phearsanta ar fáil go réidh agus níorbh fhéidir é a fháil ach ar chostais dhíréireacha.

Anti-Cancer Drugs

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether anti-cancer drugs, Eloxatin and Campto, are available on the National Health Service in Northern Ireland and to make it her policy that no unnecessary restrictions will apply regarding their use. (AQW 3546/00)

Ms de Brún: Eloxatin and Campto are available for prescription by consultants to patients with colo-rectal cancer. There are no restrictions on their use.

Tá Eloxatin agus Campto ar fáil do dhochtúirí le hordú thar ceann othar le hailse cholaidriseacháin. Níl srian ar bith ar a n-úsáid.

Belfast Rape Crisis Centre: Funding

Ms McWilliams asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if she intends to increase and mainstream the annual funding for the Belfast Rape Crisis Centre to £300,000 per annum, the average cost for a population area of over 100,000. (AQW 3556/00)

Ms de Brún: I have no plans at present to increase the core funding that the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety makes available to the Belfast Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Centre to £300,000 per annum.

Níl sé ar intinn agam i láthair na huaire an príomh-mhaoiniú a thugann an Roinn Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí d'Ionad Éignithe agus Mí-úsáid Gnéis Bhéal Feirste a mhéadú go £300,000 in aghaidh na bliana.

Consultant Posts

Rev Robert Coulter asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number and location of consultant posts, in all disciplines, that are currently vacant. (AQW 3558/00)

Ms de Brún: The information requested is set out in the attached tables.

Tá an t-eolas aiarradh leagtha amach sna táblaí faoi iamh.

CONSULTANT VACANCIES IN N. IRELAND BY TRUST AND SPECIALTY

	A & E	Anaest	Medicine	Surgery	Obs. & Gynae	Dentistry	Paediatrics	Pathology	Psychiatry	Radiology
Belfast City Hospital*			8	1					1	
Down & Lisburn									1	
Greenpark										
Mater Infirmorum	1	1			1			1		
North & West Belfast					2				1	
Royal Group		4	6	5		3		3		2
South & East Belfast			1		1				1	
Ulster Hospital & Comm.			1	1					1	
Causeway			1	1						
Homefirst										
United Hospitals			1			1		1		3
Armagh & Dungannon										
Craigavon Area Hospital		1	1							2
Craigavon & B'bridge Com										
Newry & Mourne										
Altnagelvin		2		1				3		2
Foyle										
Sperrin Lakeland	1		3							
Total	2	8	22	9	4	4		8	5	9

* Includes 6 posts which are Joint Appointment with Queen's University of Belfast

FOLÚNTAIS DO LIANNA COMHAIRLEACHA I DTUAISCEART ÉIREANN DE RÉIR IONTAOBHAIS AGUS SPEISIALTACHTA

	T & É	Ainéis	Leigheas	Máinliacht	.Cná. & Lia. Bhan	Fiaclóireacht	Péidiatraic	Paiteolaíocht	Síciatracht	Raideolaíocht
Otharlann Chathair Bhéal Feirste*			8	1					1	
An Dún/Lios Na Gcearrbhach									1	

	T & É	Ainéis	Leigheas	Máinliacht	.Cná. & Lia. Bhan	Fiaclóireacht	Péidiatraic	Paiteolaíocht	Síciatracht	Raideolaíocht
An Pháirc Ghlas										
Mater Infirmorum	1	1			1			1		
Béal Feirste Thuaidh Agus Thiar					2				1	
An Grúpa Ríoga		4	6	5		3		3		2
Béal Feirste Theas Agus Thoir			1		1				1	
Otharlann Agus Pobal Uladh			1	1					1	
An Clochán			1	1						
Homefirst										
Otharlanna Aontaithe			1			1		1		3
Ard Mhacha Agus Dún Geanainn										
Otharlann Cheantar Craigavon		1	1							2
Pobal Craigavon Agus Dhroichead Na Banna										
An Tiúr Agus An Mhuim										
Alt Na nGealbhan		2		1				3		2
An Feabhal										
Sliabh Speirín Agus Tír Na Lochanna	1		3							
Iomlán	2	8	22	9	4	4		8	5	9

*Cuireann sé san áireamh 6 post ar Comhcheapacháin le hOllscoil na Banríona, Béal Feirste iad.

Doctors and Dentists Review Board: Input

Rev Robert Coulter asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why she felt that it was not necessary to consider input from Scotland and Wales in regard to the latest report from the Doctors and Dentists Review Board. (AQW 3564/00)

Ms de Brún: At present my Department does not submit evidence to the Doctors and Dentists Review Body. Its recommendations are however implemented

here to ensure parity of pay with the NHS in England, Scotland and Wales.

Faoi láthair, ní chuireann mo Roinn cruthú ar bith isteach chuig an Fhoras Athbhreithnithe Dochtúirí agus Fiaclóirí. Cuirtear a chuid moltaí i bhfeidhm anseo áfach le cinntiú go bhfuil an pá cothrom le pá na SNS i Sasana, in Albain agus sa Bhreatain Bheag.

Food Safety

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to give her assessment of the financial implications for butchers shops' as a result of the Food Safety (General Food Hygiene) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001. (AQW 3577/00)

Ms de Brún: The main compliance costs are associated with the introduction of a Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) food safety management system, the provision of staff training and the annual payment of a licence fee.

Training in the setting up and operation of HACCP was provided free of charge to butchers by district councils, supported by funding from the Food Standards Agency. District councils also produced a HACCP introduction pack for use by butchers, with a nominal charge of £20.

The regulations require basic training for all persons handling meat in affected butchers' shops and more advanced training for supervisors. Training costs run at £20 - £30 per person for a basic course and £100 per person for an intermediate course.

The annual cost of a licence will be £100 per shop for those premises that come within the licensing scheme.

Is iad na costais is mó a bhaineas leis na Rialacháin a chur i bhfeidhm ná córas shábháilteacht agus bhainistiú bia .i. pointe anailís ar bhaol agus stiúrtha chriticiúil (PABSC) a thabhairt isteach; le hoiliúint a chur ar fáil don fhoireann; agus le díol bliantúil tháille ceadúnais.

Sholáthair comhairlí ceantair oiliúint i mbunú agus i bhfeidhmiú PABSC saor in aisce do bhúistéirí, le tacaíocht mhaoinithe ón Ghníomhaireacht ar Chaighdeáin Bhia. Chum comhairlí ceantair pacáiste tionscnaimh PABSC do bhúistéirí le húsáid, ag cosaint £20 go hainmiúil.

Ordaíonn na Rialacháin bunoiúint do gach duine a bhíonn ag láimhseáil feola i siopaí búistéirí ina bhfuarthas drochshábháilteacht bhia, agus oiliúint níos airde do mhaoir. Is é £20 - £30 costas na hoiliúna an duine do bhunchúrsa agus £100 an duine do mheánchúrsa.

Is é £100 an siopa do na háitribh siúd a théann faoin scéim cheadúnaithe an costas bliantúil ar cheadúnas.

Meat Preparations

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) her assessment of the financial impact upon butchers shops of the Meat Preparations (Hygiene) Regulations (NI) 1997 (b) the advice she has issued to butchers premises and (c) the assistance she will give to traders whose diversification in the ongoing economic climate has resulted in being unable to meet the new standards required in the above regulations. (AQW 3578/00)

Ms de Brún: I believe the Regulations you are referring to are the Minced Meat and Meat Preparations (Hygiene) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1997. These Regulations are now the responsibility of the Food Standards Agency and the question has been transferred to me for reply.

The Regulations do not apply to premises producing or storing minced meat or meat preparations for direct sale from those premises to the final consumer and therefore should have no financial impact on butchers shops.

Creidim gurb iad na Rialacháin (Sláinteachas) ar Ullmhóidí Feola agus Feola Mionaithe (Tuaisceart Éireann) 1997 na Rialacháin dá bhfuil tú ag tagairt. Tá an Ghníomhaireacht um Chaighdeáin Bhia freagrach as na Rialacháin seo anois ach aistríodh an cheist agus freagróidh mé í.

Ní bhaineann na Rialacháin seo le háitribh atá ag déanamh, nó ag stóráil ullmhóidí feola nó feola mionaithe le haghaidh díola dhíriú ó na háitribh sin leis an tomhaltóir deireanach, agus mar sin de, níor chóir dóibh iarmhairt airgeadais bheith acu ar shiopaí búistéirí.

Remicade and Enbrel

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 3282/00, to detail how much funding for rheumatological drugs such as Remicade and Enbrel was allocated to patients within the constituency Strangford in 2000-01. (AQW 3589/00)

Ms de Brún: Funding for Remicade and Enbrel is allocated by the Eastern Health and Social Services Board to Green Park Healthcare Trust for patients within the Eastern Board's area. Details of funding allocated are not recorded on a constituency basis.

Dáileann Bord Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta an Oirthir maoiniú ar Iontaobhas Cúraim Shláinte na Páirce Glaise do Remicade agus d'Enbrel le haghaidh othar laistigh de limistéar Bhord an Oirthir. Ní chláraítear sonraí an mhaoinithe dailte de réir dailcheantair.

Remicade

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of patients who were given the drug Remicade in the EHSSB in 2000-01. (AQW 3591/00)

Ms de Brún: Twelve patients were prescribed the drug Remicade in the Eastern Health and Social Services Board area in 2000/01.

Ordaíodh an druga Remicade do dhá othar déag i limistéar Bhord Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta an Oirthir i 2000/01.

Register of People with Learning Disabilities

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of people who are registered in Northern Ireland with learning disabilities in 1999-00 and 2000-01. (AQW 3592/00)

Ms de Brún: This information is not available.

Níl an t-eolas seo ar fáil.

Additional Qualified Nurses: Down Lisburn Trust

Mr McGrady asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what efforts will be made to recruit additional qualified nurses in the Down Lisburn Trust area in order to make up the current shortfall; and to make a statement. (AQW 3599/00)

Ms de Brún: Down Lisburn Trust has an active nurse recruitment policy. Advertisements are run on a regular basis and a fast-track induction process is available.

In regard to overall staffing levels, the Trust has recently submitted to the Eastern Health and Social Services Board a review of nurse staffing levels for consideration.

Over the past year the Trust has increased the number of nurses in both Lagan Valley and Downe Hospitals. This has resulted in 3 additional nurses in Accident and Emergency, 3 additional nurses in Theatre and 3 additional nurses in Surgery in Lagan Valley Hospital. In the Downe Hospital, there are 2 additional nurses in Accident and Emergency and 5 additional nurses in Theatre.

Tá polasaí gníomhach earcaíochta ag Iontaobhas an Dúin/Lios na gCearrbhach. Déantar fôgraíocht rialta agus tá próiseas ionduchtaithe mhear ar fáil.

Maidir le leibhéil iomlána líon na foirne, chuir Bord Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta an Oirthir athbhreithniú ar leibhéil líon na foirne isteach ar na mallabha le haghaidh machnaimh.

Le bliain anuas, mhéadaigh an tIontaobhas líon na n-altraí in Otharlanna Ghleann an Lagáin agus an Dúin araon. Is é 3 altra breise sa Roinn Timpistí agus Éigeandála, 3 altra breise san Oibrídlann agus 3 altra breise i Máinliacht in Otharlann Ghleann an Lagáin an toradh a bhí air seo. In Otharlann an Dúin, tá 2 altra breise sa Roinn Timpistí agus Éigeandála agus 5 altra breise san Oibrídlann.

Carers Bill

Mr McGrady asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail when the Carers Bill will be introduced in the Northern Ireland Assembly; and to make a statement. (AQW 3600/00)

Ms de Brún: The Carers and Disabled Children Bill will go to the Executive in September and, subject to its approval, will be introduced in the Assembly in late September or early October.

This Bill proposes to give Health and Social Services Boards and Trusts the power to supply services to help carers to exercise their caring role. This will give carers access to an assessment in their own right even if the person cared for has refused an assessment for, or the provision of, community care services.

It also proposes to give Health and Social Services Boards and Trusts the power to make direct payments to carers (including 16- and 17-year-old carers) for the services that meet their own assessed needs; to people with parental responsibility for disabled children and to 16 and 17 year old disabled children for services that meet their own assessed needs.

It also proposes to give Health and Social Services Boards and Trusts the power to run short-term break voucher schemes, designed to offer flexibility in the timing of carers' breaks and choice in the way services are delivered to the person cared for while his or her usual carer is taking a break.

Cuirfear an Bille Cúramóirt agus Páistí Míchumasacha faoi bhráid an Choiste Feidhmiúcháin i mí Mheán Fómhair agus, má bhíonn sé sásta leis, tionscnófar sa Tionól go mall i mí Mheán Fómhair nó go luath i mí Dheireadh Fómhair é.

Molann an Bille seo go dtabharfar an t-údarás do Bhoird agus d'Iontaobhais Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta seirbhísí a sholáthar d'fheighlithe le cuidiú leo a ndualgas cúraim a dhéanamh. Tabharfaidh seo a gceart féin d'fheighlithe measúnú a fháil fiú má dhiúltaigh an duine atá faoina c(h)úram measúnú le haghaidh nó soláthar seirbhísí cúraim phobail.

Molann sé fosta go dtabharfar an t-údarás do Bhoird agus d'Iontaobhais Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta íocaíochtaí díreacha a dhéanamh le feighlithe (feighlithe 16 agus 17 bliain san áireamh) ar sheirbhísí a riarann ar

a riachtanais mheasúnaithe féin; le daoine a bhfuil freagracht tuismitheoirí acu as páistí míchumasacha, agus le páistí míchumasacha 16 agus 17 bliain ar sheirbhísí a riarann ar a riachtanais mheasúnaithe féin.

Molann sé fosta go dtabharfar an t-údarás do Bhoird agus d'Iontaobhais Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta scéimeanna dearbháin le haghaidh sosanna gearrthearma a reáchtáil, leagtha amach le huainiú níos sochomhairlí i sosanna feighlithe a chur ar fáil, agus rogha a mholadh ar an dóigh a soláthraítear seirbhísí don duine atá faoi chúram agus a g(h)náthfheighlí ag tógáil sosa.

Gap Funding

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail her plans for gap funding in respect of those individuals with learning difficulties. (AQW 3604/00)

Ms de Brún: The gap funding initiative was designed specifically to support the work of key voluntary and community groups that until recently have been supported under EU Structural Funds, and which face short-term funding difficulties until the next round of European money comes on stream, probably in the autumn.

Under PEACE I, the only community-based activity supported by my Department was in the area of childcare and, therefore, only community groups engaged in this activity are eligible for consideration under the gap funding arrangements.

Dearadh an tionscnamh don mhaoiniú idirthréimhseach le tacaíocht a thabhairt d'obair eochairghrúpaí deonacha agus pobail amháin a tacaíodh faoi Chistí Struchtúracha AE agus a mbeidh deachrachtaí maoinithe acu sa ghearrthearma go dtí go mbeidh an chéad bhabhta eile d'airgead Eorpach ar fáil, san fhómhar is dócha.

Faoi PEACE I, ba é cúram leanaí an t-aon ghníomhaíocht phobalbhunaithe a thacaigh mo Roinn léi agus, mar sin, níl ach grúpaí pobail a dhéanann an ghníomhaíocht seo i dteideal do mhachnamh faoi shocrúithe maoinithe idirthréimhsigh.

Acute Hospital Review

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) the final cost of the Acute Hospital Review; and (b) total payments to each individual member including travel and subsistence expenses. (AQW 3612/00)

Ms de Brún: The costs of the Acute Hospitals Review, including payments to individual members, are still being processed. I shall write to the Member when the final costs are available.

Tá costais an Athbheithnithe ar Ghéarotharlanna, iocaíochtaí do bhaill san áireamh, á bpróiseáil go fóill. Scríobhfaidh mé chuig an Chomhalta nuair a bheidh na costais dheireanacha ar fáil.

Ulster Hospital: Funding

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail whether she has sought funding for (a) a new maternity hospital; (b) cancer services including ICU beds; (c) the strategic development of the Ulster Hospital and to explain how each of these areas will be achieved if no bid was made.

(AQW 3614/00)

Ms de Brún:

- (a) I announced on 25 June a new consultation process to enable me to decide on the development of a new maternity facility in Belfast. I have asked for this work to be completed by April of next year. When I have decided the way forward at the end of that process, I will consider the need to bid for any funding required in the light of the cost and timetable for project, and the capital budget available to me.
- (b) Additional resources have been obtained this year for the further development of cancer services, including recruitment and training of specialist staff, and for the increasing costs of drugs. The New Opportunities Fund has also provided funds for Magnetic Resonance Imaging scanners to support cancer services at the Antrim, Craigavon and the Ulster Hospitals. I have made a bid for an increase in my capital budget in-year for urgently-needed radiotherapy equipment at Belvoir Park Hospital.

No additional funding has been sought for ICU (Intensive Care Unit) beds since these were increased last year in line with my Chief Medical Officers' recommendations.

The Belfast City Hospital Trust is currently revising its Business Case for a Regional Cancer Centre. When the Trust's proposals have been agreed, I will look at the appropriate procurement path and funding issues, and what resources I may need to bid for.

- (c) My Department has secured £10 million from Executive Programme Funds for investment between now and 2003/04 in the Ulster Hospital. In addition the Programme for Government has identified £2 million to meet immediate requirements. Additional resources have also been obtained from the New Opportunities Fund to provide an MRI unit at the hospital. The Ulster Community and Hospital Trust has submitted a Strategic Development Plan for the hospital. Once I have taken my decision on this, and the necessary business cases have been

approved, I will bid for whatever resources are necessary to complete the work.

- (a) D'fhógair mé ar 25 Meitheamh próiseas nua comhairlithe le cuidiú liom cinneadh a dhéanamh ar fhorbairt áise nua máithreachais i mBéal Feirste. D'iarr mé go gcríochnófaí an obair seo faoi Aibreán na bliana seo chugainn. Nuair a bheas cinneadh déanta agam ar an bhealach chun tosaigh ag deireadh an phróisis sin, déanfaidh mé machnamh ar an ghá le tairiscint a dhéanamh ar mhaoiniú ar bith atá de dhíth de réir chostas agus chlár ama an tionscadail, agus an bhuiséid chaitil ar fáil dom.
- (b) Fuarthas acmhainní breise i mbliana le haghaidh forbartha breise seirbhísí ailse, earcaíocht agus oiliúint foirne speisialtachta, agus an méadú i gcostais drugaí san áireamh. Chuir an Ciste Deiseana Nua maoinithe ar fáil do scanóirí Íomhánna Maighnéadacha Athshondais le tacú le seirbhísí ailse in Otharlanna Aontroma, Craigavon agus Uladh. Rinne mé tairiscint ar mhéadú i mo bhuiséad caipitil i mbliana do threalamh práinneach raiditeiripe in Otharlann Pháirc Belvoir.

Níor iarradh ar mhaoiniú breise do leapacha IDC (Ionad Dianchúraim) mar gur tháinig méadú orthu anuraidh faoi réir mholtaí mo Phríomh-Oifigigh Leighis.

Tá Iontaobhas Otharlann Chathair Bhéal Feirste ag leasú a Cháis Ghnó faoi láthair d'Ionad Réigiúnach Ailse. Nuair a bheas moltaí an Iontaobhais comhaontaithe, déanfaidh mé machnamh ar an bhealach chuí chun maoiniú a fháil, ar cheisteanna maoinithe agus ar na hacmhainní is gá go mbeidh orm tairiscint a dhéanamh orthu.

- (c) Fuair mo Roinn £10 milliún ó Chistí Chlár an Fheidhmeannais le hinfheistiú idir anois agus 2003/04 in Otharlann Uladh. Ina theannta sin, fuarthas an Clár Rialtais £2 milliún le riar ar riachtanais láithreacha. Fuarthas maoinithe breise ó Chiste Deiseana Nua le hionad ÍMA a sholáthar san otharlann. Chuir Iontaobhas Phobal agus Otharlann Uladh Plean Straitéiseach Forbartha isteach don otharlann. A luaithe agus a bheidh cinneadh déanta agam air seo agus a fhorhreasfar na cásanna gnó dá bhfuil riachtanach, déanfaidh mé tairiscint ar cibé acmhainní a bheidh riachtanach leis an obair a chur i gcrích.

Ulster Hospital Trust: Development

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) whether the £10m given for the strategic development of the Ulster Hospital Trust is ringfenced until the remainder is

available and (b) what steps has she taken to obtain the remaining balance to enable the development to go ahead.

(AQW 3616/00)

Ms de Brún: The £10 million allocated to my Department from Executive Programme Funds for the development of the Ulster Hospital has been set aside specifically for this purpose for investment between now and 2003/04. In addition the Programme for Government identified £2m to address urgent issues within the redevelopment, and the New Opportunities Fund has also made funds available to provide an MRI unit.

Once I have taken my decision on the Trust's Strategic Development Plan for the hospital, and the necessary business cases have been forwarded, I will find whatever resources are necessary to complete the work.

Cuireadh i leataobh an £10 milliún a dáileadh ar mo Roinn ó Chistí Chlár an Fheidhmeannais d'fhorbairt Otharlann Uladh le hinfheistiú idir anois agus 2003/04 sa chuspóir ar leith seo. Ina theannta sin, fuair an Clár Rialtais £2m le dul i gceann ceisteanna práinneacha laistigh den athchóiriú, agus chuir an Ciste Deiseanna Nua maoinithe ar fáil le hionad ÍMA a sholáthar.

A luaithe agus a bheidh cinneadh déanta agam ar Phlean Straitéiseach Forbartha an Iontaobhais, agus a chuirfear na cásanna gnó dá bhfuil riachtanach isteach, gheobhaidh mé cibé acmhainní a bheidh riachtanach leis an obair a chur i gcrích.

Capital Expenditure on Hospitals

Ms McWilliams asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the level of capital expenditure on hospitals in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3626/00)

Ms de Brún: The details requested are set out in the table below. The totals include the capital value of facilities procured through private finance agreements, amounts for major hospital projects, and estimates of the amounts of expenditure on acute hospital facilities out of the general capital distributed among Health and Social Services Trusts for investment in line with their local priorities.

	1996/97	1997/98	1998/99	1999/2000	2000/01
Total	£28.577m	£38.913	£43.344m	£55.441	£59.916

Tá na sonraí iarrtha leagtha amach sa tábla thíos. Cuimsíonn na suimeanna luach caipitil na n-áiseanna faighte trí shocrúithe príobháideacha airgeadais, suimeanna do phríomhthionscadail otharlainne, agus meastacháin ar shuimeanna an chaiteachais ar áiseanna géarotharlann ón chaipiteal ghinearálta dáilte ar fud Iontaobhas Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta le hinfheistiú de réir a dtosaíochtaí áitiúla.

	1996/97	1997/98	1998/99	1999/2000	2000/01
Iomlán	£28.577m	£38.913	£43.344m	£55.441	£59.916

Reduction of Surgical Beds: Tyrone County Hospital

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 3562/00, to confirm that the reduction of surgical beds, from 38 to 26, at Tyrone County Hospital is "Temporary and the minimum necessary to maintain safe and high quality care" as stated in letter Ref. COR/325/2001 of 13 June 2001 to Omagh District Council and to indicate when the reduced capacity will be re-instated. (AQW 3678/00)

Ms de Brún: The Sperrin Lakeland Health and Social Services Trust will monitor bed requirements on a daily basis and it plans to review the position towards the end of August 2001 in order to ensure that the configuration of surgical beds beyond September meets the needs of the population. I am assured that these changes are temporary and the minimum necessary to maintain safe and high quality care.

Déanfaidh an tIontaobhas Sláinte agus Seirbhísí Sóisialta Shliabh Speirín agus Thír na Lochanna monatóireacht ar riachtanais leapa ar bhonn laethúil agus tá sé beartaithe aige a sheasamh athbhreithniú faoi dheireadh mhí Lúnasa 2001 le cinntiú go bhfreastalóidh cumraíocht leapacha máinliachta níos moille anonn ná Meán Fómhair ar riachtanais an phobail. Gealladh domhsa go bhfuil na hathruithe seo sealadach agus ar an íosleibhéal atá riachtanach le cúram slán d'ardcháilíocht a choinneáil.

HPSS Pay Awards for 2001-02

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to the additional allocation of £6m in the June Monitoring round in respect of higher than forecast pay settlement, to detail to which management grade(s) the pay settlement refers and how much will be allocated to each board.

(AQW 3683/00)

Ms de Brún: HPSS pay awards for 2001-02 have averaged out at 0.5% more than was allowed for in the 2000 Spending Review. The extra money relates very largely, if not entirely, to settlements for doctors, nurses and other frontline staff. The money will be allocated to the service once I have made my final determination on the detailed distribution of all June monitoring bids.

Is é an meán do na harduithe pá faoi choinne 2001-02 0.5% thar mar a bhí ceadaithe san Athbhreithniú Caiteachais 2000. Baineann an t-airgead breise go mór mór, mura mbaineann sé go huile is go hiomlán, le

socrúithe pá do dhochtúirí, d'altraí agus d'fhoireann eile sa líne tosaigh. Leithroinnfear an t-airgead ar an tseirbhís nuair a dhéanfas mé mo chinneadh deireanach ar an dáileadh sonraíoch de gach tairscint monatóireachta mhí an Mheithimh.

Waiting List and Times

Mr Fee asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) figures for each six-month period over the last five years, of (i) the number of people on the waiting list, and (ii) the average waiting time, for elective surgery in each Health Board area and (b) any steps that are being taken to reduce these waiting times. (AQW 3684/00)

Ms de Brún:

- (a)(i) Information is not available in the form requested.
- (ii) Information is not available in the form requested.
- (b) The *Framework for Action on Waiting Lists*, which I issued in September last, set out a strategic context for action on waiting lists. As a result, Boards and Trusts have developed comprehensive action plans. Additional resources have also been provided and, in the current year, a total of £8 million is available for action on waiting lists.
- (a) (i) Níl an t-eolas ar fáil ar an dóigh as iarradh í.
- (ii) Níl an t-eolas ar fáil ar an dóigh as iarradh í.
- (b) Leag an *Chreatlach le hAghaidh Gnímh ar Liostaí Feithimh*, a d'eisigh mé i Meán Fómhair anuraidh, comhthéacs straitéiseach síos le haghaidh gníomhaíochta ar liostaí feithimh. Mar thoradh air sin, d'fhorbair Boird agus Iontaobhais gníomhphleananna cuimsitheacha. Soláthraíodh acmhainní breise fosta agus i mbliana, tá £8 milliún san iomlán ar fáil le haghaidh gnímh ar liostaí feithimh.

Surgical Procedures

Mr Fee asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) how many elective surgical procedures have been scheduled in each month over the last twelve months, and (b) how many elective surgical procedures have been cancelled in each month over the last twelve months, in each Health Board area. (AQW 3685/00)

Ms de Brún:

- (a) Information is not available in the form requested.
- (b) Information is not available in the form requested.
- (a) Níl an t-eolas ar fáil ar an dóigh as iarradh í.
- (b) Níl an t-eolas ar fáil ar an dóigh as iarradh í.

Waiting Lists and Times

Mr Fee asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) the figures for each six month period over the last five years, of (i) the number of people on the waiting list, and (ii) the average waiting time, for outpatients appointments in each Health Board area and (b) any steps that are being taken to reduce these waiting times. (AQW 3686/00)

Ms de Brún:

- (a)(i) Information is not available in the form requested.
- (ii) Information is not available in the form requested.
- (b) I refer the member to the answer given to AQW 3684/00
- (a) (i) Níl an t-eolas ar fáil ar an dóigh as iarradh í.
- (ii) Níl an t-eolas ar fáil ar an dóigh as iarradh í.
- (b) Luaim don Bhall an freagra a thug mé ar AQW 3684/00.

Waiting Lists and Times

Mr Fee asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) the figures for each six month period over the last five years of (i) the number of people on the waiting list, and (ii) the average waiting time, for day surgery in each Health Board area and (b) any steps that are being taken to reduce these waiting times. (AQW 3687/00)

Ms de Brún:

- (a)(i) Information is not available in the form requested.
- (ii) Information is not available in the form requested.
- (b) I refer the member to the answer given to AQW 3684/00
- (a) (i) Níl an t-eolas ar fáil ar an dóigh as iarradh í.
- (ii) Níl an t-eolas ar fáil ar an dóigh as iarradh í.
- (b) Luaim don Bhall an freagra a thug mé ar AQW 3684/00.

Waiting Lists and Times

Mr Fee asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) the figures for each six month period over the last five years, of (i) the number of people on the waiting list, and (ii) the average waiting time, for day procedures in each Health Board Area and (b) any steps that are being taken to reduce these waiting times. (AQW 3688/00)

Ms de Brún:

- (a)(i) Information is not available in the form requested.

- (ii) Information is not available in the form requested.
- (b) I refer the member to the answer given to AQW 3684/00
- (a) (i) Níl an t-eolas ar fáil ar an dóigh as iarradh í.
- (ii) Níl an t-eolas ar fáil ar an dóigh as iarradh í.
- (b) Luaim don Bhall an freagra a thug mé ar AQW 3684/00.

HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

Guidance to Voluntary and Community Bodies regarding Grants

Mr Close asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail the guidance his Department and its NDPBs give to voluntary and community bodies, on accessing, using and accounting for grants from public monies.

(AQW 3449/00)

The Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Dr Farren): My Department and its NDPBs give a range of guidance to voluntary and community bodies about accessing, using and accounting for grants from public funds. None of the Department's NDPBs administers grant support to such bodies.

EUROPEAN FUNDING

The majority of incidences where the Department administers grant to voluntary and community bodies relates to European Community funding under those programmes which are now ending. The availability of European Funding was published through advertised open calls for application, press releases and holding information seminars. Information is also provided in response to individual queries from potential applicants. Application forms were accompanied by guidance notes to assist project promoters in the completion of application forms and the development of their project proposal. Successful applicants received a European Social Fund Promoters Operating Manual to inform them of requirements for administration of projects in accordance with European Commission regulations and to indicate best practice. Additional guidance is available in EU programme documentation, letters of offer, European regulations and Monitoring Visit guidelines.

Similar arrangements are being put in place for the implementation of the Building Sustainable Prosperity and Peace II programmes.

For the Northern Ireland EQUAL Programme a series of workshops for potential applicants was held across

Northern Ireland in the week commencing 25 June. A call for applications has been published in the press. An Initial Guidance document is being provided with the application form on the selection process, on administration during the first two or three stages of EQUAL projects and on compliance with European Social Fund regulations. The Department has contracted Proteus to provide technical support to applicants and later to those projects which are selected.

Funding provided to projects under Gap Funding arrangements is subject to the same guidance and requirements as are applicable to European funding.

OTHER GRANTS

The Department provides non-EU funding on a continuing basis to a number of voluntary and community sector organisations. The terms and conditions under which funding is provided and accounted for are contained in either formal contracts with these organisations or in letters of offer issued annually by the Department.

AUDIT ARRANGEMENTS

The Department has a Financial Audit and Support Team (FAST) which audits projects or groups receiving grant support. Until this year this service covered grants made by the Training and Employment Agency but this year will cover all such funding by the Department. A report is prepared following each audit and submitted to the relevant sponsor Division to follow up any issues with the project or group concerned. Follow up may include giving additional guidance.

Grants to Voluntary and Community Bodies

Mr Close asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail all grants of £100,000 or more made by his Department and its NDPBs to voluntary and community bodies in the financial year 2000-01.

(AQW 3467/00)

Dr Farren: My Department made offers of grants of £100,000 or more to the following voluntary and community bodies in the 2000-01 financial year –

Body	Amount (£k)
Action Mental Health	742
Barnardos	103
Beeches Vocational Training Unit	123
Bridge Association	115
Cedar Foundation	272
Confederation of Community Groups	107
Educational Guidance Service for Adults	1,175
Inner City Trust	174
MENCAP	197

Body	Amount (£k)
NIACRO	212
Opportunity Youth	234
Orchardville Society	106
Shadow Trust	146
Share Centre	115
Ulster People's College	382
Voluntary Service Belfast	118
Workers' Education Association	727
Young Enterprise	209

The Department's NDPBs do not offer such grants.

Grants to Voluntary and Community Bodies

Mr Close asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail all current schemes under which grants are paid by his Department and its NDPBs to the voluntary and community sector.

(AQW 3468/00)

Dr Farren: My Department pays grants to the voluntary and community sector under the following schemes –

EU Schemes - the Northern Ireland Single Programme, the Peace Programme, and the EU Community Initiatives Employment/Adapt and Interreg. The Department also pays 'Gap' Funding to previously EU-funded projects pending the implementation of Building Sustainable Prosperity and Peace II programmes.

None of the Department's NDPBs operates grant schemes for the voluntary and community sectors.

Grants paid to Voluntary and Community Bodies

Mr Close asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail all grants paid by his Department and its NDPBs to voluntary and community bodies in the financial year 2000-01.

(AQW 3469/00)

Dr Farren: Grants paid by my Department to voluntary and community bodies in the financial year 2000-01 are detailed in the Table below.

The Department's NDPBs do not provide grant support to voluntary and community groups.

In addition to direct payments, my Department also indirectly funds voluntary and community groups through Intermediary Funding Bodies (IFBs) under the EU Peace I Programme. In 2000-01 IFBs received funding for such purposes as follows

Educational Guidance service for Adults (EGSA)	£1,024,879
LEDU	£59,415
Playboard	£574,984
Proteus	£3,433,809
TWN (Women's Network)	£507,833

Voluntary/Community Organisation	Amount (£)
Action Mental Health	621,191
Aisling Centre	2,661
Barnardos	121,788
Beeches Vtu	60,307
Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre	141,937
Belfast Women's Training	13,064
Bridge Association	139,161
Business In The Community	5,000
Care	8,780
Cedar Foundation	242,089
Childcare Training	4,845
Christians Providing Care	25,420
Churches Vol Work Bureau	72,534
Clanrye Employment & Training Services	135,976
Community Outreach	49,462
Community Service Volunteers	64,442
Confed Of Community Groups	123,268
Conservation Volunteers	85,426
Craigavon & Banbridge Community Group	70,737
Cross Border Development	4,548
Cross Border Training	21,330
Cross Border Womens Internet	2,254
Cullyhanna Women's Group	21,363
Daphne Mears	44,632
Derry Northside	624,000
Education and Training Services	48,492
Educational Guidance Service For Adults	1,175,000
Employers for Childcare	11,175
Employment Link	12,793
Enterprise Technology	91,289
Faeries Fingers	64,323
Falls Community Council	73,317
Flurry Bridge	178,000
Foyle Films	99,327
Foyle Skills	23,860
Garden Reach	82,019
Gingerbread NI	117,239
Glen Community Group	88,406

Voluntary/Community Organisation	Amount (£)
Glenwood	13,040
Greenhill Ymca	48,974
Inner City Trust	216,577
Lassies Ladders & Lathes	17,583
Leo Partnership	29,526
Mencap	117,750
Moylinn	22,753
N Antrim Women's Group	15,689
National Distance Ed Centre	59,938
National Schizophrenia Fellowship	33,928
Nerve Centre	9,730
Network Personnel	73,697
New Horizons	25,726
NI Association for the Care and Rehabilitation of Offenders	265,195
NI Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux	10,391
NI Centre for Learning Resources	20,767
NI Child Minding Association	162,047
NI Council for Voluntary Action	20,957
NI Growth Challenge	13,463
NI Law Centre	85,870
NI Open College Network	97,098
NI Preschool Playgroup Association	56,685
Nicod, the Disability Charity	148,637
NW Cross Border	31,950
NW Pathways	18,149
Opportunity Youth	238,277
Orchardville Society	146,365
Outdoor Pursuits	10,067
Pheasant Feathers	8,981
Prince's Trust	45,158
Regional Tourism Training Network	1,205
Roe Valley Community Assoc.	33,225
Royal National Institute for the Blind	79,348
Shadow Trust	146,823
Shantallow Training	14,400
Skill NI	21,000
Springhill	7,600
Step	3,541
Strabane Lifford Development	5,601
Strathfoyle Womens Group	8,007
The Share Centre	144,735
Tourism Training	24,300
Tyrone Training Services	14,608

Voluntary/Community Organisation	Amount (£)
Ulidia Training	43,182
Ulster People's College	348,116
Voluntary Service Belfast	52,553
Voluntary Services Belfast	101,644
Walkway	15,213
Waterside Development	62,131
Westlink Enterprise Centre	32,835
Women into Engineering	4,601
Women's Tec	48,408
Workers Educational Association	727,000
Worknet	63,748
Young Enterprise	151,034
Youth Action	119,117
Youthnet	75,503

North Down and Ards Institute of Further and Higher Education: Newtownards Campus

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail the number of courses available at Newtownards College of Further Education in 1999-00 and 2000-01. (AQW 3593/00)

Dr Farren: There were 212 and 234 courses available in 1999-00 and 2000-01 respectively at the Newtownards campus of North Down & Ards Institute of Further and Higher Education.

North Down and Ards Institute of Further and Higher Education: Newtownards Campus

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail the number of students who completed courses at Newtownards College of Further Education in 1999-00 and 2000-01. (AQW 3605/00)

Dr Farren: In 1999-00, 1268 students completed courses at the Newtownards Campus of North Down & Ards Institute of Further and Higher Education. Information on those completing courses in 2000-01 is not yet available.

Numeracy and Literacy Skills

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to confirm that the basic skills strategy is designed to reflect an individual skills strategy for each constituency. (AQW 3611/00)

Dr Farren: There is a need to address the problem of adult basic numeracy and literacy throughout Northern Ireland.

This is a key priority for my Department which is working to produce a province-wide basic skills strategy.

Conduct of Employment Agencies

Ms Morrice asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment if he will introduce measures to protect immigrant workers who are brought into Northern Ireland by agencies so as to ensure that they have equal employment rights and access to trade unions. (AQW 3631/00)

Dr Farren: The conduct of Employment Agencies is

Staff Salary Bands

Ms McWilliams asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail the total number of (a) academics and (b) other staff employed by the Queens University of Belfast and the University of Ulster broken down separately by gender within the following salary bands: less than £20,000; £20,000 to £29,999; £30,000 to £39,999; £40,000 to £49,999; £50,000 to £59,999; £60,000 to £69,999; £70,000 to £79,999 and £80,000 and above. (AQW 3657/00)

Dr Farren: The table below sets out information on academic staff salaries by gender at Queen's University and the University of Ulster. The Department does not collect such information on other staff at the universities.

SALARY OF ACADEMIC STAFF BY NI UNIVERSITY 1999/2000

Salary 1999/2000	The Queen's University of Belfast			The University of Ulster		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Less than £20,000	159	255	414	174	134	308
£20,001 to £30,000	147	249	396	155	166	321
£30,001 to £40,000	157	385	542	123	469	592
£40,001 to £50,000	15	86	101	17	97	114
Over £50,000	15	90	105	-	-	-
Total	493	1,065	1,558	469	866	1,335

Note

- (1) Due to the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Human Rights Act 1998, HESA now implements a strategy designed to prevent the disclosure of personal information about any individual. This strategy involves the suppression of small numbers in the table. The total figures therefore reflect that the figures have been suppressed.
- (2) There is no refinement of the bands above £50,000.

Source: HESA dataset

governed by regulations aimed at protecting all workers recruited by those Agencies operating within the jurisdiction. In line with changes to GB legislation, there are plans to strengthen regulations, particularly towards ensuring greater protection from exploitation for temporary workers.

Home to College Transport

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment whether the recent allocation of £1.3m to home/college transport is sufficient to meet current demands. (AQW 3647/00)

Dr Farren: The recent allocation of £1.3m was to cover an identified shortfall in the Home to College Transport budget. I am satisfied, based on latest estimates of need, that the revised budget is sufficient to meet the current demands.

Long-term Unemployed: Educational Qualifications

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to outline the most recent educational attainment survey of those who have been unemployed for more than one year and how his Department is providing educational support to the long term unemployed. (AQW 3660/00)

Dr Farren: The most recent survey information on the educational qualifications of the ILO unemployed is contained in the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey published by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. It shows that 44% had no qualifications. There is no recent survey information on the qualifications of the long-term unemployed specifically. Under New Deal, the long-term unemployed are encouraged to work for qualifications ranging from basic literacy and numeracy up to NVQ level III.

Northern Ireland Open College Network

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment to detail the number of courses accredited by the Open College Network in (a) each district council area and (b) in each constituency. (AQW 3661/00)

Dr Farren: The number of courses accredited by the Northern Ireland Open College Network is 264.

This data is not captured in a way that allows the Department to answer the question in full.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Bus Lanes

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his plans to deal with the effects of bus lanes constricting the flow of traffic into Belfast in the morning and evening rush hours. (AQW 3193/00)

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Campbell): Bus lanes are not intended to constrict the flow of traffic but are designed to allow buses to bypass traffic queues on the approaches to traffic signals by altering vehicle stacking patterns. Bus lanes normally stop short of junctions to allow all traffic to queue back from the traffic signals and this ensures that the number of vehicles passing through the traffic signals is not reduced because of the presence of bus lanes. Even though the length of queues for non-priority traffic has increased, road capacity remains largely unchanged.

Bus lanes have not been implemented at locations in Belfast where high traffic volumes and limited road widths would result in major disruption to other traffic. I should also point out that, although buses account for only 2% of traffic in Belfast, they carry about one quarter of the people travelling into the city during the morning rush hour.

At present buses and pedal cycles are permitted to use with-flow bus lanes in Belfast and my Department has been considering if more efficient use could be made of the limited road infrastructure that is available. As taxis provide a valuable public transport service, my Department will be advertising imminently its intention to admit certain classes of public hire taxis to bus lanes on those roads where they are licensed to operate.

Road Improvements: Ards Peninsula Area

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his plans to upgrade roads that

are showing distinct signs of wear in the Ards Peninsula area. (AQW 3213/00)

Mr Campbell: I would refer the Member to my response of 4 May 2001 to his earlier Written Assembly Question AQW 2648/00.

Strangford Lough Ferry Service

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (a) what assessment he has made of the ferry service on Strangford Lough (b) what steps he is taking to extend the hours of operation to meet new social and economic patterns and (c) why the ferry service is unable to operate in fog conditions and what steps he is taking to upgrade the ferries to enable them to do so. (AQW 3343/00)

Mr Campbell: Last summer consultants, commissioned by my Department's Roads Service, carried out a comprehensive assessment of the Strangford Lough ferry service in the form of a Customer Satisfaction Survey. The survey, which involved interviews with 522 randomly-selected passengers, covered various aspects of service provision. Overall, the results of the survey were pleasing with only 9% being dissatisfied with the service (the main reason being the lack of shelter for foot passengers).

Roads Service has no plans to extend the operating hours at present. Although there is more traffic on weekend evenings because of social activity, the overall demand does not exist to warrant running the ferry service beyond the current sailing times.

The ferry vessels are not operated in dense fog as the safety of passengers, the crew and other lough users is of paramount importance. Whilst there is radar equipment on board the vessels, it is used as an aid to navigation and it is not sensitive enough to pick up the smaller craft which regularly use this stretch of the Lough. In less severe conditions sailings will only take place where the Skipper considers it safe to do so.

Comber Bypass

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (a) whether vesting notices have been advertised in respect of the Comber bypass (b) whether any objections have been received and (c) the expected commencement and completion dates for the bypass. (AQW 3351/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service published the Notice of Intention to Make a Vesting Order (NIMVO) to acquire the necessary land for stage 2 of the Comber Bypass scheme in the local press during the weeks ending 18 and 25 May 2001. The closing date for receipt of objections was 26 June 2001. One objection was

received and Roads Service is currently endeavouring to resolve it.

A commencement and completion date for the scheme cannot be confirmed until the objection has been dealt with.

Road Adoption: Definition

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 3120/00, to define “within a reasonable period from the date of completion of houses”. (AQW 3352/00)

Mr Campbell: In my response to your Written Assembly Question AQW 3120/00 I advised, *inter alia*, that:

“Where satisfactory completion of roads and sewers is not effected within a reasonable period from the date of completion of houses, my Department has powers under the Private Streets (Northern Ireland) Order 1980, as amended, to enable it to complete the necessary work at developers’ expense”.

Before responding to your recent question, I should first of all wish to correct a minor inaccuracy in my earlier reply. The word ‘occupation’ should be inserted instead of ‘completion’. I apologise for this error.

Given the nature of the way in which housing developments are normally progressed in stages and the time incurred pursuing developers to complete outstanding street works or effect such work by statutory processes, Roads Service has not thought it appropriate to define the word ‘reasonable’, as referred to in Article 21 of the 1980 Private Streets Order, in terms of a specific time period. Whilst each case is considered on its own merits, Roads Service will, however, normally seek to pursue developers on the issue of adoption where 80% of the houses have been occupied for one year or, where adoption has not taken place within two years of the street works being substantially complete.

Public Sewerage Facilities: Drumlegagh

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail progress on the proposed sewerage scheme for Drumlegagh, West Tyrone. (AQW 3354/00)

Mr Campbell: The provision of public sewerage facilities in Drumlegagh is estimated to cost in the region of £180,000 and would not be economically viable for the existing population. Water Service is aware, however, that a developer has acquired land in Drumlegagh for a new housing development.

Initial discussions with the developer indicate that, if the development currently envisaged proceeds, the provision of public sewerage facilities for Drumlegagh would be feasible. The position cannot be clarified until planning approval has been obtained and Water Service has had further detailed discussions with the developer.

Rural Community Transport Partnerships

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he has any plans to simplify the business planning process that is required for Rural Transport Schemes. (AQW 3363/00)

Mr Campbell: The requirement for Rural Community Transport Partnerships to submit Business Plans in advance of the annual award of grant from the Rural Transport Fund is in accordance with good practice in the application of public expenditure. Clearly, I would not advocate weakening controls on public spending, but my officials will be consulting with the Community Transport Association with a view to improving and, where possible, simplifying the business planning process.

NI Concessionary Fares Scheme

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail how the “free travel for pensioners scheme” will impact on Rural Transport Schemes. (AQW 3365/00)

Mr Campbell: The Northern Ireland Concessionary Fares Scheme, which is being extended from 1 October 2001 to provide free travel for older people, applies only to bus operators holding a road service licence under Part II of the Transport Act (Northern Ireland) 1967. The Rural Community Transport Partnerships, which provide minibus services for their members only, on a not-for-profit basis, do not operate under such a licence and, therefore, are not included in the Concessionary Fares Scheme.

Upgrading Roads: Newtownhamilton Area

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his proposals for the upgrading of; Elders Road; Old Road; Barkers Road; Glen Road; Cortamlat Road and Knockowen Road in the Newtownhamilton area, and to make it his policy that a special programme of remedial action will be implemented, along with appropriate resources given to the local Roads Service section, to address the dangerous condition of roads in the area. (AQW 3369/00)

Mr Campbell: Whilst my Department’s Roads Service has no plans to upgrade the above-mentioned roads (ie to carry out capital improvement works), the road

maintenance programme of works for the current financial year contains schemes on four of these roads:

- the surface dressing of Elders Road;
- the resurfacing of a 300 metre stretch of Old Road;
- the surface dressing of a 250 metre stretch of Glen Road with other resurfacing work planned for later in the year; and
- the surface dressing of Knockowen Road.

All of the surface dressing work listed above is programmed to start within the next four weeks. Due to other competing priorities, the current year's maintenance programme does not include any work on Barkers Road or Cortamlat Road, although I understand that reinstatements recently undertaken by my Department's Water Service have improved the condition of Cortamlat Road.

As I have previously indicated in the Assembly, I am very conscious that existing levels of funding to maintain properly and improve the road network fall short of what is required. It is in this context that I will be considering, as part of the work underway to develop a 10-year Regional Transportation Strategy (RTS) for Northern Ireland, the scale of the infrastructural investment required on roads, including rural roads. The RTS will consider ways of increasing investment in the transportation infrastructure and also how any additional money might best be spent. I hope to be in a position to present my draft RTS to the Regional Development Committee in Autumn this year.

Until such times as the RTS is in place, I will continue to press for additional funds for the road network at all opportunities. In the meantime, I can assure you that my Department will continue to make the best use of the resources currently available to develop and maintain the entire road network.

Roads Budget

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the total budget for roads in each district council area and to specify how much of the budget is allocated to (a) maintenance (b) new road construction and (c) other works. (AQW 3392/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service does not allocate its total budget for roads across district council areas. In particular, major road works are prioritised on a Northern Ireland-wide basis, and not on a Roads Service Divisional or district council basis, taking account of a broad range of criteria such as strategic planning policy, traffic flows, number of accidents, potential travel save times, environmental impact and value for money.

The resources available for minor road works and road maintenance are, however, allocated to the 4 Roads Service Divisions and, in turn, are apportioned across district council areas using appropriate indicators of need.

For your information the attached table illustrates the average Roads Service expenditure on minor road works and road maintenance during the period 1994/95 to

1998/99. Regrettably, because of changes to internal financial systems arising from the reorganisation of Roads Service in 1999/2000, the information for that year and 2000/01 is not yet available on a district council basis.

AVERAGE ROADS SERVICE EXPENDITURE ON MINOR ROAD WORKS AND ROAD MAINTENANCE 1994/95 TO 1998/99

District Council Area	Minor Road Works £K	Road Maintenance £K
Antrim	611	2,551
Ards	367	2,493
Armagh	761	3,672
Ballymena	687	3,199
Ballymoney	289	1,420
Banbridge	415	2,063
Belfast	1,274	11,315
Carrickfergus	293	1,100
Castlereagh	397	2,664
Coleraine	678	2,976
Cookstown	275	2,571
Craigavon	458	3,810
Derry	535	3,896
Down	672	3,060
Dungannon	420	3,256
Fermanagh	668	3,891
Larne	167	1,460
Limavady	376	1,952
Lisburn	749	4,877
Magherafelt	330	2,001
Moyle	178	1,231
Newry and Mourne	880	3,949
Newtownabbey	770	3,376
North Down	392	2,494
Omagh	461	4,083
Strabane	342	3,027

A26 - Extension of dualling and overtaking provision

Mr McClarty asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his plans to extend road dualling and overtaking provision on the A26 between Coleraine and Glarryford and to outline the proposed timetable for the implementation of these measures. (AQW 3415/00)

Mr Campbell: Proposals to extend the dualling and overtaking provision on this road are currently being assessed for possible inclusion in my Department's 10-Year Forward Planning Schedule of major works. Needless to say, there are many other schemes also competing for a place in this Schedule. Until this assessment is completed later this year, I am not in a position to indicate which schemes will be included in the Schedule. The timescale for the commencement of the schemes which are admitted to the Schedule will depend on the availability of funding in future years.

Traffic Calming Schemes: Omagh & Strabane District Council Areas

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 2971/00, to detail the traffic calming schemes that were received in respect of the Omagh and Strabane district council areas and, of these, those that were identified for possible inclusion in the 2001/02 programme. (AQW 3432/00)

Mr Campbell: As I indicated in my response to your Written Assembly Question AQW 2971/00, my Department's Roads Service received 5 and 10 requests respectively for traffic calming schemes within the Omagh and Strabane District Council areas during 2000-01. Details of these are as follows:

Omagh District Council area

Trillick Road, Dromore;
Omagh Road, Carrickmore;
Pomeroy Road, Carrickmore;
Main Street, Carrickmore; and
Hazelhill Road, Carrickmore.

Strabane District Council area

Strabane Road, Castlederg;
Castlefin Road, Castlederg;
Aghyaran Road, Castlederg;
Mason Road, Magheramason;
Church Square, Sion Mills;
Clady;
Ardstraw Village;
Mourne Park, Newtownstewart;
Urney Road, Strabane; and
Allen Park, Dunamanagh.

Of the 15 requests received, only 12 were deemed appropriate for traffic calming measures. Unfortunately, none of these 12 were assessed as being of sufficient priority to merit inclusion in the 2001-02 traffic calming programme. However, they may be included in future programmes.

I should add that 5 traffic calming schemes for locations within the Omagh and Strabane District Council areas, which had been assessed in previous years, are included in the 2001/02 programme. Details of these are as follows:

Omagh District Council area

Dromore Road, Omagh;
Derry Road, Omagh.

Strabane District Council area

Carletown Drive, Strabane;
Townsend Street, Strabane; and
Glebe.

Bus Terminal Facilities

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail bus terminal facilities currently in place or planned for each town with a population in excess of 10,000. (AQW 3435/00)

Mr Campbell: As population information is gathered on an electoral ward basis, statistics on town population are not readily available. However, Translink provide bus terminal facilities at the following towns: Antrim, Armagh, Ballyclare, Ballymena, Banbridge, Bangor, Coleraine, Cookstown, Craigavon, Downpatrick, Dungannon, Enniskillen, Larne, Limavady, Lisburn, Magherafelt, Newcastle, Newry, Newtownabbey, Newtownards, Omagh and Strabane. Bus passenger facilities are provided at all the above towns apart from Newtownabbey and Strabane. Translink also has plans to provide new bus stations at Magherafelt and Downpatrick.

In planning for new bus stations Translink consider the extent of usage of bus services to be a more relevant factor than the size of the surrounding population.

Water and Sewerage Services (NI) Order 1973

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development, in light of a House of Lords 'Alconbury' judgement made in May 2001 which deals with Article 6 of the ECHR, to detail his plans to amend Article 13 of the Water and Sewerage Services Order 1973, which precludes an independent appeal for an individual on whose land the Water Service wishes to carry out works. (AQW 3459/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department is considering the implications for its decision-making powers and processes of the recent House of Lords judgement on "Alconbury". There are no plans to amend Article 13 of the Water and Sewerage Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1973.

Traffic Management Schemes: Castle Garden School

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to ensure the safety of children attending the new Castle Gardens school in Newtownards by introducing the following traffic management schemes (a) a footpath (b) drop-off and pick-up parking areas and (c) the provision of a pedestrian crossing. (AQW 3472/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service has advised me that, during its extensive consultations with consultants acting on behalf the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) regarding the design of the new Castle Garden School, it emphasised the need to ensure safe arrangements for school children and parents. As a result, the design includes a footway link from the school to the existing public footway on

Bowtown Road and a pick up and set down area within the school grounds.

Whilst Roads Service has no plans at present to provide a formal crossing point, the situation will be monitored. It is assumed that the SEELB will provide a crossing patrol when the new school opens later this year.

Translink Service to University of Ulster

Mr Neeson asked the Minister for Regional Development to explain why Translink are proposing to operate double-decker buses on the residential Jordanstown Road to service the University of Ulster at Jordanstown rather than using the main entrance to the University on the Shore Road. (AQW 3495/00)

Mr Campbell: Translink has advised that the Property Department of the University of Ulster has allocated the side entrance of the Jordanstown Campus for service buses and provided a suitable turning circle. The route used within the campus meets DRD Roads Service standards whereas, due to safety considerations, both the routes via the main entrance on the Shore Road to the turning circle do not.

Guidance on grant aid applications to Voluntary and Community Bodies

Ms Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the guidance his Department and its NDPBs give to voluntary and community bodies, on accessing, using and accounting for grants from public monies. (AQW 3496/00)

Mr Campbell: Guidance on grant aid applications under the Rural Transport Fund is available on request from my Department and is also published on the Department's Internet web site.

Guidance on grants from the Transport for Disabled Persons Programme is available from officials in my Transport (Policy & Support) Division.

Rural Bus Service

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his plans to encourage rural commuters to travel by bus. (AQW 3501/00)

Mr Campbell: The Rural Transport Fund established by my Department provides revenue support for uneconomical rural bus services. Since Translink started operating services in February 1999, with the assistance of the Fund, 85 new services have been trialed in rural areas throughout Northern Ireland and there are currently 39 services in operation. My Department has also part-funded the purchase of 10 fully accessible midi-buses

for use in rural areas and it has enabled Translink to improve public transport information in these areas.

Translink advise that it actively promotes the Goldliner services in regional areas. Promotional offers for specific areas are advertised in the local press and on local radio. In addition Translink also produce timetables in regional formats. Translink have also developed a website that includes a journey planner facility and have provided a call centre where specific information can be obtained.

Free Car Parking: Health Visitors and Community Nurses

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development to consider the issue of free car parking "on call" discs to health visitors and community nurses when engaged on Health Service business. (AQW 3504/00)

Mr Campbell: To introduce a scheme to issue free parking "on call" discs to health visitors and community nurses when engaged on Health Service business would have significant resource implications for my Department's Roads Service who would have to administer, manage and police its operation. My Department has not been approached by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety about this matter. New primary legislation could be required to issue "on call" badges. I am not convinced that such a scheme is justified.

Road Maintenance: West Tyrone

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 3203/00, to detail response times for repairs against performance criteria in West Tyrone as covered by Omagh and Strabane District Council areas. (AQW 3505/00)

Mr Campbell: In my answer to the Written Assembly Question (AQW 3203) on 14 June 2001, I detailed the new performance criteria introduced during 2000-2001 against which my Department's Roads Service monitors their response times for repairs of defects on the road network. These new standards were introduced as part of Roads Service's continuous improvement programme.

As this is the first year these particular standards have been set, performance monitoring results for a complete year are not yet available. However, results for the period 1 March to 31 May 2001 for repairs to defects in the combined Strabane and Omagh District Council area are as follows:

- Of those defects identified to be repaired or made safe within 1 day of detection, 81% were repaired or made safe.

- Of those defects identified to be repaired or made safe within 5 working days of detection, 71% were repaired or made safe.

Grants paid to Voluntary and Community Sector

Ms Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail all grants of £100,000 or more made by his Department and its NDPBs to voluntary and community bodies in the financial year 2000-01.

(AQW 3522/00)

Mr Campbell: The Department for Regional Development gave grant aid of £456,512 to Disability Action and £102,500 to Bridge Accessible Transport in the financial year 2000-01.

Grants paid to Voluntary and Community Sector

Ms Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail all current schemes under which grants are paid by his Department and its NDPBs to the voluntary and community sector.

(AQW 3523/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department currently provides grant funding to the voluntary and community sector under the Transport for Disabled People Programme and the Rural Transport Fund.

Grants paid to Voluntary and Community Bodies

Ms Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail all grants paid to voluntary and community bodies by his Department and its NDPBs in the financial year 2000-01.

(AQW 3524/00)

Mr Campbell: In the financial year 2000-01 the following voluntary and community bodies received grant aid from the Department for Regional Development:

Transport for Disabled People	£'s
Bangor Shopmobility	5,500
Belfast Shopmobility	10,250
Disability Action	456,512
Bridge Accessible Transport	102,500
Moving People Together	50,500

Rural Transport Fund	£'s
Community Transport Association	98,343
Armagh Rural Transport	39,963
Cookstown Rural Community Transport Partnership	35,417
Down Armagh Rural Transport	32,945

Rural Transport Fund	£'s
Down District Accessible Transport	34,099
Fast Rural Transport Ltd	52,235
Roe Valley Rural Community Transport Partnership	20,000
Strabane District Transport Partnership	38,000
Mid Ulster Community Services Ltd	52,500
Mid-Tyrone Accessible Community Transport	32,500
Newcastle & District Older People's Network	16,000
North Antrim Community Transport Consortium	49,800
Peninsula Community Transport	30,616
Coleraine Area Rural Transport	17,225
Foyle Connect	19,000
Rural Lift for South West Fermanagh	46,500
Bann Community Project	11,000
Churchtown Community Association	5,000
Laurencetown, Lenadarg & Tullylish Community Association	3,780
Limavady Community Initiative	39,812
Melmount Community Care	4,000
Loughgiel Community Association	5,400

Strangford Lough Ferry Service: Message Signs

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to consider providing a sign at the floodgates on the Portaferry Road, Newtownards, indicating whether ferry services in Portaferry are operating normally in order to prevent wasted journey times for motorists.

(AQW 3533/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service is currently considering a contract for the provision of 5 electronic variable message signs for the Strangford Lough ferry service. These signs are to be located at the ferry slipways and at strategic road locations close to both Strangford and Portaferry.

It is hoped that this contract will be the first phase of such works. If successful and funding is available in future years, the provision of further signs, including one at Portaferry Road, Newtownards, will be considered.

Strangford Lough Ferry Service: Operating Hours

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to consider providing a 7.00 am commencement of ferry services between Portaferry and Strangford in order to alleviate early morning congestion.

(AQW 3534/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service has no plans at present to extend the operating hours of the Strangford Lough ferry service. The service currently operates to the limits of the permissible European Union

and Maritime Coastguard Agency working hours regulations and to extend the operating hours would involve the employment of additional crew with other associated costs. Roads Service believes that the increased capacity of the new vessel, due to enter service in September 2001, will help to ease any difficulties with early morning capacity.

Traffic Congestion: Portaferry Road, Newtownards

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail what surveys he has done or has planned on traffic congestion on the Portaferry Road, Newtownards in respect of the forthcoming relocation of Castle Gardens Primary School this autumn.

(AQW 3535/00)

Mr Campbell: As I indicated in my response to your Written Assembly Question (AQW 3291/00) on 21 June 2001, following closure of Castle Gardens Primary School, my Department's Roads Service intends to carry out a study to determine the feasibility of introducing traffic management measures to improve traffic progression at this location.

This study is programmed to commence in September, after the holiday period, and will include any necessary surveys to help assess traffic movement at this junction. No recent surveys have, therefore, been carried out.

Maintenance of Range Wall, Derg Bridge

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail who has responsibility for the repair of the range wall leading to Derg Bridge, Castlederg on the Castlegore Road.

(AQW 3537/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service has responsibility for the repair and maintenance of the above wall which is a continuation of the parapet wall of Derg Bridge. A section of this wall, fronting Castlederg Free Presbyterian Church, was taken down by the Rivers Agency to facilitate the installation of a sewer. Rivers Agency have asked Roads Service to incorporate the repair of the wall into the scheme to raise the level of the parapet walls on Derg Bridge to the same level as the recently constructed flood protection wall. This scheme is programmed to be carried out later this year in conjunction with other maintenance work to the bridge.

Resurfacing: Ednagee Road, Castlederg

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail when Ednagee Road, Castlederg will be re-instated to Roads Service standards following pipe laying.

(AQW 3539/00)

Mr Campbell: Departmental officials have advised me that, following the installation of a replacement water main along a section of Ednagee Road, a temporary bitmac reinstatement was laid for a period to allow settlement to occur. Officials anticipate that a scheme to resurface the entire road width along the length of the temporary reinstatement will be completed before the end of August 2001.

Road Maintenance: Newtownards Town Centre

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps he intends to take in order to repair/upgrade roads in Newtownards town centre once the Phoenix Gas pipe laying programme has been completed.

(AQW 3542/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service intends to resurface Old Cross Street, Castle Street, Court Square and parts of New Road and Portaferry Road in Newtownards during the current financial year. This scheme had been programmed for completion last Summer but was postponed to accommodate works in these streets by Phoenix Natural Gas.

As you will know, Phoenix Natural Gas is continuing to carry out street works in Newtownards and Roads Service will monitor these works to ensure that reinstatements are to agreed standards.

Roads Service: Grass Cutting

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (a) the criteria presently used to determine what areas of grass are cut by the Roads Service (b) how often they are cut (c) the number of contractors employed this year compared to last year and (d) the number of employees working on grass cutting this year compared to last year.

(AQW 3543/00)

Mr Campbell:

- (a) My Department's Roads Service cuts grass on areas of land which it owns to prevent:
- overgrowth onto carriageways and footway surfaces; and
 - the obstruction of sightlines and traffic signs.

Grass cutting operations are carried out for road safety reasons and not for cosmetic or amenity purposes.

- (b) Roads Service cuts roadside verges and other areas of its land up to twice a year in rural areas and up to 5 times a year in urban areas. It is accepted policy to leave some areas of verge uncut, especially in more rural areas.
- (c) In 2001 Roads Service let grass cutting contracts to 12 contractors compared to 11 contractors in 2000.

- (d) It would not be possible to ascertain specifically how many Roads Service employees are involved in grass cutting duties because, in general, employees are not dedicated full-time to this task. The number varies from day to day for various reasons, for example, the start and duration of the growing season, the speed of growth and work priorities. Generally, however, the average number of employees working on grass cutting is similar to that of last year.

Roads Service: Weed Control

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (a) the criteria presently used to determine what areas are sprayed for weed control by the Roads Service (b) how often they are sprayed (c) the number of those employed in spraying this year compared to last year and (d) what steps he intends to take in order to prevent the spread of noxious weeds. (AQW 3544/00)

Mr Campbell:

- (a) My Department's Roads Service sprays weeds on all footways and kerbed and paved areas (including road drainage channels) for road safety reasons and to prevent the deterioration of the road pavement.
- (b) Spraying is carried out as often as is necessary to control or eliminate the growth of weeds.
- (c) It would not be possible to ascertain how many Roads Service employees are involved in weed spraying duties because, in general, employees are not dedicated full-time to this task. The number varies from day to day for various reasons, for example, the start and duration of the growing season, the speed of growth and work priorities. Generally, however, the average number of employees engaged on weeding spraying is similar to that of last year.
- (d) Most noxious weeds seed late in the growing season and Roads Service endeavours to prevent their spread by treating or removing the weeds early in the season (ie, before mid-July). This is done by:
- spot cutting or pulling;
 - cutting by mower (when this is more economical); and
 - chemical spraying.

Resurfacing: Inishargey Road, Kircubbin

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 3293/00, to state when he intends to have the other section of the Inishargey Road, Kircubbin resurfaced. (AQW 3545/00)

Mr Campbell: Following the recent resurfacing of a section of Kircubbin Road, Ballywalter, my Department's Roads Service has no immediate plans to resurface either

the remaining stretch of Kircubbin Road or Inishargey Road, Kircubbin.

Planning Application J/2000/0599/O: Inadequate Sight Lines

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development to reconsider Roads Service's decision in respect of "inadequate sight lines" concerning planning application J/2000/0599/0 at 163 Fyfin Road, Victoria Bridge, BT82 9LJ. (AQW 3563/00)

Mr Campbell: As you will know, my Department's Roads Service has been consulted by the Department of the Environment's Planning Service regarding this planning application. Roads Service has determined that visibility splays of 2.4 metres by 90 metres in both directions are required for the access from the proposed site onto Fyfin Road.

I understand that, whilst the required visibility standard can be provided in one direction, the standard in the other direction is only 2.4 metres by 11 metres. This is because the applicant does not have control over a portion of adjacent land. Roads Service therefore gave an opinion to refuse the application to Planning Service.

I am advised that Planning Service presented the application to Strabane District Council on 26 June 2001 with a recommendation to refuse on grounds of road safety. The Council asked that a decision on the application be deferred. This is to give the applicant another opportunity to meet and discuss his application with Roads Service. That meeting will be arranged in due course. I trust you will appreciate, however, that Roads Service cannot be expected to agree to visibility standards that would prejudice the safety of road users.

Proposed Links to A5 from Donegal

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (a) any correspondence he has received from consultants, RPS Environmental Services, acting for Donegal County Council, regarding environmental assessment in relation to route selection stage for proposed links to the A5 from Donegal and (b) any replies he has made. (AQW 3565/00)

Mr Campbell: I can confirm that I have not received any correspondence from RPS Environmental Services.

My Department's Roads Service has, however, received four letters over the last year from these consultants seeking comments on their environmental assessment of the various proposals being put forward by Donegal County Council for improvements to the road network in the vicinity of Lifford and a possible connecting link to the A5 in Northern Ireland.

In its replies Roads Service offered the consultants the opportunity to visit its offices at County Hall, Omagh to inspect the Environment Statement prepared for the proposed Stage 2 Strabane Bypass Scheme. It also commented that the longest suggested connecting route (south of Croghan Hill) may not be economically viable.

Pedestrian Guard Rail: Orr Park to Baronscourt Road, Newtownstewart

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development to consider, in the interests of road safety, the provision of a pedestrian guard rail on the main Strabane Road from the junction of Orr Park to Baronscourt Road, Newtownstewart. (AQW 3566/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service has considered the need for a pedestrian guardrail on the footway at this location but has concluded that it would not be appropriate as it would not provide protection to pedestrians from a vehicle mounting the footway as a result of an accident. Guardrails are normally only provided to channel pedestrians to a safe crossing location and are not designed to withstand vehicular impact.

To reduce the risk of accidents at this location, Roads Service has laid a high friction anti-skid material on the carriageway surface at the sharp bend close to the Baronscourt Road junction and past the junction. This work was completed in the latter half of last year and, since then, there have been no reports of accidents on this stretch of road.

Peninsula Community Transport Ltd

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the steps he is taking to offer job security for the part-time drivers in the Peninsula Community Transport Scheme. (AQW 3568/00)

Mr Campbell: Voluntary partnerships such as that run by Peninsula Community Transport Ltd are eligible for grants from the Rural Transport Fund towards the cost of operating minibus services including any payments to part time drivers. However, the terms and conditions of employment of part time drivers employed by Peninsula Community Transport Ltd is a matter for the Partnership itself. My Department has offered grant towards the operating costs of Peninsula Community Transport Ltd up to the end of March 2002. Support for further years will be based on an assessment of the Partnership's business plans for those years.

Peninsula Community Transport Scheme

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to consider permitting the Peninsula Community Transport Scheme to retain fares for a 12 month period

to defray running costs, repairs and maintenance as a result of the delay in the receipt of funding.

(AQW 3569/00)

Mr Campbell: The Peninsula Community Transport Partnership is entitled to retain fares. However, my Department takes into account a Partnership's existing cash resources when making offers of grant from the Rural Transport Fund.

On receipt of the business plan for 2001-02 from Peninsula Community Transport officials from my Department completed discussions with the Partnership on 24 May 2001 and an offer of grant for the current year issued on 13 June 2001.

Peninsula Community Transport Ltd

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he has any plans to extend the service of the Peninsula Community Transport Scheme to include Newtownards and Holywood. (AQW 3570/00)

Mr Campbell: It is primarily a matter for Peninsula Community Transport to consider the area it wishes to serve. On receipt of any proposal from Peninsula Community Transport to extend services to include Newtownards and Holywood my Department would have to determine whether the proposal would meet the eligibility criteria for the provision of grant aid from the Rural Transport Fund. In particular my Department would have to consider the extent to which the proposal would benefit those who live and work in the rural areas around Newtownards and Holywood.

Road Dualling: M22 to Proposed Toome Bypass

Mr Clyde asked the Minister for Regional Development to consider duelling that section of road from the end of the M22 to the proposed new Toome Bypass as this is a high accident road and will become more congested with the provision of the bypass. (AQW 3579/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Road Service is currently assessing the dualling of the existing road between the end of the M22 motorway and the start of the proposed Toome Bypass for possible inclusion in its 10-year Forward Planning Schedule.

I hope to publish details of the Forward Planning Schedule later this year.

M2 Slip Roads at Antrim Area Hospital

Mr Clyde asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the timetable for the provision of onslips to the M2 motorway from Antrim Area Hospital.

(AQW 3580/00)

Mr Campbell: As you are aware my predecessor, Mr Peter Robinson, agreed last year to include the M2 slip roads at Antrim Area Hospital in Roads Service's Major Works Preparation Pool. Since then, a preliminary alignment has been designed and an environmental consultant has recently been appointed to advise on the environmental assessment for the scheme.

The scheme will be progressed through the necessary statutory procedures as quickly as possible. However, even if there are no objections to the scheme, it could take up to 3 years before these procedures are concluded.

You will appreciate, therefore, that no firm date can be given for the implementation of this scheme as it is at an early stage of development and will depend on the availability of funds at the time when the statutory procedures are completed.

Comber Bypass Scheme

Mr Taylor asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (a) the number of objections received in respect of the Vesting Order application for the Comber by-pass road scheme; and (b) when it is intended to invite tenders for this scheme; and to make a statement.

(AQW 3606/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service has received one objection in response to the recently-published Notice of Intention to Make a Vesting Order in respect of the Comber Bypass scheme. Roads Service is currently endeavouring to resolve the objection and, at this stage, it would be inappropriate to advise when invitations to tender for the scheme might be issued.

Public Transport: East Antrim Area

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail any plans he has to improve public transport in the East Antrim area.

(AQW 3639/00)

Mr Campbell: Translink has advised that the following developments will help to improve public transport in the East Antrim area. The refurbishment of Carrickfergus railway station is well underway and should be completed shortly. It expects to submit proposals to the Department shortly to upgrade the railway line between Whiteabbey and Whitehead. Translink is continuing to investigate the provision of park-and-ride spaces at Trooperslane railway halt as well as providing further parking spaces at Greenisland. It also intends to provide a new bus service between Carrickfergus and Mallusk.

In addition to these developments there have already been some recent improvements to public transport in the East Antrim area. The City Express Quality Bus Corridor along the Jordanstown Road is open and

operational, and the number of park-and-ride spaces at Whitehead railway station was recently increased to 29.

Walkways in Carrickfergus

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to give his assessment on the state of walkways in Carrickfergus town centre area.

(AQW 3640/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department's Roads Service considers that, while the existing footway surfaces in Carrickfergus town centre area are showing signs of normal wear and tear, they are currently in a safe and satisfactory condition.

Roads Service officials inspect the town centre area on a four weekly cycle basis and any defects that are considered to be safety hazards are identified and repaired in accordance with established road maintenance procedures. Also, any defects brought to the attention of Roads Service by members of the public are investigated and appropriate action is initiated.

Pedestrian Zone: Carrickfergus

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to give his assessment of the adequacy of the pedestrian zone in Carrickfergus town centre.

(AQW 3641/00)

Mr Campbell: Officials from my Department's Roads Service have advised me that the pedestrian zone in Carrickfergus town centre comprises Market Place, West Street and the adjoining North Street. Subject to certain exceptions (eg, emergency/delivery vehicles etc.), vehicular traffic is excluded from the zone.

Officials have recently observed that a number of vehicles have been parked illegally within the zone, mainly in North Street. As the enforcement of parking restrictions is a matter for the RUC, officials have brought this matter to their attention.

Other than the above problem, from a Roads Service perspective the pedestrian zone appears to be adequate in meeting the needs of pedestrians.

Brownfield Sites

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of brownfield sites which are available for development in each district council area.

(AQW 3648/00)

Mr Campbell: At present information is not held detailing brownfield sites currently available.

The draft Regional Development Strategy indicates that urban capacity studies will be used to inform the

degree to which future urban housing growth can be met within the “footprint” of individual towns.

These urban capacity studies, to be prepared by the Department of the Environment, will establish the extent of land, including brownfield sites, within existing urban areas which is available for development.

This information will provide an important baseline survey for future supplies for housing land within existing urban areas and will inform the preparation of development plans.

Traffic Survey: Bangor

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail when the Roads Service’s survey into traffic in Bangor will be completed. (AQW 3672/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department’s Roads Service has advised me that, whilst it had anticipated that the results of its traffic study of Bangor would be available by the summer, they are not likely to be available until the autumn. This is because of the extensive nature of the study which involves an assessment of traffic conditions at the junctions on a number of roads south and west of the town.

Roads Service officials will make a presentation to North Down Council when the survey is complete.

Traffic Survey: Bangor

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development whether the Roads Service’s survey into traffic in Bangor will be made public. (AQW 3673/00)

Mr Campbell: My Department’s Roads Service has advised me that, whilst it had anticipated that the results of its traffic study of Bangor would be available by the summer, they are not likely to be available until the autumn. This is because of the extensive nature of the study which involves an assessment of traffic conditions at the junctions on a number of roads south and west of the town.

Roads Service officials will make a presentation to North Down Council when the survey is complete.

Brownfield Sites

Dr Birnie asked the Minister for Regional Development to give his assessment of the target for use of brownfield sites in the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan. (AQW 3681/00)

Mr Campbell: At present there is no target for the Belfast Metropolitan Area.

The latest draft of the Regional Development Strategy, which was debated in the Assembly on 2 July 2001 sets an ambitious regional target of 60% up to 2010.

Targets for individual settlements will be set through the development plan process which has recently commenced for the Belfast Metropolitan Area. An assessment of the capacity for additional housing within the existing urban area will be carried out by DOE and this will be used to develop an appropriate target for the BMA.

Proposed Greenfield Over-Zoning

Dr Birnie asked the Minister for Regional Development to give his assessment of the 10% proposed greenfield overzoning in the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan. (AQW 3682/00)

Mr Campbell: The latest draft of the Regional Development Strategy, presented to the Assembly on 2 July 2001, allows a limited level of over-zoning up to a maximum of 10% to be used as an exception in those situations where a potential land supply difficulty is likely to arise.

I am advised by Mr Foster, the Minister responsible for the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan, that work on the project is still at an early stage of preparation and he hopes to publish an Issues Paper for discussion later this year. No decisions have been taken as regards the content of the Plan, including proposals for over-zoning.

However, the Plan will be prepared within the context set by my Department’s Regional Development Strategy.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Grants to Voluntary and Community Sector

Mr Close asked the Minister for Social Development to detail all grants of £100,000 or more made by his Department and its NDPBs to voluntary and community bodies in the financial year 2000-01. (AQW 3465/00)

The Minister for Social Development (Mr Morrow): The Department for Social Development and its NDPBs have made grants of £100,000 or more to voluntary and community bodies in the financial year 2000-01 as detailed below.

Organisation Name	Grant***
Bryson House-Heatsmart (Heating Advice service for Tenants)	£103,320.00
Community Change	£140,248.00
Creggan Enterprises Ltd	£100,000.00
CRISP* – Armoy Community Development Forum	£135,879.00
CRISP – Bushmills Development Association	£102,960.00
CRISP – Donaghmore Torrent Valley Initiative	£207,105.00
CRISP – Dundrum Development Association	£124,620.00

Organisation Name	Grant***
CRISP – Tobermore Business Development association	£136,512.00
CRISP – Upperlands Community Development association	£210,571.00
Ebrington CERS** – Maydown Youth Training Project Ltd	£687,200.00
Fold Home Improvement Agency	£278,000.00
Housing Rights Service	£233,000.00
Intercomm - Inter Community Development Project (North Belfast)	£121,180.00
Castleberg Enterprise Company	£323,750.00
Drumquin Development Association	£143,541.00
Iona Park CERS – Iona Enterprises	£295,428.00
Law Centre (Northern Ireland)	£377,033.00
Lee Hestia	£379,790.00
N.I. Council for the Homeless	£133,000.00
Northern Ireland Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux	£366,060.00
Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA)	£388,570.00
Northern Ireland Tenants Action Project (NITAP)	£418,000.00
LEDCOM (Phase 3)	£110,000.00
Omagh Boys & Girls Club	£105,138.00
Village Garden Broughshane Ltd	£286,000.00
Ulidia Training Services	£185,000.00
Voluntary Service Belfast	£126,768.00
Volunteer Development Agency	£146,590.00
Women's Aid	£186,892.00

* CRISP – Community Regeneration and Improvement Special Programme

** CERS – Community Economic Regeneration Schemes

*** Sums shown represent offers made by the Department not all of which have been drawn to date.

Grant Schemes: Voluntary and Community Sector

Mr Close asked the Minister for Social Development to detail all current schemes under which grants are paid by his Department and its NDPBs to the voluntary and community sector. (AQW 3466/00)

Mr Morrow: The schemes are as follows:

- EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation;
- Community Economic Regeneration Scheme;
- Community Regeneration and Improvement Special Programme;
- Article 3 of the Social Need (NI) Order 1986;
- Articles 28 and 156A of the Housing (NI) Order 1981;
- Maydown Ebrington Community Economic Regeneration Scheme;

- Iona Park Community Economic Regeneration Scheme;
- Liganside Schemes;
 - Local Events
 - Investment Incentive
 - Ladder of Provision
 - Events Sponsorship
- Volunteer Bureau Initiative;
- Community Volunteering Scheme;
- Active Community Initiative;
- Grant aid to Regional Infrastructural Voluntary Organisations;
- Grant aid to Regional Voluntary Organisations in the Advice Services Field and Community Work Education;
- Londonderry Regeneration Initiative; and
- Londonderry Sub-programme of the EC Urban Community Initiative.

Disability Welfare Reform Branch

Mr Tierney asked the Minister for Social Development to detail, under the New Disability Welfare Reform Branch (DWRB), the number of (a) cases awaiting re-examination (b) applicants that have had their benefits reduced under the new scheme (c) applicants that have had their benefit increased and (d) cases remaining unchanged. (AQW 3506/00)

Mr Morrow: As at 28 June 2001 Disability Welfare Reform Branch considered 3045 Disability Living Allowance awards.

- 448 cases are currently awaiting re-examination/determination;
- 472 awards (18%) have been reduced or withdrawn;
- 534 awards (21%) have been increased; and
- 1,591 customers (61%) were found to be receiving the correct level of benefit and their current award was maintained.

NIHE Property: Replacements Windows

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the criteria used by the Housing Executive to determine whether replacement windows are wooden or uPVC. (AQW 3507/00)

Mr Morrow: The Housing Executive's Chief Executive has advised that softwood, hardwood and UPVC materials are currently used in the manufacture of window frames for Housing Executive contracts. The Executive's approved standard material for window frames is softwood.

There are, however, certain circumstances where softwood is inappropriate, such as:

- the material used for the windows in an existing phase or phases of a scheme;
- sound insulation requirements,
- climate exposure,
- medium/high rise construction or
- location eg maritime environment.

In these circumstances, either uPVC or hardwood may be used.

In addition, if there is no conflict in the choice of materials with adjacent Housing Executive housing, the Executive may apply an approved financial formula to establish which material represents best value for money.

Loft Insulation

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Social Development to detail, by district council area, the number and proportion of Housing Executive properties that do not have the current recommended depth of loft insulation installed. (AQW 3508/00)

Mr Morrow: The Housing Executive's Chief Executive has advised that the information requested is not readily available in the format requested and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

However, loft insulation has been part of the Housing Executive's External Cyclic Maintenance programme since 1996. The Executive estimates that a further 2,000 properties require top up loft insulation and that these will be completed in 2001/2002.

Cavity Wall Insulation

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Social Development to detail, by district council area, the number and proportion of Housing Executive properties that have cavity wall insulation. (AQW 3509/00)

Mr Morrow: The Housing Executive's Chief Executive has advised that the information requested is not available in the format requested and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

However, I am advised that only a few properties are without cavity wall insulation and that these are included in the Housing Executive's Cavity Wall Insulation Programme.

Type of window frames fitted to NIHE properties

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Social Development to detail, by district council area, the type of windows

that have been fitted (including replacements) on housing schemes in each of the last two years.

(AQW 3511/00)

Mr Morrow: The Housing Executive's Chief Executive has advised that the information requested is not readily available in the format requested and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

However, I am advised that the Executive installs softwood, hardwood and uPVC window frames as part of its External Cyclic Maintenance Programme or in the Multi-Element Improvement Programme. The type of window frame installed depends on a number of factors including, for example, sound insulation, climate exposure or medium/high rise construction.

Guidance to Voluntary and Community Bodies regarding Grants

Ms Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the guidance his Department and its NDPBs give to voluntary and community bodies, on accessing, using and accounting for grants from public monies. (AQW 3521/00)

Mr Morrow: In June 2001 my Department launched the Government's Strategy for Support of the Voluntary and Community Sector entitled "Partners for Change." This strategy commits Government Departments to ensuring that information on grant programmes is widely available and accessible to the sector.

The Department for Social Development and its NDPBs have a strong and well-established relationship with the voluntary and community sector extending across all of the key business areas. We are committed to the promotion of community well-being through integrated social and economic action, in partnership with the sector.

I will arrange for precise details of the guidance supplied to the sector, by the Department and its NDPBs, to be placed in the Assembly Library.

Grants paid to Voluntary and Community Bodies

Ms Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail all grants paid to voluntary and community bodies by his Department and its NDPBs in the financial year 2000-01. (AQW 3525/00)

Mr Morrow: My Department and its NDPBs paid 1,037 grants to voluntary and community bodies in the financial year 2000-01. I have arranged to have this information placed in the Assembly Library.

Gap Funding: Omagh and Strabane Areas

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail those applicants who were awarded Gap funding via interim funding arrangements in (a) Omagh District Council area and (b) Strabane District Council area. (AQW 3572/00)

Mr Morrow: The applicants listed below relate to Department of Social Development awards only, in the Omagh and Strabane areas, as it has not been possible to separate the areas on a postcode basis:

Cairde Strabane Republican Ex Prisoners	BT82
Mid-Tyrone Accessible Transport	BT79
Omagh Women's Area Network	BT78
Omawest Community Development Association	BT78
Silverbrook Mills	BT82
The Branching Out Project	BT82
The Villages Together	BT82

Gap Funding: Omagh and Strabane Areas

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail those applicants who were not awarded Gap Funding via interim funding arrangements in (a) Omagh District Council area and (b) Strabane District Council area. (AQW 3573/00)

Mr Morrow: The applicants listed below relate to Department for Social Development decisions only and it has not been possible to separate the Omagh and Strabane areas on a postcode basis: -

Dennett Interchange	BT82
Derry & Raphoe Action	BT78
Gaelphobal	BT82
Melmount Forum	BT82
Milestone Training Initiative	BT79
Omagh District Volunteer Bureau	BT78
Trillick Enterprise Group	BT78
Trillick Enterprise Resource Centre	BT78
Outreach Advice Service	BT82

Gap Funding

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the selection criteria under which the awards

of Gap Funding were considered via interim funding arrangements. (AQW 3574/00)

Mr Morrow: The criteria used were those detailed by the Minister of Finance and Personnel on behalf of the Executive Committee in his statement on 12 February. Applications were scored on eligibility and evidence of insufficient resources in the first instance and on the selection criteria in the Programme Complements of the 2 EU Operational Programmes. Given the high demand for some Measures the Department had to prioritise applications based on their score in the assessment process.

Strabane 2000 Pride in our Town Sub-Committee

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 3355/00 and his response to a supplementary question to AQO 1379/00, to explain why the investigation did not involve both parties affected by this matter. (AQW 3607/00)

Mr Morrow: When this alleged incident was first raised at Question Time on 8 May I undertook to "see what my Department's role is and what representations there might be from the incident".

The investigation carried out by my officials was limited to the role played by the Department in the Strabane 2000 Pride in our Town Sub-committee. As stated in my written reply of 8 June, no officials attended any of the meetings and the Department played absolutely no part in the work of this committee.

When it became clear that DSD officials were in no way involved, officials did not attempt to investigate the circumstances surrounding the alleged incident because it was not a matter for the Department.

Disability Living Allowance/Incapacity Benefit Claimants

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of people claiming DLA and/or incapacity benefit who are then; (a) sent for independent medical examination as a percentage of total claimants; (b) total claimants within the constituency of Mid-Ulster; and (c) total claimants referred to independent medical examiners. (AQW 3609/00)

Mr Morrow: In the year 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001, there were 13,750 Disability Living Allowance customers and 42,100 Incapacity Benefit customers referred for medical examinations. This represents 25% and 35%, respectively, of total claims.

As at February 2001, there were 10,767 people claiming Disability Living Allowance and/or Incapacity Benefit in the Mid-Ulster constituency. Information on

the number of these customers referred for medical examination is not held.

Rural Poverty and Social Exclusion

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the steps he has taken to address Rural Poverty and Social Exclusion. (AQW 3610/00)

Mr Morrow: Whilst my Department does not have specific responsibility for rural areas, addressing social exclusion is a high priority and applies to all of its business areas. The steps I have taken include action in housing, social security and child support that, among other things, address the needs of unemployed people, travellers, homeless people, and older people with low incomes. In addition my Department provides a wide range of grant programmes that fund the regional voluntary sector, volunteering and advice services infrastructure, promote volunteering, encourage all forms of community involvement and support the local community infrastructure through channelling grant aid to local communities through District Councils. Information on my Departments work programme are set out in a Corporate Plan and the New TSN Action Plan "Making it Work", copies of which are available in the Assembly Library.

Data on Household Income

Ms McWilliams asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of children living in (a) low income households; (b) households where nobody is in work and (c) housing that falls below "the set standard of decency" in Northern Ireland and how this compares to Great Britain and if he will define what is meant by "low income households" and "the set standard of decency". (AQW 3618/00)

Mr Morrow: Data on household income is currently not available for Northern Ireland to allow identification on low income households and the Department does not have a definition of low income households. Detailed information is obtained in Great Britain through the Family Resources Survey (FRS), which is not currently undertaken in Northern Ireland. The Department is seeking to introduce the FRS to Northern Ireland in April 2002.

The Department does not collect data on the number of households where nobody is in work, and eligibility for benefit is established for benefit units rather than households. It is possible for the household as a whole to be outside the low income grouping, whilst certain members are entitled to receive benefit. There are a number of income related Social Security Benefits and Tax Credits. The table below shows the number of dependents aged 18 and under for recipients of Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance and Working Families Tax Credit.

Credit	Income Support	Jobseeker's Allowance	Working Families Tax
NI	101,820	43,860	85,600
GB	2,294,000	36,000	2,194,200

NB: NI figures for Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance are at May 2000.

GB figures for Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance are at February 2001.

Working Families Tax Credit for Both NI and GB are at November 2000.

Figures supplied by Department for Social Development and Department of Work and Pensions.

The 1996 Northern Ireland House Condition Survey records that there were children in 5,080 inhabited houses which failed the statutory fitness standard. The Survey does not record the total number of children within these households, nor is a GB comparator available. Again there is no definition of "set standard of decency".

A dwelling is unfit for human habitation if it fails to meet one or more of the following requirements:

- it is structurally stable;
- it is free from serious disrepair;
- it is free from dampness prejudicial to the health of the occupants (if any);
- it has adequate provision for lighting, heating and ventilation;
- it has an adequate piped supply of wholesome water;
- there are satisfactory facilities in the house for the preparation and cooking of food, including a sink with satisfactory supply of hot and cold water;
- it has suitably located water-closet for the exclusive use of the occupants (if any);
- it has, for the exclusive use of the occupants (if any), a suitably located fixed bath or shower and wash-hand basin each of which is provided with a satisfactory supply of hot and cold water;
- it has an effective system for the draining of foul, waste and surface water.

Consultancy Reports

Ms McWilliams asked the Minister for Social Development to list each consultancy report commissioned by his department in 2000-01, noting its objective, cost and whether or not it was published. (AQW 3622/00)

Mr Morrow: The information requested is set out in the table below.

Report Name	Objective	Cost £	Published
1. Pre Contract Review of Service Delivery Project	To carry out a review focused on a risk based assessment of the readiness of the Social Security Agency and Eisis consortium to enter into a contract to provide the Agency with: a.Strategic Advice Services b.Operational Support Services.	71,000.00	No
2. Welfare Reform and Modernisation Programme State of Readiness Report	To establish the state of readiness of the Welfare Reform and Modernisation Programme to begin implementation of the Programme for which funding had been made available.	27,000.00	No
3. Support to Welfare Reform and Modernisation Programme	To advise the Social Security Agency on the implementation of its Welfare Reform and Modernisation Programme.	228,000	No
4. Financial Monitoring and Controls Guide for the Welfare Reform and Modernisation Programme	To develop financial monitoring control procedures.	3,000	No Ongoing
5. Financial Business Case for Welfare Reform and Modernisation Programme	To provide a business case to underpin the funding provided by HM Treasury for the Northern Ireland Welfare Reform and Modernisation Programme.	17,000	No Ongoing
6. Welfare Reform and Modernisation Programme Communications	To conduct a study on the current status of communications across the Welfare Reform and Modernisation Programme.	5,000	No
7. Technical Architecture and Strategy	To specify the technical architecture required for the co-location of Training and Employment Agency and Social Security Agency services	27,000	No
8. ONE Service Evaluation	To carry out an independent evaluation of the ONE Service.	50,000	No

Report Name	Objective	Cost £	Published
9. Survey of Northern Ireland Social Security Recipients paid by Order Book or Giro-cheque	To provide an overview of the characteristics, experiences and attitudes of those Northern Ireland Social Security benefit recipients not currently paid by Automated Credit Transfer	162,000	The Agency intends to publish report when it is finalised.
10 Steps to Excellence – Evaluation Report	Evaluation of BRO funded project	6598.00	No
11. Health Perceptions – Evaluation Report	Evaluation of BRO funded project	5,500.00	No
12. Help the Aged – Evaluation Report	Evaluation of BRO funded project	6,877.00	No
13. Jaffe Centre – Evaluation Report	Evaluation of BRO funded project	5,031.00	No
14. Feile an Phobail – Evaluation Report	Evaluation of BRO funded project	21,500.00	No
15. Kerbside Recycling – Evaluation Report	Evaluation of BRO funded project	5,150.00	No
16. Homezone – Evaluation Report	Evaluation of BRO funded project	30,622.00	No
17. Youth at Risk – Evaluation Report	Evaluation of BRO funded project	9,906.00	No
18. Literacy & Numeracy – Evaluation Report	Evaluation of BRO funded project	4,320.00	No
19. West Belfast Health & Advocacy – Evaluation Report	Evaluation of BRO funded project	3,975.00	No
20. Greater East Belfast Partnership – Evaluation Report	Evaluation of BRO funded project	4,049.00	No
21. Men's health Project – Evaluation Report	Evaluation of BRO funded project	1,062.00	No
22. Sponsored Daycare – Evaluation Report	Evaluation of BRO funded project	1,017.00	No
23. North Belfast Neighbourhood Network – Evaluation Report	Evaluation of BRO funded project	450.00	No
24. Foyer – Evaluation Report	Evaluation of BRO funded project	900.00	No
25. Supported Work Opportunities Programme – Evaluation Report	Evaluation of BRO funded project	1,200.00	No
26. Law Centre Employment Rights – Evaluation Report	Evaluation of BRO funded project	985.50	No
27. Disability Network - Evaluation	Evaluation of BRO funded project	4,200.00	No
28. Aftercare - Evaluation Report	Evaluation of BRO funded project	660.00	No

Report Name	Objective	Cost £	Published
29. Feasibility Study into proposed recycling facility in the North West	Feasibility Study	5,400.00	No
30. Notional Charging System for the Management of Roads Service Interim Estate	Establish a system to deliver accurate and actual costs for providing management for Roads Service	3,752.72	No
31. Review of Voluntary Activity Unit	To determine the strategic priorities for VAU and make recommendations on an appropriate organisational structure to deliver business activities	55,000	No
32. Volunteer Bureaux Initiative	To conduct an objective evaluation of the Volunteer Bureaux Initiative	29,465.00	No
33. Joint Government/ Voluntary and Community Sector Forum	Compilation of report on a joint planning day on the Compact between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector	1,500.00	No
34. Community Development Skills Commissioned by The Community Work Education and Training Network paid for by DSD	To assess the level of community development skills, education and training needs in the statutory sector	19,995.00	Yes
35. Responses to the Consultation Document on Funding for the Voluntary and Community Sector	To provide an analysis of the responses to the consultation	11,261.00	No
36. Responses to the Consultation Document on the Active Community Initiative	To provide an analysis of the responses to the consultation	7,000.00	Yes
37. Retired and Senior Volunteer Programme	To conduct an objective evaluation of RSVP	3,825.00	No
38. GAP Funding	Evaluation of the effectiveness of the Department's handling of the GAP funding process	700.00	No
39. Joint Government/ Voluntary and Community Sector Forum	Evaluation of the effectiveness of Joint Forum Meetings	1,579.00	No

School and Public Property sold for NIHE Development

Ms McWilliams asked the Minister for Social Development to detail how many acres of (a) school and (b)

public property have been sold for NIHE development in each of the last five years. (AQW 3629/00)

Mr Morrow: The Housing Executive has advised that the information requested is not readily available in the form requested and could only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.

However, the Housing Executive considers that the amount of land involved is small: Land and Property staff recall only one transaction, involving a former 12-acre school site at Ballygomartin Road, Belfast, purchased from the Belfast Education and Library Board.

Eden Development: Phase 2

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Social Development to detail any plans he has for phase two of Eden Development. (AQW 3637/00)

Mr Morrow: The Housing Executive's Chief Executive has advised that Phase 2 of Eden redevelopment, for approximately 25 units of new build, is scheduled to start in 2003/2004. However, the actual start date will depend on the successful completion of Phase 1, which is due on site within the current financial year.

It is anticipated that Phase 2 will be delivered by a Housing Association, yet to be specified.

Income Support Appeals

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Social Development, for each of the last five years for which figures are available, to detail (a) how many appeals to backdate Income Support have been received (b) how many of these appeals are related to lack of entitlement to Incapacity Benefit on the grounds of inadequate National Insurance contributions and (c) how many of these appeals have been successful and to detail how much claimed Income Support remained unpaid because of unsuccessful appeals. (AQW 3651/00)

Mr Morrow: The Department does not hold this information and it could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Recovery of overpaid benefits

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (a) the average cost of recovering an overpayment of benefit and (b) whether there is a significant difference between the cost of recovering different benefits. (AQW 3652/00)

Mr Morrow:

(a) The Social Security Agency is currently developing an activity based costing system. The initial research indicates that the average cost of recovering an

overpayment of Income Support was around £70 during the 2000/01 financial year. This calculation is based on the direct costs incurred in recovering overpayments. There is no information available about recovering overpayments of other benefits.

- (b) This information is not available at present.

Recovery of overpaid benefits

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Social Development to detail what evidence there is to show that (a) the recovery of overpaid benefits is a cost-effective exercise (b) the current method of recovering overpayment of benefits is an effective deterrent to fraudulent claims and (c) legitimate benefit applicants are not misjudged as fraudulent claims. (AQW 3653/00)

Mr Morrow:

- (a) The Social Security Agency is developing an activity based costing system and initial findings are that the average cost of recovering an overpayment of Income Support is around £70. In cases where the amount of benefit recovered falls below this, the cost effectiveness is questionable. However, even where it is not cost-effective to recover a debt, the policy is still to do so in order to discourage further overpayments.
- (b) The cost effectiveness of deterrents is difficult to determine and no information on this is available.
- (c) There is no evidence that legitimate benefit applicants are misjudged as fraudulent claims.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has any plans to amend Incapacity Benefit regulations to reflect recent changes in regulations announced for Great Britain. (AQW 3654/00)

Mr Morrow: In keeping with the long-standing principle of parity between Great Britain and Northern Ireland in social security matters, any changes to Great Britain Incapacity Benefit legislation will be mirrored in Northern Ireland.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr Fee asked the Minister for Social Development, given the nature of the circumstances which lead to a claim for Incapacity Benefit, to detail what discretion is at the disposal of his department when processing a late benefit claim. (AQW 3655/00)

Mr Morrow: Regulations prescribe that a claim for Incapacity Benefit can be backdated for up to 3 months from the day benefit is claimed. The Social Security Agency has no discretion to extend this period.

ASSEMBLY COMMISSION

Senior Salaries Review Body

Mr B Bell asked the Assembly Commission to detail any plans to review the pay, allowances and pension arrangements currently payable to elected Members, office-holders and Ministers. (AQW 3613/00)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Rev Robert Coulter): I am responding to you on behalf of the Assembly Commission.

The Speaker, on behalf of the Assembly Commission, wrote to the Chairman of the Senior Salaries Review Body (SSRB) on 29 June 2001 to seek the SSRB's agreement to review the existing structure for salaries, allowances and pension benefits paid to Members and office-holders of the Assembly.

In 1999 SSRB reported on the initial pay, allowances, pensions and severance arrangements for the devolved institutions (Report No 42) and devolution salaries for Ministers, other office-holders and office support staff (Report No 43). Both reports recognised that the recommendations were based on planning assumptions about how the devolved bodies would operate and what would be the roles and responsibilities of Members. It is now almost three years since SSRB reported and with the benefit of experience the Commission now feel that it is time to review the structure of existing remuneration arrangements and the levels of salary and allowances which should be payable to Members. The SSRB recently reviewed pay and allowances on behalf of Westminster and the National Assembly for Wales.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 3 August 2001

Written Answers to Questions

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Regional Rate

Ms McWilliams asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline what analysis was carried out before the decision was taken to raise the Regional Rate particularly in relation to the equality and New TSN agendas and will he ensure these assessments will be deposited in the Assembly Library. (AQW 3630/00)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Durkan): No specific equality and New TSN assessments were carried out in relation to the increase in the Regional Rates. Analyses were carried out for the Executive, however, on the Regional Rates as part of the Budget exercise to gauge both the effect of various percentage increases in rate poundages on the revenue raised and of obtaining a particular level of revenue on rate poundage increases.

Already, in working towards the 2002-3 budget, the Executive Position Report has been published. This was partly with a view to providing for fuller consultation on equality and New TSN considerations in relation to the Programme for Government and budget. In future work on the budget, the basic working assessment on the relationship between a percentage increase and revenue levels will be shared with the Committee for Finance and Personnel.

The comprehensive Review of Rating Policy, which is now underway, will include equality and New TSN assessments on the Regional Rates. These will be subject to full and open consultation and both the Finance and Personnel Committee and the Assembly will be kept informed of progress.

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Staff Grade Appointments

Dr Birnie asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of staff grade appointments within Northern Ireland based on specialty and Trust; and to make a statement.

(AQW 3551/00)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms de Brún): The information requested is set out in the attached tables.

The Staff Grade was introduced in 1989 to provide a range of services at an intermediate level of responsibility, in support of consultants. Staff grade practitioners make a valuable contribution to the care and treatment of patients and have played an important role in the development of services.

In order to encourage the greater use of these staff, the upper limit on the number of staff grade posts was removed in 1999. However, the creation of staff grade posts remains subject to Departmental approval.

Tá an t-eolas iarrtha leagtha amach sna táblaí faoi iamh.

Tugadh Rangú Foirne isteach i 1989 le réimse seirbhísí tacaíochta a sholáthar, ag meánleibhéal freagrachta, do lianna comhairleacha. Cuireann lianna comhairleacha rangaithe foirne go mór le cúram agus le cóireáil othar agus bhí ról tábhachtach acu i bhforbairt na seirbhísí.

Le níos mó úsáide as na foirne seo a spreagadh, athraíodh an teorainn is airde ar líon na bpost rangaithe foirne i 1999. Braitheann cruthú post rangaithe foirne ar fhormheas na Roinne.

STAFF GRADES IN N.IRELAND BY TRUST AND SPECIALITY (HEADCOUNT)

	A & E	Anaes.	Medicine	Surgery	Obs. & Gynae	Dentistry	Paediatrics	Pathology	Psychiatry	Radiology
Belfast City Hospital	3	1	2	1						
Down & Lisburn	7		4						1	
Greenpark	2		1	2						
Mater Infirmorum	1		4						2	
North & West Belfast									1	
Royal Group		3	9	3		2	3			

	A & E	Anaest.	Medicine	Surgery	Obs. & Gynae	Dentistry	Paediatrics	Pathology	Psychiatry	Radiology
South & East Belfast										
Ulster Hospital & Comm.	5	1	3			2	1	1		
Causeway	1		2	2			3		1	
Homefirst			2				2		2	
United Hospitals	2	2	3	2			2			
Armagh & Dungannon			2				3		1	
Craigavon Area Hospital	3		4	1	1		3	1		
Craigavon & B'bridge Com							1			
Newry & Mourne			2	2			4			
Altnagelvin		1	1	1			1			
Foyle			1				3			
Sperrin Lakeland	4		5		1		3		2	
Total	28	8	45	14	2	4	29	2	10	

	T & É	Ainest.	Leigheas	Máinliacht	Cnámh./ Liacht Bhan	Fiaclóireacht	Péidiatrac	Paiteolaíocht	Siciatracht	Raideolaíocht
Pobal Agus Otharlann Uladh.	5	1	3			2	1	1		
An Clochán	1		2	2			3		1	
Homefirst			2				2		2	
Otharlanna Aontaithe	2	2	3	2			2			
Ard Mhacha Agus Dún Geanainn			2				3		1	
Otharlann Ceantair Craigavon	3		4	1	1		3	1		
Pobal Craigavon Agus Dhroichead Na Banna							1			
An Tiúr Agus An Mhuirn			2	2			4			
Alt Na Ngealbhan		1	1	1			1			
An Feabhail			1				3			
Sliabh Speirín Agus Tír Na Lochanna	4		5		1		3		2	
Iomlán	28	8	45	14	2	4	29	2	10	

RANGANNA FOIRNE I DTUAISCEART ÉIREANN DE RÉIR IONTAOBHAIS AGUS SPEISIALTACHTA (LÍON NA NDAOINE)

	T & É	Ainest.	Leigheas	Máinliacht	Cnámh./ Liacht Bhan	Fiaclóireacht	Péidiatrac	Paiteolaíocht	Siciatracht	Raideolaíocht
Otharlann Chathair Bhéal Feirste	3	1	2	1						
An Dún/Lios Na Gcearrbhach	7		4						1	
An Pháirc Ghlas	2		1	2						
Mater Infirmorum	1		4						2	
Béal Feirste Thuaidh Agus Thiar									1	
An Grúpa Ríoga		3	9	3		2	3			
Béal Feirste Theas Agus Thoir										

Inflammatory Arthritis: Allocation of Funds

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (a) what criteria does the EHSSB use for the allocation of monies for the treatment of severe inflammatory arthritis and (b) what criteria is used to prioritise who receives the treatment first. (AQW 3590/00)

Ms de Brún:

- The funding of treatment for severe inflammatory arthritis is based on the clinical needs of patients and the availability of resources.
- A range of medicines is prescribed for severe inflammatory arthritis. Patients receive these medicines according to clinical need. For a number of patients with severe and progressive rheumatoid arthritis who have not responded to existing drug therapies, anti TNF preparations may be considered appropriate. In determining who receives treatment with anti TNF medicines, priority is given to those who have been waiting longest, having taken account of the specific clinical needs of individuals, including those relevant to children.

- (a) Tá maoiniú chóireáil na n-othar a bhfuil géar-airtríteas athlastaithe orthu bunaithe ar riachtanais chliniciúla na n-othar agus ar infhaighteacht acmhainní.
- (b) Tá réimse cógas leagtha amach do ghéar-airtríteas athlastaithe. Faigheann othair na cógais seo de réir riachtanais cliniciúil. Do roinnt othar a bhfuil airtríteas géar agus réamatóideach forchéimnitheach orthu

nach bhfreagraíonn do theiripí druga atá ann faoi láthair, is féidir ullmhúcháin frith-TNF a ghlacadh san áireamh bheith cuí. Tugtar tús áite dóibh siúd is faide ag fanacht, ag glacadh san áireamh riachtanais chliniciúla ar leith an duine aonair, iad siúd a bhaineann le páistí san áireamh, nuair atáthar ag cinntiú cé is cóir cóireál frith-TNF a chur orthu.

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